

Rocked by a Baby

*A daily devotional and prayer guide to lead you
through the Christmas season*

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The Seed of the Story

¹⁴ Then the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all animals, domestic and wild. You will crawl on your belly, groveling in the dust as long as you live. ¹⁵ And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.” —Genesis 3:14-15, NLT.

It was the beginning of all time, the start of human history. There was a garden called Eden. Within that garden, God planted the seed of the Christmas story. As Adam and Eve walked around the Garden of Eden, God told them they could eat any of its fruit, except the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. But one day, history was forever changed. Adam and Eve ate some fruit from the tree in which God had told them not to eat. The devil, in the form of a serpent, had tempted them to demand their own way. Because Adam and Eve disobeyed God, he expelled them out of the garden. Although God was angry, he promised that someday a Savior, one of Adam and Eve’s own seed, or offspring, would come to overthrow all evil and the devil as represented by the serpent in this story. Adam and Eve looked forward to that day. The day, of course, is Christmas, the birthday of Jesus—Eve’s seed and our Savior.

Have you been “Rocked by a Baby” this Christmas season because Jesus has entered into your life as Savior—One who has rescued you from sin? If so, how will this assurance of salvation make an impact upon your life?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who need to be rescued by the baby Jesus this Christmas season. May Jesus rock their lives and offer them a fresh perspective in their celebration of Christmas.

PRAYER—Jesus, during this Christmas season, I’m reminded of the sacrifice you made in coming to earth as a baby. I, like Adam and Eve, know I’m not perfect. I need a Savior. Thank you for coming to save me. Amen.

December 6

A Brave Journey

¹ *The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. ² I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. ³ I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.” —Genesis 12:1-3, NLT.*

Abram (or Abraham, as God named him later) lived in a land called Ur. One day, God told him to leave his friends and family and travel to a faraway land. God promised Abraham many rewards if he would obey his command. One reward was that Abraham’s family would grow into a great and mighty nation. The most important reward though was that through Abraham’s family God would bless all nations. But there was one problem. Abraham and his wife Sarai (later named Sarah) had no son, no one to inherit these wonderful promises. It seemed impossible that they would ever have a baby, for both of them were so old. Yet he believed and bravely set out for that distant land. He looked forward to the day when Jesus—both an offspring of Abraham and the very Son of God—was born. Through Jesus, all people would be blessed—a fulfillment of a promise made long before to man named Abraham.

Have you been “Rocked by a Baby” this Christmas season because Jesus is asking you to consider a fresh beginning—to try something new in your life? If so, what is the new beginning you’re facing?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who may be child barren, yet desire to have a family. May Jesus rock their lives, providing a miracle in their lives in the months ahead through the birth of a baby.

PRAYER—God, help me to depend on your leading in my life. Sometimes I’m afraid to try something new. But you’re a God of fresh beginnings, as you proved in the story of Abraham. Thank you for blessing me through Abraham’s family line, through Jesus Christ my Savior. Amen.

December 7

The Ultimate Test

¹⁶ “This is what the LORD says: Because you have obeyed me and have not withheld even your son, your only son, I swear by my own name that ¹⁷I will certainly bless you. I will multiply your descendants beyond number, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore.” —Genesis 22:16-17, NLT.

Just as God had promised, Sarah gave birth to a baby boy. The young Isaac was truly a miracle child, and he brought much joy to Abraham and Sarah. Then one day, God told Abraham to take Isaac to a mountain far away. It wasn't a happy journey, for God had asked Abraham to give up Isaac, his own son. Abraham didn't know how he could live without his son—the boy in whom he had placed his hopes. Yet God had spoken, so Abraham obeyed. When Abraham reached the mountain, an angel of the Lord called out, “Abraham! Abraham! Don't hurt your son. The Lord knows now that you trust him so much you won't withhold your only son. You have passed God's test. Because of this, your family will grow into a nation through which the Savior will come.” From then on Abraham treasured his son all the more. Isaac was a gift from the Lord. Through Isaac's family would come a Savior—Jesus Christ the Lord.

Have you been “Rocked by a Baby” this Christmas season because Jesus is asking you to offer unto God someone or something you cherish most in your life? If so, how will you pass God's test by trusting God to hold what you cherish most in safe confidence?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who have lost someone or something they have cherished most in their lives. May Jesus rock their lives by providing the strong assurance of his presence. Be near them and invite them to attend worship with you to hear the story of what it means to “Be Rocked by a Baby” this Christmas season.

PRAYER—Lord, like Abraham, you didn't withhold your only Son. Instead, you sent him to earth to save me from my sins. Thank you for your great gift! Help me to be more like you—heartfelt in my giving to you and to those in my Oikos. Amen.

A Restless Night

¹³ *At the top of the stairway stood the LORD, and he said, “I am the LORD, the God of your grandfather Abraham, and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I am giving it to you and your descendants. ¹⁴ Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will spread out in all directions—to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants.”* —Genesis 28:13-14, NLT.

Bright stars filled the night sky as Jacob sat alone on a rock. This youngest son of Isaac had been traveling all day. He was dusty and tired. He needed to rest, but he didn't have a pillow or a tent. All he could do was roll a small rock closer and use it as a pillow for his sleepy head. Jacob fell asleep and dreamed of a stairway that reached far into heaven. Angels—more than he could count—were going up and down this heavenly staircase. At the top stood God himself! His voice thundered throughout the earth. Suddenly, Jacob woke up. “Surely this is the house of the living God,” he said to himself. “God has given me this place in his great plan.” So Jacob, like his grandfather Abraham, and his father, Isaac, before him, believed God's promise for a son. Through their family, God would bless all nations.

Have you been “Rocked by a Baby” this Christmas season because Jesus is asking you to keep your promises to family and friends? If so, what promises does God want you to honor that cause your restlessness?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who may have been betrayed by close friends or family. Provide them an opportunity to experience the unfailing promises of God through you as you live up to your spoken promises. This will also give them confidence in the promises of God's Word. God is dependable, even through the restless nights.

PRAYER—Father God, thank you for keeping the promises you made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, to save and bless me. Help me to be as loyal to you and keep my promises as you are to your promises. Amen.

December 9

A Passover Lamb

⁷ *Get rid of the old “yeast” by removing this wicked person from among you. Then you will be like a fresh batch of dough made without yeast, which is what you really are. Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us.* ⁸ *So let us celebrate the festival, not with the old bread of wickedness and evil, but with the new bread of sincerity and truth. —1 Corinthians 5:7-8, NLT.*

After many years, the number of Abraham’s children and grandchildren increased. They were called Hebrews, and they lived in Egypt, when Egypt’s evil king Pharaoh had made them slaves. Their life was very difficult, so they cried out to the Lord their God. God heard their cries and sent Moses to order the Egyptians to let the Hebrews go. But king Pharaoh refused to let them go. Instead, he made them work even harder. Finally, God had enough of this stubborn king. He would free his people, even if it meant taking away every one of Egypt’s firstborn sons. God wanted the Hebrews to always remember his power and might, so he commanded Moses and Aaron to tell them to sacrifice a Passover lamb that very night. The Hebrews were to paint the lamb’s blood on the doorposts of their homes. This would save their own firstborn sons, and it would represent God’s love for them. It would also point to Jesus—God’s only Son—who would one day show his Father’s love to everyone.

Have you been “Rocked by a Baby” this Christmas season because Jesus is asking you to live through mistreatment by a spouse, friend, or work associate? If so, how will you depend upon God to show you his power and might in the midst of a difficult and trying situation?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who are living in tough times at home, at work or in the community. Come alongside them and invite them to a class or small group gathering this Christmas season.

PRAYER—Dear Jesus, reading about the Passover reminds me of your purpose in coming to this earth. You are my Passover Lamb. You gave up your own life for my sins, and even the mistreatment I may face in honoring you in my life. Amen.

A Mountain Set On Fire

¹⁸ *But God was fulfilling what all the prophets had foretold about the Messiah—that he must suffer these things...* ²² *Moses said, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own people. Listen carefully to everything he tells you.’* ²³ *Then Moses said, ‘Anyone who will not listen to that Prophet will be completely cut off from God’s people.’* ²⁴ *Starting with Samuel, every prophet spoke about what is happening today.*
—Acts 3:18, 22-24, NLT.

The Hebrews—freed from their Egyptian taskmasters—gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai. There, God would give them his law. With loud thunder and lightning, God did speak, and Mount Sinai was set on fire. The people shook in fear. “Don’t let God speak. His voice frightens us,” they pleaded. “Have someone go between us and him, for he is so great and we are so frail.” The Lord God agreed. For now, Moses would be God’s spokesperson and prophet. Yet God also promised the Israelites that one day he would send a greater prophet. The Hebrews held on to this promise, waiting for this great prophet. Jesus is this great Prophet and Teacher.

His words are to be followed; his life is our model. This is why we enjoy Christmas Day—Jesus’ birthday.

Have you been “Rocked by a Baby” this Christmas season because Jesus is asking you to remember to say thank you to the people who have meant a lot to you? If so, think of a way to say thanks to your parents, mentors, teachers or pastors this week. Although Jesus is your ultimate teacher, you can learn to be grateful by thanking those who teach you.

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who need to be taught and mentored in God’s Word. May they learn to trust Jesus as a great Prophet and Teacher.

PRAYER—Lord, in this busy season, I often don’t take the time to be silent and wait for you to speak. But I know that you still want me to listen to the preachers and teachers of your Word. Thank you for sending Jesus, the ultimate Prophet and Teacher. Amen.

December 11

A Royal Throne

¹¹ *The LORD declares that he will make a house for you—a dynasty of kings!*
¹² *For when you die and are buried with your ancestors, I will raise up one of your descendants, your own offspring, and I will make his kingdom strong.* ¹³
He is the one who will build a house—a temple—for my name. And I will secure his royal throne forever. ¹⁴ *I will be his father, and he will be my son.*
—2 Samuel 7:11-14, NLT.

One day, King David sat on his royal throne and looked over everything he owned: a large palace made of sturdy cedars and a vast kingdom headed by twelve tribal leaders. “How can I live in this fine palace,” he sighed to Nathan, his friend, “while the ark of God stays in a flimsy tent?” Nathan, a prophet and wise leader, replied, “God has spoken. He doesn’t need a palace or a home of any kind. He already lives high above the tallest cedar and near all his devoted believers. And God doesn’t need your gifts.” Nathan explained. “He placed you on your throne. God promises to you this day that he will place your son on that same throne to reign forever and ever.” From then on, David longed to see the day when his perfect son would reign forever. That Son of David is Jesus, and the day David longed for is Christmas—the birthday of the King of kings.

Have you been “Rocked by a Baby” this Christmas season because Jesus is the King of kings? If so, how will your life reflect a place for the King of kings to reign and rule, knowing that God doesn’t need your gifts, but your heart?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who need to have Jesus reign and rule in their hearts this Christmas. Witness to them concerning the fact that God doesn’t need their material possessions, but desires to rule in their hearts. God looks forward to having his Son Jesus set up his royal throne in their lives. Invite them to our CHRISTMAS SERVICES.

PRAYER—Jesus, Son of David, you are the King of kings and Lord of lords. In this day of constant change, it is comforting to know that you’re always the same. Your kingdom will never pass away. For that, I’m grateful. Amen.

December 12

In Need of a Friend

¹⁹ *Even now my witness is in heaven. My advocate is there on high.* ²⁰ *My friends scorn me, but I pour out my tears to God.*

²¹ *I need someone to mediate between God and me, as a person mediates between friends.* —Job 16:19-21, NLT.

Long ago, a rich and honest man named Job lived in the land of Uz. He owned thousands of sheep, camels and a great number of oxen and donkeys. One day, Job's life was turned upside down. His oxen, camels, and donkeys were stolen. His sheep and servants died in a fire. Worst of all, his oldest son's house caved in, killing all Job's sons and daughters, who were visiting in the house. Job was brokenhearted. "Why has this happened?" Job moaned. "What have I done to deserve such great harm?" Job's wife, friends, and neighbors didn't console him. And so Job sat down in a heap of ashes, truly alone. Yet Job still looked to God to save him. "No one will defend me here on earth," he cried. "But I know my Supporter—my Savior—is in heaven. He pleads with God on my behalf as a man would plead for his friend." Job's hope wasn't misplaced; God did save him. God restored his good fortune by giving him more than he had before. We know who is our Friend in heaven—the person to whom Job looked long ago. On Christmas Day we celebrate the birth of Jesus, our Friend and Savior.

Have you been "Rocked by a Baby" this Christmas season because Jesus chooses to be your friend? If so, how will you depend on Jesus as your friend when you feel alone and going through a difficult time?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who need to know that Jesus is their friend when they go through a difficult time. Show Christ's love by running an errand, preparing a meal, helping with Christmas decorations or shopping. Invite them to a Christmas party!

PRAYER—Dear Jesus, thanks for being my Friend and Savior. In those difficult times when my friends here on earth seem to abandon me, it is a comfort to know I can depend on you. You are in heaven, taking up my cause before God Almighty. Help me to show that same compassion and love to my friends. Amen.

December 13

The Promise of a Son

⁶ *For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* ⁷ *His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will make this happen! —Isaiah 9:6-7, NLT.*

“A virgin will give birth to a baby boy, and his name will be Immanuel,” the prophet Isaiah proclaimed. “That name means ‘God with us.’” King Ahaz listened carefully to Isaiah. His nation was in trouble, and his neighbors were threatening him, so Ahaz was very worried. Isaiah had come to Ahaz with a comforting message. God was with him. A son would be born as a sign that God was with his people, the Israelites. “A child, a son, will be born to us. He will rule as a king: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!” The Israelites believed Isaiah’s promise and looked forward to the birthday of their King who would be above all kings. On Christmas Day, Isaiah’s words of comfort came true. Jesus our King, was born to the Virgin Mary.

Have you been “Rocked by a Baby” this Christmas season because Jesus comes to you as Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace? If so, how will you trust this all encompassing Jesus to help you in whatever problem you’re facing today?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who need to know that Jesus is multi-tasking. He can help them with any problem they face. Jesus provides help as: Wonderful Counselor coming alongside; Mighty God from above; Everlasting Father from below; Prince of Peace within.

PRAYER—Jesus, I can come to you for help with my problems. I thank you Wonderful Counselor. You possess all power. I praise you Mighty God. You provide all I need. I thank you Everlasting Father. I can lie down in peace. I honor you, Prince of Peace. Amen.

A King is Coming

⁵ “For the time is coming,” says the LORD, “when I will raise up a righteous descendant from King David’s line. He will be a King who rules with wisdom. He will do what is just and right throughout the land. ⁶ And this will be his name: The LORD Is Our Righteousness.’ In that day Judah will be saved, and Israel will live in safety.” —Jeremiah 23:5-6, NLT.

Long ago, there lived the great prophet Jeremiah. It was a cruel and godless time in which to live. In those days, the people were doing whatever they wanted to do. The powerful would lie, cheat, and steal, while the powerless had little or no hope. Their rulers would simply look the other way. “There will be a time,” the prophet Jeremiah declared, “when God is going to place a righteous Branch on the throne of King David. He will do what is right in the land.” What a promise! The helpless would have hope, because a king who did only what was right would one day rule the entire land. The people listened carefully. They would be able to live in safety! Jeremiah spoke of a king who would be powerful—a king who would reign forever as their great protector. This mighty King is none other than Jesus. Christmas is his birthday. He is the reason we have a grand celebration.

Have you been “Rocked by a Baby” this Christmas season because Jesus brings you hope in your helplessness? If so, how will you depend on this righteous Branch to make all things right in your life?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who need to know that Jesus can bring them hope in the midst of their helplessness. Enable them to see that Jesus will help them do the ‘right thing’ in a culture that people do whatever they want to do. Invite them to worship so they can experience the hope of God’s people visibly portrayed before their eyes.

PRAYER—Dear Jesus, you are the righteous Branch, the one Jeremiah foretold. You are the only True Vine, whereas the children of Israel proved to be a false vine. Today I praise your name and look forward to celebrating your coming to earth. I will make a joyful noise to the Lord. Come quickly! Amen.

December 15

The Little Town of Bethlehem

² *But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past. —Micah 5:2, NLT.*

“Bethlehem, even though you are a small town, one who will rule over Israel will come from you,” the prophet Micah announced. The promise of a coming ruler was the only ray of hope that Micah could give the people of Israel. The people no longer looked to God to protect them. As a result, the Lord was going to allow the country to experience war and destruction. So the people were hopeless and they lived in torn-down places. These were places where doubt and fear existed instead of faith and courage. Yet the people of Israel would not be completely abandoned. In a small town of Bethlehem, a great leader would be born. Again, what a promise! Israel would one day have a mighty ruler. That ruler promised long ago is the baby Jesus. Tucked into the hills of Judea, the small town of Bethlehem became the birthplace of the King of kings. Today we can join in spirit with the children of Israel who find their hope in this mighty ruler. God’s promises have surely come true - King Jesus, born on Christmas Day in the little town of Bethlehem.

Have you been “Rocked by a Baby” this Christmas season because Jesus is born in your heart? If so, how will you allow this baby to give you hope when doubt and fear exist instead of faith and courage?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who need to know that Jesus is born to give them hope. Our country today experiences war and destruction. Jesus can help them in the torn-down places of their lives to bring faith and not fear; courage and not doubt.

PRAYER—O Jesus, I don’t know why you chose to be born in Bethlehem, that small, overlooked town. You are the King of kings, yet you chose to live in a frail human body like mine. Thank you for coming to this earth to provide salvation for me. Prepare my heart for your coming this Christmas season. May you be born afresh and anew in my life today! Amen.

December 16

An Angel's Visit

¹¹ While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. ¹² Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. ¹³ But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John..." ¹⁷ He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord."
—Luke 1:11-13, 17, NLT.

[For the next nine days we will read a little of the Christmas story each day.] The Christmas story begins with the priest Zechariah. He had been praying for a child but only ended up waiting. His wife remained childless, and he grew hopeless. But then one day, he was chosen to offer prayers and incense in the Temple before God's sight. While the people stood outside praying, Zechariah stood inside with his hands trembling. As the smoke from the incense spiraled upward, he called out to God. Suddenly an angel appeared. He said, "God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give birth to a son. He will be great in God's sight, and he will go before the Lord to make the people ready." Zechariah was stunned. "A son? How can it be? My wife and I are very old." "How dare you question the Almighty!" Gabriel replied. "Yes, you will have a son just as I say. But because you didn't believe me, you won't speak a word until that joyous day."

Have you been "Rocked by a Baby" this Christmas season because Jesus brings to you the impossible? If so, how will you allow Jesus to handle the areas in your life where you react in unbelief?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who need to know that Jesus can bring them hope in the midst of the impossible. They need not react in unbelief to the changes God desires to make in their lives.

PRAYER—Lord, sometimes I'm tempted to react in unbelief as Zechariah did, especially when I hear news that seems too good to be true. Help me to remember that with you, nothing is impossible. With you, I can know the truth. Amen.

December 17

An Unbelievable Message

²⁶ *In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. ²⁸ Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!" ²⁹ Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. ³⁰ "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"*
—Luke 1:26-33, NLT.

One day, a bright angel appeared to a young woman named Mary. Mary, white with fright, couldn't say a thing. The angel Gabriel told her that she was going to give birth to a son. And she was to name the baby, Jesus. Mary was confused and wondered how this birth could take place for she was a virgin. Mary humbly protested. Gabriel told her that the Holy Spirit would cause this birth to happen and the baby would be called the Son of God. Mary didn't know how this event could take place, but she knew she was God's servant—His trusted employee. Mary agreed. She would hold and love this special baby.

Have you been "Rocked by a Baby" this Christmas season because Jesus comes to you in the most unbelievable circumstances? If so, how will you affirm that you are God's servant and take on the task?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who need to know that Jesus is born to help them in the most confusing situations they face in their lives. Help them see that with God all things are possible. It's not too late to invite them to OUR CHRISTMAS SERVICE tomorrow.

PRAYER—Father God, I want to respond to you as Mary did—with a heart open to receive the precious gift of your Son. Help me to view Jesus' birth with fresh eyes this season. Amen.

December 18

A Magnificent Song

⁴⁶ *Mary responded, “Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. ⁴⁷ How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! ⁴⁸ For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. ⁴⁹ For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me. —Luke 1:46-49, NLT.*

Both Mary and her cousin Elizabeth were going to have a child; one woman was young, the other old. After the angel told Mary about God’s marvelous plan, she hurried to see Elizabeth. She did not hurry to reveal God’s message to her parents. When Mary arrived, Elizabeth felt the baby move inside her. Then, at the sound of Mary’s voice, the child in Elizabeth’s womb leapt for joy. “Praise God!” Elizabeth said to Mary. “You believed the Lord, and he will surely keep his word.” “Yes, praise God!” Mary proclaimed. Then Mary sang a song to express how her soul praised the Lord. How Mary rejoiced in God her Savior! For God took notice of a lowly servant girl, and from then on all generations would call Mary blessed. Mary believed in the Mighty One because God did great things for her.

Have you been “Rocked by a Baby” this Christmas season because God has done great things for you through his Son? If so, how will you express your praise to God your Savior? In spoken word or song of praise?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who need to know that God can do great things in their lives because of Jesus. Today is our CHRISTMAS SERVICE. Spend time over lunch with those in your Oikos who came with you as guests. Assure them of God’s great love for them.

PRAYER—O Lord God, I join Mary in praising you; my soul praises your name, and my spirit rejoices in you. As I worship you on this Christmas Sunday may my life reflect a testimony of praise to those around me. Grant that this day will be a day in which your Son is lifted up and magnified in my worship. Thank you for your willingness to become flesh and dwell among humanity, to live and die for my sake. Amen.

December 19

Birth of a Forerunner

⁶⁷ Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy: ⁶⁸ “Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people. ⁶⁹ He has sent us a mighty Savior from the royal line of his servant David, ⁷⁰ just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago... ⁷⁶ “And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord.” —Luke 1:67-70, 76, NLT.

When the time came for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a boy. All the neighbors and relatives who gathered rejoiced; they wondered what they should name him. “Zechariah,” the father’s name, was the most common suggestion. However, Elizabeth protested and said that John is his name. The neighbors around them couldn’t believe it because no one in their family was given the name John. Finally, they asked Zechariah his father for a definite answer. Since Zechariah was still unable to talk, he picked up his tablet and wrote, his “name is John.” The neighbors were surprised at his answer. Then something more surprising happened. Suddenly Zechariah could speak, and he began praising God. Looking down at his son he affirmed that John would be the forerunner of Jesus—he would prepare the way for the Lord’s coming.

Have you been “Rocked by a Baby” this Christmas season because Jesus comes to you with elements of mystery and surprise? If so, how will you be a forerunner to prepare Jesus’ way this Christmas?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who need to know that Jesus comes to them through the lives of God’s people who prepare a way for Jesus’ coming. Be a forerunner of Jesus and help your Oikos open their hearts to Jesus.

PRAYER—Jesus, there are so many names that describe you: **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. I also call you my Friend and my Savior. As you called John to be a prophet who prepared the way for your coming, I too am called to prepare my heart for your coming. Amen.**

December 20

Humble Parents

²⁰ *As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet: ²³ “Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’” — Matthew 1:20-23, NLT.*

Joseph was a hardworking carpenter who was engaged to be married to a young woman named Mary. One day, Joseph received some startling news: Mary was going to have a baby! Joseph kept asking himself how could this birth happen. How could Mary betray me? Bewildered and confused, Joseph lay down and went to sleep. Then an angel suddenly appeared to Joseph and told him not be afraid. Joseph was to marry his young bride, Mary. The baby Mary was carrying was Israel’s Lord and Savior. And Joseph was to name the baby, Jesus. He would save his people from their sins. Joseph did what the angel said, and he and Mary became husband and wife.

Have you been “Rocked by a Baby” this Christmas season because Jesus has shaken you by some startling news? If so, what is God asking you to do that might be labeled bewildering and confusing?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who have been shaken by some startling news. Help them to discover God’s purpose in the midst of bewilderment and confusion. Only 3 days until our CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE. Who in your Oikos are you going to invite to the service?

PRAYER—Father of Jesus, thank you for the grace you showed both Mary and Joseph. Thank you for letting your Son grow up and mature mentally, physically, spiritually and socially in a carpenter’s family. May I learn from this example of humility this Advent season. Amen.

December 21

A Time-Consuming Wait

²⁵ *At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him ²⁶ and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah...* ³⁶ *Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. ³⁷ Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshipping God with fasting and prayer.*

—Luke 2:25-26; 36-37, NLT.

In the city of Jerusalem lived a good man named Simeon. He believed God's promise that Israel would have a great Savior. The Lord had told him he would see this great deliverer with his own eyes. Simeon held on to God's promises tightly and simply waited. He greeted every day thinking; *will I meet the Lord of all nations today?* In that same city—within the Temple courts—a devout woman also waited. Her name was Anna. And night and day, she prayed to her Creator, expecting her Lord and Savior. Although she and Simeon didn't know Joseph and Mary or their baby, they knew their Maker. They knew God kept his promises, so they waited confidently.

Have you been "Rocked by a Baby" this Christmas season because Jesus is calling you to wait patiently for him to come unexpectedly into your life? If so, how will you meet the Lord of all nations today?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who need to know that Jesus is the Lord who is worth the wait. Perhaps they've been waiting for Jesus in their own lives. Now is the time to wait alongside them.

PRAYER—Lord, in this day of instant communication, I find waiting very difficult. Yet Simeon and Anna waited many years to see the fulfillment of your promise to send your Son. I too look forward with eagerness to Christmas as I celebrate Jesus' birth. I truly want to honor you on this glorious day. Amen.

December 22

The Long Journey

¹ Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, ² “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.” ³ King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. ⁴ He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?” ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote: ⁶ ‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’” —Matthew 2:1-6, NLT.

After Jesus was born, a group of wise men set out on a journey. They loaded their camels with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, for they were searching for a newborn king. They had watched his brilliant star rise in the east and followed it to the city of Jerusalem. King Herod was upset when he heard about the wise men’s search because he was the king of the Jews, and there would be no other. Herod wanted to know where this King was born. So, all the priests and teachers said that this baby was born in Bethlehem. Herod instructed the wise men to go to Bethlehem and find this King, pretending that he wanted to worship the baby too. So the wise men continued their search for Jesus, the great King of the Jews.

Have you been “Rocked by a Baby” this Christmas season because finding Jesus demands a wholehearted search? If so, how will you humble yourself and find Jesus this Christmas in the most unlikely places?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who need to carry on their own search for Jesus. Help them find Jesus in places of worship. There’s a gathering for worship at our CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE tomorrow night.

PRAYER—Lord Jesus, I thank you that I don’t have to search the entire world to find you, as the wise men did. I can pray to you anywhere and anytime. May I never stop seeking you and your will for me, in both good times and bad. Amen.

December 23

A Startling Night Visit

⁸ That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. ⁹ Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, ¹⁰ but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. ¹¹ The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! ¹² And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger." ³ Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, ⁴ "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased." —Luke 2:8-14, NLT.

The night sky was clear, and stars shone brightly on the shepherds far below. They were watching over their flocks, keeping them safely within sight, so no harm would come to them. Then all of a sudden, an angel appeared. The shepherds were frightened. But they didn't need to be afraid for the angel brought good news to them. "Today a Savior has been born in the city of David; he is Christ the Lord." The night sky lit up. Angels appeared all around, singing, "Glory to God and peace on earth!" As the angels were leaving, the stunned shepherds continued to stare into the sky. Finally they decided to go to Bethlehem and see for themselves what God had done. They wanted to find the baby boy—their Savior.

Have you been "Rocked by a Baby" this Christmas season because Jesus enters your life in some startling way? If so, how will you accept this good news, knowing he comes with peace to all he favors?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who need to know that the startling good news of Jesus' birth comes to them. Our CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE tonight is the last opportunity before Christmas to spend time with those in your Oikos.

PRAYER—Oh, Lord, my voice joins the angels in enthusiastic praise on this Christmas Eve. Jesus, my Savior, has come. May the people in my Oikos acknowledge his glorious name, for with Jesus' birth, the world will never be the same. Amen.

December 24

The Birthday of the King

¹ At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. ² (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. ⁴ And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. ⁵ He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was now obviously pregnant. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. ⁷ She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them. —Luke 2:1-7, NLT.

Joseph and Mary had traveled a long, long way. As dusk approached, they came to the little town of Bethlehem. Its household lights were a welcome sight, for they were tired. But Joseph and Mary couldn't find any room in the inn because of the census crowds. So with no room in the inn, all Joseph and Mary could find was a modest stable. That night, the time came for Mary to have her baby, and she gave birth to a son in a manger. That night the shepherds gathered to worship the baby. Some time later, the wise men also found the baby and they too bowed to worship Jesus. Even Simeon and Ana were able to see the baby Jesus. They knew that Jesus was someone special. This Christmas day we celebrate the fact that Jesus, God's only Son, comes to save all who believe in him and comes to set them free!

Have you been "Rocked by a Baby" this Christmas season because Jesus is born to set you free from your bondage? If so, how will you allow Jesus to rescue and release you from things that handcuff you in life?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who still need to receive Jesus as their Savior. Call them today and wish them a Merry Christmas!

PRAYER—I praise you, O God. Today a baby has been born to me; he is your only Son. Today with food and gifts, I celebrate his birthday; he is the greatest gift of all. Thank you for sending your Son to save me. I bow to worship Jesus, my Savior. Amen.

December 25

A Contrast between Two Kings

¹³ *After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother,” the angel said. “Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”*

¹⁴ *That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, ¹⁵ and they stayed there until Herod’s death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: “I called my Son out of Egypt.”—Matthew 2:13-15, NLT.*

Herod was no stranger to political ruthlessness. He lived a very dog-eat-dog life. With reports of the birth of the "king of the Jews" it was entirely natural for his way of thinking to seek to kill the potential rival, including many other innocents in the effort. Put most simply, the man was a brute. God brought Jesus and King Herod, two kings who couldn't have been more different, together at the same moment in history. What was God trying to reveal about himself through this contrast? God uses people who appear weak to triumph over those who appear to be strong. No matter how overwhelming and undefeatable a person may seem, God's power is stronger. And what is done for God's kingdom has lasting value, as opposed to fleeting earthly honors we seek for ourselves. The contrast of Herod and Jesus reminds us to follow God's ways rather than the world's ways. Ultimately, we create a lasting legacy through self-sacrifice and servanthood, not through self-glorification.

Have you been “Rocked by a Baby” this Christmas season by a King who desired to follow God’s ways and not the world’s ways? If so, how will you create a lasting legacy through self-sacrifice?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who need to see that Jesus humbly followed God's ways and not the world's ways. Help them know that God's power overwhelms the Herods of this world.

PRAYER—Jesus, your legacy continues to impact millions of people throughout the world. I desire to still study your words and seek to follow the humble example of your life. Amen.

December 26

The Actors of Godly People

¹ Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ² “The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees are the official interpreters of the law of Moses. ³ So practice and obey whatever they tell you, but don’t follow their example. For they don’t practice what they teach. ⁴ They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden. ⁵ “Everything they do is for show...

¹⁰ And don’t let anyone call you ‘Teacher,’ for you have only one teacher, the Messiah. ¹¹ The greatest among you must be a servant. —Matthew 23:1-5, 10-12, NLT.

Before Jesus’ birth the Pharisees had the authority in teaching how to be godly in fulfilling of the Law of God. However, Jesus taught that it is not about how much we fulfill the commandments of God but he brought a new teaching of surrendering our whole heart and life to God. The Pharisees’ teaching was focused mainly on people’s effort to attain godliness and eternal life, but Jesus’ teaching was all about people’s reliance on God to attain godliness and eternal life. With Jesus it was the heart that must be right with God, not merely the external actions; not only the outside of the cup and platter was to be cleansed, but the inside first of all. Jesus’ birth brought conflict with the Pharisees due to the fact that his birth represented “Immanuel,” God with us. When Jesus humbly moved into the Pharisees’ neighborhood as a servant claiming to be the Son of God, his servanthood turned the religious system of the Pharisees upside down.

Have you been “Rocked by a Baby” this Christmas season because Jesus causes you to revamp your religious beliefs? If so, how will you build your faith upon surrendering your whole heart and life to God?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who need to know that religious systems can’t bring salvation and eternal life. Help them to see it’s only by having a heart right with God that brings peace.

PRAYER—Lord, I want to serve you from the heart. Help me not to build my relationship with you upon religious traditions, but upon a whole heart totally surrendered to you. Amen.

December 27

A Time for Solitude

³⁸ *As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.* ³⁹ *Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught.* ⁴⁰ *But Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing...* ⁴¹ *The Lord said to her, "My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details!"* ⁴² *There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it and it will not be taken away from her."* —Luke 10:38-42, NLT.

Martha had invited Jesus to her house. Martha was getting upset because Mary was sitting and listening to Jesus. She wasn't helping with all the chores. Martha was a tireless worker. She was cooking and setting the table and she wanted some help. She didn't want to do all the work herself. Jesus didn't get on to Mary or Martha about what either one of them was doing. He knew Martha was worried and so he tried to calm her down. He gently got Martha's attention and told her she was worried and upset over a very small matter. Jesus guided her about what was important. Like Mary, Jesus wanted Martha to spend time with him: not cleaning the dirty dishes, not cooking, not sweeping. Jesus wanted Martha to spend a quiet moment with the Master.

Have you been "Rocked by a Baby" this Christmas season in the likeness of caring for a baby—tasks that take insurmountable time? If so, how will you slow down and take some time with the Master before this year ends?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who are hurried and hassled by life's agenda. Help them to see how vital it is to come to Jesus and learn to get out of the fast lane of life.

PRAYER—Jesus, help me today by the prompting of your Holy Spirit to remember to spend time with you. I can read my Bible, I can meditate and pray. Help me remember when things get busy, that it's still important to spend quiet time with you. May I spend the remaining days of this year with you. Amen.

December 28

A Great Confession of Faith

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.” ¹⁵ Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you.”
—Matthew 16:13-17, NLT.

Jesus was teaching in the region of Caesarea Philippi. On this particular day, as he frequently did, he went off by himself to pray. His disciples found him and he asked them, "Who do people say that I am?" There were many different ideas about Jesus. In Jesus' day many people thought highly of him, comparing him to several respected prophets. But their estimation of Jesus was sadly short of his true identity, as Israel's Messiah. The same is true today. Many people are willing to admit that Jesus was a good man and a great prophet, but they are not willing to accept his claims to be the Son of God. They are not willing to trust him as their only hope of salvation. But Jesus wanted his disciples to say what *they* thought about him. Simon Peter said, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." How could Peter be so sure about this? Jesus gives us the answer. He called Peter's name, Simon son of John. Jesus said that Peter knew his identity as the Son of God because it had come to him as a divine revelation. God Himself had told Peter.

Have you been “Rocked by a Baby” this Christmas season because Jesus challenges you to accept his claim as the Son of God? If so, how will you reorder your life, claiming Jesus as your Messiah, the Son of God?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who need to trust Jesus as their only hope of salvation. Help them to see in their estimation that Jesus is more than a highly respected man. He's the Son of God.

PRAYER—Lord, I want to openly confess that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Help me to reorder my priorities and prepare my life to trust you as my only hope of salvation. Amen.

December 29

The Right Timing

³ *And that's the way it was with us before Christ came. We were like children; we were slaves to the basic spiritual principles of this world.* ⁴ *But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law.* ⁵ *God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. —Galatians 4:3-5, NLT.*

Paul dealt plainly with those who urged the Law of Moses together with the gospel of Christ, and endeavored to bring believers under its bondage. They could not fully understand the meaning of the law as given by Moses. They were tied to many burdensome rites and observances, by which they were taught and kept subject like a child under tutors. We learn the happier state of believers under the mercy and grace of the gospel. The wonders of Divine love and mercy were shown as God the Father sent his Son into the world, born of a woman, to redeem and save us. This birth of a baby came just at the right time. The Son of God came in the flesh, submitting so low, and suffering so much for us in condescending to dwell in the hearts of believers. Also, Paul shared the advantages we enjoy under the gospel. Although by nature children of wrath and disobedience, we became by grace children of love, and partakers of the nature of the children of God; for God will have all his children resemble him. The Holy Spirit witnesses with our spirits that we are God's children.

Have you been "Rocked by a Baby" this Christmas season by God's perfect timing? If so, how will you allow God to redirect your schedule and relationships as the old year ends and the new year begins?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who need the perfect timing of God in their schedule and relationships. Help them see that the plans of God always surpass the plans they set in their own will.

PRAYER—**God, in your perfect time, you sent your Son into the world. Help me to grasp the need to allow you to set the pace and direction for my life. Guide me in my schedule and relationships as I wait on the threshold of a new year. Amen.**

From A to Z

⁷ *Look! He comes with the clouds of heaven. And everyone will see him—even those who pierced him. And all the nations of the world will mourn for him. Yes! Amen!* ⁸ *“I am the Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the end” says the Lord God. “I am the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come—the Almighty One.” —Revelation 1:7-8, NLT.*

The Apostle John, who was exiled to the island of Patmos, wrote about the coming of our King, the Lord Jesus. His return is planned meticulously. His timing is perfect. He returns, not as a vulnerable baby, not as an honored guest, and not as an esteemed prophet or teacher. He returns as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Our God returns for his people, his bride, and his church. John’s prologue ends with the promise that Jesus is coming with the clouds. This promise is confirmed by the Lord himself who states, “I am the Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the end.” In essence, I’m everything between “A to Z.” He is the beginning of time. He is the end of time. He is the beginning history, and the ending history. As we face persecution and even death at the hands of Autocrats, remember, Jesus is Coming. As we stand before Judges, remember, Jesus is Coming. As terrorists blow up and kill innocent men, women and children, remember, Jesus is Coming. In the face of sickness and death, remember, Jesus is Coming. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is faithful and true. He is the Prince of Peace, Immanuel, “God with Us.” Jesus, our God, is Coming!

Have you been “Rocked by a Baby” this Christmas season because Jesus will return to the earth as the Alpha and the Omega? If so, how will you be ready to receive him, not as a vulnerable baby but the King of kings?

JESUS ROCKS!—pray for those in your Oikos who need to claim Jesus as the King of kings and Lord of lords in their lives. Remind them to be ready because Jesus will come as a righteous Judge, not an innocent baby.

PRAYER—Lord, I want to be ready to receive you as my King of kings and Lord of lords. I await your return with expectation. As I enter a new year, I trust you with the “A to Z” of my life! Amen.