

November 29, 2021

[Isaiah 40:1-5](#)

[Mark 1:1-3](#)

I picked these two passages because the validity of Scripture becomes substantiated as Isaiah was written 700 years before Christ and Mark after the resurrection of Jesus. Isaiah prophesied the precursor to Christ, John the Baptist. Many details of John are given including first the desert, a picture of the challenges that each person faces individually. For me, this shows that I can't go it alone. I need a Savior! Through this prophecy and then the fulfillment in John the Baptist, we are challenged to prepare the way for the perfect plan for eternal life through THE Christ, our Lord and Savior, Jesus. There are and will be "rough and rugged" periods for each of us. Expect them! But the best is coming in the comfort of our sin being paid for with the blood of Jesus. All glory of the Lord will be revealed. Prepare your hearts and minds with confidence in expectation of the coming of our Savior during this Advent season as we trust in the Lord with ALL our hearts, soul, and minds.

What challenges are you facing that bring to light where you need a Savior?

Dear Jesus, thank you for your sacrifice of leaving heaven to show and teach us the way and the giving the ultimate, your life, so we can have forgiveness for our sins to live in communion with you now and forever. May we prepare our hearts in gratitude for your coming. In your precious name. Amen

Jo Ditzel

November 30, 2021

[Isaiah 40:9-11](#)

In this passage, the prophet Isaiah is addressing people who are in exile. Seemingly cut off from God, hopes and expectations for the future are shattered. When I think about what they may have felt, I bet a lot of us feel that way sometimes, too. We wonder where God is when life doesn't go as planned. The verses prior to this passage (Isaiah 40:1-8) offer comfort for God's people -- he urges them that comfort that can be found in the Lord and his Word.

Verse 9 continues to command the people to joyfully seek God and declare that He is here. I love the personal pronoun used -- "Here is YOUR God!" The prophet is emphasizing that God is not distant or far off. He wants each of us to claim our own unique relationship with Him as our personal Lord. And this is indeed good news! Isaiah urges us to not be afraid to claim this news as good.

Verses 10-11 go on to describe both the power and gentleness of the Lord. Verse 10 describes God as a prince coming "with power" and ruling with "a mighty arm" -- which assures us that He is strong and powerful beyond measure. Nothing is out of His control. And also, in verse 11, we are reminded that He deals gently with us -- "like a shepherd...He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart." What a beautiful picture that God can be so powerful that even the wind and the waves obey Him, but He also loves us so much that He "carries us close to his heart."

Just like the people in Isaiah's time, our futures are unknown to us. But we are held by an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving God.

Even in the midst of trials or uncertainty, how can we look for God carrying us close to His heart? To have eyes to see the small graces and how God is carrying us through these times? How can we pray for more faith -- to trust that He has the power to do anything and yet also surrender to His leading us like a shepherd?

Dear Lord, Help our unbelief and give us more faith in you. Thank you for giving us a picture of your great power and your gentleness and desire to care for us. Help open our eyes to the ways you are moving in our lives. Help us seek you in joyful anticipation as we look forward to the birth of your Son, your ultimate expression of love for us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Charlotte Marie Sturtz

December 1, 2021

[Genesis 15:1-6](#)

By now, Abram (later named Abraham) has been hearing God's promises for some time. After leaving his ancestral land for Canaan and then stopping to settle down in Haran instead, Abram hears the Lord call him to resume the journey with the promise to make of him a great nation so that "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Once he reaches Canaan, God then promises the land to his descendants. Forced to go to Egypt because of famine in Canaan, Abram returns to Canaan where God again promises the land to him and his offspring.

This passage opens with God making another promise. Coming immediately after Abram has rescued his nephew Lot from the captivity of a group of powerful kings and then refused the gifts of another King, God tells him not to fear, promising safety and, once again, "great" reward. But all these promises are beginning to sound a bit hollow to Abram, for he doesn't have the one thing that he sees as necessary for them to be realized -- an heir. As things stand, his heir will be his foreign slave. But "the word of the Lord" (the same word that spoke the universe into existence) insists that only his own flesh and blood will be his heir. Reminded that God is the creator, and he is the created ("count the stars, if you are able to count them"), Abram hears again the promise of many descendants, and "he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness."

One of God's greatest promises is to be with us. It's an easy promise to distrust, especially when things go terribly wrong in our lives or the lives of those we love. This passage reminds us of the importance of trusting the Lord even when we don't understand the why or how. While many Christians know this passage as Paul's proof of the sufficiency of salvation through faith rather than works, James cites this same scripture and Abraham's subsequent willingness to sacrifice his only heir as proof that "faith without works is dead." Being "righteous" means "to be aligned with" God, not with just some kind of intellectual faith, but with the willingness to trust God's promises enough to cling to him and risk what's most dear to us in his service, no matter what the circumstances.

Lord, we pray for the faith that trusts that you are for us, even when we struggle to see you or understand your ways. Give us the same trust that young children have in their loving parents. We ask this in the name of Jesus.

Walter DuPre

December 2, 2021

[Psalm 89:1-4](#)

To say that the past few years have been full of uncertainty and change is a massive understatement. We have felt it in different ways and to different degrees, but we have all felt it. While this time has been unique in many ways, one only has to look at a history book to see that it is full of times of turbulence and strife, including when this psalm was written. In contrast, this psalm speaks to God's unending faithfulness and love for his people. Through God's covenant and the gift of Jesus, we know we can always turn to the same constant and loving God, no matter how much the world around us is changing.

How have you recently felt change and uncertainty? How have you felt God's unaltered faithfulness?

God, thank you for your unwavering faithfulness and love for us. Help us to turn to you and your constant and unending love when the world around us changes.

Jane Wilkinson

December 3, 2021

[Isaiah 11:1-10](#)

This passage begins with an image of a new growth coming from a stump. Visualizing a fresh green offshoot calls me to hope and seek opportunity where I sense dread and tension. I'm a classic conflict avoider but this passage encourages me to think there can be peace and promise in a ravaged world or tough situation.

Verse 3 is a good reminder that you can't fool God with what the world sees and hears from you. God knows the inner workings of your unspoken thoughts and motives and will judge the real you despite what the world thinks.

Verse 6 onward speaks to a world where knowledge of the Lord flips everything upside down with no predators and harmony among all creatures. Seems like a foreign concept to what I see and hear today, but Christmas is a time to be encouraged and feel secure that the Lord's work is not done. Righteousness will win out like the new growth coming from the stump.

How can we help to advance Jesus' unfinished work?

Dear Lord, I pray that regardless our individual and the world's circumstances we can grab onto the hope that your work is not done. Give us the strength and peace of mind to confidently spread this message during the Advent season and throughout the year. Amen.

Colin Edwards

December 6, 2021

Micah 5:2-3 (The Message)

But you, Bethlehem, David's country, the runt of the litter --- From you will come the leader who will shepherd-rule Israel. He'll be no upstart, no pretender. His family tree is ancient and distinguished. Meanwhile, Israel will be in foster homes until the birth pangs are over and the child is born.

This is the scripture that so disturbed King Herod, that caused him to call together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law (Matthew 2:3-4) to find out when and where the star appeared so he could identify the child heralded as the king of the Jews, as the Messiah. He even tried to trick the Magi into revealing his location.

But God had a bigger plan, bigger than Herod's ego and drive for power. That plan was rooted in God's plan from ancient times, the beginning of time. Many have tried to thwart that plan over the eons. But those who live knowing Jesus as the Messiah, the shepherd-ruler that Micah foreshadowed in this scripture can live knowing they can trust absolutely in the Lord.

As we live through the challenges in our own lives, see the huge problems facing the world around us, there's a sense of strength and peace that comes from knowing God keeps his promises and that He's in control of our eternity.

Cece Webster

December 7, 2021

[Zechariah 6:12-13](#)

The Book of Zechariah was written as the Jews returned as former exiles from Babylon to Judah and attempted to reestablish Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple, around 520-515 AD. My Bible commentary states that the Prophet Zechariah was concerned with more than just the physical rebuilding of the temple and reclaiming of their physical homeland, but also had the desire to see a restored relationship between God and his people. In 6:13, Zechariah refers to a King who will share the throne with a Priest, “and there will be peaceful counsel between the two of them.”

In the last few years, the season of Advent has become fraught with the busyness of to-do lists and forced family fun. As a mom, I feel the crush of wanting to control the holiday season to make every experience magical-- all with a true intention to find joy amidst the chaos! I believe many can relate; the desire to manufacture the “Christmas Spirit” often takes the spirit right out of our Christmases. I find comfort in these verses from Zechariah about a King who rules in splendor overseeing the concerns of his people and the Priest who intercedes for them sharing the same throne—Jesus is both our Lord and our High Priest. And there is peace between the pressing concerns of the world (for the Jews rebuilding the temple) and the spiritual concerns of rebuilding relationship with God. How can this be? Only in Jesus. Jesus is the Branch that extends out to each of us. Jesus our King and High Priest invites us into a place of peace at the intersection of the world’s demands and the Spirit’s calling.

My intention this Advent is that I might not tack holiday spirit onto a to-do list; but cultivate it from a place of gratitude for what Christ has already done for me. As He continues to intercede for me, I pray that I might find space for remembering, meditating, and quieting my heart for His presence. Jesus knows the tensions we live in. He does not ask us to overcome the world; rather, He has already overcome it! And He invites us to share His kingdom with the ones He loves on earth.

“Oh come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, Oh come and Behold Him, born the King of Angels, Christ the Lord.”

Mary Flynn Niemitz

December 8, 2021

[John 1:1-6](#)

The Christmas season is a wonderful time to reflect and appreciate God's wonderful gift to us of Jesus. I have always been intrigued and fascinated by John's description of Jesus as "the Word" in John 1. Jesus was one of the most powerful ways God has chosen to reveal Himself to us and to use Jesus as a living word to show us His heart for us and his Character. As the Word, Jesus showed us a God who loves, who heals, who creates, and who blesses us. Jesus' actions in life and in death speak to God's deep love and willingness to not only love us in our imperfections, but to endure great pain and suffering to create an opportunity for us to choose to have a close personal relationship with Him. According to this passage, Jesus was there in the beginning with God and is responsible for all creation, including each one of us. We owe our existence to Him. It has always amazed me that while possessing that kind of power, he chose to pursue us fully by becoming a man and walking among us. For me, this inspires profound gratitude.

I encourage you to take time this Christmas season and reflect on what Jesus' life says to us about who God is and how He truly feels about us. Jesus demonstrated patient love in the gospels over and over again. Perhaps that is one way Jesus lights up the darkness, through answering questions that we all wrestle with about who God is and how he feels about each of us.

What do I think God thinks about me and feels for me? How does that line up with God's character demonstrated by Jesus and how he lived his life?

God, thank you for the incredible gift of Jesus to shine light for us on who you truly are and how You love us. Let the essences of who we are and how we live our lives be evidence of our receiving of your love for us and it pouring out on the people around us.

Ben Merrill

December 9, 2021

[John 1:9-18](#)

The verse John 1:14, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” is a touchstone of the Christmas season, read and recited every year during Advent and Christmas; remembering and celebrating that Jesus was not just a person, but a physical manifestation of God, the Word who created the world. But what is the impact of this embodiment? The rest of this passage, which is not as commonly recited, starts to define WHY this incarnation is so important.

God’s people already had the law through Moses, they already inhabited the world that God made, so what was missing? Verse 17 explains, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” This passage tells us that through Jesus Christ’s “fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” This phrase “grace upon grace” evokes the image of a cup already overflowing, with more being poured on in an unending stream. It is not the mere presence of Christ on Earth that is significant, it is that his presence ushers in the abundant grace of God, full of grace and truth, to us all.

When I reflect on this grace upon grace, it feels like a sweet and tender gift. Christ is described as being active in these verses “coming into the world” and giving the right to become children of God. For us, his people, the actions laid out are simple; believe and receive. To receive the grace upon grace that comes from Christ’s truth is simple, although it may not be easy. In a time when we are often attempting to prove to others our worth through the words and actions we share, to faithfully believe God’s truth and receive the grace of Christ might be the opposite of our instinct. Just as we prepare our homes for visitors and graciously receive Christmas presents at this time of year, let us prepare our hearts for Christ, and allow ourselves to receive his presence, truth, and unending grace.

Is there a particular area of your life where you long to receive the grace of God?

God, full of truth and grace, we are grateful for your gifts and blessings, grateful that the Word became flesh to dwell among us. God, help us to believe that you are for us, and to receive your love and grace as the foundation of our identity as your children. And let that identity serve to encourage us and to drown out the noise of busyness and comparison that the world can bring. It is in Christ’s name that we pray, Amen.

Jarrett Jackson

December 10, 2021

[Luke 1:14-17](#)

So I've just read the NIV and the NLT versions of this passage; the words "Joy," "Delight," and "Gladness" are paramount in the telling of Jesus' birth and the effect he would and will have on all of our lives. To be filled with the Holy Spirit even before his own birth, how profound is that? Yet, not so far-fetched, because we know all we need to do is accept Jesus, our Lord and Savior, and that peace is ours.

I know there is a peace that has existed in my life since I accepted Jesus into my heart, much like Jesus being filled with the Holy Spirit since birth. I believe that the Lord our God takes delight in knowing that his children follow these steps in coming to know his peace and understanding.

This is evermore so apparent when a member of God's community decides to share this good news with those around them.

What are you doing daily to spread the word of Christ?

I pray that each of us could have the courage and take the time in our busy schedules to see opportunities to share the gospel of Jesus. I know I let many of those opportunities slip by, but I pray the Lord keeps challenging me to stand up and speak up for him.

Sam Martin

December 13, 2021

[Luke 1:18-25](#)

Do you sometimes sit and contemplate that you have it too good? That life is going so well and easy that you are just waiting for a shoe to drop? It seems easy to pray for mercy and grace when life seems overwhelming, and circumstances are murky and chaotic. But how often do we take the time to praise our Heavenly Father when we are having our prayers answered and for the joy He is providing?

Luke 1:18-25 is a microcosm of this view. Zechariah and Elizabeth's prayers of becoming pregnant and having their first child are answered after years of heartbreak trying to get pregnant. Not only are they answered, but this gift is personally delivered by one of God's personal angels, Gabriel! What does Zechariah do when he hears this incredible news? He doubts! Immediately, Gabriel, who stood in the presence of God himself, takes away Zechariah's ability to speak. I am imagining this was a blessing for Zechariah so he wouldn't spread his doubts, worries, and fears on Elizabeth, their family, and his congregation. Perhaps not coincidentally, as soon as Elizabeth becomes pregnant, she goes into seclusion. Although this was fairly common at the time due to high rates of pregnancy complications and given the fact she was older than typical mothers and barren until that point, (1), she was not joyful and appreciative of this amazing blessing.

In verse 25, Elizabeth finally seeks to realize her answered prayers when she proclaims, "How kind the Lord is!" she exclaimed. "He has taken away my disgrace of having no children." At this point in time, the nation of Israel wondered if God would ever provide a Messiah.

Well, we now know the importance of the child born to Zechariah and Elizabeth and how he prepared the way for our Savior! I hope this Advent season you (and I!) will find true faith and joy in the birth of Jesus. He is there regardless of our situation and disposition.

Even when prayers are answered, why do we still doubt?

Jesus, thank you for coming into this world to bring us joy and hope and may we celebrate Your birth in real faith!

Trey Tolbert

December 14

[Luke 1:26-38](#)

“May your word to me be fulfilled.” I can almost promise you that would not be my first response to Gabriel’s news. If I’m honest, it’s not my initial response to most things God asks of me. What extraordinary words from an ordinary girl from small town Nazareth. Mary must have had her own dreams of a husband, house, and children. And then, Gabriel appears with an invitation from God, an invitation that will change everything.

If Mary said yes, her future marriage and other dreams would be in jeopardy. Her standing in the community would be ruined, actually not only hers, but her family’s as well. Mary did not argue or question or suggest an alternate plan (which would most likely be my initial response) or even demand to know all the details. Her response was simple but profound, “I am the Lord’s servant. May your word be fulfilled.” She listened to Gabriel, considered the request, and trusting God and His plan, responded simply, “Yes.” Her response was not only life-changing for her but world-changing. She gave birth to not just any baby but God’s own Son, Jesus, the Savior of the World. God’s plan for her was way bigger than her own dreams and plans.

Sometimes what God asks of us seems too hard, too messy, too uncomfortable, too risky, too scary, and definitely too inconvenient. (After all, we have our own plans.) If we say yes, we may be judged, criticized, or misunderstood. We may have to give up our own plans, step out of our comfortableness, and be inconvenienced. We may see and suggest to God what we think are much better plans or want all the details upfront before agreeing to the plan.

The truth is that God is going to accomplish His purpose, His plan, with or without me. But He invites me, an ordinary person, into His plans. I can say no and continue with my own plans. (If I say no, what do I miss out on?) If I say yes, although it might be hard, messy, uncomfortable, risky, scary, and inconvenient, I get to be part of something way bigger than I can imagine. When we say yes, God does extraordinary things through ordinary people like us.

What is God asking you to say yes to today?

God, thank you for using an ordinary girl named Mary to change the world. Today, I, like Mary, claim your promise that no word from You will ever fail. Help me to say yes to what you are asking me. In the name of Mary’s baby, Your Son, the Savior of the world, I pray. Amen.

Jan Williamson

December 15, 2021

[Luke 1:39-45](#)

Elizabeth's reaction to Mary's greeting reminds me of one of my favorite children's books, "Oh, The Places You'll Go!" by Dr. Seuss. In the book, there is a section about The Waiting Place where everyone is just waiting. After describing the Waiting Place, the narrator says:

"NO! That's not for you!
Somehow you'll escape all that waiting and staying.
You'll find the bright places where Boom Bands are playing."

I've always loved this part of the book because I think the imagery perfectly articulates the feeling of finally finding what you've been waiting for. Elizabeth exclaims in a loud voice because she anticipates the fulfillment of something she's long been awaiting — she can hear the Boom Bands playing. Along with so many others, Elizabeth had been waiting for the Messiah. Of course, she would shout for joy at this miracle of new life.

In this Advent season, we already know how, or rather through whom, we can "escape" the waiting. Whether or not we get what we're waiting for, let us look to the Lord who fulfills his promises. He is the bright place where Boom Bands are playing.

Remember a time when you were in the waiting place. How did the Lord meet you there and fulfill his promises, no matter the outcome?

Oh Lord, thank you for the comfort you provide as we wait. Even as I sometimes struggle to wait, remind me that you are the bright place where Boom Bands are playing.

Matt Niemitz

December 16, 2021

[Luke 1:46-56](#)

Mary's joy was so full that a new song came out of her, her own psalm. Mary's praise starts with her personal experience of God's mercy and favor in being seen by God and chosen as Jesus' mother, then it transitions to what her son's birth will mean for the Israelites who believe in him. Praises for God's mercy, power, provision, and salvation.

Have you ever been so excited about something that you started singing? Our 5-year-old, Foster, will burst into song throughout the day. Typically, these "songs" come out as she plays and is excited about something. But last week she caught me by surprise when we were in her playhouse, and she started singing a song about God. It was her own song, talking about how she loves God, and Jesus is strong and beautiful. I joined her in just telling God how much I love Him in a sing-songy way. I was holding back tears. I'm not always sure where Foster's relationship with God is, and I was overjoyed that God met us in that moment - He inhabits the praise of his people.

Can you praise God with a new song like Mary did? Sing or write a song, poem, or note to God - thinking about the way He has blessed you personally and Christ's impact from generation to generation.

Lord, my soul magnifies you, we lift you up. My spirit rejoices in God my Savior. We trust you to keep your promises. We praise you and love you, Lord. I pray that we'll experience your mercy, and we'll show your mercy to others. You are with us. We wait on you and know that you hear us cry out in tears and in joyful moments. You are God with us. Thank you for the joy you bring to me. I love you Lord, Amen.

Julie Straw

December 17, 2021

[Isaiah 9:2-7](#)

I recently read that this passage of Isaiah was like a modern-day birth announcement. I am sure many of us have received such cards in the mail with an adorable picture of a newly born baby along with the child's name, height, and weight. If we think of this passage as an ancient birth announcement, it is a bit embarrassing that Isaiah sent it way too early. About 700 years too early.

Imagine reading these words - that one day a child would be born who would reign forever. Then imagine living in that waiting and the dream not being fulfilled within your lifetime.

It could have been disappointing, but I think that these words of Isaiah might have given the people something to hope for. A glimpse of the light that was to come. Many of us are waiting for something, and there is a big difference between waiting without hope and waiting with hope.

In this passage, Isaiah gives hope by sharing and naming the character of who this child will grow up to become. Four names are given: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. These names are indicative of how the Messiah will exist in their world. When Jesus is born, he is not a distant deity but one who counsels and tends to his people. He is mighty with divine power showcased in many miracles. Jesus' reign does not end; rather, Jesus is still the everlasting ruler who cares for us. And lastly, Jesus comes to bring peace - not only to our world but to our hearts as well.

Many of us might be waiting for something. We might find ourselves in dark places where all seems lost. How can these words of Isaiah provide some light and hope into your life?

This day, be reminded that we are called to wait with hope because we place our hope in the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. Amen.

Mary Beth Walker

December 20, 2021

[Matthew 1:18-25](#)

For most of my spiritual life, my instinctual reaction to this passage has been to put on my proverbial Joseph hat and place him in our modern times. How would I react to news that my virgin fiancé was pregnant? One would struggle not to be incredulous, and further struggle to not annul the engagement. This season, I took time to consider another approach to the story. Joseph's role in the birth of Jesus is squarely in the secondary cast of characters. How many Renaissance master paintings do you recall of Joseph and Jesus? Surely Kairos member Walter DuPre knows several, but nothing comes to mind for me. And yet, here in this story we all know, God sends an angel to visit Joseph in a dream to ensure that he remain faithful and understand the significance of what is to come. Joseph's supportive role is so important that God reveals His plans for their family through an angel.

I am struck by two significant elements to this passage: (1) Joseph's supportive role, however less significant than Mary's, still involved divine intervention from God. (2) Joseph's reaction to this dream was to immediately change his plans and follow the words of the Lord. To seriously consider the words from an angel in his dream, Joseph was clearly listening for and open to receiving God's message. In this season of anticipation and celebration, this passage encourages me to listen faithfully for God and to be ready and willing to play whatever role He has in mind – especially one of support for my loved ones.

How ready are you to serve others for God's glory?

Dear Jesus, we thank you for the opportunity to love others as a reflection of Your love. Help us to be receptive to whatever path you have planned for us. Amen.

Chris Fehn

December 21, 2020

[Luke 2:1-20](#)

Oh, the beauty and glory of Christmas.

Oh, the stress and mess of it, too.

I love all things Christmas: the family gatherings, the gift exchanges, reflecting on Jesus' miraculous birth. Unfortunately, those very things also expose the messiness of my heart.

But isn't that the message of Christmas?

Israel's long-awaited Messiah was coming at last... through the virgin Mary! *Glory!*

But did her community believe the father was God? Or was she misunderstood and accused of immorality? *Messy.*

In Bethlehem, there was no room for them in the "inn." Theoretically, Mary and Joseph could have been turned away from Joseph's family members. *Complicated.*

Angels appeared to shepherds in a field announcing, "Good news of great joy! A Savior is Born!" *Glory!*

Yet he was placed in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. *Messy.*

The shepherds, however, would have seen the *glory in the mess*. The manger was "a sign to them." They knew the drill. When baby lambs were born, shepherds would "wrap them in swaddling cloths and place them in a manger" to keep them from becoming defective so that they would be perfect sacrifices for priests.

This was their glorious sign, in the middle of the muck and mire: the perfect sacrificial lamb, Jesus--the "lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), was born in the same way--set apart for sacrifice--that one day, he would die as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins and to end the sacrificial system once and for all. *Glory!*

God displays his glory in the mess!

He is always working--even when things are complicated, messy and inconvenient. That is the promise of the manger, and that is the promise of Christmas.

As you prepare for today, how can Jesus' messy but glorious birth be "a sign to you?"

Lord, I confess I sometimes do not receive your birth as good news of great joy. My mind is flooded with thoughts of family dynamics, toy assembly, shipping delays, and a never-ending to-do list. Thank you that you came for messes like me. Thank you for entering my mess in the most glorious of ways. I ask for the joy of the angels, the pondering of Mary, and the haste of the shepherds to share this good news of great joy.

Lindsay Fluker

December 22, 2021

[Matthew 2:1-2](#)

We are almost there. Do you imagine that is what the wise men said? Are we there yet? Are you asking this same question: Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?

Through a season that just flies by with so many different feelings, I hope today you can rest and find this King. Settle in the truths that He has spoken. In just a few days He will be here.

“This is the season of almost. We learn to sit in the faint glow of a long Advent, the shorter days and endless nights. This is the season for all of us who need that extra hour of darkness, preferably under a blanket near the Christmas tree, to feel the immensity of what we’ve gained and what we’ve lost...And as we anticipate Christ’s birth together, may we experience the stubborn hope of Christmas, joy in the midst of sorrow, a love that knows no bounds, and a transcendent peace amid a world on fire.

Jesus can’t be born soon enough.” - Kate Bowler, “The Season of Almost”

Jesus, I look for your star today. I ask as the wise men did, “Where is the one who is born king of the Jews?” Please be close today. Amen.

Jessica Sykes

December 23, 2021

[Matthew 2:9-12](#)

Tomorrow is Christmas Eve! Can you believe it? I am excited for our Christmas Eve service where we will hear many of the Scripture passages we have been reflecting on over the past few weeks. On Christmas Eve, when we re-tell the story of Jesus, sometimes it seems like the story happened all at once. Angels appear, a baby is born, shepherds and wisemen come seek Him. We end the evening lighting candles and singing “Silent Night” and I tear up every time.

Did you know that Bible scholars speculate that Jesus was likely between 1-2 years old when the Magi found him? Sorry to break it to you, the wisemen were likely not there at the same time as the shepherds. Can you imagine following a star to search for a newborn king for a couple of years? Needless to say, they were “overjoyed” when they reached their destination. And their joy in encountering Jesus causes them to bow down in worship.

We see gift giving as part of the Christmas story too. The wisemen brought three gifts with important symbolism. Gold is a gift for a king, frankincense (like incense) is a gift for a deity, and myrrh (a spice used in embalming) is a gift for one who was going to die. In their gift-giving, the Magi acknowledge who Jesus came to be—our King, our God, and ultimately our Savior, the one who would give his very life for us.

As we reflect on the example of the Magi, what can we learn? I am struck by their persistence in seeking Jesus. Their willingness to leave all that they knew to follow a star. Their unwillingness to give up. Their delight in encountering Jesus. Would you like to be more persistent and intentional in the way you seek Jesus?

I am also moved by their posture toward Jesus. On encountering Jesus for the first time, the wisemen are filled with joy and bow down in worship. Their gifts acknowledge a fuller understanding of Jesus’ identity. What is your posture as you encounter Jesus—do you feel a sense of joy in his presence?

How might reflecting on WHO Jesus came to be and what this means to you help you experience more joy this Christmas?

Jesus, we want to be wise people who seek after you persistently and intentionally. We want to experience joy in your presence. Would you help us remember the gift that your presence means in our lives—you are our King who reigns and is in control, our God who is able to do more than we could ask or imagine, and our Savior who died to give us everlasting life. Open our hearts to worship you and truly encounter you this Christmas. AMEN.

Miriam Ryan