

Advent

DEVOTIONAL

November 28 – December 24, 2021



Village Church
FOLLOWING JESUS FOR LIFE

Advent

We celebrate the season of Advent during the four Sundays that lead up to Christmas. Advent begins on the Sunday that falls between November 27th and December 3rd each year. This year we begin Advent on November 28. The new Christian year begins with the twelve-day celebration of Christmastide, which lasts from Christmas Eve until Epiphany on January 6.

Advent presents an opportunity for communal discernment and personal examination as we prepare to celebrate the nativity of the Lord and look with hope for Christ's return. We are spending this advent season looking at the characters of Christmas by celebrating the tradition of the nativity scenes we love. While not all the characters will have a place in the traditional scenes, they all play an important role in the story of Christmas. We celebrate Christ's coming into the world and watch with expectant hope for his coming again.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is intended to provide families, individuals, or study groups with a devotional to study each day of the Advent season.

- Start by centering yourself mentally during your time of devotion.
- A reflection is provided to share some experiences and/or provide a topic to contemplate. Some reflections are written by our friends in the Village Church. Others are excerpts from writings of others from outside the church.
- Each day there is a Scripture passage that relates to the Christmas story. Read the passage and reflect on how your heart is being moved through God's word.
- A picture of a nativity scene is provided as an artistic expression of the celebration of the birth of Christ. What message do you receive from the picture?
- The devotion each day ends with a music video of Christmas music. If viewing the devotional electronically, you can click on the link. If reading in written form a link is provided for you to type into a browser window. Use the music video to end your devotional time in prayer and worship. Music can be an excellent way to put ourselves in tune with God's spirit.

The Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath is a Christian tradition that symbolizes the passage of the four weeks of Advent in the liturgical calendar of the Western church. It is usually a horizontal evergreen wreath with four (three purple and one pink) candles around the wreath and a fifth, white candle in the center. Beginning with the First Sunday of Advent, the lighting of a candle can be accompanied by a Bible reading, devotional and/or prayer. An additional candle is lit during each subsequent week until, by the last Sunday before Christmas all four candles are lit. The fifth, Christ candle, is lit on Christmas Eve. The custom is observed both in family settings and at public church services. There are instructions on which candles to light on each Sunday of Advent and on Christmas Eve in the devotional.

NOVEMBER 28, 2021 FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

REFLECTION: *Excerpt from an article written by L.V. Anderson, a contemporary news editor.*

St. Francis of Assisi is credited with staging the first nativity scene in 1223. The only historical account we have of Francis' nativity scene comes from *The Life of St. Francis of Assisi* by St. Bonaventure, a Franciscan monk who was born five years before Francis' death. According to Bonaventure's biography, St. Francis got permission from Pope Honorius III to set up a manger with hay and two live animals—an ox and an ass—in a cave in the Italian village of Greccio. He then invited the villagers to come gaze upon the scene while he preached about “the babe of Bethlehem.” (Francis was supposedly so overcome by emotion that he couldn't say “Jesus.”) That nativity scenes had enormous popular appeal. Francis' display came in the middle of a period when mystery or miracle plays were a popular form of entertainment and education for European laypeople. These plays, originally performed in churches and later performed in town squares, re-enacted Bible stories in vernacular languages. Since church services at the time were performed only in Latin, which virtually no one understood, miracle plays were the only way for laypeople to learn scripture. Francis' nativity scene used the same method of visual display to help locals understand and emotionally engage with Christianity. Within a couple of centuries of Francis' inaugural display, nativity scenes had spread throughout Europe. It's unclear from Bonaventure's account whether Francis used people or figures to stand in for Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, or if the spectators just used their imagination, but later nativity scenes included both *tableaux vivants* and dioramas, and the cast of characters gradually expanded to include not only the happy couple and the infant, but sometimes entire villages. The familiar cast of characters we see today—namely the three wise men and the shepherds—aren't biblically accurate... Nowhere in the Bible do the shepherds and wise men appear together, and nowhere in the Bible are donkeys, oxen, cattle, or other domesticated animals mentioned in conjunction with Jesus' birth. But early nativity scenes took their cues more from religious art than from scripture.

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 3: 12-17

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [A Hymn of the Nativity](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Vszzbj_MGg): Performed by Julia Doyle and the City of London Choir
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Vszzbj_MGg



Assisi Basilica Lit with Giotto Nativity Frescos

If using an advent wreath, light the first purple candle, which symbolizes hope and is called the Prophet's Candle. The prophets of the Old Testament, especially Isaiah, waited in hope for the Messiah's arrival.

NOVEMBER 29, 2021

REFLECTION: *Written by Arlene Stamper*

It was fall of 1969. My husband and I and our two-year-old daughter were living in a one-bedroom apartment in Anaheim CA. We were blocks away from Disneyland where we would watch the fireworks in the evenings from our little patio.

After walking my daughter in her stroller one day, I spotted a hobby shop. They had the most beautiful nativity scene out on display! Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus. The three Wisemen and the Shepherd. The statues were each about a foot tall and burnished a rich gold.

Being a young married couple, Jerry and I did not have many Christmas decorations. In fact, we were still using the aluminum foil Christmas tree my folks had purchased in 1959! So, I went into that hobby shop and signed up to make that nativity! I took weekly classes and learned how to make a wire form for each figure, drape and form the fabric for their clothing and then finally to burnish them. It was a proud moment when I applied the gold leaf on just in time for Christmas!

This nativity has travelled to three different homes we have lived in over the years. Although we have received and purchased many Christmas decorations over the years, our first Nativity continues to bless and remind me of the real reason for Christmas.

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 7:10-14

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [O Holy Night](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CO6OZIY-IYw): Performed by Home Free
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CO6OZIY-IYw>



The Stamper Family Nativity

NOVEMBER 30, 2021

REFLECTION ON ZECHARIAH: *Written by Derrek Busha a contemporary pastor of counseling and Brynn James, a contemporary author.*

It's been 400 years since Israel has heard from Yahweh. They have hung on to the promise that the day of the Lord is coming. They believe that there will be a Messiah and one who precedes him to prepare the way. This is where we find Zechariah. He is faithfully tending to his duties in worship at the Temple when he encounters an angel, who brings the good news that the old Zechariah and his barren wife shall finally have a son. The angel tells Zechariah that his son's name is to be John, and that John will fulfill God's promise!

You would think that Zechariah would respond with joy and gladness at the angel's news. But instead, he seems skeptical, almost doubtful, as he responds: "How shall I know this? I am old, and my wife is advanced in years." The angel informs him that because of his disbelief, he will be struck with muteness, unable to speak, to explain, or communicate what is happening until his son arrives. So, Zechariah is left to wait—for nine months. He is left to ponder. All he can do is wait with intense hope and anticipation—anticipation that grows in strength all the way up to the day that his son arrives.

Zechariah gets to speak again when his son is born. And the words that he speaks are of even better news to come. Zechariah's waiting reminds us of Israel's waiting. But unlike his growing anticipation, Israel's doubt festered over a long period of time. There should have been an anticipation while waiting on God to act. But because of their disbelief, they are left to wait a bit longer, and a bit longer...until the right time for God to enter back into their story. Like Zechariah, Israel doubted. But God's Word was able to fill them with hope and salvation. This Advent, may we find hope and encouragement. And may we also find words to proclaim that God has broken the silence and has given us his Word in Christ.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 1: 5-23; 67-79

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QiQ_R-s6h00): Performed by Tapestry Chamber Singers
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QiQ_R-s6h00



An empty creche awaiting the birth of Christ

DECEMBER 1, 2021

REFLECTION ON GABRIEL: *Written by Jamie Janosz, a contemporary author.*

According to several recent polls, more Americans believe in the existence of angels (55 percent) than in global warming (36 percent). In August 2007, a Pew poll found that 68 percent of Americans believe that “angels and demons are active in the world.” The story of the Nativity features one of these angels, Gabriel. His name means “the strength of God,” and he is often seen delivering messages of God’s kindness. The angel Gabriel is mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments, first to Daniel (Dan. 8:15–16) and later in the New Testament, predicting the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. The passage tells us that the angel Gabriel was sent by God to Nazareth in the “sixth month,” referring to the pregnancy of Elizabeth (1:36). The angel had previously appeared to Zechariah, and now was sent on a second birth announcement mission to Mary. To this young girl, a virgin, the angel Gabriel appears and addresses her with great respect: “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you” (v. 28). Like most humans receiving a heavenly visitor, Mary was “troubled” by the angel’s appearance. Gabriel repeated that she has found “favor” with God (v. 30). The fact that God has favored or chosen her should allay her fears. He then told Mary the reason for his visit: she will bear a son, in a supernatural way, and name Him Jesus. This will not be an ordinary baby, because His destiny will be to reign over the house of Jacob forever (vv. 31–33). Jesus would not be the son of an earthly man, but the “Son of the Most High” (v. 32). The announcement of this baby certainly warranted an angelic messenger.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:26-33

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: *The Angel Gabriel:* Performed by All Angels
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHuokdjT4UY>



Nativity Scene with Mary, Joseph, and Angels

DECEMBER 2, 2021

REFLECTION ON MARY: *Written by Will Graham, grandson of Billy Graham and Vice-President and Associate Evangelist at the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association*

It's hard not to be intrigued and impressed by Mary. She was just a teenager, some estimates say between 13 and 16 years old, when an angel appeared to her. I can just imagine how a teen today would have reacted if an angel of the Lord showed up in their room. My guess is that the immediate response would be fear, screams or crying. The sheer overwhelming nature of the experience would be enough to cause that reaction. However, when the angel appears and brings a joyful message—"Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"—the Bible says that Mary was "troubled." The angel even encouraged her with, "Do not be afraid." One would expect that Mary would struggle with this revelation and abrupt change in her life's path. After all, things seemed to be going okay. She was even engaged to a man named Joseph, but now she would be the gossip of the town. A scandal like an unwed pregnancy would not go unnoticed and answering the critics by saying that an angel visited her would likely cause more questions than answers. But Mary was clearly no normal teenager! After her initial response, Mary embraces her calling as the earthly mother of Jesus. In what is called "The Song of Mary", we see a young woman who considers herself blessed, who rejoices! Of course, the story doesn't end there, and things don't get any easier. Mary, at the end of her pregnancy, must endure the trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem, at the end of which she delivers the Christ child in a manger. Was she bitter? Did she shout at God, "You did this to me, and now you can't even give me a decent place to give birth? Not even one room?" No, as she held her child, the Son of God, the Prince of Peace, Emmanuel, she pondered all that had taken place, keeping it in her heart. As you enter this Advent season, maybe this year hasn't gone how you planned. Maybe you expected your life to be much different than it is. Perhaps you're even mad at God and blame Him for your circumstances. If so, it's okay to be troubled, but I invite you to do as Mary did, and rejoice in the midst of your pain. Lay it all at the feet of the One who came to save you, whose birth we celebrate. Despite the struggles, Mary considered herself blessed because of what God did for her, and you can too as you ponder how He has blessed you.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:34-38

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [Mary, Did You Know?](#): Performed by Pentatonix

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifCWN5pJGIE>



Mary on Donkey from the Ostheimer's Nativity Collection from Germany

DECEMBER 3, 2021

REFLECTION ON ELIZABETH: *Excerpted from a writing by John Mark Reynolds, contemporary author and director of the Torrey Honors Institute.*

Nobody knew her name, but then she burst into history after a long life. Elizabeth was a failure by the standards of her culture, but God loved her. Just when most friends thought her time had passed, Elizabeth found herself at the beginning of Christmas. There is hope in her life for any of us. God acts when the time is right and can empower anyone, at any time, in any place to do His will. Elizabeth loved God and God did not forget her... Elizabeth faced the surprise Advent visit of a very pregnant Virgin Mary. She faced this guest while very pregnant herself with a husband who had been cursed by an angel. When Mary discovered she was pregnant, she knew where to go. Most anybody would guess, gossip, or judge her swelling belly, but Elizabeth would take her into a home and keep Mary safe... She had been judged by others, but she refused to prejudge Mary. The older woman had longed to be pregnant and now an angel had promised her a son... Elizabeth models the possibility of knowledge that comes from within by faith in God's promises... Elizabeth is always joyful, joyful in greeting Mary, and joyful at the birth of her son. Some of us might demand more from God, but Elizabeth was delighted with her one great blessing. She knew what she *should* want and that she was bound to get it and so could be content. Elizabeth valued properly and history has given her proper value. The old woman must have died happy as her son and his great relative, God's son, grew up. The baby grew and became a man, the forerunner to Messiah. Mary would face pain so great that it would be compared to a sword thrust through her heart, but Elizabeth likely was not there for the conclusion of the life of her son John and Jesus. She did not have to go to the foot of the cross. We have no record of her during John the Baptist's ministry.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:24-25; 39-45; 56-66

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [This is the Time](#): Performed by Wanda Viola

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPaHha-u6QY>



Nativity Scene from the Pope Family Nativity Collection.

DECEMBER 4, 2021

REFLECTION: Written by Ruth Grendell

I have a collection of Creche ornaments that I have collected over the years. Initial ones were purchased with my childhood allowance at the local Dime Store! Bob made a wood manger to house them. I've gathered others from different countries, and a small ornament that is intricately carved from a soft, rough white How-lite stone from Romania that is displayed in its special place all year. Eventually, the collection includes a beautiful set of Lenox figurines. I even have a set of needle point figures –that are still in progress! Perhaps that will be my goal for 2022.

Christmas really begins for me when the ornaments are unwrapped.as I reflect on the history of acquiring each one. The grandchildren have heard the stories and have chosen their favorites. Each year an artist friend and his wife send their card with a picture of the creche nestled in a beautiful setting. They travel throughout the world and always looks for a perfect location where he can insert his drawing of Christ's birth. The one, below, that I have framed has a very prominent place near our Christmas tree.

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 1:24-31

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [Some Children See Him](#) performed by Sixpence None the Richer.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_3-haTEFrU



Creche Scene Submitted by Ruth Grendell

DECEMBER 5, 2021
SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

REFLECTION ON THE MAGNIFICAT: *Written by Bill Gaultiere, a contemporary psychologist, spiritual director, and author.*

For two thousand years Mary's Magnificat has been a source of daily prayer for Christ-followers who use *The Liturgy of the Hours*. She exclaimed these words upon hearing her older cousin Elizabeth confirm that she was indeed carrying Christ the Lord in her womb! We seem to have the idea that when Mary sang the Magnificat it was as if the clouds parted, and a divine light beamed into her body, and she burst forth singing with the assistance of a choir of angels! Probably it was more than a moment of sudden inspiration from God. It's likely that Mary's song was informed by her readings of the Old Testament and her conversations with family and friends about the coming of the Messiah. For instance, we know that Mary prayed and discussed the great prayer of Hannah in the Old Testament and that Mary's song has similarities to Hannah's prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10). We also know that Mary was a woman who "treasured and pondered in her heart" the things that God showed her (Luke 2:19). Probably she prayed or sang her Magnificat *many times* throughout her life, perhaps even before her visit with Elizabeth, but especially in the days *and years* afterwards. That makes sense because she certainly needed the blessed words of life that God gave her! For a long time, no one but Joseph believed her story that she was pregnant by a miracle of the Holy Spirit — she was branded with *the Scarlet A!* Like Jesus, all of her life she lived with the slanderous accusations that were spoken against her (John 9:29). Imagine Mary walking to the village well to get water and people frowning at her and whispering about her. If she looked to them for acceptance, she'd feel embarrassed and insecure, but instead she smiles and quietly hums the words of the glorious song that God gave her! "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord... All generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me..." (Luke 1:46-47). Mary experienced many other trials in her life, like poverty, fleeing to Egypt when Herod wanted to kill baby Jesus, losing her husband at young age and raising a family without him, and the sword that pierced her heart when her son was scourged and crucified (Luke 2:35). I can imagine Mary praying and singing the Magnificat to help her see with eyes of faith beyond her circumstances and into the spiritual reality of the Kingdom of God where she was indeed blessed, and the strong arm of the Lord Almighty was doing great things for her and through her to others! This is a picture of Mary that I can relate to in the trials that I face. I can practice seeing the unseen Kingdom of God in my midst and putting my trust in the risen Christ who is there with me.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:46-55

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [Magnificat Gregoriano](#):

Performed by Harpa Dei

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLUZM3nJ4sg>



St. Peter's Square sand sculpture 2018

If using an advent wreath, light the first purple candle and the second purple candle. The second candle represents faith and is called "Bethlehem's Candle." Micah had foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, which is also the birthplace of King David.

DECEMBER 6, 2021

REFLECTION ON JOSEPH: *Written by Ricky Chelette, a contemporary pastor, teacher, author, and executive director of Living Hope Ministries.*

Not much is written about his life. Most scholars treat him as a minor character in the most amazing drama in history – the birth of Jesus. Church pageants portray him as a dutiful helper to Mary, with few if any lines, but not much more. He was a good man, and he had a heart that was sensitive to the things of God. We know him as Joseph, the earthly father of the Son of God. Ponder the significance of that eight-word description. Let it linger for a moment. Can you imagine the weight of such an assignment? Most father's feel ill-equipped to raise a child, but to raise the Son of God was a task no one could have even anticipated! However, Joseph was up for the task. Like many men in a new experience, Joseph rose to the occasion. His response, fortified by his faith in God, gives insight and direction for us all.

Joseph was a just and kind man who honored women. Joseph had every right to put Mary away, to disgrace her publicly, and even to have her stoned. After all, Mary's guilt was ostensibly apparent given that no one had ever become pregnant without a sexual relationship. Yet, Joseph's concern for Mary and her future showed his heart of compassion and love. Joseph also believed and obeyed God. Despite what was seemingly impossible, Joseph trusted the words of the angel of the Lord and, by faith, obeyed... Joseph was a faithful father who loved his son. A rhythm of faith permeated the life of Joseph and his family. Notice that "every year" and "according to custom," Joseph consistently led his family to spiritually engage with God. His willingness to leave his business, travel to another city, and participate in the Feast of Passover further attests to the priority Joseph placed on the spiritual growth of his family.

As the pageants are delivered and the applause are given this Christmas season, few will notice the steady and faithful father Joseph, but Jesus did. Jesus was shaped in his earthly manhood by his earthly father just as we are. He learned a skill and a craft from hours at the feet of Joseph. He saw faith and sacrifice lived out through a simple, faithful builder, who loved God and loved Him. Not everyone lives in the spotlight or has the starring role in the drama, but we each play a significant role in God's cosmic saga of redemption, just like Joseph. Today you may feel unnoticed, unseen, or even forgotten, yet God knows and sees you. There are no bit parts in His story. Your life matters and others are observing you to see if you reflect the faith, you say you believe and the God whose name you claim. Live carefully and faithfully. You might be an unsung hero!

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 1:18-25

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [Joseph's Lullaby](#) performed by Mercy Me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7InZv8Zfs10>



From the Arant Family Nativity Collection

DECEMBER 7, 2021

REFLECTION: *Written by Kelly Deehan, a contemporary theology student and author.*

Take a moment to visualize the Nativity scene that was in your home as a child. Try to see it through your childhood eyes once again. What do you see? Do you remember that sense of wonder as you look at that familiar figurine of baby Jesus in the manger? I have many early memories of being in awe of my family's Nativity scene. My mom would make sure it was the first decoration to be set up. Before the adorable Christmas village came out of the attic, the little rundown stable needed to be put in its rightful place. I loved that little stable and often imagined what all the sheep and cows were saying to each other when Jesus arrived. In a season full of lights and color and sparkle, we may notice that we still stop to gaze at the Nativity scene, which sometimes lacks the aesthetic appeal that Christmas has become known for. And yet we are still drawn in. As children we already could sense it. This is different. This is sacred. This is the beginning of the greatest love story. We understood the gravity of the Incarnation long before we could define it. In contemplating Jesus' Nativity, Dorothy Day wrote, "I'm so glad Jesus was born in a stable. Because my soul is so much like a stable. It's poor and in unsatisfactory condition—yet I believe that if Jesus can be born in a stable, maybe he can also be born in me." This Advent, we are invited to prepare ourselves to be the manger. Like its rough wood, we are insufficient to welcome the Savior into this world. But Jesus loves us in our smallness and in our simplicity. While our human hearts may not be fit for a king, we can still eagerly await his coming and offer all we are. As you set up your Nativity scene this year, or as you contemplate other crèches throughout this season, allow yourself to see with eyes of childhood wonder.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 7:16

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [Joy to the World](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GjOer3TID4) performed by the Cedarmont Kids
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GjOer3TID4>



Gourd Nativity from the Pope family nativity collection

DECEMBER 8, 2021

REFLECTION ON THE SON OF GOD: *Written by John Piper, a contemporary pastor, theologian, and author.*

Christmas is about the coming of Christ into the world. It's about the Son of God, who existed eternally with the Father as "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature," taking on human nature and becoming man (Heb. 1:3). It's about the virgin birth of a child conceived miraculously by the Holy Spirit so that he is the Son of God, not the way you and I are sons of God, but in an utterly unique way (Luke 1:35). It's about the coming of a man named Jesus in whom "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col. 2:9). It's about the coming of the "fullness of time" that had been prophesied by the prophets of old that a ruler would be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2); and a child would be born called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6); and a Messiah, an anointed one, a shoot from the stem of Jesse, a Son of David, a King, would come (Isa. 11:1–4; Zech. 9:9). And, according to Mark 10:45, Christmas is about the coming of the Son of Man who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." These words in Mark 10:45, as a brief expression of Christmas, are what I hope God will fix in your mind and heart this Advent. Open your heart to receive the best present imaginable: Jesus giving himself to die for you and to serve you all the rest of eternity. Receive this. Turn away from self-help and sin. Become like little children. Trust him. Trust him. Trust him with your life.

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 9:1-7

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: Son of God by Paul Cardell and performed by Patrice Tipoki
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4OvsqB-y4oI>



The Village Church Nativity Scene

DECEMBER 9, 2021

REFLECTION: *Written by Twyla Arant*

One of my favorite Advent activities is unwrapping and setting out my Nativities. The weekend of Thanksgiving (usually ending with the first Sunday of Advent) is when the decorating begins, and the Nativity sets all need a special place. I have several sets collected over the years, including an outdoor set which saw its last display in 2020. After about 20 years, it simply fell apart. I hated to lose it, but it was a reminder that while things may be with us no longer, the memories remain.

My strongest memory of a Christmas Nativity is one I have had in my possession well over 20 years, and which I have never known Christmas without. It is made of what I call fabric mâché, with great big eyes on the faces, and nice color in the clothing. My parents acquired it their first Christmas, shortly before I was born. It sat on our living room coffee table every year, and for as long as I can remember, I would sit and look at all the details: the folds in Mary's clothing, the hay beneath Baby Jesus, the staff in Joseph's hand. No animals, no angel, no Wise Men. Just Jesus, His mother, and His earthly father. The basics of The Story.

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 40:3-5

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [Somewhere in My Memory](#), written by John Williams and performed by the Twilite Orchestra in Jakarta, Indonesia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFvCshTdqlY>



From the Arant Family Nativity Collection

DECEMBER 10, 2021

REFLECTION ON THE DRUMMER BOY: *Written by Nancy Ruth, a contemporary children's minister and author.*

The story of the little drummer boy is not in the Bible, but this fictional story points to an important truth. It tells the story of a young boy who was invited to go see the newborn King, Jesus. He worries that he is poor and has nothing to bring this special child as a gift. When the little drummer boy gets to the stable and sees the baby and the mother, Mary, the young boy asks if he can play them a song on his drum. What a special moment it would have been if a poor little drummer boy actually had a chance to play his drum for the King of kings and His earthy parents. Can you imagine what that would feel like? If you read the descriptions of Jesus' actual birth, there is no little drummer boy. Still, the Bible does say that God doesn't want or need fancy gifts. All He wants is your heart. When we give God our heart, we turn away from our sin (doing wrong things and not doing the right things). We tell God we are sorry and mean it. We ask God to help us not sin anymore...We believe that He is who the Bible says He is. We trust that He will save us from the punishment of our sin. You also trust God to know what is best for you. Since Jesus is the King of kings, died and came to life again for you, choose to love Him, trust Him, and obey Him for the rest of your life. At Christmas, we give gifts to each other. The first Christmas, God gave us the greatest gift ever—Jesus Christ. All He wants in return is your heart. He wants you to love and trust Him with all that you are. Have you done that? Would you like to do that? There is no better time than today.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 10:1-27

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [Little Drummer Boy](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzEX3QMuVPM) Performed by For King and Country
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzEX3QMuVPM>



Navajo Nativity Scene with Drummer Boy

DECEMBER 11, 2021

REFLECTION ON THE PALM TREE: *Written by Lisa Appelo, a contemporary author. This is an excerpt from her book "Countdown to Christmas."*

Do you have any stumps from old trees in your yard? Our yard is full of towering oak trees and every now and again, we have a tree surgeon come out to trim up dead branches and cut down any old, weak trees. Last year, one of our granddaddy oak trees was cut down to a stump. Do you know what happened a few weeks later? New green shoots started growing right out of that old stump. That's the picture the prophet Isaiah uses. Isaiah prophesied about 700 years before Jesus was ever born and foretold that a new shoot would come from Jesse. To understand Isaiah's prophecy about stumps and shoots we first need to know a little about Jesus' family tree.

Jesus descended from King David, the great king who reigned over Israel. In fact, both Mary and Joseph were in the line of King David. King David's father was named Jesse. For several hundreds of years, one of King David's royal descendants sat on the throne of Israel, and then Judah. But the last Davidic king was taken prisoner by the Babylonians and his sons were killed. Israel then went through a series of foreign rulers like the Babylonians and Persians, and Romans, and King David's royal line looked dead – like an old, rotting stump. But out of what looked like a dead royal line, God brought a new shoot. This shoot was the Messiah, Jesus, who would be a new king. He didn't rule like King David did. Jesus didn't have a palace or throne or royal robes on earth. Jesus' kingdom is a heavenly kingdom, and He left all the glory of a king to come to earth as a baby. Add a palm tree or plant to your nativity scene to represent the shoot that came from the stump of Jesse.

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 11:1-10

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

[Lo! How A Rose E'er Blooming](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBCnCf732hE) performed by Frederica von Stade

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBCnCf732hE>



Olive wood Nativity Scene from the Holy Land

DECEMBER 12, 2021
THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

REFLECTION ON THE DONKEY: *Written by Max Lucado, a contemporary pastor and author.*

Christmas bespeaks of nativity. And nativity gives occasion to nativity plays... Though each has its own unique wrinkle, they all have some common features: angels with chiffon wings, wise men and their gifts from afar. A weary innkeeper will turn Mary away. A wide-eyed Joseph will bunch the manger's hay. And Mary, weary and sweet will say, "I think *today*." Beneath a suspended star a baby will be born, the angels will sing, the wise men will kneel, and children of all ages will go home telling their parents that next year they want a part in the nativity play. Little boys want to be Joseph. Little girls want to be Mary. Some want to wear the angel wings or bear gifts from a distant land. A few might even offer to be the hard-hearted Herod or the hassled innkeeper. But no one, ever, as far as I know, volunteers to be the donkey. Which is odd, for what greater honor could exist than to do what the donkey did? He carried Jesus. I know, Joseph is better looking, and Mary is quite stunning. Wise men get the cool hats and angels have the halos. And the donkey? He just stands to the side and chews on hay. But look at him. Do you not see contentment in those big, brown eyes? A look of satisfaction on his face? He just delivered history's greatest gift! Before Santa had a sleigh or UPS had trucks, God had a donkey. Thanks, in no small part, to him, the choir can sing "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given." ... I'm thinking a donkey at Christmas is a good thing to be. The Christmas donkey did his work. He delivered Jesus so Jesus could be delivered. He plodded. He didn't gallop or giddy-up. He did what donkeys do. He steadily stepped in the direction the master directed. And, upon arrival, he stepped to the side. He demanded no recognition, expected no compensation. He isn't even mentioned in the Bible. He was happy to do his job and let Jesus have all the attention. Perhaps we could learn a lesson from the Christmas donkey? There is always a place in the nativity, God's nativity story, for the person who will plod along expecting no applause, bear up under the weight of the long haul, and carry the One who will carry us all. So, here's to the donkeys of the story. May your ride be faithful, and your rest be fruitful. And we will do our best to follow your example.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:1-5

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [Little Donkey](#) performed by the Gunter Kallmann Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YweZzCop2rA>



La Posada - The Journey to Bethlehem

If using an advent wreath, light the first two purple candles and the third rose-colored candle. This candle symbolizes joy and is called the Shepherd's Candle. To the shepherd's great joy, the angels announced that Jesus came for humble, unimportant people like them, too. In liturgy, the color rose signifies joy.

DECEMBER 13, 2021

REFLECTION: *Written by Laura Metzger*

For as long as I can remember, I have had the same nativity scene on my Christmas tree. It was on my parent's tree for as far back as I can remember, and it has had a special place on our family tree since we were married. It's a humble nativity from the 1950s...made of cardboard, with pretty, ceramic figures adorning the Christ child, and with glitter adorning the roof. If positioned just right, a light will shine through the star at the front of the stable. I remember a few of the ornaments that were traditions in our family – a small string of gold paper stars my grandmother made, some ornaments some crafty friends of my mother's handmade (and are still on my tree today), some pretty glass ornaments I remember always being told to be careful with when we were decorating the tree, a few decorations I received as a child, and this nativity scene. Today the nativity is always put front and center, on our tree. It brings back so many memories of Christmases past, and hope for Christmases to come. It reflects what Christmas is about – God with us in a world where we desperately need him!

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 24:1-10

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [Away in a Manger](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXXpJeXCJ1w) performed by Phil Wickham
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXXpJeXCJ1w>



The White/Metzger Family Nativity Ornament

DECEMBER 14, 2021

REFLECTION: *Written by Kim Endraske, a contemporary author*

Sheep need a good shepherd. They are easy targets for wolves because they are fearful. They are easily led astray because they are quick to follow one another. They are easily encumbered by their thick fleece. Sheep need a good shepherd to show them where to find fresh, safe food, water, and shelter. Sheep need a good shepherd to protect them from stumbling or being harmed by a hungry predator. In Psalm 23, King David wrote about God as His loving shepherd. David himself had been a shepherd, faithfully taking care of his father's sheep, so David understood well how important a good shepherd was to the life of the sheep. How comforting to know that God Himself guides us, restores us, provides for us, comforts us and walks with us every single day like the very best shepherd! God, our good shepherd, promises that we will one day dwell with Him in His eternal home when we place our trust in His Only Son, Jesus Christ. Isaiah, too, described God as a shepherd, caring for His flock, gathering His lambs into His arms, carrying them close to Him and carefully leading those who are with young. Our Father is almighty, but He is also tender. God rules with everlasting power and love. As David and Isaiah described God our Father as the good shepherd, they were also pointing toward the son of God, Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, who would one day be born as a baby in Bethlehem. Jesus, too, is our good shepherd. Jesus Himself laid down His own life for His sheep. Jesus knows how helpless we are. Jesus knows how easily we go astray. Jesus knows that we need a shepherd to guide us, restore us, provide for us and walk with us. Jesus is our good shepherd. He came to give us eternal life. No one can snatch us out of His hand. Jesus will care for you with his mighty, loving hand. We can trust Him. Today is a perfect day to thank God for sending us our shepherd, Jesus, to guide us and care for us. Remember ... Christmas is all about Jesus!

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:8

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks By Night](#) performed by Cambridge Choir Of St. John's College

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HenCssKnnY>



From the Arant Family Nativity Collection

DECEMBER 15, 2021

REFLECTION: *Written by Susan Smart, a contemporary author, and the owner of the creativebiblestudy.com website.*

The shepherds were some of the first entrusted with the Good News that the Savior was born. No, God didn't choose the rich, the well-educated, the influential. He chose common shepherds. This just shows me again how great God's love is for us; He doesn't want anyone to not hear the Gospel! It's not for an elite group; it's for an elect group – anyone and everyone who believes trusting Jesus as our Savior...our Shepherd.

A good shepherd lays down his life, he cares for the sheep, he protects the sheep, he gathers the sheep, he knows his own sheep. Think about the many ways God has cared for you today. He knows everything about each of us and still cares and loves us. He is our protector. The question is – do we know Him? Jesus says “My own know Me.” If you don't know Jesus, you can! You do not have to be a lost sheep wandering all by yourself. The Good Shepherd has come searching for you to make you His own. Let's be like the shepherds from that first Christmas night and share the Good News that Jesus, the Son of God, has come to save and give life. Hope is found in Him! Keep your eyes open during this Christmas season for shepherds and let them remind you of this Christmas devotion and how much the Good Shepherd loves you!

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:15; 17-20

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [Go Tell It On The Mountain](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYWvs3t6B3g) performed by Anthem Lights
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYWvs3t6B3g>



Willow Tree Nativity with Shepherd

DECEMBER 16, 2021

REFLECTION ON CATTLE/OXEN: *Written by Thomas Smith, a contemporary author.*

As a young boy, one of my favorite traditions was to help my grandmother set out her porcelain Nativity set on top of her mammoth tv credenza. I especially liked to play with the animals. There was a small lamb, a little cow (ox) and an observant donkey (ass). I've never paid much attention to why those particular animals are ubiquitous in every nativity scene. Re-reading the Gospel stories, no animals are mentioned (but the presence of a feeding trough (the manger) makes it a near certainty animals were nearby). The presence of a lamb is a no-brainer, I suppose. Bethlehem was known for its shepherds. The Holy Family is very likely taking shelter in one of the shepherd's caves that dot the hillsides of Bethlehem even today. It is also a foreshadowing of Jesus's sacrificial offering as the Lamb of God. But why the ox and ass? While re-reading the Prophet Isaiah (which many early Christians called the Fifth Gospel), my attention was drawn to Isaiah 1:3. One of the images Isaiah uses to show the people's utter ignorance of God is this, "The ox knows it's owner and the ass its master's crib, but Israel does not know me, my people do not understand." Early Christian commentators linked this verse to the Nativity.

In all the busyness of this time, one of the most beautiful gifts we can offer Jesus is a time of dedicated adoration in your private devotions. The great irony of Isaiah is non-rational animals (the ox and the ass) *know* their Creator (a term of personal intimacy) and *understand* who He is, namely their God and Creator but his own people do not. Ask the Lord for the grace to know Him better through these seasons and recognize and discern him more clearly in the ordinary circumstances, conversations, and events you will experience.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 96

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [The Friendly Beasts](#) Performed by Garth Brooks

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsUSfk8EDfg>



Carved Nativity Scene with Animals

DECEMBER 17, 2021

REFLECTION: *Written by Nina Pope*

I don't remember exactly when I became charmed by nativities. I did not grow up in a home that had any, but as my faith grew over the years, they clearly captured my heart and imagination. I began a collection of miniature nativities, easier to store and display than larger ones, and I loved the seeming simplicity of them but also discovered the artistry of their detail in spite of their tiny size. Many of them picture the nativity setting of another culture and feature materials relating to that culture. One example: a tiny nativity scene nestled within a dried seed pod ~ I admire the spirit of using what is at hand to showcase the universal blessing of Christ's birth. One very precious nativity of mine is larger, a pewter cast of an elaborate scene including cherubs and animals crafted in exquisite detail from Bavarian tradition dating back to the 9th century. I am cheered to see the nativity pictured on ornaments, postage stamps, simple stickers, and crafts, giftwrap, or enacted interactively at our church Breakfast in Bethlehem. These images take us away from the secular and refresh our memories of the precious nature of God's astonishing gift to all humanity, a baby savior born on that first long-ago Christmas.

SCRIPTURE: John 3:16

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [O Come, O Come Emmanuel](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01BcaggibDw) performed by Enya
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01BcaggibDw>



Seed Pod Nativity from the Pope Family Nativity Collection

DECEMBER 18, 2021

REFLECTION: *Written by Peter Beck, a contemporary pastor, author, and professor of religion.*

Ever see a frightening angel in a nativity scene? Me neither. They're always cute little kids or beautiful women (or really effeminate looking men). The same thing is true of the angels on most Christmas trees. That's just not right. Biblically speaking, angels were frightful creatures, not because they were ugly but because of the strangeness of an encounter with a heavenly being. The most common response, throughout the Bible, to such an encounter was fear. Nearly every episode resulted in the human falling prostrate before his visitor. Thus, we hear the frequent refrain, "Fear not." In the book of Revelation, the picture becomes more frightening as the angels of God's avenging wrath await release. Clearly, angels are not to be taken lightly.

Such was the case when the angels visited a group of shepherds tending their flocks on the night of Jesus Christ's birth. Those shepherds trembled with fear. The angel said to them, "Fear not." Then, those messengers of God delivered the most amazing message. The Christ, the Messiah, had been born that very day. The response of the angels, the very messengers of the good news, is instructive this Christmas season. Upon delivering their message, they worshiped. ***They worshiped Him because of who God is.*** "Glory to God," they exclaimed, "in the highest." He is not some little god to be pulled from the closet once a year. He is God in the highest. The Creator God. He is the one and true God and worthy of our worship no matter what else he may ever do for us. ***They worshiped Him because of what He had done.*** God has something great and marvelous. Rather than leaving us in our sins, He has sent his Son and with Him "peace on earth among men." The peace they proclaimed is not national peace as so many think today. The peace they announced is God's plan of peace between rebellious sinners and their Righteous King. ***They worshiped Him because of why He has done it.*** God did not have to send His Son. He would have been well within His rights to wipe the earthly slate clean and start over again with a righteous people. But He didn't. God reached out in mercy to save. He did so because it pleased Him to do so. He sent His Son to save "those with whom He is pleased!"

The right response to the Christmas story isn't "oh how cute" but "oh, how gracious." The first noel ought to drive us to our knees and lift our voices to God in gratitude. That's why Christ came. As A. W. Tozer once remarked, "Jesus was born of a virgin, suffered under Pontius Pilate, died on the Cross, and rose from the grave to make worshipers out of rebels." Or, to quote the familiar Christmas carol: Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King; peace on earth, and mercy mild; God and sinners reconciled."

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:9-14

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [Hark the Herald Angels Sing](#) performed by Celtic Women

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xw38pGhPXIk>



Angel Nativity from the Pope Family Nativity Collection

DECEMBER 19, 2021
THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

REFLECTION: *Written by Michael Dyer*

I grew up in an era when Christian displays could occur on city public property. An important family Christmas tradition in my hometown Nashville TN, was to see the Nativity Scene exhibit in Centennial Park. This Nativity Scene, which first appeared in 1953, was an elaborate exhibit commissioned by the Harvey's Department Store. It drew thousands of visitors from Tennessee and Kentucky during the Christmas season. Christmas carols played and an elaborate light show continuously illuminated the characters throughout the evening. I particularly recall my connection between the exhibit and the hymn "The First Noel." Both addressed Jesus' wondrous appeal to shepherds, members of the least admired occupations in Biblical times, and the Magi, members of Persia's "intelligentsia." Jesus coming was first proclaimed to "the least" yet was also acknowledged by those of great privilege. The Magi endured a long arduous journey to witness his birth and bring gift offerings. The exhibit, hymn and the myriad of people who witnessed the exhibit reinforced my belief that God, through Jesus Christ, is available to all of us, regardless of our heritage, occupation, or circumstances. Sometimes Jesus' appears spontaneously and dramatically (shepherds heralded by the heavenly hosts or "born again moments), other times it occurs after a lengthy personal journey (Magi). Regardless, we simply need to be open to his presence in our lives and he can enter. Time, weather related decay and social/political mores eliminated the Nativity exhibit in 1967. Jesus though is always with us, as is the memory of the Nashville Nativity for those of us blessed to experience it.

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 4:8-10

Click on the link to see and hear a video about this display.

VIDEO: [Nativity Scene: Memories of Nashville](#)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsPSd3_WvqQ



Nativity Scene - Harvey's Department Store Nashville, TN

DECEMBER 20, 2021

REFLECTION: *Written by Jeff Taylor, a contemporary author.*

None of the biblical accounts of the birth of Jesus even mentions the innkeeper. In fact, the only reference to a manger or an inn is in the Book of Luke. “And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” On the basis of that single sentence, we convict the innkeeper of shutting Jesus out. Perhaps we have been too hard on him. I think the innkeeper is an improbable hero. He had no reason to know that the strangers at his door were about to bring the Messiah into the world. Had he known, perhaps he would have made room for them, but that would have meant that some other weary travelers would need to be displaced. Yet, rather than making excuses, the innkeeper was resourceful, and gave what he could give—not a room or even a corner in his already crowded inn, but the stable that demonstrates that the King of the world is at home with the humblest of the humble.

The arrival of the long-expected Messiah stood out in contrast to peoples’ expectations. He did not come in a manner befitting of a king. No pomp and circumstance, no great earthquake, no thunder and lightning, no burning bush, but humbly and anonymously in a barn to a young unmarried woman. The Jesus born in those surroundings would grow up to teach us to believe the unbelievable, to be prepared for the unexpected, and that the poor and meek will occupy a prominent place in the Kingdom of Heaven. Less prominent than even the lowly shepherds and animals, the innkeeper is neither mentioned by the writers of the gospel nor placed in the crèches that adorn our mantels and tables during Christmastime. Rather, he was and is behind the scenes, humbly and anonymously playing a major part in God’s great plan. He serves as a reminder to us that God uses what we have. Perhaps we should be more like the innkeeper.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:6

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [The Song of the Innkeeper](#) performed by Jason Gray

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w60V7ILY2bs>



Iglesia Nativity Scene from the Pope Family Nativity Collection

DECEMBER 21, 2021

Written by Daniel Darling. This is an excerpt from his book “The Characters of Christmas.”

REFLECTION ON THE TWO KINGS:

Matthew’s gospel is all about Jesus as king. This is why he opens with a genealogy establishing Jesus as rightful heir to the throne of David. And it’s why Matthew sets up a contrast with another king, Herod, the bloodthirsty ruler of the Jews appointed by Rome. This is Herod the Great, who kept power by attacking and often killing his political enemies (and even family members) and who built impressive architecture in Israel. The prominent and wealthy men from the East traveled far and wide, not to sit at the feet of the one who sat on a throne in Jerusalem, but to bow before an infant in a house in Bethlehem. The star from heaven didn’t point to Herod, but to Jesus. Matthew is telling us that true worshippers worship the true King. While most of Israel slept in spiritual lethargy and those who knew the Scriptures—the scribes and the chief priests—were more fearful of Herod than God, these men had the faith to worship the One who deserved worship: Jesus.

The presence of these men from the East—outsiders, Gentile—is a confirmation of God’s promise to send a Messiah who would not only be the King of the Jews, but a Messiah for the nations. Jesus’ kingdom is a kingdom not just for insiders, but for outsiders. In fact, many insiders—those who were closest to Jesus—were most resistant to His message. And so it often is today. Those who are most “churched” are often those who are so blinded by self-righteousness they cannot see—we cannot see—the gospel. And it is often those who seem so far from God whom God by His Spirit is drawing. This should also give us pause when we begin to think that the gospel is only for people who look like us, who come from our background, who speak our language. The truth is the if you live in the West, you are likely one of the “outsiders” to whom the gospel had to be extended; you are part of the Gentile nations who were furthest from Jesus. We should thank God that His promise wasn’t only for a certain ethnic group, but that in His kingdom, we see every nation, tribe, and tongue represented. This is a global kingdom. Let’s pray that our churches reflect heaven’s reality, the beautiful diversity of the kingdom of God.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 2:3-8

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [Christmas Day](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=182xcb3GyOg) performed by Chris Tomlin and We the Kingdom
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=182xcb3GyOg>



Pastor Jack setting up The Village Church Nativity

If using an advent wreath, light the two purple candles, the rose-colored candle, the third purple candle and the center white candle. The fifth white candle represents light and purity and is called “Christ’s candle.”

DECEMBER 22, 2021

REFLECTION: *Written by Sheryl Dawson, a contemporary author.*

Christmas is a favorite time for us all to give and receive gifts. Forty five percent of consumer merchandise is sold during the Christmas season. When we buy at Christmas, we spend big dollars on clothes, electronics, jewelry and a vast array of personal items. Our intentions are generous as we seek to please our family and friends with material gifts we believe they will enjoy and appreciate... But all of these gifts and their wrappings pale in the light of the greatest gift of all times, a gift wrapped in swaddling clothes. Over two thousand years ago, Jesus was born as God's gift to all mankind... Jesus fulfilled over 300 prophecies in his birth and life and death and resurrection! God's gift was carefully planned, immaculately conceived, meticulously prepared, and miraculously delivered! ... Jesus, the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, was the gift of grace, salvation freely given. No strings or ribbons attached. No qualifications or requirements demanded. No exclusions or returns dictated. Grace... undeserved, unencumbered, unbelievable! This was the heart of the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes. All one need do to receive this gift of grace, is to accept it. Simple. A gift that will last not a year, not a decade, not merely our earthly lifetime, but will last for eternity. Our relationship with Jesus is for the here and now as He resides in our hearts, and for eternity when we shall pass from this earth-bound body to eternal existence with Him in the spirit. This is truly a gift of peace, of joy, of hope. Jesus reinstated all the privileges of the original Garden-of-Eden relationship between God and Adam and Eve. Through Jesus we can commune with God — seek His face, walk with Him, and talk with Him. This incredible gift simply accepted brings peace where there is dissension, joy where there is depression, and hope where there is despair. Grace, like the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, is a gift given in humility. With like humility, a gift simply received. It is so easy to get wrapped up in the activity and glitter and festivity of the season that we miss the simplicity yet profoundness of the original Christmas story. As you prepare your carefully selected gifts for Christmas this year, consider the greatest gift of all. Have you received the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes — the gift of grace? If so, take time this season to praise Him for his matchless gift and share it with another. If not, take time to consider the value of this precious gift. All the gifts ever given around the world, are merely chaff blown by the winds of time when balanced against the eternal weight of salvation by grace. Accept the priceless gift wrapped in swaddling clothes this Christmas and receive abundant and eternal peace, joy, and hope.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:7

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [A King in Swaddling Clothes](#)
performed by Hal Leonard and the Shawnee Press
Church Chorale

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwLQaNyecHo>



Crochet Nativity from the Pope family nativity collection

If using an advent wreath, light the two purple candles, the rose-colored candle, the third purple candle and the center white candle. The fifth white candle represents light and purity and is called “Christ’s candle.”

DECEMBER 23, 2021

REFLECTION: *Written by Skip Heitzig, a contemporary American pastor.*

A few years ago, my mom gave me the Nativity scene that was in our house when I was a kid. It evoked wonder in my early years, and it's still wonderful, but there's something not quite right about it. For one thing, the figure of Jesus looks more like a two-year-old than an infant. For another, He has blond hair and blue eyes—and from what I know of the Middle East, I have kind of a problem with that. Obviously, this Nativity set was crafted by a European! And the manger is made out of wood. Of course, that's how most of us think of it. But the word in the Bible translated "manger" could mean either a feeding trough or an enclosure for animals. In that part of the world animals were kept in caves, and feeding troughs were made out of stone, so Jesus was probably born in a cave around Bethlehem somewhere and laid in a stone trough. Now, I know I've probably destroyed a lot of your mental pictures of Jesus' birth. But the important question is "Why a manger?" Why wasn't He born in a palace, and His birth heralded in the Jerusalem Post? The answer is in two words, humility, and accessibility. His mother wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, like any peasant of the time. This great gift came in simple wrapping. The one who would be called "Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father"—the Creator—became an embryo, and then a baby. It's amazing, and the more you think about it, the more staggering it becomes. This humility would depict His entire life and ministry. And when He died, He was buried in a borrowed grave, another cave similar to the one He was born in. Because He was humble, He was accessible. Going into a throne room to see a king would be intimidating, but there's nothing intimidating about going into a cave and approaching a feeding trough. You don't need special credentials; you don't need to have to have an appointment. The shepherds could just come in. And again, this marked not only His birth but His entire life... So it's not really important what your Nativity scene looks like. The important thing is what you think about the Child who was laid in that manger. In the words of an old Christmas carol, "Infant holy, infant lowly, for his bed a cattle stall; oxen lowing, little knowing, Christ the babe is Lord of all."

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:16

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [Infant Holy, Infant Lowly](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IaqoeCl_jR0&t=51s) performed by King's College, Cambridge Choir
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IaqoeCl_jR0&t=51s



Every year the town of Rute in southern Spain constructs a nativity scene made entirely of 1,000kg chocolate making it the biggest chocolate nativity scene in Spain.

If using an advent wreath, light the two purple candles, the rose-colored candle, the third purple candle and the center white candle. The fifth white candle represents light and purity and is called "Christ's candle."

DECEMBER 24, 2021
CHRISTMAS EVE

REFLECTION: *Written by Irene Dickson*

The birthplace of Jesus is often visually depicted very elaborately, particularly in Renaissance art, with bright colors, rich textures, angels and kings surrounding the manger in the stable where our Lord was born. When I think of the manger, I think of the simplicity. Two young parents with a tiny baby, trying to figure it all out, like most young parents do. This photo of a humble manger scene carved out of acacia wood, reminds me of my years growing up in Africa. In my parents' house we had many hand carved wooden animals and other African artifacts. I wonder if the local African craftsmen knew of Jesus when they carved these nativity pieces. When I think about the scene at Jesus' birth, the words of a favorite hymn keep playing in my head 'Jesus was born in a stable, there was no room at the Inn, He had a stall for a cradle ... and that was good enough Him'. We see in the stores that the shelves are empty due to 'supply chain issues'! Yet another Christmas unlike most in the past. But surely, as we are able to gather this Christmas, attend worship in our Church, and all the wonderful Advent events, we all feel that we don't need extravagant gifts- being with family and friends is 'good enough'.

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 4:10

Click on the link to see and hear the music video.

MUSIC VIDEO: [Jesus Was Born in a Stable](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O04ALcothkM) performed by Robert Sund
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O04ALcothkM>



If using an advent wreath, light the two purple candles, the rose-colored candle, the third purple candle and the center white candle. The fifth white candle represents light and purity and is called "Christ's candle."

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