

christ community church

CHARACTERS
FOR CHRISTMAS



DAILY AWAKE DEVOTIONAL 2024

- volume 3 -

Dear Church Family,

During the Christmas season, our calendars fill up to make it one of the busiest seasons of the year. Advent is an opportunity to intentionally pause and remember the reason for our season of celebration. Advent holds some of my favorite memories growing up. As my family sat around our den, we would fight over who got to light the candles and snuff them out, but more importantly, we spent time **TOGETHER** focusing on the birth of Jesus and all it meant for us.

This Advent Devotional is for every person who desires to spend time focusing on Jesus this Christmas. Each day there will be a short devotional as we examine the characters of Christmas from Matthew and Luke.

My prayer is that by taking this daily pause, your Christmas season will be more special than any in recent memory!

-Pastor David

CHARACTERS FOR CHRISTMAS

December 15th

24 After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, 25 "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.

Luke 1:24-25



There's an old country song with the line, "Some of God's greatest gifts, are unanswered prayers." Although it's a catchy lyric, it's terrible theology. The reality is God always answers prayer. It may not be the answer for which we hoped. It may not be answered in the timeframe we prefer, but He always answers: yes, no, or wait. Sometimes though, we end up misinterpreting His "wait" as a "no".

Elizabeth was long past the child bearing years. She was much more comfortable with the idea of hot flashes than she was with the sound of little feet running through her kitchen. Long ago, she had faithfully prayed for a little one to call her own, but believing God had said "no", she had long since ended those prayers.

Isn't that just how the Lord works sometimes? He surprised Elizabeth with a child when she least expected or requested one. He hadn't said "no", it was "wait", and now His "yes" had turned their world upside down. As she laughed to herself at the blessing and humor of the Lord's timing, she felt joy from His gift. He had seen her, and God had chosen to answer her prayer years after she stopped praying.

As you prepare your heart for Christmas and celebrating the Savior, I wonder if now is the time when He might give you something you stopped praying for long ago? Could there be an "unanswered" prayer you thought was a "no" but was really a "wait"? Either way, I hope you feel the joy of being seen by Him, and may He answer all your prayers according to His perfect will in His perfect timing, even those you've stopped praying.

DAILY ADVENT DEVOTIONAL 2024

December 16th

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. 36 And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:26-38

It is what it is. That's life. Don't fight fate. That's the way the cookie crumbles. What are ya' gonna' do? Everything happens for a reason. All of these sayings are responses people use when life throws a curveball. Life is full of surprises and rarely goes the way we expect. When I read today's Scriptures, I think Mary's response is the best I've ever heard.

Mary, still feeling the fight or flight response from the angel Gabriel's appearance, barely had time to process the news. My life is going to be different than I thought. I'm going to be the mother of the Son of God. Even her question, "How will this be?", came from a place of faith. She wasn't doubting God's ability or power, she only wanted to know how He was going to make this happen, how He would defy the laws of nature He created to make a virgin become pregnant. As Gabriel informs her this will be a work of the Holy Spirit so the child born to her will be called God's Son, her response is so beautiful. "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." Let it be because I am trusting that whatever happens, You are sovereign and completely in control. Let it be because I am your servant and I surrender to your plans.

Ultimately, when you say, let it be, You are showing the Lord your submission as His servant. Today, make your prayer, "Whatever You have in mind, even if it's unexpected, whatever Your hand and Your plan, let it be."

CHARACTERS FOR CHRISTMAS

December 17th

39 In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, 40 and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, 42 and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

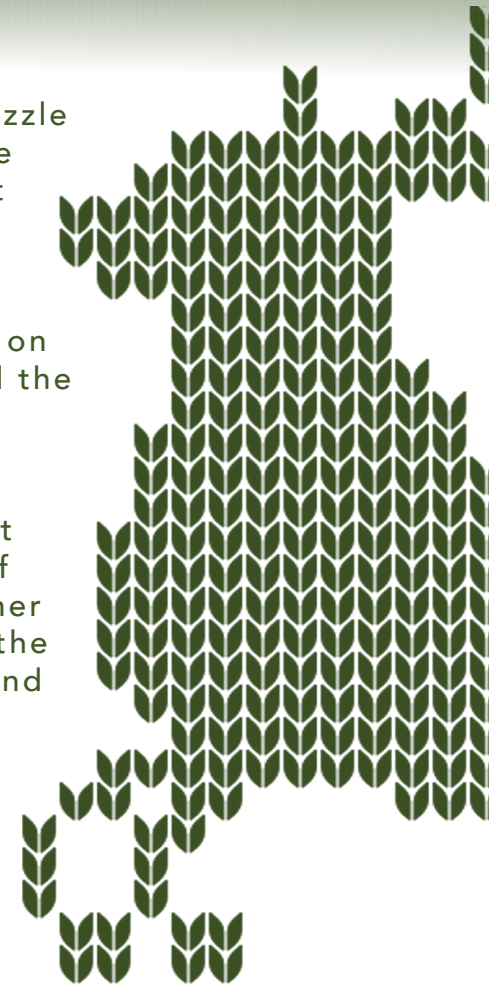
Luke 1:39-45

There is something so cute about baby talk. Not the type where two smitten teens nuzzle and talk like they are whittle babies who wuv each other, but actual thoughts from little kids. There was an old tv show called, "Kids Say The Darnedest Things", and any parent can testify that toddler talk can get crazy. When our girls were young, we were doing a missions highlight at church. We told them about some missionary friends in another country who helped kids with no home be included in a family. My daughters asked where the kids slept if they didn't have a house, and we told them these children slept on the street. "You mean they don't have a bed?", came my oldest's refrain. Then with all the faith and sincerity she could muster, she said, "Well, you can mail them mine."

Kids get the heart of God. Their faith is so simple and pure. As a nervous Mary went to spend time with her cousins, away from the prying eyes of Nazareth during her first trimester, God made the first testimony about Jesus' identity come from the mouth of another baby still in the womb. Before Mary could even say a word to Elizabeth about her situation, the Spirit-filled John knew and responded with praise. Though he was still in the womb, he leapt in excitement, and the Spirit filled Elizabeth to say, "Blessed are you, and blessed am I to host the mother of my Lord!"

The Scriptures tell us that God is going to get praise, with or without us. Jesus said if we didn't cry out in praise, the rocks would cry out in our place. Don't miss your opportunity to echo some baby talk. Today, spend some time praising the King of Kings with a heart filled with childlike faith.

DAILY ADVENT DEVOTIONAL 2024



December 18th

46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; 49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50 And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. 51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; 52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; 53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55 as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." 56 And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

Luke 1:46-56

One of the biggest prayers for my life and the life of our church has been, "God, do something that can only be explained by Your Presence." I long to be a part of something that can't be explained by our collective talents or finances, where the only rational explanation is for everyone to say, "Look at what God did!".

As Mary praises in her Magnificat, she lifts high the Lord. All focus is on Him, not her. All praise, all credit, all glory, all power are firmly attached to God. She can't believe that God would choose her to be a part of His glorious plan.

A consistent theme through the pages of Scripture and the story of our lives is God chooses the unlikely to accomplish the impossible so He gets all glory and praise. He takes the shepherd boy and turns him into Israel's greatest king. He takes a man who stutters and Moses becomes the voice of the Lord to the nation. He makes the tax collector into the gospel writer and the denier into the Spirit-filled preacher at Pentecost. God delights in choosing the unlikely to accomplish the impossible so He gets all glory and praise.

Today, would you choose to pray big prayers for your life and His church? Pray God would use you in ways you can't even imagine so He would get all the credit? Pray this church would have an open door that nobody could shut. Pray that His presence would work through all of us as unlikely people He uses to accomplish the impossible so He gets all glory and praise?

CHARACTERS FOR CHRISTMAS

December 19th

57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. 58 And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. 59 And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, 60 but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." 61 And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." 62 And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. 63 And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. 64 And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. 65 And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, 66 and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.

Luke 1:57-66

When an amateur golfer slices a shot into the woods, all he has to yell is "mulligan", and he can retake the shot. Ok, so it's not that simple, but wouldn't it be amazing to have a do-over button in real life? Imagine how much it would come in handy. When you say the wrong thing and instantly realize you stuck your foot in your mouth, when you forgot to check how fast you were going and see a flurry of blue lights in the rearview mirror, when you make a bad financial decision and wake up with buyer's remorse, all you would have to do is declare, "REDO".

We know second chances don't work like that, but God often gives us opportunities to obey where we disobeyed before. Zechariah squandered his once in a lifetime moment in the temple when he demanded a sign to believe God's message. You would think God's messenger standing face to face would be proof enough. For his doubt, his sign would be his silence for the next 10 months. Instead of delivering the benediction over the worshipers, all he would do was mumble.

I bet more than anything, Zechariah wished he could have a mulligan or call a do over. The Lord did give him a second chance at the birth of his promised son. God told Zechariah the boy's name should be John, and he would pave the way for the promised Messiah. As the crowd asked Zechariah the name of his baby boy, he made sure he had his tablet in hand to write, "HIS NAME IS JOHN." He wouldn't waste his second chance. Immediately, his mouth was loosed, and he delivered a beautiful benediction that was 10 months in the making.

Although you can't get a redo, don't miss any second chances today to say or obey what the Lord has shown you.

CHARACTERS FOR CHRISTMAS

December 20th

67 And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, 68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people 69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, 70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, 71 that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; 72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us 74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. 76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, 78 because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." 80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

Luke 1:67-80

Everyone loves a good delivery. No doubt your home is visited daily this Christmas season by the Amazon driver bringing the latest must have on your list for those you love. Modern day Christmas shopping is a marvel. I can buy something from home, type in the address of the recipient, and have it wrapped and delivered as a gift. The only thing I can't do is determine whether or not the recipient will open and enjoy their gift. That's up to them.

As Zechariah finally had his lips loosened, he proclaimed the gift the Father had long promised was finally in the process of being delivered. His son, John, would pave the way for the Savior to come, bringing His gift of salvation for any who would receive Him.

The promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all of God's people, were about to be fulfilled. The Savior would deliver the world from our enemies, sin and death. Once He delivered that gift, it was up to us to decide to receive or reject His offering.

God's goal isn't just to present you with an opportunity for salvation, He longs for you to receive His gift as you open your life to His Lordship. When you say yes to enjoying His gift, these verses tell us the promise is complete and you can serve Him without fear. Have you been delivered out of the hand of your enemies? Have you been gifted rescue from sin and the power of death? Today, make sure your service shows your thankfulness for His deliverance.

CHARACTERS FOR CHRISTMAS

December 21st

1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Luke 2:1-7

So much of life comes down to perspective. Two people can experience the same joys, hardships, successes and battles, and one sees their day filled with blessings while the other only sees burdens. Your perspective makes all the difference. When it comes to daily inconveniences, do you see delays as diversions from your plans or Divine interruptions?

You are on your way out the door and get a call from a friend who is going through a difficult season with their toddler or teenager. Do you see your delayed grocery run as a diversion from your plan or a Divine interruption? All you want to do is turn on the TV and veg out until your brain turns to mush, but your spouse, who's had a long day, turns to you as their helpmate, choosing this moment to bear their soul. She is emotionally naked and unashamed in this moment, ready to receive the support God can only provide through you. Is the delay a diversion from your plans or a Divine interruption? You long for the time you can sleep through the night without the cry of a little one stirring you, but as you rock them back to sleep the Spirit directs you to pray for that baby who will be all grown up before you know it. Disruption or Divine interruption?

I'm sure the last thing a very pregnant Mary wanted to do in her final trimester was take the 70 mile trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Joseph could have dreamt up dozens of other things to do with his time besides registering for the Roman census. They could have viewed their delays as diversions from their plans, but instead they saw them as Divine interruptions. Because they were in Bethlehem, the prophecy of the Savior's birth from town of David was fulfilled. Because there was no room, the shepherds could easily find the baby.

What other baby would be lying in a manger?

I'm sure today won't go exactly as you planned. When delays happen, may your perspective be that this isn't a diversion from my plans, it's a Divine interruption.

COMMENTS FOR CHRISTMAS