

christ community church

CHARACTERS
FOR CHRISTMAS



WILLY ADWENT DEVOTIONAL 2024

- volume 2 -

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 8th

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;

Matthew 2:1-3

We are so connected to our phones and worldwide information that breaking news barely makes us blink. Hearing the "ding" of a notification rarely restructures our day. We get alerts for weather updates, our next calendar meeting, that someone liked our photo on social sites, for voicemails from spam callers, and emails that flood our inbox. Sometimes we are so inundated with notifications, we miss an important one.

The wise men from the east had a notification that struck them so deeply, they altered their schedules for months. The news that a baby had been born king of the Jews was significant enough to make them leave everything behind and make the long journey to see and worship this child.

As the wise men broke the news to Herod, the installed client king of Israel who was never born king of the Jews, they had no idea how troubling their notification would be. Herod's paranoia against threats to his power had led him to kill members of his own family. This is why Matthew tells us not only was Herod troubled, but all Jerusalem with him.

In all the messages and notifications you get today, let one stick out above them all. It's the same news that altered the schedule of the magi for months. It's the news that troubled the terrible king hell-bent on keeping his power. It's a notification that refuses to be ignored. It demands a response. Let the notification that Jesus has come to restore His relationship with you, that the King of Kings and Lord of Lords loves you, interrupt your schedule. Drop everything, and come spend some time with Him.

DAILY AWAKEMENT REVOLUTIONAL 2024

December 9th

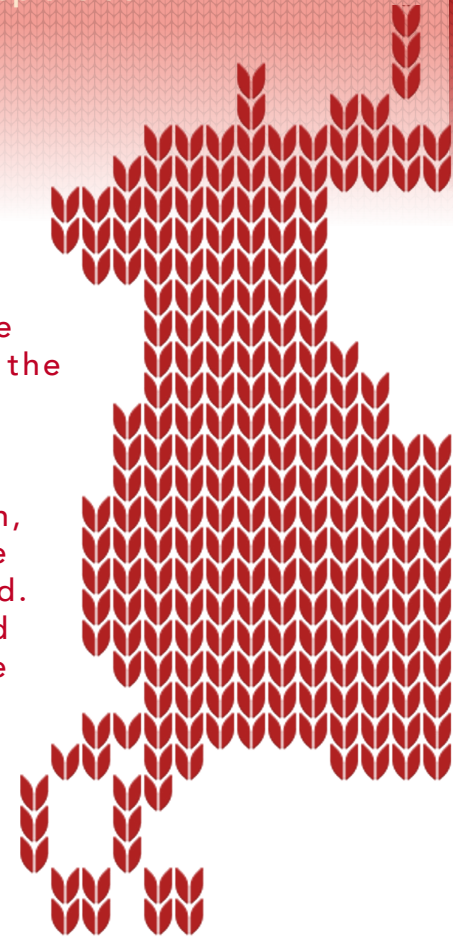
4 and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judaea, for so it is written by the prophet: 6 "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

Matthew 2:4-6

They say, "Big things come in small packages." This isn't just a favorite advertisement of the diamond corporations. The origin of this phrase is uncertain, but it rings true for so many applications. Some of the most powerful and fiery fighters I've ever seen were subcompact in stature. Some of the world's most flavorful dishes are found in single-bite servings. Some of the biggest blockbuster ballads come as one hit wonders from outside the music mecca. Matthew also teaches us that big things come from unexpected places.

As Herod asked the scribes and religious leaders if there were any Scriptures that could point to the location of the newly born king, they confidently parroted the prophet Micah, "The Ruler would hail from the little town of Bethlehem." Just a few miles away from the major seat of power in Jerusalem stood the hamlet whose name means the House of Bread. The greatest king Israel ever had, King David, was born there, and the prophets testified that the though the town was still small in stature and importance, the Bread of Life, the King of all Kings would be born there as well.

In a world full of self-promotion and flattery, where it is popular to flaunt your talents and hide your weaknesses, remember the greatest ever born showed up in a humble town, laid in an animal feed trough. Humble circumstances are not a deterrent to God working, sometimes they are the requirement and catalyst. God delights in using the humble to magnify and showcase His glory. Remember, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."



CHARACTERS FOR CHRISTMAS

December 10th

7 Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." 9 After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 2:7-11

What's the greatest gift you ever received on Christmas morning? Was it the Red Ryder BB Gun you longed for as a kid? A trampoline that Santa smuggled into his sleigh? A puppy who wriggled out of your stocking and into your heart as your new lifelong friend?

A few years after the birth of Jesus, the wise men made their way to the little town of Bethlehem. As their Starlink, led to the home where Joseph and Mary now resided, these wealthy regents prepared to darken the door of the Savior's humble family. Their mission was almost over. After months, they would finally be able to present Jesus with the worst baby gifts anyone could ever imagine! Babies put everything in their mouths, including small golden coins. Heaven forbid He smear the myrrh in his eyes.

These terrible baby gifts were actually the perfect gifts to represent Jesus' identity and pay the way for their quick exodus to Egypt. Gold was the gift that showed Jesus as the King of Kings. Frankincense, used in worship as an incense, revealed Jesus as our High Priest who connects us with the Father. Myrrh, a spice mixed into the anointing oil poured over prophets, affirmed that Jesus was the message and Messenger who brought good news of our salvation.

As you wrap up your Christmas shopping looking for the perfect gift for everyone on your list, don't forget about Jesus. What gift do you bring to the One who gave us Himself, the greatest gift ever?

December 11th

7 Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." 9 After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. 12 And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Matthew 2:7-12

Have you ever faced an opponent who seemed to be one step ahead? They were willing to try every trick in the book to decimate you?

The Bible tells us not only was Satan intent on destroying Jesus, but he is our enemy as well. He makes it his mission to distract, disturb, divide, and destroy us. Peter describes Satan as a lion stalking his prey, ready for any opportunity to pounce and devour us. Thankfully, we serve a God who makes it perfectly clear that no matter the plans of the enemy, even where he appears to have the upper hand for the moment, God remains in complete control.

The wise men were under order from Herod to return after finding the child. Herod didn't want to know Jesus' location to come and worship Him. He only sought to exterminate Him. God wouldn't let the enemy's schemes prevail. He warned the wise men and sent them home another way.

The enemy may plot and plan, but God is the only Sovereign. No trap or scheme of the enemy will overtake us. God always provides a way of escape. The words of this hymn ring true, "No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from His hand. 'Til He returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ, I'll stand."

Thank the Lord that He sees every pitfall the enemy has placed in your path. Pray He would keep you close in fellowship to Him, that He would make you aware of any attempts to distract, disturb, divide, or destroy so you can escape and walk in God's peace.

CHARACTERS FOR CHRISTMAS

December 12th

13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." 14 And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt 15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son." 16 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: 18 "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.

Matthew 2:13-18

Our culture has bought the lie, if it is right, it should be easy. Even believers errantly believe following God's will will result in smooth sailing. If it is the right job, then it will be easy. If I married the right person, then we wouldn't have to work this hard to get along. Nothing could be further from the truth. Somewhere along the way, we've twisted God's promise of peace in the midst of the storm and rewritten it to say the absence of a storm is proof of God's peace. No wonder so many believers are disappointed and disillusioned, believing they aren't experiencing the life God has "promised" because of their faulty expectations.

Jesus never promised us life would be easy. In fact, He said that following Him meant dying to self daily. He posited that if the world hated Him, they would hate His followers too. His own suffering proved that in this life we would have troubles. Peace does not mean the absence of pain, but rather access to calm in the midst of life's greatest pains because He has overcome the world.

Hearing the news of Herod's fury and their middle of the night exodus as refugees to a foreign land couldn't have felt very peaceful to Mary and Joseph. They were smack dab in the center of God's will, but that didn't mean a life of ease where everything was comfortable. His promise was for peace in the process despite the pain. Because Jesus came, all of His followers will experience an eternal peace.

Whatever you are walking through today, thank Him for His peace that meets you right at the point of your pain.

CHARACTERS FOR CHRISTMAS

December 13th

19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." 21 And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. 23 And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

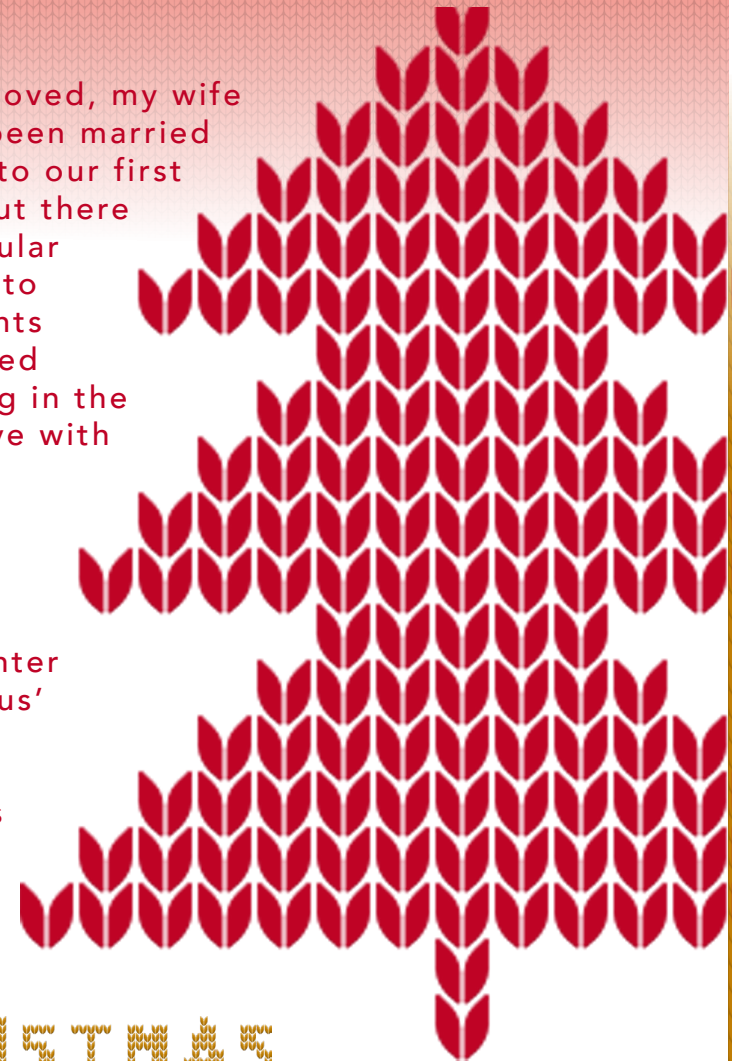
Matthew 2:19-23

How many times have you moved in your life? Every time our family has moved, my wife has enacted a brilliant strategy. We purge before we pack. After we had been married a few years, we packed up everything from our tiny apartment to move into our first home. We unpacked practically every box before moving day was done, but there were a few boxes we weren't sure about. They didn't belong in any particular room and they didn't serve an immediate need. We shoved those boxes into the garage promising to go through them whenever we needed the contents inside. Four years later, as we were preparing to move again, we discovered those same boxes untouched. Since that day, if we haven't used something in the last 12 months, it gets donated, sold, or trashed. It doesn't make the move with us; we purge before we pack.

As Joseph prepared his family for the move back to Israel, they had to purge their fear. Herod was dead and the Lord told them it was time to move back to Israel. No longer would they have the life of refugees; they were headed home. Joseph relocated his family to a far away from the center of religious and political power, but even the location of Nazareth, as Jesus' childhood home, was a fulfillment of Scripture.

As you move through this Christmas season and into the new year, what is God calling you to physically, spiritually, or emotionally purge before you pack? What doesn't make sense to continue to carry with you? What habits, fears, and flaws do you need to leave behind before you move into the new season He has prepared for you?

CHARACTERS FOR CHRISTMAS



December 14th

5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. 8 Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, 9 according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. 11 And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 17 and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." 18 And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years."

Luke 1:5-18

There is a phrase about the Lord I've heard recently in celebration of something He's done, some work of His hands. You can say it about the little things that are answers to prayer or about the impossible things that He makes reality. "Won't He do it?" It's a phrase filled with faith and hope. Isn't it just like God, isn't it just like His character, His love, His grace, His mercy, His provision, to do exactly what He just did?

For Zechariah, his reaction was less than full of faith on the day the angel visited him. This was the best moment of his life. Priests only offered incense in the holy place once in a lifetime. He waited his whole career to burn the incense and offer prayers on behalf of the worshipers outside the temple, asking God to meet them and answer their requests.

When Gabriel told Zechariah his prayers were answered, the people's prayers for a Deliverer, and his own prayers he had given up on decades ago, his reaction wasn't, "Won't He do it?" Rather than responding in faith that it is just like God to miraculously grant him a son in his old age, after a lifetime of barrenness, just as He did for Abraham, Hannah and others, Zechariah gave into doubt and demanded a sign.

I don't know what prayers you are lifting up this Advent season. Maybe they are prayers for you, for your family, or on behalf of others. When God shows up and answers your requests, big or small, make sure your first thought isn't doubt. Instead, may your first reaction be, "Won't He do it?"

COMMANDMENTS FOR CHRISTMAS