

A CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL FROM CHRISTIANITY TODAY



The
ETERNAL KING
Arrives

**JOURNEYING THROUGH ADVENT WITH
OUR HUMBLE & MIGHTY SAVIOR**

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THE ETERNAL KING ARRIVES: A Christmas Devotional from Christianity Today
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Christianity Today, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188
ChristianityToday.com

Printed in the USA

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READING PLAN

WEEK 1 OF ADVENT

DAY 1 MICAH 5:2-5

Alexis Ragan: The Humble Character of Our King

DAY 2 JEREMIAH 23:5-6

Elizabeth Woodson: Prophesying a Perfect Ruler

DAY 3 ISAIAH 7:10-14

Alexandra Hoover: A Relentless Love

DAY 4 LUKE 2:22-32

Monty Waldron: An Unscheduled Appointment

DAY 5 LUKE 4:16-21

Kristel Acevedo: The Synagogue Visit That Changed Everything

DAY 6 ISAIAH 35:4-10

Beca Bruder: He Is Not One to Leave Us Hurting

WEEK 2 OF ADVENT

DAY 1 JOHN 16:33

Strahan Coleman: The Good News About Our Bad News

DAY 2 JOHN 3:16-21

Ronnie Martin: A Universe-Sized Love

DAY 3 2 CORINTHIANS 3:17-18

Steve Woodrow: How to Behold the Glory

DAY 4 1 PETER 2:9

Elizabeth Woodson: We Forget We Belong to God

DAY 5 JOHN 3:25-30

Laura Wifler: The Goodness of Growing Smaller

DAY 6 EPHESIANS 1:15-23

Carlos Whittaker: True Hope Cannot Be Manufactured

WEEK 3 OF ADVENT

DAY 1 COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

Caroline Greb: Flutters of the Firstborn of Creation

DAY 2 LUKE 1:26-38

Malcolm Guite: The Suspense of Mary's Yes

DAY 3 MATTHEW 1:18-25

Joy Clarkson: Why Joseph Is Known as the Silent Saint

DAY 4 LUKE 1:39-55

Dorothy Bennett: The Contrast Between Two Mothers

DAY 5 MATTHEW 2:13-23

Kristel Acevedo: From Egypt, Into Eternity

DAY 6 ISAIAH 60:1-3

Jon Nitta: Out of Darkness, Light

DAY 7 LUKE 2:13-14

Alexis Ragan: A Symphony of Salvation

WEEK 4 OF ADVENT

CHRISTMAS EVE LUKE 2:8-20

Ronnie Martin: God's Astonishing Announcement Scheme

CHRISTMAS DAY ISAIAH 9:2-7

Trillia Newbell: There Is a Light That Changes Everything

DEC. 26 MATTHEW 2:1-12

Malcolm Guite: What Made This 'Epiphany' Stand Out?

DEC. 27 REVELATION 21:1-6

Craig Smith: Advent for Grieving Hearts

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He said to them,
"Go into all the world
and preach the gospel
to all creation."

MARK 16:15

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PROPHETIC INAUGURATION





READ
MICAH 5:2-5



The Humble Character of Our King

BOLD PROCLAMATIONS
OF A GREAT LEADER

BY ALEXIS RAGAN

As we read through the Old Testament prophecies of Scripture, we are reminded that it has always been set in stone that an everlasting ruler would emerge from Bethlehem. Micah 5:2 proclaims, as if announcing from the rooftops to reach the ears of the city, “Out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

With this bold proclamation, it’s clear that God designed the news of this birth not to be kept a secret but to be spread throughout the land with confidence. Yes, *the Anointed One*, told to be trickling down from the Davidic line, was

indeed coming, to save Israel from what they could not bear themselves. Imagine what waiting felt like during the prophets’ times—the Ancient of Days was on his way, after all. Curious believers and dreamers alike must have lived with great anticipation. *What will this King be like? What wisdom, they might have wondered, will he bless us with to then carry us out of exile?* How would this King make himself known when he finally did come?

In keeping with his nature, Jesus takes on the mantle of a chief shepherd who graces his sheep with the sweet presence of strength and safety. There is something deeply calming about having a Savior who guides me like a shepherd does sheep—in the way I should go instead of the way I imagine best. We are all “prone to wander” from the safe path and away from his heart, as the hymn “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” puts it so vulnerably.

The Shepherd would cover Israel with his disposition of majesty and honor in the Father’s name. He would stand steadfast as the ultimate overseer of their lives, ushering them bravely and boldly into everlasting pastures. This was something God’s people not only longed for but desperately needed—a safe haven that would provide them rest. Micah 5:4 reassures us of the holy

safeguard Christ will bring: “And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.”

As his sheep, we have been given a bountiful lot of prosperity and protection. What’s more, inhabitants of this land will find that the Chief Shepherd “will be our peace” (v. 5). What does this look like? We might imagine a herd of docile sheep resting freely under a shady tree as he stands with staff in hand, ensuring total serenity in his care. His peace ushers eternal shalom into every avenue of life. Not even Israel’s opposing forces of Assyria on all fronts would be able to penetrate the gate (v. 5). Truly, there is no safer place than to be wrapped up in the loving ownership of our Creator to flourish in fields, unthreatened forever.

REFLECT

How does the humble character of our King challenge our understanding of God’s mysterious plans?

In what ways does embracing Jesus as our Chief Shepherd transform our daily lives and relationships?



*ETERNAL
JUBILEE*





READ

JOHN 16:33



The Good News About Our Bad News

SOMETIMES, SUFFERING
CAN'T BE SPIRITUALIZED

BY STRAHAN COLEMAN

I have some good news for you: There's going to be bad news.

Christ's incarnation was punctuated by bad news. His arrival saw the slaughter of a generation at the hands of a tyrant. His ministry climaxed with his torture and execution. Even after the victory of the Resurrection and birth of the church at Pentecost, his Spirit-filled followers were persecuted and exiled, "scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pet. 1:1). Eventually the church took the gospel global, only to suffer pain and division over petty theological disagreements and cults of personality. I imagine this is not the messianic story Israel had expected, nor was it the dream of the early church.

We live in a culture obsessed with eradicating pain—inventing and selling technologies to insulate against it, pills to dull it, or self-help techniques to avoid it. It's unpopular to say "Life is hard; expect to suffer," but it's true.

Jesus says directly that "in this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33), and though we have heard this, many of us have found ourselves shocked, angry, and unprepared when we actually *do* experience deep suffering. As the dust settles, we realize our reactions to life's troubles don't match the theological truths we affirm.

I've been jarred by this dissonance more than a few times. Jesus' teaching that we can expect a life filled with bad news—and expect him to lead us through it—is actually very good news.

Knowing that suffering is coming inoculates us from a shallow spirituality that believes pain can be avoided or attributes difficulties to unfaithfulness. It is no exception or failing when we suffer—it's a baked-in fact of life. If we believe that our efforts or positive thinking will protect us from pain, we are set up for existential shock when it comes. Christ is forthright about this reality and invites us to accept both the inevitability of trouble and the assurance that he has overcome it. This reality is actually quite liberating.

Christ overcame the world's suffering and temptations in the same way that he overcame death: not by removing it but by traveling through it faithfully, allowing it to become the very vehicle by which he offers salvation to the whole cosmos. In John 16, Jesus invites us to do the same by living from the peace of his Spirit rather than the anxiety of our circumstance, seeing the trouble of the world as an aberration held in Christ's hands, an expected reality we are empowered to walk through.

Suffering will come, and sometimes it will be the sort you can't spiritualize and probably think you can't face. When it happens, don't be surprised, and don't think it's on you to make it into a miracle. Remember that it is Christ who overcomes—trust him, lean in, and allow him to do the work of saving you and the world through it. This is the earthy reality of the Advent story. Hallelujah!

REFLECT

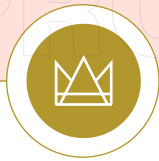
How do you personally respond to suffering and difficult circumstances?

How can you lean on Christ's example and the peace of his Spirit during times of suffering?



*DIVINE
CORONATION*





READ

COLOSSIANS 1:15-20



Flutterers of the Firstborn of Creation

HOW WE LOVE EVEN
WHAT WE DON'T YET SEE

BY CAROLINE GREB

At this time of year, we are bombarded with images that nag at our attention, presenting us with the idea of the perfectly peaceful holiday and all the gifts that will truly satisfy us. Imagine, for a minute, loving something you've never seen. Even without fully understanding what you are loving, there is an ache and a hope for fulfillment, for completion, for wholeness. But what about loving *someone* you've never seen?

This is a concept mothers know well, feeling their babies move in the womb before ever seeing their faces. Perhaps this is what Mary felt for nine long months as her stomach grew, trying to make sense of the fact that the little flutterers and

punches were the first movements of the Son of the Most High.

For 2,000 years, God had revealed his presence in the various forms of smoke, fire, manna-giver, and cloud on a mountaintop. It was impossible—and forbidden—to attempt any picture or representation of him. He was invisible, unable to be whittled down to an image and unable to be comprehended by our human eyes.

True worship always holds God's immanence and his transcendence in tension. Where can we conceive of that worship more than in his enfleshing, his incarnation? God in his grace made the invisible visible and chose to dwell among his people as one of us. But not only did the firstborn of the dead come in our fragile human form; he came as the weakest of us all—a newborn. God became a helpless creature in need of the most basic human requirements: being fed, clothed, and kept clean. It's difficult to even imagine the fullness of God somehow fitting into a six-pound newborn. This infant was the mover at the beginning of creation, present before time began and preeminent in all things. In him—the babe who couldn't hold his own head up—all things hold together. Jesus in the manger is an image we may not expect, but the God of humility, servanthood, and reconciliation is the one that we need.

But the story unfolds further; the image becomes clearer. In a feeble, tiny body, God was pleased to dwell. It was not his obligation or an inconvenience to reveal himself to us this way, but his pure pleasure. And even now, it continues to be God's pure pleasure—his joy—to reveal himself, to give of himself even when he doesn't need to, to rule as a humble King, for our good and our joy. It is his delight to bring reconciliation, to restore the very creation he made in its edenic beginning and, yes, to lift the veil and make a way for us to see him face to face.

He is the image of the God we need—a God who exemplifies humility, servanthood, and pleasure in reconciliation. He holds all things together, from creation to the manger to the cross to the new creation.

REFLECT

Considering the analogy of a mother feeling her baby's movements in the womb, how does it deepen your understanding of Mary's experience and the significance of Jesus' incarnation?

Contemplating the tension between God's immanence and transcendence, as exemplified in Jesus' incarnation, how does the image of a helpless newborn challenge our notions of power and greatness?

*Now to the King eternal,
immortal, invisible,
the only God, be honor and glory
for ever and ever. Amen.*

1 TIMOTHY 1:17

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ISBN: 978-1-61407-253-9