

SAMPLE

The Mystery Hidden for Ages

Sally Michael

The Mystery Hidden for Ages

by Sally Michael

Our vision at Truth78 is that the next generations know, honor, and treasure God, setting their hope in Christ alone, so that they will live as faithful disciples for the glory of God. Our mission is to inspire and equip the church and the home for the comprehensive discipleship of the next generation.

We equip churches and parents by producing curriculum for Sunday School, Midweek Bible, Multi-Age, Youth, and Backyard Bible Club settings; vision-casting and training resources (many available free on our website) for both the church and the home; materials and training to help parents in their role in discipling children; and the Fighter Verses™ Bible memory program to encourage the lifelong practice and love of Bible memory.

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Introduction

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son... (Hebrews 1:1-2a)

God is a God who speaks. He wants to be known. He wants His ways to be known. And He wants His merciful plan of salvation through the ages to be known. This Advent family devotional explores what God spoke through the prophets and recounts the many times Christ was foreshadowed in the Old Testament. This “mystery hidden for ages”¹ is then revealed in the Person and work of Jesus Christ through thirty-one devotional meditations. What was hinted at by the Old Testament prophets has been clearly “spoken to us by his Son.”² His message of redemption was a message to Israel and to all peoples, including us today.

May you and your family discover the plan of the mystery hidden for ages (Ephesians 3:9) and rejoice in God’s merciful salvation!

*Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ!
Amen. (Romans 16:25-27)*

Adaptations to Consider

There are four sections in each chapter of this Advent book—a short devotional, discussion questions, a thought for consideration and prayer, and an activity to do using gift cards and activity sheets. Here are a few ideas for adapting this resource to the ages of your children.

- Read only the devotional.
- Read the devotional and answer one or more questions.
- Read the devotional; answer one or more questions; meditate and pray.
- Have each child work on a set of activity sheets after you do whatever portion of the devotional works best for your family.

You could also divide the content, doing the devotional reading in the morning and saving the discussion questions and thoughts for consideration and prayer for the evening.

¹ Colossians 1:26; Ephesians 3:9

² Hebrews 1:2

Additional Notes

- The devotional chapter titles for December 1-16 come from the Old Testament, while those for December 17-31 come from the New Testament.
- Sometimes difficult words in the devotional are followed by simpler words in parentheses for use with younger children. Feel free to use these and add your own as needed.

Gift Cards and Activity Sheets

To make the experience of reading this devotional together even more engaging and interactive for children, there are gift cards and activity sheets. Using these with this devotional will enable your child to discover a mystery message by the end of this month.

There are thirty-one gift cards on six sheets of cardstock. Cut and fold the cards as indicated. Then use a paper clip to keep them closed. (If you have red- or green-coated paper clips to use for this, that will make the gift cards even more festive.) Put the prepared gift cards in a basket or a gift box, or you could hang them on a Christmas tree or on a ribbon stretched across a mantle or wall.

You will need a set of activity sheets for each child. You may want to gather fine-tip markers, glitter pens, stamp markers, mini stickers, etc. for your child to use to decorate the gifts on the activity sheets.

Explain to your child that, just as the contents of his Christmas presents are a mystery, so the Bible reveals a mystery to us. You will be discovering this mystery throughout the month of December.

How to Use the Gift Cards and Activity Sheets

There is one gift card for each day in December. Have your child choose the folded gift card that matches the date and open it to reveal the title of the chapter in this book for this date. Read this chapter together.

After you finish the devotional for the date, your child can work on an activity sheet.

For December 1-16, ask your child to find the symbol on the inside of the gift card for that date and match it to the symbol on one of The Mystery Hidden for Ages activity sheets. This symbol marks the gift picture to use for this date. Have your child write the chapter title for this date's devotional (i.e., the name referring to Jesus) inside the box on the gift picture and decorate the gift picture. Finally, your child can find the mystery word/s on the back of the gift card for this date to write on the line below the gift picture.

For December 17-31, ask your child to find the symbol on the inside of the gift card for the day's date and match it to the symbol on one of The Mystery Hidden for Ages activity sheets. Read the chapter title on the gift picture associated with that symbol and ask your child to explain the connection between the Old Testament title and the New Testament reference to Jesus that you just read about in the devotional. Doing this will help your child to connect the Old Testament foreshadowing with the New Testament revelation. After this, your child can find this same location on one of Christ in You, The Hope of

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Glory activity sheets (e.g., first sheet, second row, present on the left). That location identifies the gift picture to work on for this date. Your child can write the chapter title for this date's devotional in the box provided on the gift picture and decorate the gift picture. Finally, your child can find the mystery word/s on the back of the gift card for this date to write on the line below the gift picture.

At the end of the month, when your child has filled in all the mystery words, you will be able to read the mystery message.

Additional Optional Activity

Hang two ribbons horizontally across a mantel or on a wall or over two doorways or windows in the same room. After finishing the devotional each day, your child can hang the card on the ribbon. December 1-16 will hang in order on the top or first ribbon. December 17-31 will hang on the bottom or second ribbon. When completed, this will show the mystery message.

The Substitute Sacrifice

...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. (Hebrews 9:22b)

Have you ever had a food item like a juicy orange get “lost” in the back of the refrigerator for weeks? What is it like when it is found? A once sweet, juicy orange can become mushy and even moldy. You certainly would not want to eat it! And there is nothing you can do to restore it.

This is kind of like what happened in the fall. People were created to know, trust, obey, honor, and love God. But when Adam and Eve distrusted God’s wisdom and disobeyed His command, sin came into God’s perfect world and man’s heart was changed. As soon as Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, *the eyes of both were opened and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together...*²¹ Adam and Eve tried to cover their sin and their shame—but their solution wasn’t God’s solution. Blood had to be shed for there to be forgiveness of sin. God alone can cover sin. *And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.*²²

All men inherited Adam’s sin nature, but God allowed man to sacrifice animals as a temporary covering for sin. It was not a permanent, forever covering, but it allowed man’s sin to be forgiven. Sacrifices had to be made often because man continues to sin, and the covering was only temporary.

We know Abraham had faith in God, but one day God tested Abraham’s faith. As a sinner, Abraham offered animal sacrifices for his sin. But this time God told Abraham to take his only son, Isaac, and offer him as a sacrifice. The ungodly nations sometimes offered people as sacrifices to their false gods. The God of Abraham did *not* require human sacrifices; He required animal sacrifices. Would Abraham trust God with this strange request to offer his very own son? *Can you imagine what thoughts he could have had?* Abraham, the father of many nations was asked by God to give up something he loved dearly—his promised son, Isaac. *What would this mean for Abraham and God’s promise to make from him a great nation?* This was a test between what he *knew* about God and what he *thought* about God.

The very next day, Abraham set out with Isaac to offer his sacrifice. *And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.*²³

²¹ Genesis 3:7

²² Genesis 3:21

²³ Genesis 22:7-8

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As Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac on the altar, God stopped him. *He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.*²⁴

God had provided a substitute sacrifice for Abraham—He provided a ram to take Isaac’s place. Someday God would provide a permanent substitute sacrifice for man’s sin. Trusting in God’s permanent sacrifice is the solution God has provided for our sin.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. (Hebrews 11:17-19)

To Discuss (Choose one or more.)

- *Why can’t we decide for ourselves what God will accept to forgive sin? What did God reveal about Himself in covering Adam and Eve?*
- *What does “God tested Abraham” mean (Genesis 22:1)? What was God testing? What did Abraham’s response show?*
- *What is a substitute? Why would God provide a substitute sin-bearer for man? What does this tell you about God? How should we respond to Him?*

To Think and Pray About

- *Do you truly understand that you need a substitute sin-bearer? If God were to “test” you as He did Abraham, what do you think would be the result?*

Activity

- After you finish the devotional for today, your child can work on the gift cards and activity sheets. At the end of the month, when your child has filled in all the mystery words, you will be able to read the mystery message.

²⁴ Genesis 22:12-13

at

Mystery Word



December 3

and in

Mystery Word



December 6

ago

Mystery Word



December 2

times

Mystery Word



December 5

Long

Mystery Word



December 1

many

Mystery Word



December 4

DECEMBER 3



One Way of Salvation

DECEMBER 2



The First Adam

DECEMBER 1



God, The Most High

SAMPLE

DECEMBER 6



The Prophet, Moses

DECEMBER 5



The Substitute Sacrifice

DECEMBER 4



**The Promised
Son, Isaac**

The Mystery Hidden for Ages

