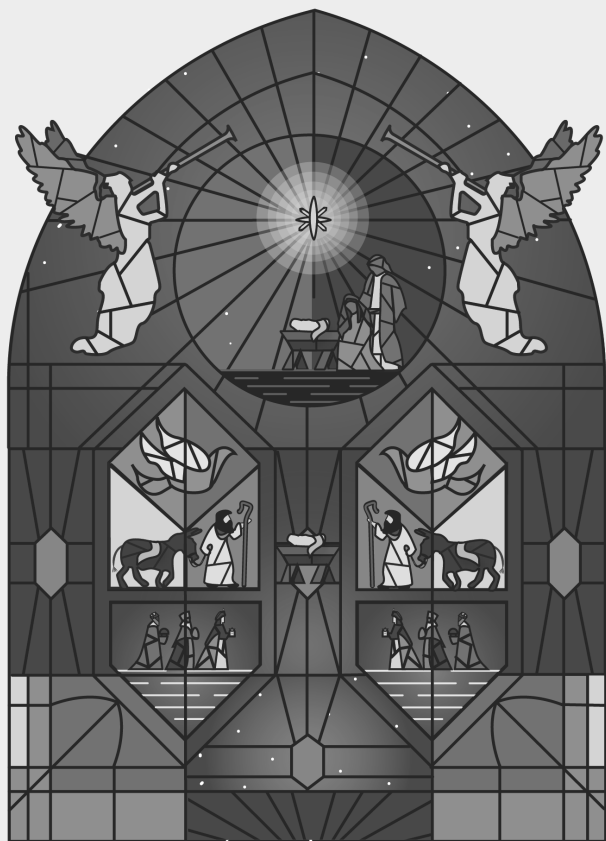




# BEHOLD THE SAVIOR

A 25-DAY CHRISTMAS AND ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



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PUBLISHED BY YM360



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# INTRODUCTION

There's nothing like the month leading up to Christmas. Sure, Christmas decorations may go up in October, but when the calendar hits December 1, it gets real. The anticipation begins. Christmas parties. Christmas movies. Christmas break. Then Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

The anticipation is definitely worth the wait. But there is another kind of Christmas anticipation as well, one that should be at the forefront of our Christmas experience.

Christmas is a time when we prepare our hearts and minds to celebrate the moment that God became human. This anticipation was a feeling so many in the Christmas story knew well. Isaiah. Mary. Joseph. John. The shepherds. The wise men. But have you ever thought that Heaven itself was anticipating Jesus' arrival? If you think about it, all of creation was waiting for the moment that the promised Messiah would burst onto the scene.

Then, all at once, He did. He showed up, but not with big parades or fanfare on the steps of the Roman emperor's palace. No, the Savior who would take away the sins of the world was born in a humble stable in an off-the-beaten-path town. Born to a teenage mom and a simple but honest dad, the Prince of Peace was suddenly among the very people He created.

And they beheld Him. His parents observed Him in wonder. The shepherds looked down at Him, recalling the angel's message of wonder. The wise men would come to do the same thing. They beheld the Savior. Thousands of years later, we do the same thing.

Christmas is a time for looking once again at the Christ child. We do this by getting our hearts in a state of anticipating the celebration of Jesus' birth. That's where these devotions come in. They're designed to help you spend the month of Christmas preparing to celebrate God's gift of His Son.

There's one devotion for each day of the month. We hope you'll find that these 25 days of Christmas devotions get you in the perfect state of mind to truly appreciate the significance of the Savior's arrival.

# DAY 1: LOOK!

*“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” – John 1:29*

It’s Christmas season! You can just feel it in the air. Everywhere you go, you are reminded of that magical day that comes on December 25th. Christmas trees, music on the radio, red bows, and twinkling lights, not to mention the excitement that comes along with getting out of school for Christmas break. Beyond all of the commercials, lights, songs, and shopping, there’s something that quietly lies at the heart of this exciting season. It’s not found in boxes or even in family gatherings around a festive table. It’s the story of a young mother, a reluctant father, and a tiny baby that would change the world forever.

As we enter into this holiday season, challenge yourself to rethink your holiday and begin to celebrate these holy days. In no way am I suggesting that we shouldn’t celebrate by giving presents, singing jingle bells, or drinking hot chocolate. Those are all fun and exciting ways to celebrate this wonderful time of year. But let’s make sure we’re not only looking for those things.

Take a second and read John 1:29. Behold may not be a word we say very much, but believe it or not, we do it all the time! It basically means to look at or see something that’s impressive, remarkable, or interesting. So when you can’t take your eyes off your phone or catch yourself staring at your crush as they walk down the hallway, you’re beholding! When John tells the people to behold Jesus, he’s saying, “Look! You don’t want to miss this!” John knew that Jesus was more than impressive, remarkable, or interesting. He knew that Jesus was the long-awaited, promised Messiah that would save the world from its sins.

There are so many things to look forward to and pay attention to in this season. And rightly so! Christmas should be a time of celebration, fun, and getting together with those you care for the most. Even though all these things are worth paying attention to, we don’t want to miss Jesus, the Lamb of God who has come to save the world. So, starting today, begin looking forward to December 25th by anticipating the birth of Jesus. Join this journey through the story of His birth as we move from simply celebrating a holiday to celebrating holy days.

## QUESTIONS

1. What about Jesus did John want people not to miss? Why would this have been important?
2. What might it look like to “behold” Jesus as we get closer to Christmas?

# DAY 2: WHAT DO YOU EXPECT?

*“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

– Isaiah 9:6

Sometimes, the best surprises are the ones you know are coming...you just don't know when. Sure, it can be fun and exciting to be surprised by something completely unexpected (unless you're like me, which, in that case, sounds like your absolute worst nightmare). But when you're expecting something big to come at some point in the future, the anticipation becomes almost unbearable! Especially around this time of year when we ask for the exact gifts we want, our expectations can make it feel like Christmas Day will never get here.

The Christmas season brings a lot of expectations with it. We expect things like certain gifts, an incredible Christmas dinner, or even a little bit of snow. But imagine waiting hundreds of years for something you knew was coming. On top of that, what you're expecting is much more valuable than anything you would ever dream of asking for. And to really seal the deal, God Himself promised to give it to you. Can you feel the anticipation, suspense, and excitement?

Read Isaiah 9:6 and take a moment to rework what you're expecting this Christmas. This verse was a prophecy made hundreds of years before Jesus was born. Through Isaiah, God showed His people what to expect when His Son would one day come to live among them. This expectation is a huge part of what Christmas is all about.

So what are you expecting this year? If you could make a list of the things you're expecting this Christmas, what would it look like? Where on your list would you find the aspects of our faith that are so important to this time of year – things like hope, joy, peace, and, most of all, a Savior? As we get closer and closer to Christmas Day, let the expectation of our Savior's impending arrival create a different kind of excitement in your heart. An excitement that goes beyond gifts and instead awaits the One who will make all things right.

## QUESTIONS

1. Imagine if today, someone promised to give you something spectacular, but years and years go by, and you still don't have it. How would you start to feel? What would you do?
2. How has God come through on His promises in your life before? Does this affect what you expect Him to do in the future?

# DAY 3: THE ANGEL

*"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!'"*

– Luke 1:26–28

Take a moment and read Luke 1:26–28. Can you even imagine what Mary must have been thinking at this moment? An angel just up and appeared to her! It's not like she got a text from the angel asking if it was okay to drop in. One second, there wasn't an angel in her living room, and the next second, there was. Talk about a surprise visitor!

Throughout the rest of the Bible, whenever we see an angel appear to someone, the first thing they say is usually, "Do not be afraid." However, in the case of the angel that appeared to Mary, it wasn't "do not be afraid," but that the Lord favored her and was with her. This radical truth would be a source of encouragement, hope, and joy in Mary's life.

We all have "angels" in our lives, those people who come into our lives at just the right moment with a message from God. They don't have halos and wings; they're people like you and me whom God chooses to speak through. Who have been those people in your life who help you re-center and know that you're not alone? Who has been a source of encouragement and joy? And more importantly, who have you been an angel to?

Some of you might know the answer to that question, but I bet there are also people to whom you've been an angel without knowing it. I think that's one of the coolest parts of how our spiritual lives play out. God does things through us without us even realizing it. During this season, pray that God will use you as a voice of truth to speak hope and joy into a life that needs an encouraging word.

## QUESTIONS

1. If an angel suddenly showed up in your living room, what do you think it would have to say to you?
2. Why do you think the angel called Mary "favored one?" What does that mean?
3. Who are some people in your life who have encouraged you and pointed you to God? How might you do the same for others?