



WONDER

A 25-DAY CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL



YM360

ANDY BLANKS

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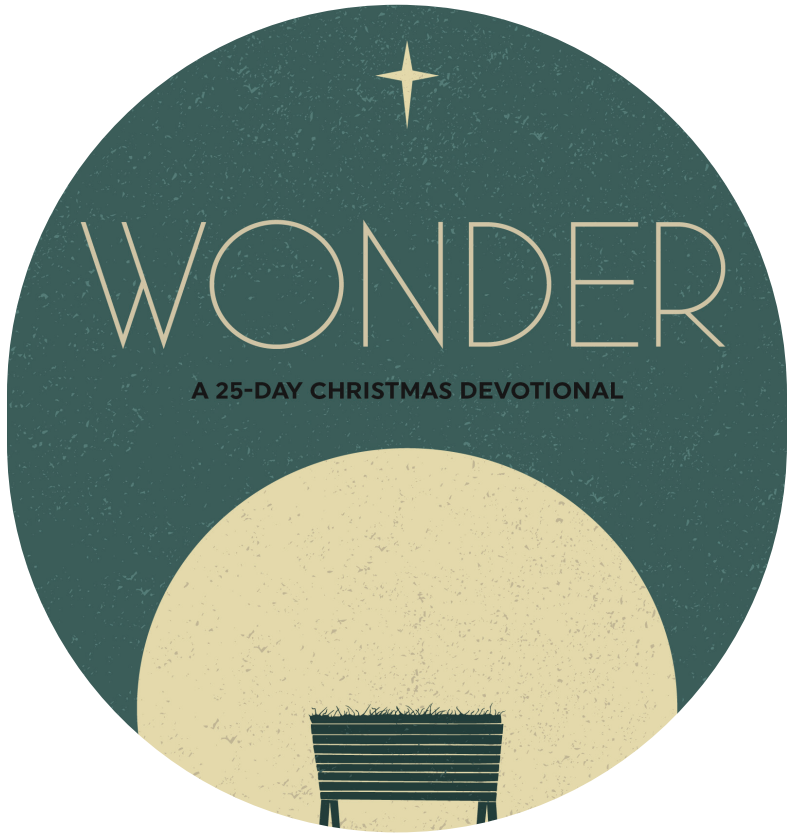
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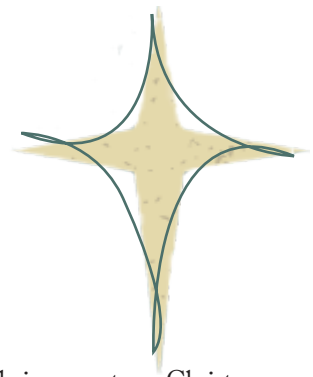
BY ANDY BLANKS

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INTRODUCTION

There are few things more enjoyable than watching a child open their presents on Christmas morning. The joy. The excitement. The wonder of it all. *Wonder*; what a concept. Wonder is part of what makes Christmas such a special season. What is your relationship with “wonder”? People who see the world with wonder experience their surroundings with a sort of curious surprise. To wonder is to soak up the absolute joy of a particular experience. Children display wonder at Christmas. The question is, do you?

When faced with the story of Christmas, the incredible tale of God becoming human in order to build a bridge back to Himself, do you experience wonder? Are you in awe of God’s audacity? Do you marvel at His creativity? Are you overwhelmed at how HUGE His plan is?

If any of these things are true, then you are someone who knows what it means to wonder at God.

There is so much wonder contained in the Christmas story. The wonder of God’s amazing birth announcement to Elizabeth and Zechariah. The wonder of Mary and Joseph’s encounter with the angel. The wonder of John leaping in the womb of his mother. The wonder of the virgin birth. The wonder of the shepherds’ encounter with a heavenly host. The wonder of the magi. Every single aspect of the entire incarnation narrative is saturated with wonder. We just have to see it.

The last stanza of the timeless Christmas hymn, “Joy To the World,” captures this sentiment:

*“He rules the earth with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness,
and wonders of his love.”*

Remember how that song ends? We don’t just sing “and wonders of his love” once. We sing it three times! The goal of this devotional is to help you remember the wonder of the love of God that we see so clearly in His relentless pursuit of His people.

May this Christmas season be a *wonderful* one.

DAY 1

DEVOTIONAL PASSAGE ISAIAH 9:6-7

What if you walked into school this morning, and your PE teacher looked at you and said, “Hey! By the end of the day, you’re going to be \$20 richer. Count on it.” You would probably laugh uncomfortably, all the while thinking to yourself that the constant whistle blowing has finally rattled something loose in his brain. But then, what if at some point during the day, a friend walks up to you and says, “This is crazy, I know, but I want you to have this,” and presses a \$20 bill in your hand. What would you think of your PE teacher then? You’d probably be shocked, amazed, freaked out, and maybe even thankful that you’re \$20 richer. In short, you would look at your PE teacher with wonder.

Here’s the cool thing: God did something similar to this, except about a million times more wonderful. Take a second and read Isaiah 9:6-7. Isaiah 9:6-7 was written by Isaiah, one of the most important prophets in the Bible. Isaiah was sharing the words God had given to Isaiah for His people. The problem was that the Israelites, God’s chosen people, had pretty much turned their backs on God. God had given them a lot of advanced warning, but they hadn’t listened. So, Isaiah was warning the people that God’s judgment was coming.

But the most profound thing is that even while promising His people judgment for their rebellion, God promised them hope. Isaiah 9:6-7 is God telling His people of a hopeful future in which God once and for all provides relief from the penalty of our sins. Fast forward a few hundred years, and you see this message of hope coming to life in the Christmas story. The baby God was forming in Mary’s stomach? He was the same promised savior Isaiah was writing about in Isaiah 9:6-7. You want to talk about something that makes you respond in wonder? Long before God sent Jesus to this earth, He knew the plan. Jesus was always the plan! God has always known that Jesus would be the answer to a perfect relationship between God and His children, which is great news for you and me. But to see this plan come to life, Jesus had to come to earth. And that’s what Christmas is all about.

THINK ABOUT THIS:

- God has had a plan to redeem you from the consequences of your sins for all eternity. How does that help you trust Him with your worries, concerns, and future?
- Take a moment to reflect on the wonder of a prophecy made hundreds of years before Jesus’ birth that was perfectly true in Christ. Thank God for His creative, relentless, awe-inspiring love for you and the world.

DAY 2

DEVOTIONAL PASSAGE MATTHEW 1:1-17

Yesterday we looked at the wonder of prophecy and how amazing it is that God could make a promise that would come true hundreds of years later. (Well, it's amazing to us; for God, it's pretty normal.) Today is going to be another look at a similar move by God. But this one is really, really personal.

Take a moment and read Matthew 1:1-17. Yes, read every single name. All the easy ones. And all the weird ones. Finished? Hopefully, you recognized some of the names. Abraham. Isaac. Joseph. David. Maybe even a few others (like Rahab, a reformed prostitute, proving that God can redeem anyone from their sins). Most of them you probably have never heard before, and that's OK. But even though you don't recognize their names, this list is super important. It's not just a strange cultural thing that would have been popular 2,000 years ago.

This list of names accomplishes a few things: it proves that Jesus is the promised Messiah, who would one day be sent to restore the Israelites. (Of course, we know that Jesus did more than just save the Israelites; through His death and resurrection, Jesus provided a way for all who will believe in Him to be saved from their sins.) Old Testament prophecy said that the Messiah would come from the line of David. Look back at verse 7. Whose name do you see?

But, among other things, this list doesn't simply prove that Jesus' lineage was what it should be. It proves that God works through people. It proves that every life matters. This list is full of people who were going about their lives, living as faithfully as possible. While we don't know for sure, it's safe to say that the overwhelming majority of them had ZERO idea that one of their ancestors would be God's promised Son. Most of them were ordinary people living ordinary lives. And yet, thousands of years later, we read their names.

There is so much wonder in this! Your life works much the same way. You have no idea what God is doing in and through you, but you can know for sure that God is using you to advance His Kingdom.

THINK ABOUT THIS:

- In what ways does your life function to the world around you as a testimony of the "realness" of God?
- Is there anything in your life that is an obstacle to your wonder? What would it take for you to remove that obstacle so you can see this Christmas season with open eyes?

DAY 3

DEVOTIONAL PASSAGE Luke 1:5-7

Some of the biggest wonder-producing moments come when we are shocked out of our expectations.

Read Luke 1:5-7. In this passage, we meet Zechariah and Elizabeth. These two people are extremely important to the Christmas story and in Jesus' overall ministry. But today, let's focus on what we know about them from these verses. In verse 5, we discover that Zechariah was a priest. This means that he would have represented his people before God in the Temple. He would have led them in worship and in making sacrifices and offerings. We know he was married to Elizabeth. In verse 6, we see that Elizabeth and Zechariah were godly people. They were meticulous in following God and His ways. But in verse 7, we learn something really sad.

In verse 7, we see that they had no child. When Luke's original audience read this verse after reading verses 5-6, they would have been caught off guard. Why? Because in this period, if you weren't able to have children, it was thought that God was judging you because of some sin in your life. Yikes!

Spoiler alert: Zechariah and Elizabeth would miraculously become pregnant with a child. That child would be the man we know as John the Baptist (more on that later). What we see from this story is God working in ways that defy our expectations. This childless couple? They would miraculously become the parents of a crucial partner in Jesus' ministry. But not yet. God wasn't quite ready for them to be blown away by His amazing plan for them. In the meantime, they were left to deal with unmet dreams and frustrated expectations. And yet, they did so faithfully. There is much for us to learn from them, isn't there?

THINK ABOUT THIS:

- What is something you wanted badly that God didn't choose to provide for you?
- Zechariah and Elizabeth stayed faithful even though God had not yet granted their desires. What can you learn from their example?