



WONDER

A 10-DAY CHRISTMAS & ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



YM360

ANDY BLANKS

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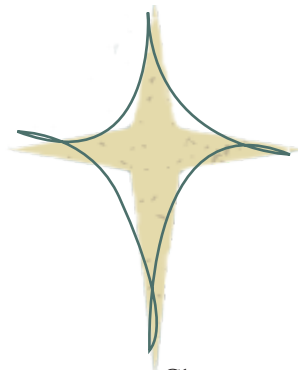
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INTRODUCTION

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 LUKE 1:5-17

Do you remember the last time that you were on the receiving end of a really great surprise? Did you make the “I’m so surprised” face? You know the look: eyebrows up, eyes wide, mouth open. Maybe you put your hands to your face. There’s nothing like a good surprise.

Guess what? In every surprise, there is a little bit of wonder. There is a little bit of that childlike joy, a happiness that comes from the sudden, unexpected goodness of it all. In today’s devotion, you’re going to see a guy get surprised in about the most fantastic way possible.

Read Luke 1:5-17. In the passage you just read, Zechariah found out he would be receiving the thing he and his wife had most longed for. In their old age, the couple would have a son. Zechariah had to be surprised. But look back at verses 14-17. This was no ordinary baby. This child, who would grow up to be John the Baptist, would play a significant role in God’s rescue plan to save people from their sins. So not only did Zechariah and Elizabeth have their prayers answered, but they were also answered most miraculously.

“Do not be afraid, for your prayer has been heard.” Zechariah would be excused if his first response was fear. It’s not every day an angel pops up in the middle of your work. But the angel told him to be happy, not afraid. Why? Because God was on the move, preparing the world to receive His Son, Jesus, and Zechariah, and Elizabeth had a role to play.

As you think about Zechariah and Elizabeth, ask yourself how their story impacts your story. God is able and willing to work through you to shake up the world for His glory. Pray to God and ask Him to use you in extraordinary ways, just like He used Zechariah, Elizabeth, and eventually, their son John. And then get ready to wonder at how He will answer you.

THINK ABOUT THIS:

- Would you say that you expect God to do amazing things in your life? Why or why not?
- What if you were to truly pray that God would work through you to do mighty things for His glory and BELIEVED that He would? How would this change the way you see God and your life?

DAY 2

DEVOTIONAL PASSAGE LUKE 1:26-29

Read Luke 1:26-29. There are a few things that we can discover about Mary here. First, she was from Nazareth in Galilee. Luke's original readers would have known this meant that Mary was not from a big city. Nazareth was considered a small, kind of backwoods town. So, the original audience might have drawn some conclusions about Mary based on where she lived. Second, she was a virgin engaged to be married to Joseph. In other words, she had never been with a man sexually. Mary was morally upright. She was also young. Most scholars believe Mary was only around 14 or 15 years old at the time. But above all, Mary was confused. And who could blame her?

Put yourself in Mary's shoes. One day you're minding your business. The next, an angel sent from the Lord is giving you a message. "Favored one"? What in the world was that all about? "A message from God to me"? Can you imagine how confused she must have been? Verse 29 says Mary was troubled and was trying to figure all of this out.

We can relate to Mary, can't we? While God may not choose to have you parent His Son, God does have plans for your life. Specific and important plans. Sometimes these plans may confuse you. If they do, don't worry. You're in good company. Mary was confused, too. But Mary ultimately trusted God's plan (more on this tomorrow). That's our challenge as well.

When God leads you down a road you're unsure of, know beyond a shadow of a doubt that it's exactly where you're supposed to be. Trust, and stay true. And keep your eyes open. You're God's plan to share His name with the world.

THINK ABOUT THIS:

- Can you think of a time when you knew God was working in your life, but you didn't know exactly what He was doing? What emotions did you feel?
- If you aren't aware of God working in or through you, what does that say about your faith? (Here's a hint: God is always present and always at work. If you can't feel it, the issue is not with God.)
- Take a moment to pray today that God will help you have a clear vision to see what He is doing in your life.

DAY 3

DEVOTIONAL PASSAGE MATTHEW 1:18-25

What is the opposite of wonder? Weird question, right? Maybe there isn't even an answer to it. Or maybe, there is more than one answer. What if you were told that the opposite of wonder was disappointment? That sort of makes sense. If wonder is a sense of joy-filled excitement and disappointment is when our expectations don't match reality, then they are opposites.

Read Matthew 1:18-25. Joseph found himself in the mother of all unmet expectations. He was engaged to Mary, the girl he loved. The couple had correctly chosen to wait until marriage to engage in sexual relations. And yet, Joseph was met with some news that must have sounded absolutely nuts to his ears: his sweet fiancée Mary was pregnant. And if that wasn't enough, she claimed it was God who had conceived the baby inside of her. As we'll look at it more closely tomorrow, Joseph ultimately made the right call. He eventually believed Mary. All was well. But do you ever wonder if he still struggled a bit with unmet expectations?

Sure, Joseph was a miraculous, amazing part of God's plan to rescue humankind from their sins. But do you ever wonder how Joseph felt about this? Maybe he was shy and simple. Maybe he didn't want the pressure of being part of God's plan. His expectations of a "normal" marriage went away pretty quickly. Do you wonder if he was disappointed at first? Before he grasped what it meant to be the earthly father of God's Son? To Joseph's credit, he rolled with it. He adjusted his expectations, got used to his "new normal," and devoted himself to Mary and Jesus.

God will often do things differently than we want or expect. We can let this derail us, or we can trust God and go with His flow. We know what Joseph chose. What would you choose?

THINK ABOUT THIS:

- Think of a time when God did something for you or through you that was awesome, but that completely went against your expectations. How did it make you feel?
- How can our expectations sometimes be an excuse to do things the same old way we've always done them?
- Are you brave enough to pray and ask God to blow away your expectations of Him and how He wants to use you?