



GOD WITH US

A 25-DAY CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL

YM360

BY ANDY BLANKS

Thank you for sampling,

GOD WITH US

A 25-DAY CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL

Christmas can be a time when we get so wrapped up in the commercial aspects of the season that we lose sight of the spiritual aspect. We are so familiar with the story that we can forget how amazing it is. God came to our earth in the form of a fragile, human baby. THAT is the most amazing story ever told. And we need to do whatever we can to keep from losing our awe of this story.

God With Us is a 25-day Christmas and Advent devotional that will help students prepare their hearts and minds to celebrate the most wonderful story ever told. With bonus family devotions for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, this resource will empower your students' entire family to celebrate Christmas together.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT
GOD WITH US: A 25-DAY CHRISTMAS DEVOTION,
PLEASE DON'T HESITATE TO CALL US AT 1.888.969.6360.

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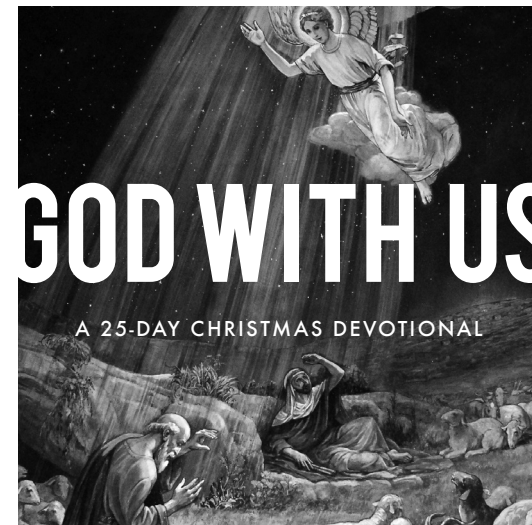
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INTRODUCTION

What is something extraordinary that you take for granted?

How about your phone? We rarely think about how incredible the technology is you have in your hand. Just a few years before you were born, the kind of technology you walk around with every day would have been unthinkable.

What about the human body? You don't think about it, but consider how incredibly complicated a simple act, such as reaching for the remote control, is. You somehow decide to reach for it, and your brain fires all these signals to your nerves, which move your muscles to reach out and grasp something a few feet away from you. It's stunning how miraculous this simple action is.

Why don't we think about how cool these seemingly random things are? Because they are so routine. We do them so often we don't think about them. We lose the wonder because of how seemingly normal it is.

The same is true when it comes to how we think about Christmas. And we HAVE to change this.

Christmas can be a time when we get so wrapped up in the commercial (and chaotic) aspects of the season that we lose sight of the spiritual aspect. We are so familiar with the story that we can forget how amazing it is. God, the eternal, unchanging God who spoke the universe into being, came to our earth in the form of a fragile, human baby. And He did this to save us from the penalty of our sins so that we could be in relationship with Him. THAT is the most amazing story ever told. And we need to do whatever we can to keep from losing our awe of this story.

That's what this book helps you do. Each day, from December 1 to Christmas morning, you will be walking through the Christmas story, the moment when God became human. You'll be challenged to be moved by this story and to see your life and faith differently. There are even family devotionals for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Prepare your heart and mind to celebrate the most wonderful story ever told.



DEVOTIONAL PASSAGE: LUKE 1:5-7

Waiting is something most people struggle with (even though these days, waiting in line or for someone to show up at a restaurant means you get extra time to check social media or play a video game on your phone). We're impatient by nature. But the funny thing is that God often sees waiting in a different light than we do. God will sometimes make us wait so that we learn to appreciate what He has already planned to reveal to us.

Read Luke 1:5-7. What do we learn about Zechariah and Elizabeth here? We learn Zechariah is a priest. We learn Elizabeth is the daughter of priestly heritage (that's what the whole "daughters of Aaron" means). We learn that they are righteous. But we also learn something about them in verse 7: they have been waiting for a child that has not come.

The theme of "waiting" runs through the Christmas narrative, but it's easy for us to miss it if we don't know the backstory. If we go back to the time of David, something like 1,000 years before Jesus was born, God was continually speaking through His prophets. If you were an Israelite during those days, God's presence seemed like a constant thing. But as the Israelites were repeatedly unfaithful to God, He chose to speak predictions of judgment through His prophets, warning the people what would happen if they didn't turn back to God. With each message of judgment, there was also the promise of future hope when the Messiah would come. But the people never listened to the message. Judgment came as God promised it would. The people were scattered and defeated.

Then, as far as we know, God went silent. For close to 400 years, we have no recorded revelation from God. God was not absent, but He was quiet. God was letting His people wait. They had been waiting in anticipation for the Messiah to come. They had been waiting for God to speak. They had been waiting for hundreds of years. But suddenly, this changed. The Christmas story is essentially about God breaking His silence and speaking into the void. The wait was over. God was moving, and nothing would ever be the same.

THINK ABOUT THIS:

- Why is waiting on God difficult at times?
- What can you do to keep your faith strong as you wait?



DEVOTIONAL PASSAGE: LUKE 1:8-23

Surprises. Sometimes surprises are good. And sometimes surprises are not so good. When your parents tell you you're going to the beach after Christmas? Good surprise. When your coach informs you that today's practice will be nothing but conditioning? Bad surprise. New phone for your birthday? Good surprise. Pop-quiz? Bad surprise.

A surprise is nothing more than being caught unprepared. If your parents said to you, "Just a head's up. Tomorrow we're going to tell you that we're going on a super-fun vacation," when it came time for the announcement, you wouldn't be surprised. You would have been prepared for it. God likes surprises as much as the next person. Isn't the heart of every miracle a surprise? But God also understands the value of preparation. And in today's passage, we see how preparation is woven into the Christmas narrative.

Read Luke 1:8-23, paying special attention to verses 16 and 17. You were introduced to Zechariah yesterday. In this passage, we see Zechariah going about his priestly duties when God chose to surprise him. Zechariah met an angel who had an important announcement: Zechariah and Elizabeth would be the parents of a special child. Not just any child, but John the Baptist. What an epic announcement.

Look closely at verses 16-17. This is a prophecy about the nature of John the Baptist's life's work. John would give his life to preparing people for the coming Messiah. In God's great plan to send Jesus to earth to live among His people, He wanted John there, calling people to prepare themselves to encounter Jesus. I believe there is a powerful truth for us here, as well.

As we navigate the Christmas season in our 21st Century culture, it's easy to forget what we're building toward. Ideally, each day that draws closer to December 25 is another day we're preparing to encounter Jesus. Not literally, as the people in John's world would do. But preparing our hearts and minds to celebrate the amazing, world-changing story of Jesus' birth. If we don't intentionally prepare ourselves, the real risk is that Christmas passes us by, and we've not been moved by it.

God knew that preparation was important for people in the 1st Century. It's no less important for us today.

THINK ABOUT THIS:

- What do you need to do to prepare yourself for a meaningful Christmas season?
- Is there anything in your life that is an obstacle to your preparation? What would it take for you to remove that obstacle for this Christmas season?

DAY

3



DEVOTIONAL PASSAGE: LUKE 1:24-25

Have you ever been accused of something you didn't do? It could have been something small or something big. No matter what it is, when you get blamed for something, it's a terrible feeling, especially when you know that you didn't do anything wrong.

Read Luke 1:24-25. We're continuing with the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth. They are an important (if sometimes forgotten) part of the Christmas story. We can learn from them a great deal, but we may have to look a little more closely to find it. In today's passage, it's easy to skip over the really powerful truth contained within it. So let's take a moment to slow down a bit.

Why did Elizabeth hide for so long? To understand this, we have to understand what the word "reproach" means. In verse 25, Elizabeth says the Lord "looked on [her], to take away [her] reproach among people." The word reproach means "an expression of disapproval or disappointment." What was going on? What had Elizabeth done wrong that people would disapprove of? In a word, nothing. But that didn't keep people from treating her as if she had.

In Elizabeth's culture, when a woman was unable to have a child, it was seen as a sign of God's judgment. People assumed that if a woman couldn't have a child, she must be living in such a way that God was displeased with her. Now, certainly, Elizabeth wasn't perfect. But the Bible describes her and Zechariah as "righteous." Nowadays, we know that the inability to have a baby is due to biological reasons. But Elizabeth had lived her life under the judgment of others. In a sense, she had been accused of something she didn't do. So not only was she happy that God would be giving her a son, but she had to be incredibly, amazingly relieved that God was clearing her name, freeing her from the undeserved judgment of others.

Freedom. Freedom from judgment. Freedom from guilt. Freedom from sin. Jesus' birth over 2,000 years ago signified all of these things. Not just for Elizabeth, but for all people everywhere who would come to believe in Jesus.

THINK ABOUT THIS:

- What are some words that describe how Elizabeth must have felt when God took away her reproach?
- Have you ever thought about how it makes you feel when you consider the fact that Jesus has done the same for you? Express to God how it makes you feel when you think about Him removing your sin, guilt, and shame.