HOPE
Around the
WORLD
A FAMILY
CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL
A devotional focused on the events of 2020
What a year ...

While it probably seems a little cliche at this point, we recognize that 2020 has been a year unlike any in recent memory. From a global pandemic, to civic unrest, to an extremely contentious election season, it has often seemed like Hell must be throwing everything at us (including the kitchen sink). We are all worn and weary, and in need of some rest and hope.

Unfortunately, the holidays are often anything but restful, aren't they? If anything, the days are filled with nonstop to-do's, activities, more stress, and the rush to "fit everything in." For many of us, it can feel like we're just barely making it to New Year's alive. And in the midst of the frenzy and stress, we often miss what this season is truly all about.

Does the true meaning of Christmas even matter anymore? Are we just running around all month for silly, old-fashioned traditions? Most of us probably know that all of this began with a story in the Bible, but how do we know we can even trust that anymore? And if we can't trust it, then why are we adding more stress and busyness at the end of a long, stressful year?

If you've ever wondered in your own spirit if all of this really matters, don't worry; you're not alone! All of the questions are understandable – especially this year – but especially because of how stressful this year has been, we want to help point you and your loved ones back to the true meaning of Christmas. It's not the busyness and stress, not the goofy decorations and traditions. We firmly believe that the true story of Christmas is the hope and peace we all so desperately need.

That's why we've created this guide – not to add one more thing to your "to-do's," but rather to help direct you away from the to-do's and toward some times of stillness that will draw us back to what this time is all about. It's our hope and prayer that over the course of these 12 days, this will lead you and your family into the true beauty of this season, guide you deeper into the story, and draws you closer together.

So take a moment, take a breath, and just be still for a moment. We'll wait ...

Now, join us as we set aside the stress, the noise, and all the distractions, and we spend a few minutes each day getting reacquainted with "what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown." Let's start with the basics: How do we know we can trust all of this, anyway?
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DAY
1
It seems like with each passing year, there are more and more people struggling with doubts and hard questions about the Bible. If you’re one of them, we’re glad you’re here! We do not shy away from those hard questions, because we love and serve a God who doesn’t either. In fact, the Bible is full of places where, instead of making us feel bad about our skepticism, it actually invites it!

In his first letter to a town called Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul encourages the struggling believers to “test everything; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). And while scripture repeatedly encourages people to have faith, it also gives us many other examples where God welcomes our doubts. Struggling with doubt and hard questions is nothing new; it’s been a part of the Christian story since the beginning!

What questions are you struggling with?

Okay, so struggling with hard questions isn't uncommon, but are there good answers? Yes! There are plenty!

For starters, we know with confidence that we can trust the Bible. Despite common objections that criticize it for being too old, or “out of touch,” or “not relevant” to today, the more time you spend with God’s Word, the more you’ll discover that the opposite is actually true. In fact, one could argue that in light of everything going on in the world today, it’s never been more “in-touch” and relevant.

But how do we know we can trust it? That’s a great question, and there are some even greater answers.

Of all the ancient works of literature in the world today – from works like those of the ancient Greeks to biographies of famous ancient leaders like Alexander the Great—we have more ancient copies of the Bible than any other famous work; and it’s not even close! This is important because the more ancient copies—or “manuscripts”—we have, the more we can compare them to see if they match up to each other, and to the modern copies we have in our books today.

So whereas there are only about 400 manuscripts of the biographies of Alexander the Great, we have more than 24,000 manuscripts of the Bible! Furthermore, the biographies of Alexander the Great were written about 400 years after he died. In the Bible, the four biographies of Jesus—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—were written within a decade or two of Jesus’ death and resurrection. This matters because the eye witnesses who were there when Jesus went to the Cross were still alive when those accounts were written. Any one of them could have easily come forward and said, “Hey! That’s not what happened! I was there!” And yet, the Gospels have all stood the test of time.
Jesus himself has a lot of proof on his side, too. There are about 300 prophecies about Jesus and his life throughout the Bible, including ones about where he would be born, to whom he would be born to, who would be present, how he would die, and that he would rise again. Some of these were foretold as many as 1,000 years before Jesus was even born, and yet, he fulfilled every single one! A mathematician once calculated the odds of this happening as one in 100 quadrillion!

How does it strengthen your faith to know that the Bible is backed up by other reliable sources?

Entire sections of libraries are filled with books full of proof and explanations like this, but to be brief, we know this: We have plenty of good reasons to trust what the Bible says. And its message is this:

God created us because he loves us and wants a relationship with us. But we chose to rebel against him, first Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1), and then each one of us on our own. We may not even realize it, but we all fall short of God’s standard, and that’s called sin. The bad news is that there’s nothing we can do to fix that. There are not enough prayers, or charity work, or being nice to each other we could ever do to make up for our sin. But the good news is that God has already done it for us! God sent his only son to earth, born as a baby, to live and grow up and eventually pay the price for all of us, once and for all. We can’t save us, but he already has!

And all we have to do to receive salvation is put our faith in Jesus.

That’s what Christmas is all about! That’s why we celebrate this beautiful season, because what God has done for us is worth celebrating and sharing with the entire world! Jesus came to be the hope of everyone, and he offers his free gift of salvation to everyone! But we have to accept this gift in order to receive it. We have to choose to put our faith in him, and if we do, we can rest assured that we have an eternal hope that is bigger than any problem this world can throw at us. Our lives may not become easy, but our difficulties will be much different compared to the glory of eternity with God.

Will you now take that step of faith and acknowledge Jesus as your Lord?

FAMILY CHALLENGE
Create your own “historical evidence” of this Christmas by taking a family photo and tagging @missionhillslittleton.

Pray together and ask God to work in the lives of your family these next 12 days and to fix your eyes on him this Christmas season.

Note your family thoughts from today’s lesson.
Ever been on a long trip? Remember how good it felt when you started seeing signs that you were “almost there?” Those signs themselves are not the destination; you weren’t traveling just to see them. But they still caught your attention and helped you manage your expectations. “Only 20 more miles till Yellowstone National Park!” “Disneyland, 3 miles!” You can feel the excitement almost bursting out of you!

What was the last trip you took? What is your favorite memory from the trip?

In ancient times, kings and queens had their own versions of signs that announced their coming: They were called “heralds.” A herald is someone who went before the king to announce his coming. You’ve probably seen a few before in movies and TV shows like Robin Hood: A guy in fancy clothes marches into a town square, blows a big horn, and begins, “Hear ye! Hear ye!” and then begins to tell everyone within ear shot that the king is coming. People got excited, maybe nervous, and they all prepared accordingly.

Since Jesus is Lord, he too had a version of a herald: his own cousin, John the Baptist.

In the first chapter of the Book of John (another, different John!), we learn of John’s incredible story, ministry, and the purpose he serves.

John was born to a family who had always been Priests of Israel. However, his father and mother were older, and believed they were unable to have children. So when the Lord visited John’s father Zechariah in the Temple to tell Zechariah that he would have a son who would play an important role, Zechariah doubted God, and was then struck mute until John was born.

What miracles have you seen God do in your life?

Once grown, John lived what some would call a strange life. He lived mostly in the wilderness, encouraging people to repent and baptizing those who did. Many even questioned if John was the “Messiah,” the long-foretold savior that the people of Israel had been awaiting for many centuries. While John makes it clear that he is not the Messiah, he tells everyone that the Messiah is coming soon (John 1:27)!

You see, John was not the destination; he was merely a sign along the highway, a herald to prepare the way for the coming King—Jesus!

Listen to what John says about Jesus, “I baptize you with water for repentance, but after me will come one more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matthew 3:11).

John got people’s attention, but his mission eventually cost him his life. While John was eventually executed by the King for boldly speaking truth, it was okay. Jesus’ public ministry had begun, and people were starting to turn to him in faith. John’s mission was complete.
John understood his purpose, his place in the story; it was not about him!

Far too often in this world, we walk around living like we are the stars of our own stories, like we live in a movie that’s all about us. That’s just not true, and it’s actually the root of a lot of selfishness and greed that plague so many of our communities and families.

John showed us a different way: A way of preparing the way.

As a herald of the coming King, John understood that his life was bigger than just him. In the movie of his life, he accepted that Jesus was the star; in fact, he relished it! John found joy in his purpose because he understood who he was in light of his understanding of who Jesus was. His life had meaning because of the role Jesus gave him to play, and there can be no greater joy, and no greater peace.

We have a similar purpose. Scripture tells us that our mission as the people of God is to “prepare the way,” both in our own hearts and minds, as well as in the hearts and minds of those around us. We can do this by spending quiet time alone with God, reading the Bible and praying.

How do you experience closeness with God? If you’re unsure, that’s ok! What small, practical changes could you make to your routine to make room for God?

Our good God hasn’t just saved us. He’s created important roles for each of us to play in his story! So when we pray, we’re preparing the way. When we read the Bible, we’re preparing the way. And when we tell other people about Jesus, we’re preparing the way. We’re announcing our coming King and pointing everyone who can hear us toward him.

Signs along the highway are not the destination, and their purpose only makes sense in light of what they’re pointing people to. Like those signs, and like John, we too are here to prepare the way. That’s our purpose. That’s our role in the story! We don’t have to struggle and stress about what our purpose might be because God has already given us parts in his story!

But to learn our roles, we must first trust in him. Only through connection with God through Jesus can we come fully alive in the purpose he’s made us for!

FAMILY CHALLENGE

Put on a short skit. Act out the Christmas story or come up with your own original story. Give every person a role to play. After the play, talk about how each person had their part and their purpose in the play.

Talk to your kids about their purpose, given to them by God. Pray together and thank God for giving us life and purpose.
DAY 3
It often seems like life is a never-ending quest to prove ourselves; to show the world that we're good enough, that we matter, that we have what it takes, and that we're okay. Here's the problem with that: it's exhausting.

And no matter what we achieve or accomplish, no matter how many times we succeed in proving ourselves, it's never enough. We wake up the next morning, and it's still there: That pit in our stomachs and hearts that drives us to prove ourselves all over again.

While striving toward the right things for the right reasons can be good, it can also set us up for constant disappointment, feelings of failure, and struggling with identity and self-worth. These struggles are common because they're tied to common lies—things the world tells us that just aren't true. Fortunately, the Bible tell us something else—we are who God says we are. And we are his.

Can you think of anything you've experienced recently that reminded you of who you are to God? Maybe a song, a sunset, a kind note ... maybe something you didn't even recognize at the time, but comes to mind now?

It doesn't matter what we can or can't do. It doesn't matter how much money we have or don't have; where we live, what we drive, or what's in our closet. It doesn't matter what color our skin is, or where we grew up; the language we speak, or the education we have (or don't have). None of these things matter to God. When he looks at us, he sees us for who we are, not these superficial things society tells us that matters. We may judge each other for these things, but he doesn't.

And therefore, none of those things are who we are.

Don't believe me? Pick up your Bible!

The Bible itself was written across a few thousand years by more than 40 different people in three different languages and on a few different continents. The writers were as different as possible. They were both kings and slaves, Jew and Greek, generals, priests, servants, rabbis, fishermen, carpenters, tent makers, doctors, and shepherds. They wrote God's Word in palaces, in caves, in fields, in dungeons, and on battlefields. The people who God used only had one thing in common:

They were willing.

The number one ability God looks for is availability! He uses whoever has a heart that is willing to be used, and he does not care about anything else. He doesn't need to—he's God!

Take inventory of your spiritual availability: What number would you give yourself 1-10 (10 being “completely available”). What in your life gets in the way of being available to God? What can you do about it?
When God initiated his plan to come to earth and save us, he did it in the least likely way and in the least likely place using the least likely people possible. He didn't choose a princess in a palace to be the mother of Jesus. He chose a poor girl in a dark, unknown corner of a vast empire.

Historians believe Mary was about 12-14 years old when the angel told her that she would give birth to the Son of God (Luke 1:30-33). For anyone, this would be overwhelming, but for a young Jewish girl in Mary's position? It was seemingly impossible.

You see, Mary wasn't married yet, although she was promised to a young man named Joseph, by the agreement of their families (which was the custom in that part of the world at this time). So for Mary to become pregnant before she was married to Joseph was so scandalous. It would, by their custom, almost certainly mean her death by execution. But in spite of the pressure and fear she felt, Mary chose to respond with faith:

“I am the Lord's servant. Let everything you've said happen to me” (Luke 1:38).

It wasn't Mary's wealth or popularity or standing or career or looks that set her apart. It was her faith. What made Mary special was that she was willing. Mary's super-ability was her avail-ability.

Do you think you've ever been “nudged” by God to do something? How did you respond?

Our striving cannot only discourage us, it can also distract us from both the truth of who God says we are, as well as the plans he has for us. If we're too busy trying to prove ourselves with success, popularity, and wealth, then how will our hearts and minds ever have room for what God wants to give us? We might strive toward a lot of “abilities,” but at what cost? What does this do to our availability.

We are the Lord's. We can and should live to glorify him in all we do, but not in ways that are unhealthy and overburden us with things that cannot satisfy. Our striving does not define us, but it can preoccupy us. And a preoccupied person is hard to mobilize for a mission.

Regardless of who we are, we are his, and he has a purpose for us. All he asks is that we be available when he reveals it to us. Like with Mary, he will do the rest.

**FAMILY CHALLENGE**

*Be available.* Think of some needs in your family's circle and answer those needs as a family the best you can. Maybe someone on your street could use their sidewalk cleared of snow. A family member might need to be reminded how much they are loved. Give them a call.

Write a letter, deliver a meal, serve at a food bank. Pray as a family that your hearts would be available this Christmas season to be the Lord's servant.

Note your family thoughts from today’s lesson.
DAY 4
“Listen, I’ll be honest with You
There’s so many things that You allow that I sometimes question
How You feel about me, I know how I feel about You
But the things that You allow
It’s very hard to trust Your heart when I can’t see Your hand”

These lyrics from “I Love You” by Sara Reeves sum things up pretty well, especially in 2020. At some point this year, each of us has probably said some version of these lyrics.

What song has been your 2020 “anthem?”

“It’s very hard to trust your heart when I can’t see your hand” is especially appropriate. How, in the midst of what we see every day, are we supposed to trust a God we’re told is always good, and always in control? It just doesn’t feel like that makes sense. Yet, the Bible is clear—God is good, God is in control, and he loves us.

Even if this doesn’t always feel true, it’s always true. Our circumstances and feelings will change, but he does not!

Two thousand years ago, a young girl in the Roman province of Judea must have felt the same way and struggled with the same questions. Mary was given what seemed like an impossible task within impossible circumstances. When she was visited by the angel who told her she would give birth to God’s Son, she was afraid. She was hesitant. She had obvious questions:

“She was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be” (Luke 1:29)

She wonders, “How will this be?” (Luke 1:34).

And yet, in spite of her fear, her hesitation, and her questions, Mary chose faith over fear:

“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).

What are you afraid of right now? How can you invite God into those fears and give them over to him?

Mary chose to trust even though she didn’t understand. She chose faith in God, rather than fear in her circumstances. When the Angel told her, “For nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37), she chose to believe him. She chose to believe that God was God, that he is in control, and that he is good.
Mary’s response is famous. It’s known as The Magnificat, which is Latin for “My soul magnifies the Lord.” It is a beautiful example of responding in trust with praise while in the midst of scary seasons:

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever” (Luke 1:46-55).

Mary didn’t understand God’s plan, or where it was going. She didn’t have all the answers. She experienced fear and uncertainty and yet, she chose to rest in what she did know: The same God who had led her people out of Egypt and Babylon and had saved Israel time and again was now asking her to trust him. So she did.

In the midst of dark times and hard moments, we should also remember God’s faithfulness. Instead of focusing on what we don’t know, it’ll focus us on who we do know. This will lead us to trust him even when we “don’t see [his] hand.”

**FAMILY CHALLENGE**

Create a simple obstacle course out of household items. Take turns being the leader and the listener. The listener will be blindfolded, and the leader must help guide them through the obstacle course. Repeat the activity until everyone has a chance to be the leader and listener.

After the activity, talk about how hard it would have been to try to make it through the obstacles without that voice. We can have faith that God will get us through the obstacles we face because of our faith in God. Pray together and thank God for his perfect guidance and because of that guidance, we have nothing to fear.

**Note your family thoughts from today’s lesson.**

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Do you know someone who struggles with worrying too much? Is the person you’re thinking of the one in the mirror? Don’t worry—you’re not alone. Worry is a constant battle in our world today, and one that seems to get harder with each passing day, week, and year. And in a year as stressful and complicated and 2020, we’re sure worrying too much has been a problem for all of us.

But worrying takes its toll, and oftentimes, in ways we may not even realize. One of the worst ways in which worrying too much effects our lives is that it gets in the way of faithful obedience to God. See, God has plans for us, and they’re wonderful plans that are both for our ultimate good and his ultimate glory. But when worry overwhelms our hearts and our minds, it acts like a spiritual roadblock, preventing us from moving forward in the direction God intends us to. Sometimes, worrying too much starts in a good place: We want to be responsible and diligent. But then worry starts to grow like a weed, and that triggers fear, and fear is the enemy of faith.

And we can’t obey God if we’re not faithfully living for him.

Worrying causes fear, which creates a roadblock. And roadblocks stop us from moving forward—and sometimes, from moving at all. So instead of making good, clear, faithful decisions, we freeze and make no decision at all. And that’s right where Satan wants us—frozen in place, too afraid to move, too afraid to faithfully obey the Lord.

What are you worried about? Is this something you can actually change and control? How much of your time and energy do this take up?

Joseph, Mary’s husband-to-be, is an awesome example we can look to as someone who overcame fear in order to faithfully obey God. And here’s the thing: We know this not because of the things Joseph said, but because of the things he chose to do. The Bible does not have a single word of Joseph’s recorded. Anywhere. That’s right! We don’t have any lines of him speaking, sharing what he thought or how he felt. All we have is what he did, and we’re pretty sure that’s on purpose. What God wanted us to know wasn’t what Joseph said or felt; what God wanted us to know is that Joseph was a faithful man of action.

Like Mary, Joseph probably felt like he was in an impossible situation. Given the customs of their day, Mary’s pregnancy would not only most likely lead to her death, but it also meant a great deal of shame and dishonor upon Joseph as well. Yet, Joseph’s actions show him to be a godly man. Upon being visited by an angel in his dream and told to still take Mary as his wife and care for Jesus as his own:

“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife” (Matthew 1:24).

Joseph obeyed by taking decisive, faithful action. Even though he probably felt afraid,
worried, and wasn’t sure what would happen next, he still chose to push past all of that in order to trust God and obey him through his actions. He didn’t let his fear of what might happen get in the way. He pushed past his fear and chose faith.

Joseph accepted that he wasn’t called to control an outcome. He just knew that he was called to obedience. He trusted God to take care of the rest.

Where is fear keeping you from taking action? What are some decisions you can start making today to move past the roadblocks of fear and toward where God wants you to go?

How often do we let worry turn into fear, and fear block our path forward? What might God want to do in our lives if we just chose, like Joseph, to trust that the outcome belonged to the Lord? What if we just trusted his call to faithful obedience and moved forward in decisive ways?

Life throws a lot at us: work, money, kids, family, bills, elections, pandemics, etc. While those things may worry us, they don’t worry the God of heaven because they’re not a surprise to him. He knows everything that has and will ever happen. So we can trust him when he calls us to something because he’s already seen the outcome. And because he’s a good God who wants our ultimate good for his ultimate glory, we can take action like Joseph to be faithfully obedient—and then watch God do miracles.

**FAMILY CHALLENGE**

*Obey the rules.* Make cookies together. It doesn’t matter if you are starting with refrigerated dough or from scratch, obedience will determine how your cookies turn out. As you make the cookies ask your kids about some of the steps, “What would happen if I didn’t obey this direction? Would the cookies still turn out?”

Pray together and thank God for his Word being our pathway to knowing him better and following him closer.

Note your family thoughts from today’s lesson.
No one likes being uncomfortable, especially not 21st century Americans. After all, we live in the freest, most prosperous, and therefore, relatively most comfortable nation and culture in the history of the world. So why should we choose discomfort? Why should we settle for anything less than comfort?

Because comfort is a double-edged sword. It can be a blessing, but too much can be a curse that leads to complacency.

Where do you see your comfort causing complacency in your life?

The truth is that often, God has to get us out of our comfort zones to refine us into what he wants us to be, and to use us to do what he wants to accomplish. When you read through the Bible or study heroes of the faith through history, what you find over and over again is this: God does some of his best work in the darkest and most uncomfortable moments of our lives.

In fact, his miracles shine brightest in the discomfort of the dark.

When was the last time you allowed yourself to be uncomfortable? What made it hard?

This is definitely true for the Christmas story, and the experience of Joseph and Mary.

In Luke 2, Joseph and Mary had to travel from their home in Galilee to Bethlehem for a census. Both were descended from King David, and therefore, Bethlehem ("The City of David") was their ancestral home. This trip was about 70 miles long through rugged country that didn’t have paved roads. They didn’t have cars with cruise controls and air conditioning or a stereo system. There were no Circle K’s or 7-11’s with bathrooms or racks of beef jerky, potato chips, and Gatorade. There was just miles and miles of harsh terrain, and Mary was pregnant with the Son of God.

Their’s was not an easy trip.

The movie The Nativity Story (2006) does a wonderful job portraying this reality. And while many of those scenes are extrabiblical (meaning not in scripture), they represent what that journey was probably like—exhausting, uncomfortable, dangerous, and filled with sacrifice.

Definitely not comfortable!

But it was in their discomfort where God performed one of his greatest miracles and acts of love – the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, come down from heaven to save us.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"
(Luke 2:14)
God often calls us out of the familiar, the comfortable, and the easy. Not because he wants us to suffer, but because he wants to show us who he is and what he will do when all we have left is him. It’s in moments of struggle where we’re finally forced to acknowledge our need for him. It’s in these beautiful moments that God does his best work, and unleashes miracles that can not only change us, but can change all of history.

We cling to comfort because it’s safe, but God calls us out into the wilderness even though it’s unsafe. Safety is not necessarily his goal—our salvation is. And sometimes, to save us, he has to make us uncomfortable. It’s the only way we will be shaken out of our complacency, our malaise. It’s where all we have left is him, and it’s where we realize that he is all we need.

FAMILY CHALLENGE

Stepping outside the comfort zone. Create the ultimate staring contest. Eye contact for long periods of time can be uncomfortable. When we are talking about God doing work in the darkest most uncomfortable moments in our lives, obviously we are talking about things more uncomfortable than a staring contest between friends or family members. Think as a family of some dark, uncomfortable moments you’ve walked through and how God showed his faithfulness.

Pray together thanking God for those tough moments and how he used them for his glory and for your good.

Note your family thoughts from today’s lesson.
Like most Americans, chances are you’ve probably seen the Charlie Brown Christmas special at least a few times. You remember—Charlie Brown is bummed out because even though it’s “the most wonderful time of year.” He confesses to his buddy Linus that he’s just not feeling it because he’s not really sure “what Christmas is all about.”

At Lucy’s recommendation, Charlie Brown becomes director of the kids’ play to feel “more involved,” and while assigning parts, Pig Pen is picked to play the innkeeper. While he’s made fun of for being “an absolute mess!” Pig Pen replies, “In spite of my outward appearance, I shall try to keep a neat inn.”

Who is your favorite character from Charlie Brown Christmas? Which character do you most relate to this Christmas season?

Pig Pen’s role as the innkeeper is a part of the story we think we all know. There’s just one problem—what we think we know about the actual “innkeeper” is mostly wrong!

Luke 2 tells us this: “she [Mary] gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7).

Over the years, all the beautiful and deep meaning of what’s actually going on here has gotten lost in our traditions. Here’s what we mean: When we read “inn” in our English bibles, it makes us think of the person behind the counter at a motel. But in the ancient Greek language in which this story was recorded, “Inn” is the word “kataluma” (sometimes spelled “katalyma”), which is actually close in meaning to “guest room.”

So why do you think this matters? How might this change your understanding of what’s going on in this story?

Most scholars believe that Joseph and Mary were probably trying to stay with Joseph’s extended family (think of going to visit your distant cousins in another state during a big event like a wedding). Unfortunately, because of the census, the town was crowded, and they were forced to stay in the lowest part of the house, which was normally reserved for the family’s animals. After traveling many days and miles, they had to stay in an overcrowded house with their extended families in an overcrowded town in a room normally reserved for barn animals.

It’s a little bit different of a picture than what we usually think of, isn’t it? See, Pig Pen wasn’t just playing some front desk clerk; he was playing their family.

But that’s not all! Some scholars also believe that another reason Mary and Joseph had to stay where they stayed was because they were rejected by their own people.

Mary was pregnant, but she and Joseph were not yet married. As previously discussed, this would have been a shameful scandal. Have you ever been judged by those supposedly closest to you? Have you ever felt rejected and unloved? Exactly.
When have you felt the sting of rejection from those who are supposed to love you most?

Jesus was rejected right from the start, too. He hadn’t even been born yet, and yet he was already judged, unwelcomed, and cast aside. The God of the universe was rejected from the outset by those he came to save, and those closest to him. This becomes a major theme throughout Jesus’ life on earth, which scripture speaks to repeatedly:

“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (John 1:11).

“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him …” (Mark 6:3).

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (Psalm 118:22).

“And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household” (Matthew 13:57).

“For not even his brothers believed in him” (John 7:5).

“He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:3-5).

We’ve all made mistakes. We’ve all made bad choices. But the good news of Christmas is that God came down from heaven to pay the price for our mistakes because he loves us that much! And not only that, he is a God who understands how we feel when we’re rejected and feel unloving, because he’s been there. He knows how it feels because he’s felt it too.

Christmas means that we can be healed from our mistakes, their consequences, and the rejection we often feel. Jesus came to restore all of this. That’s why he endured rejection from the start to be born in a barn: to save us because he loves us.

The word “Emmanuel” means “God with us.” Reflect on what you’ve read today and let it change how you think of the word “Emmanuel.” Write out a prayer of thanks to God for not just being the Lord over us, but for being Emmanuel, God WITH us.
FAMILY CHALLENGE

_Humble yourself._ Gather everyone at the bottom of the stairs with one person at the top (the person at the top should be a grown up). Tell the group at the bottom that they have to get to the person at the top of the stairs. Sounds easy? The catch is, that the people at the bottom can’t touch the stairs. The person at the top is all powerful and can do anything! Let them brainstorm and try out some ideas. Keep going until someone realizes that the ONLY solution is for the all-powerful person at the top of the stairs to come down, and by their strength alone, get everyone to the top. Use the activity as a starting point for talking about why God had to send his son Jesus to the earth as a baby.

Pray together and thank God for giving us a way to him, a payment for our sins.

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Note your family thoughts from today’s lesson.

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"While [he] may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief, and envy; he cannot give peace of heart, for which man yearn for more than even outward peace."

Doesn’t this sound like something that pretty well sums up 2020? “... Peace of heart, for which man yearn for more than even outward peace.” Can we think of a time where we have yearned for “peace” more than now, at the end of this difficult year?

But here’s the thing about the quote you just read—it wasn’t written today, it was written by a writer in the 1st century named Epictitus, and the “he” in his quote was the Emperor of Rome. Epictetus knew that earthly rulers and things can’t bring peace to our souls. What’s striking about Epictetus’ quote is how much it seems like he’s truly yearning for something that does bring peace—just like us today.

What does this have to do with Christmas?

Within the Christmas story in the Bible, there’s a moment one writer describes as a “proclamation of peace” that fulfills all yearnings for the peace of heart that we desire:

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the LORD appeared to them, and the glory of the LORD shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the LORD. This will be a sign to you – you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:8-12).

Are you yearning for peace? What brings you peace?

This is such a glorious proclamation—good news of great joy for the whole world! What could be better? This is the moment, the message, that the people of God had been awaiting for generations. This was to be the fulfillment of everything they’d longed for.

So why would such a huge and glorious moment be shared with shepherds? After all, shepherds were some of the lowest of the low in their culture. They were very poor; they lived out in the fields with their flocks for a very long time, so they often smelled and weren’t the best around other people. The rest of their society really looked down on them. So why were they there? Why would God choose them to be among the first he announced this good news to?
Why do you think the angels told the shepherds to go and see Jesus?

There are several other times in scripture that God chooses a humble shepherd to fulfill his purpose. In the second book of the Bible, Exodus, God appears to Moses as he’s “tending the flock of his father-in-law” (Exodus 3:1) to send him back to Egypt to be the deliverer of God’s people. A few generations later in the story of Israel, a prophet named Samuel goes to anoint a young boy named David to become king, but he’s “out keeping the sheep” (1 Samuel 16:11).

So why shepherds? Why not great rulers or warriors? Why not the powerful in society? Why “the least?”

Because God doesn’t care about the flashy. He cares about humble hearts he can use for his purposes.

If we’re honest, many of us usually feel pretty ordinary, and so we often doubt ourselves and our ability to do great things. But scripture constantly gives us hope that any of us can be used for his purpose.

After all, it’s about his power, not ours.

So how could God use you? What’s getting in the way?

Which brings us back to those shepherds in the nativity. While these men and boys were the “lowest of the low,” their flocks were not. Scholars believe that the shepherds outside Bethlehem weren’t just watching over any shee—they were actually watching over the sheep to be used in the Jewish temple for sacrifices!

According to the law, only spotless lambs “without blemish” were good enough to be sacrificed for the sins of Israel. Only a pure lamb could bring peace. So when the angel appears to the shepherds and invites them to leave their really important flock, it’s because an even more important “lamb” has been born nearby! Jesus came to be the one, final atoning sacrifice for all by going to the Cross and dying for our sins. The shepherds were released from their sheep because Jesus came to finally do what even those perfect lambs never fully could—atone for all sins, and finally bring everlasting peace.

And this is for “all the people” because regardless of our circumstances, God can use anyone, and Jesus came to save us all.

Does it change your perspective of the nativity scene to know that they were outcasts? Why or why not?
FAMILY CHALLENGE

Shepherds are always searching. They are either looking for their sheep or looking out for predators. In the Christmas story, they are looking for a Savior. Create a scavenger hunt in your house using either the clues provided or come up with your own. At the end, the kids should find baby Jesus, it can be a drawing, a printed picture or the Jesus from your nativity scene.

CLUE 1: The shepherds watched their flock by night, the angels gave them quite a fright. You'll find me with the things you eat, everything from fruit to meat (The refrigerator)

CLUE 2: The angels sang a heavenly tune and told them the Savior was coming soon. Your next clue lays not in your bed but somewhere else you lay your head. (The couch)

CLUE 3: There was no time to waste, the shepherds left for Bethlehem with haste. Be quick and rush—find your next clue where you brush. (Bathroom sink)

CLUE 4 BABY JESUS: What they found was not a King—but a baby, and what joyous hope did he bring! Your hunt is almost through, just one more clue. You'll find him, not in a stable but rather, underneath the _________. (Table)

Note your family thoughts from today's lesson.

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DAY 9
When the Mission Hills team set out to create the 2020 Christmas event, we had one goal in mind—to present the beautiful truth about the story of Christmas, and to share with our community how that story is celebrated around the world.

The word “multicultural” is thrown around often, and while that’s a major component of what we were aiming for, we were also sensitive that it’s a word that is often loaded with meaning and charged with strong feelings that could make it tricky to navigate. So we moved forward with prayerful care and consideration of these issues, but also with bold faith that the vision God was giving us was good, and that as long as we were obedient to it and him, he would take care of the outcome.

Write some words that come to mind when you think of “multicultural.”

As the months flew by and our planning progressed, and our event’s story took shape, a beautiful realization dawned on us. Like a curtain slowly pulling back to reveal something beautiful, the Lord slowly made us realize the real story he wanted to tell.

We—all of us, all over the world—have so much more in common than we realize.

We didn’t create this on our own; he led us to it. Here’s how it happened:

We work with global partners around the world. Some we can share about, and some we can’t in order to protect them from persecutions in those counties. But they all helped! For months, they emailed us pictures, stories, videos, and songs of their culture’s Christmas celebrations. As we sifted through everything they sent us, it wasn’t the differences that caught our eye, but the similarities. Red Santa hats here, a decorated tree there, some familiar songs over there … and that’s when it hit us:

All the differences that drive us apart are so much less than the weight of all that knits us together.

We thought we were going to tell the story of how we celebrate Jesus differently, but what Jesus taught us along the way is how much we actually have in common. So why is that? Simple (and powerful, especially this year): Jesus is “Lord Over All.”

“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

“On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords” (Revelation 19:16).

In Matthew 2, we read about a group of “wise men” coming from the east to visit and worship the baby Jesus. These guys often show up in Christmas specials, movies, and nativity scenes. We often know them as “The Three Wise Men,” the Magi, or “The Three Kings.”
If you stop and think about it, they seem a little random, don’t they? They’re from a far-off country that historically was always at war with the Jewish people. They were considered noble and similar to sorcerers because of their study of the stars and their practice of predicting events and knowing a lot about a lot. So what are they doing visiting a small Jewish baby of a poor family in a barn in Bethlehem?

Without reading ahead, why do you think the Magi (or wise men) are important to the Christmas story?

Simple: Jesus is indeed the Lord Over All.

If you were to start reading the Bible from the very beginning all the way up until the Christmas story in Matthew, it’s clear that Israel is God’s chosen people. The Jews were the people front and center in the action. Other nations played a part, but oftentimes, it wasn’t a good one. The focus was usually on Israel. But God kept hinting at a central promise all the way through: One day, he would save the world through Israel, and salvation would be a blessing offered to every nation.

Do you believe that Jesus came for YOU? What is holding you back from believing that to be true?

The wise men knew about these prophecies, including a very old one in Numbers 24:17, which predicts where Jesus would be born, and that a star from heaven would light the way. So when the Magi see the star in the sky, they know what’s going on. They’re outsiders who don’t seem to fit in, but because of the miracle of Christmas, God has included everyone, even them.

So when God showed us what our Christmas event was really about, we felt like it was the most obvious realization we’d ever had! It doesn’t matter if we’re missionaries in China, middle class folks in Littleton, tribal children in Rwanda, native fisherman in Alaska, or “Three Kings” from ancient Persia … Jesus is Lord over all, and he came to save us all.

In a year of so much strife, division, and chaos, that brings us a lot of comfort. We hope it does for you, too. No matter who you are, where you’re from, the language you speak, the color of your skin, or where you grew up, we are all brothers and sisters, created in the image of the same God who came to save us all.

FAMILY CHALLENGE

Using a physical map, a world map on the internet, or a globe, work together and locate one or more of the countries that Mission Hills has ministry partners at. Talk about some things you know about that country. Find at least one difference and one similarity. Take some time as a family praying for our partners in those areas.

Note your family thoughts from today’s lesson.
"Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright
’Round yon virgin Mother and Child
Holy infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace
Sleep in heavenly peace ..."

We all know the song, and have sung it a hundred times. Like so many other of the classic traditions and images of Christmas, the song Silent Night is one of those time-honored “Christmassy” things we pull out sometime around Thanksgiving, dust off, and enjoy for a few weeks before it goes back into a drawer somewhere.

**What is your favorite Christmas Carol?**

Was it really a “silent night”? Was all “calm and bright”? Is this all that was going on, or was there something more?

You’ve probably seen many different versions of the nativity scene: Fancy porcelain ones, toy Little People ones, hand-sculpted wooden ones, even Lego ones! They all show a version of the same story: Baby Jesus lying in a manger, and everyone calmly, serenely gathered around him, quietly bowing with prayer hands, the picture of peace and stillness. A “silent night,” right?

Not even close.

Maybe that’s all human eyes could see, but there was so much more happening. And it wasn’t very “calm and bright” at all. Because that first Christmas was not really a “silent night.” It was actually an invasion.

Saving Private Ryan is considered one of the greatest war movies ever made, especially because of the incredibly accurate and graphic way it shows the famous “D-Day” invasion of Normandy on that heroic morning in June 1944. To this day, historians still aren’t sure how many people died during the D-Day invasion, but it turned the tide of the largest and most important war in human history, and led to ultimate the Allies’ victory over Nazi Germany. It was a great victory, but it came with a great price.

God wages war for us, too. While not every burned piece of toast or stubbed toe is caused by a demon, spiritual warfare is real. We usually can’t detect it with our human sense, but God is always fighting the Enemy on our behalf. This is why the first Christmas has a lot in common with those first few minutes of Saving Private Ryan. God and his armies of angels were invading reality to rescue us and to bring us back to him.

This was always the plan, and it was also going to be a battle.
Way back in Genesis, after Adam and Eve brought sin into the world and were kicked out of the Garden of Eden, God says to the serpent who has deceived Eve:

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring: he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15).

Eve's offspring in this verse is a reference to Jesus, to the great war for the redemption of everything, all the way back in the first few chapters of the Bible! God told us from the beginning that he would be coming for us, but it was going to be a battle. We get more details about this later in scripture in Revelation 12.

John, the last living Disciple and at the end of his life, is given a vision from God while alone in a cave on an island. John sees a woman in pain, giving birth to a child, and a great dragon trying to devour the child. But the child survives and goes on to rule over all nations (Revelation 12:1-5).

That's Jesus, and that's what was really going on that seemingly silent night: a great invasion! Heaven and hell battled in ways our human eyes cannot see, but there was a battle nonetheless, and it was over us.

God stormed the beaches of reality for us. He has had a plan since the beginning, and on the first Christmas night, he launched his great invasion to rescue us by coming to die for us, and therefore bringing us back to him.

Remember Gabriel? The angel who appears to Mary. In the book of Daniel, Gabriel appears to Daniel and tells him that he has come as an answer to Daniel's prayer (Daniel 10). He basically says, I would have been here sooner but I have been in a battle with the "commander of the Persian kingdom" (Satan) for 21 days. Knowing that the enemy fought Gabriel for 21 days to keep him from answering Daniels prayer, how much harder do you think the commander of the Persian kingdom (hell) fought to keep Gabriel from Mary? Or to keep Mary from Bethlehem?

That's what God has done for us. That's the battle he waged on our behalf because he loves every single one of us that much.

So the next time you and your family set up the family nativity scene, remember that there's so much more going on there than meets the eye. Our human, physical eyes couldn't see it, but there was a cosmic battle taking place that changed reality forever, and its result is the free gift of salvation for us all.

You just have to accept it.

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**FAMILY CHALLENGE**

*Optical Illusions.* Click this link, and watch this video together: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XB-LiULVafU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XB-LiULVafU)

Discuss what it means that Jesus died to restore our relationship with God that was broken because of sin. Pray and thank God for sending his son Jesus to save us from death and separation from God.
DAY
11
Here’s the thing: Over the course of history, there have been a lot of people who have come and gone who have claimed to be the “Savior of the World.” From politicians to cult leaders to mythological figures from ancient history, claiming to be the Savior isn’t anything new.

Have you ever experienced someone claiming to be someone they are not? When the truth was revealed, how did it leave you feeling?

So what makes Jesus different? What makes the night of his birth so special? Why, 2,000 years later, is it still the single most celebrated season on our planet year after year?

Simple.

The birth of Jesus matters so much because of his death.

Jesus did a lot during the course of his 33 years on this earth. The Gospels record snippets of his youth, and they overwhelmingly focus on this three years of public ministry. He performed miracles, taught about God and what he is actually like, took care of the poor and downtrodden, and garnered quite the following.

Why does it matter if Jesus was the “Savior” or just a “good teacher”?

But like his birth, none of that would have mattered if not for his death (and what came after)!

There was a group of Jewish leaders called the Pharisees who held an important position in Jewish society 2,000 years ago. Experts on God’s Law, they were looked to as the gatekeepers for Jewish society and judged who lived rightly, and who didn’t. They took God’s good and simple law, turned it into a complicated religious system that was difficult to follow and obey. They took the good thing God gave us and made it ugly and complicated.

So naturally, Jesus was constantly at odds with these guys. In fact, most of the times in scripture where Jesus gets really mad is when he’s dealing with the Pharisees. Jesus was always patient, kind, and gracious with the poor, prostitutes, beggars, and the desperate of society, but when it came to the self-righteous elite, he never hesitated to put them in their place.

The Pharisees didn’t like Jesus and felt threatened by him. Eventually this led to their plotting against him. When they were finally able to bring Jesus before a court, Jesus told the truth about who he was: The Son of God, the long-awaited Savior and Messiah. Because they didn’t believe him (or just didn’t want to), the Pharisees accused Jesus of heresy, which is a fancy way of saying that he was a false religious teacher who was misleading people. This is why they killed him.
Honestly consider where you would have been in this argument? If someone claimed to be the Son of God, would you have followed him with skeptical optimism? Would you have been one that was an all in Jesus follower? Or would you have been yelling “crucify him!” with the crowd?

But that was all part of God’s plan, too. Jesus had to come and die, because the Bible makes it very clear that the “wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). And since every person who has ever been born is a sinner, a price has to be paid on all our accounts. So God himself came down and paid it for us, because he was the only one who could. Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life, so only he could be that perfect, spotless sacrifice that paid the price for us all, once and for all.

So his birth matters because of how and why he died.

And we should only have faith in the power of his death because HE DIDN'T STAY DEAD!

On the first Easter morning, Jesus walked out of that grave, just like he said he would. He paid the price, but then rose again to overcome and defeat sin and death! Death could not hold him because unlike everyone else who's ever claimed to be the Savior of the world, Jesus actually is!

Since Jesus is who he said he is, that means that everything we know about him is true. Which means he did come for everyone, including you. Have you accepted that free gift?

That's why Christmas is so important. God stormed the beaches of reality for us, and his plan was to die for us in our place. This is why we love and celebrate and worship the Baby in the Manger—because he would become the man who walked out of the grave. Jesus came to live and die and then rise again. Through faith in him, we too can share in the same victory. The grave could not hold him, and if we repent and come to faith in Jesus, then sin and death will have no hold over us, either. We may go on to physically struggle now and then in what’s left of this life, but spiritually, we will go on in glory with God forever!

And that’s what Christmas is all about.

It matters so much because of the entire story. It matters so much because he didn’t stay just a baby in a manger, and later, he didn’t stay dead. The tomb is empty; it’s a fact of history.

What makes Jesus’ birth special is his death, and what makes his death special is that he is the only one who didn’t stay that way!

Jesus was born, lived, died, and rose again for all of us.

Are you ready to put your faith in him? Why or Why not?
FAMILY CHALLENGE

Have each person pick their favorite Christmas song and either sing or just listen to them together.

Then read through the Christmas story in Luke as a family with fresh eyes. Not just with anticipation for Christmas morning or the birth of Jesus. But with anticipation of the resurrection of our Savior. Soak in each step of the Christmas story remembering where it leads to: the cross and the empty tomb. Pray together and thank God not just for sending his son Jesus as a baby, but for sending him as a sacrifice.

Note your family thoughts from today’s lesson.
DAY
12
“Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies.”

This is a great quote from the movie *The Shawshank Redemption*, a story of a man imprisoned for almost 20 years for a crime he never committed. He’s beaten, tortured, and brutalized in awful ways. But in the end, he gets redemption. In the midst of darkness, he held onto hope, and his hope was rewarded. While *The Shawshank Redemption* is not a Christian movie, its final few scenes beautifully display the patient endurance of hope and the satisfaction of when it’s fulfilled.

**What’s a movie or tv show you’ve seen that made you feel hopeful?**

**Why did it make you feel that way?**

We have a hope that’s even greater.

2020 has tried us all to varying degrees, and we’ve all struggled in our own ways. But none of us have escaped this year without some kind of stress, pain, worry, or heartache. More than any year in recent memory, the entire planet has gone through something that’s been universally hard. In a way, we’ve never had more in common.

Which brings us back to the baby in the manger.

Jesus is the Lord of all, and the good news of Christmas is that even in the midst of really hard times and trials, our stories do not end there. We have a real, living hope that our stories do not stop until we one day arrive to be face to face with Jesus in heaven. For those who have chosen faith in him, that day will wash away all the pain, the heartache, the stress, and the hardship wash away. The promise of our hope will be fulfilled, and we will finally get our happily ever after.

Christmas is for everyone. God’s invitation of salvation and restoration through his son is the only way to overcome this fallen, broken world. He came to make the way for us all. But we have to accept his offer of grace in order to receive it. We’ve explored the good reasons we have for faith. We’ve also seen how at every point in the Christmas story, we see our good God moving heaven and earth to knit the entire story of reality together with one goal in mind:

Saving all of us. Because he loves us that much.

Jesus is the true gift of Christmas. While we may give and receive presents to each other, God has already given us the greatest gift any of us could ever receive: his Son.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” *(John 3:16-17).*
He came to save us. You, your loved ones, your neighbors ... everyone who has ever lived.
It doesn’t matter who you are, what you’ve done, or what you look like: the baby in the
manger is for you. He was born, lived, died, and rose for you.

Will you accept his free invitation now for eternal life? If you already have,
how can you recommit your life to loving and serving him?

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**FAMILY CHALLENGE**

*Write a prayer together.* Using one piece of paper, each take a turn writing a few
sentences thanking God for the gifts he’s given you and what they mean; then pass it to
the next person. When you’re done, read it aloud together as a family, and then put it
somewhere safe. The next time you need HOPE, pull it out and remember all the God has
done, and let HOPE become renewed within you!

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**Note your family thoughts from today’s lesson.**

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Additional Note Space from this devotional that you’d like to remember!
Well, you made it.

But this isn't the end – it's only the beginning.

See, here's our little secret: This was never meant to just be 12 days that you checked off like another holiday "to-do." It's been our hope and prayer all along that this would be a springboard that propels you forward into a lifetime of not just knowing what the good news of Christmas is really all about, but living a life in light of what that good news means.

The God of heaven stepped onto the stage of reality and was born, lived, died, and rose again for us. The baby in the manger is for all of us, no matter who you are, where you’re from, or what you’re going through. Despite what we’re told, we have so much more that binds us together than drives us apart because He is Lord over all! His free gift of true peace, love, and hope is for everyone, and it overcomes everything. That’s not something we should confine to just 12 days; that’s something that should shape every day for the rest of our eternities!

So how do we receive that gift? Glad you asked ...

The bible says that whoever asks forgiveness for sin and confesses Jesus as Lord is born again (Romans 10:9-10), a new creation made right with God; not because we deserve it or have done enough "religious stuff," but because of what Jesus has done for us. All we have to do is repent, proclaim Him as Lord, and receive His gift of Grace. That’s it! He does the rest!

So if you’re finally ready to receive this free gift, wherever you are, whatever you’re doing, pray this prayer with us:

Dear God,

Thank you for the gift of your Son Jesus. Thank you for coming into this world to rescue me from it and from my sin. I ask your forgiveness for the ways I’ve fallen short, and want to receive your grace, forgiveness, and salvation. Please come into my life so that I may spend forever with you.

Amen.

Yes, it’s that simple – we promise. And we promise because God promises, and as we’ve learned these last 12 days, His promises are always true! So if you just prayed that prayer for the first time, you have now received the gift that Jesus was born to give! We’d love to celebrate with you and help you figure out what it means and what’s next. Text "JESUS" to 888111 so we can connect with you and help you take your next steps!

Know that we at Mission Hills Church love you, have been praying for you, and as you finally turn the page from 2020 into 2021, we are here to support you and worship with you! To get more connected with us, visit missionhills.org.

We hope to see you all soon. Until then, thank you for spending part of your holiday with us. Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year! See you soon!

In Christ Alone,

The Mission Hills Outreach Team