

Advent Devotions 2023



**Immanuel Lutheran Church
Sebewaing, Michigan
Pastor Michael Boyer**

This little Advent devotional travels through portions of the Advent and Christmas narrative in Luke and Matthew. As you read of the shepherds and wise men seeking the Christ remember that you are seeking Him too. You seek Him not in a stable or house, but in His Word, through Baptism, and in the Supper. Come where the Christ is for you and receive Him!

In the Name of Jesus,
Pastor Boyer

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December 3

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Luke 2.1-2

Luke sets the stage for the birth of the Christ in the history of the world. Caesar Augustus lived and did issue such a decree. Quirinius was a governor of Syria. The Christ was born in time and place. Luke grounds the birth of the Christ in world history.

This he does for you. It would be too easy for our sinful nature to doubt; was the Christ really born? Did this actually happen? Luke is careful to record historical details; people and places to show clearly that Christ was born in time.

But the Christ's birth is not some random even, rather it occurred at the exact time the Father desired. "When the fullness of time had come God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons (Galatians 4.4-5)." The Father arranged the events of world history as He desired and then sent forth His Son.

It was the right time and the world was in need. Since the fall into sin by Adam and Eve, all creation was plunged into the darkness of sin and the gloom of death. God had promised to reverse all this and through Jesus salvation would come. The Father decreed that He would send His Son to pay for the sins of the entire world.

In those days, this became reality. Jesus, true God and true man, came. He lived among sinners, healed, worked miracles, and spoke sermons. He directed all to see what He would do upon the tree.

Upon that tree the God of all died for you. He paid the full price your sins demanded before the Father. Luke sets the work of Christ in history to give you confidence in what He has done and to show you that Christ has come to you in your time to declare your sins forgiven.

Prayer: Father in heaven, at just the right time You sent Your Son into the history of this world. He was born of Mary to live and die for me. I praise You for Your compassion toward me and all people. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

December 4

And all went to be registered, each to his own town. Luke 2.3

Because of this census Jesus was born in Bethlehem. This is also why Luke records the census: to explain why Jesus is not born in a house, but in the lowly stable. No doubt, to the first readers of Luke's Gospel, this is not how they thought the Christ should have been born.

Was it right that His parents had to uproot their lives to follow the census of a civil ruler? Was it right that a pregnant Mary had to travel to Bethlehem? Was it right that God's Son would be born in a stable? Should He have been laid in a trough? Shouldn't kings and princes have come to pay homage to Him and not shepherds?

The Father arranges the events of history so that His Son is born in Bethlehem, in a stable, attended to by shepherds. This is the way the Father wanted it. But why?

Because the Christ came for all. He came not just for the elites, but for all. He came not just for the 'religious,' but for all. He came not just for Jews, but for all. His lowly birth reminds us that the Christ came for all, and He came for you.

He was born in Bethlehem for you. He was born in a barn and laid in a manger for you. He was attended to by shepherds to show that He was born for you. For you who are steeped in sin and unworthy of God's compassion, the Christ came. For you who deserve nothing but death and hell, the Christ was born.

Mary and Joseph were registered in Bethlehem so the Christ could be born there to fulfill Scripture. He was born, lived, and died for

you that you would be registered in heaven eternally. This was the Father's will and plan. All things work out according to His wisdom. At just the right time the Christ was born to save you.

Prayer: Father, in Your wisdom You prepared history until the time was right to send Your Son. Jesus was born so humbly to show He came to save all- even me. I thank You that Jesus has secured my salvation through His death on the tree. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

December 5

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.
Luke 2.4-5

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days (Micah 5.2).” Here the city of David is not Jerusalem, but the place where David grew up. To that small and insignificant Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary traveled. This was to fulfill Scripture.

The ruler whose origins were ancient would be born in Bethlehem. He who was ruler in Israel would be born in the same place David was born. This Jesus would be the new Davidic king who would rule.

Yet, He would not rule like David did. Jesus would not live in a palace feasting on fine foods. Jesus would not fight battles with armies nor would He conquer cities. He would rule over all people in weakness and humility.

The humble origins of Jesus point to His rule in humility. That Caesar Augustus is involved in this account reminds us that this Jesus will be for all; Jews and Gentiles. Jesus is the ruler of all and through His humility He rules. His throne is the cross. He is crowned with thorns and robed in the mockery of purple. He lays down His life to rule sinners.

He rules by coming to you through simple water. Through Baptism He forgives your sins. He rules through bread and wine,

there He gives you His body and blood. He rules through Word as He declares you clean and forgiven.

You who are full of sin and too small to be among the children of God, rejoice that your Savior has come. He is the ancient of days, the eternal one, the living one who died and lives forever more. He died and lives for you, that you would not die but live eternally.

Prayer: Father in heaven, the origins of Your Son are from ancient days. Your Son is true God, yet He took on flesh and became man. I praise you that Jesus is man and able to die for me. I praise You that Jesus is God and a sufficient sacrifice for my sins. In His Name. Amen.

December 6

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she 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 2.6-7

Could Luke record the birth of Jesus, the Christ, in a simpler way? Shouldn't he go into more detail talking about the feelings of Mary or gently describing the first few moments of Jesus' earthly life? Luke keeps this simple and straightforward.

Isn't that how Scripture is usually? For the most important things Scripture is clear, simple, and straightforward. When God makes the world in six days, the language is clear and simple. When God makes promises to Abraham, He is very straightforward. When Jesus institutes Baptism or the Supper, His language is clear.

It is no surprise then that Luke would use such clear and simple language. He is matter of fact. At just the right time God's Son was born in flesh. God took on flesh. But how can this be! Isn't God everywhere? Isn't God all powerful? How could God be confined to flesh? This is beyond us, it's a mystery.

How is not the question we should be asking, but why. Why would God do this? God did this for you. He willingly limited Himself, not fully using His divine nature. He took on flesh that He would take on your sins and die for you upon the cross.

In the nativity of Jesus you see the love of God. That the Father would not withhold His Son, that Jesus would take on flesh and die

for you, that the Spirit would bring the benefits of Jesus' death to you. Luke tells this simply that you might believe and trust all that God has done for you.

Prayer: Father, Your Son took on flesh for me, He died in my place under the law suffering Your wrath against my sins. I rejoice in the simplicity of Scripture that I would know Your love. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

December 7

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. Luke 2.8-9

Of course the shepherds were filled with great fear. An angel, a messenger from God, usually did not appear to them on the hills around Bethlehem. This supernatural occurrence moved them to fear.

Odd though, isn't it? An angel comes with the best message he has ever delivered and the shepherd cower in fear. Could the angel have rejoiced anymore? Isn't this what the angel had been waiting for since the fall of Adam and Eve? Now the Christ has come and there is no room for fear!

This would happen again. Angels would deliver news of great joy and people would be afraid. At the tomb of Jesus two angels spoke to frightened women about the resurrection of the Christ (Luke 24.5-7). Angels announce to frightened sinners the birth and resurrection of Jesus. They point us to the most important things God does.

That shouldn't surprise us. Angels are the messengers of God. They bring the message of God to us. What is the message of God? Jesus has come! Jesus has died and rose again! Angels point to what God has done for your salvation.

So do not be afraid. See what the angels want you to see! See Jesus Christ coming in the flesh. See Him offering that flesh upon the tree for your sins. See His flesh raised up on the third day for your justification. This is what the angels would have you see; Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Father in heaven, You sent an angel to the shepherds to announce the birth of Your Son. You sent angels to announce the resurrection to the women at the tomb. Grant me to see what those angels pointed to- even Jesus Christ crucified for me. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

December 8

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." Luke 2.10

Interesting, isn't it? The angel made this announcement to the shepherds, but the angel said that this great joy would be for all the people. The angel is clear. This is not just for shepherds, not just for Jews, not just for those who think they are righteous; this is for all the people.

This news is for all the people because all the people need this news. All the people are sinful. Christ came for sinners, thus He came for all. Adam and Eve sinned in the garden. Their sin was passed down to the next generation and the next and the next. This original sin was and is sin.

Sin is not just what sinners do, but who sinners are. Before we take a breath of air we are sinful. Before we think a thought or act we are sinful. And from us who are sinful from before our birth comes sin. Our original sin lives within us and cannot be overcome by our own might.

Is this fair that we are born sinful before God? No, it is not fair to God. We should come out of our mother's womb praising God, but we come out crying in selfish need. We continue selfishly sinning through our lives. Sinners put themselves first before God and neighbor. And all are sinful, including you.

That is why the angel brings this news to shepherds and tells them this is for all the people. It is for all sinners. The Christ has come for you. Because of your sins and sinful nature the Christ has come. By His birth, through His death, and by His resurrection your sins are put away and you are given confidence in the mercy of God. This is news of great joy for all people, even for you!

Prayer: Father in heaven, the angel brought news of great joy the shepherds, but this was not only for them it was for all. I praise You for sending Your Son to take my sins and granting me salvation. Bring this great news to me continually. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

December 9

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2.11

For you. That says it all, doesn't it? The Christ is born for those shepherds. Luke does not want you to miss this, nor does the angel! The Christ comes for you; He is your Savior.

Even before Jesus was born this simple fact was known: the Christ would come for sinners. He would come for shepherds, for Mary, for Zechariah, for the sick and healthy, for rich and poor, for you. Thus, when the Christ is born the angel does not give a lengthy speech, but cuts right to the most important truth: the Christ came for you!

He comes in the lineage of King David to rule over all people in humility. These humble shepherds are proof that Jesus came for all. You are proof that Jesus came for all. He came to take your sins from you upon the cross. He came to die for all your faults and failures. He came to die for your very nature. The Christ came for you.

He came not to give you riches or a happy life. He came to destroy your enemies of sin, devil, and death. He overturns your sin through His mercy and grants you forgiveness. Did the shepherds understand all this? Did they know that the Christ being born for them meant that He would die to save them? They understand the angel's joy and excitement. They know something great is happening and they are a part of it. Know that you are a part of this also. The Christ came for you and has had mercy on you.

Prayer: Father, You sent Your Son for all people even me. I rejoice that Jesus was born for me and died for me. He has fully paid for all

my sins and grants me forgiveness. Strengthen my faith in Jesus and all He has done for me. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

December 10

“And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” Luke 2.12

What a sign! You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Isn't that the way God works? Giving signs that no one would expect. Who would ever think that a little baby would be a sign from God.

This baby was that sign promised to the serpent in the garden. The seed of the woman would overcome the evil one. He was the sign promised to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through one of his offspring. This was the sign the people of God had been looking for; this little baby.

Could the shepherds have imagined all this when they first saw the angel? The angel was coming to bring them this good news of great joy, that a child was born. That was the great news, a child? Yes, that was the great news.

That news is great because this child is the Christ; true God and true man. True God eternally from the Father and true man of Mary. This news was great because this child would offer His flesh upon a cross for the sins of those shepherds. But not only them, Jesus would offer Himself for all. There is no greater sign in heaven or on earth than Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Indeed, what a sign!

Prayer: Father, You sent an angel to direct the shepherds to the Christ child. You have given us Your Word and Spirit to direct us to Your Son. You show us Your love and mercy as You send Your Son to die in our place upon the tree. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

December 11

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” Luke 2.13-14

Peace on earth? Could this really be the message of the angels? Where is this peace? Are there not wars raging? Are not people hurting? The message of the angels sounds the opposite of reality.

Won't Herod kill all the babies in Bethlehem? Won't Jesus be mocked and ridiculed? Won't people turn away from Him? Where will His disciples be on Maundy Thursday night or Good Friday? Who remains faithful?

Yes, the angels message is right. Peace on earth has come. Not the peace that we might assume, between nations or persons. This is peace between the sinner and God. As sinners fail to meet the righteous demands of God's law how can God not punish them forever in hell; it is just. But not peaceful. While your sins bring discord between you and God, Jesus brings peace.

This peace comes as Jesus dies upon the tree. There He takes your sins from you and makes peace between you and the Father by giving you His righteousness. He pays your debt to God. He brings peace. Covered by His death you have no debt, you have peace with God. You are forgiven. God is well pleased with you.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son brings peace, peace that this world cannot comprehend. He also brings forgiveness, life, and salvation to me. Grant me to rejoice in this peace and proclaim Your goodness and mercy. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

December 12

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. Luke 2.15-16

They didn't have to go to Bethlehem. They could have ignored the words of the angel. They could have kept on tending their flocks. The shepherds could have realized how busy they were and how important their watch was and not gone. But they understood that God made this known to them and they went with haste.

With how much haste to do attend the things of God? God makes His Son known to us through Word and Sacrament and are we quick

to seek Him there? Would we rather not travel with haste to seek God, but be about other things. Life easily gets in the way of seeking the Christ. As we listen to the law of God in those Ten Commandments are we quick to seek God by following them? Is the law of God our delight? Do we really meditate on that law day and night?

How quick are we to pick up our brother when he falls into sin? How speedily do we travel to Christ when we sin ourselves? We are too often lazy in sin. But not so with the shepherds! They stopped what they were doing and went with haste to the Christ.

Go with haste to Jesus. Confess to Him your sins. Admit the times you have been lackadaisical about seeking Him. Repent of your sins and go with haste to Jesus. Go to His Word and the Supper. There you will find Jesus. There you will find forgiveness. Jesus comes to you not as a baby, but as the one who died and is alive forever more. He comes with forgiveness for you.

Prayer: Father, too often I sin and am lazy about seeking Your Son. I repent of my sins. Forgive me through the death of Jesus. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

December 13

And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. Luke 2:17-18

They told everyone. But who would listen to these excited shepherds? Luke records that all who heard it “wondered at what the shepherds told them.” Yeah, they wondered. Could the shepherds be believed? Did they really see angels? Did they really see the Christ? People listened but who else went to see the Christ child?

Scripture does not tell us that any of those who heard the shepherds went to see. They listened, the wondered, but they did not go. Why would anyone else actually go to see the Christ? All there was to see was a baby.

But isn't that how it is today? Who wants to go to church, that place where Christ is? What's there to see- some water, some bread

and wine, some preacher preaching. That's how it looks to the world. It looks ordinary and boring.

There shepherds went and saw and told everyone. They knew that there was something there that was beyond sight; that took faith to see. That something that was there was Christ and what He gives. It looks ordinary and boring, but faith sees. Faith sees that in water combined with Word faith is given and forgiveness granted. Faith sees that bread and wine are the real body and blood of Christ, for the forgiveness of sins. Faith sees that from words proclaimed forgiveness is granted.

See and make this known, all that the Christ is doing for you. Let others wonder at your words that they too would come and see the Christ.

Prayer: Father in heaven, You use ordinary means to give Your Son to me. Grant me to rejoice that You forgive me through the Word and Means of Grace. Take my sins away and grant me to marvel at Your mercy. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

December 14

But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. Luke 2.19-20

Mary treasured up these things. She treasured how the angel had come to her and announced the birth of the Christ. How Elizabeth gave birth to John. She treasured the flight to Bethlehem and the coming of the shepherds to see Jesus. She treasured these things.

But she also pondered them. She thought about them over and over. No doubt, there were others who treasured these things also. What about Joseph? How about the shepherds? They treasured these things also. But Luke records that Mary treasured up these things.

Mary is an example for us all. Shouldn't we treasure up these things? This is the beginning of God fulfilling His promises to mankind. God had promised to send a Savior, born of woman, to overthrow our sin and the might of the devil. God is faithful! Treasure this up! Jesus has come! But there is more to treasure.

Treasure up all of Jesus' miracles, all His sermons, all the times He has compassion on sinners. Treasure up all that Jesus says and does. Treasure up His journey to the tree. Treasure up His love for you as He gives Himself for your sins. Treasure up His resurrection and the way He comes to you in the Divine Service. Treasure up Jesus for He is your Savior.

Prayer: Father in heaven, You have given Your only Son to us that Your Word would be fulfilled. Grant that I treasure up Jesus and rejoice in the salvation He has accomplished for me. In His Name. Amen.

December 15

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." Matthew 2.1-2

Here we skip over to Matthew. Luke records the shepherds coming, but not the wise men. Matthew has the wise men looking for the king of the Jews. They saw the star and came searching. Matthew reminds his Jewish readers that the wise seek Jesus.

Matthew also shames his Jewish readers. These wise men are gentiles, they are not Jews. They shouldn't be the ones traveling to seek Jesus, but they are. Jesus has not just come for the Jews, but for all.

There can be no doubt that the wise men knew that Jesus was not the child of Herod. Although Herod is the king, they do not seek the child of Herod. Thus, they seek a king from a different lineage. One whose origins are of old, of everlasting. Just like the shepherds, the wise men do the unexpected.

It is unexpected for anyone to seek Jesus. It is not in keeping with our sinful human nature. It is not approved by the world nor the evil one. So seek Jesus. You need not follow a star, you know where He is found. He is found in the Word and Sacraments. There He is for you. There He is to forgive you your sin and strengthen your faith. So simply seek Him.

Prayer: Father in heaven, the wise men sought Your Son, the King of the Jews. Jesus is my King as He gave His life for me on the tree, grant me to rejoice in seeking Him in Word and Sacrament. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

December 16

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;
Matthew 2.3

Should fear accompany the birth of the Savior? Man should rejoice as the shepherds had done; man should treasure up all these things in his heart, but not so here. Herod is troubled and this trouble spreads through Jerusalem.

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he (Zechariah 9.9).” But they would not rejoice. Man does not understand the purpose of God. Fear, anger, hatred accompany the coming of the Christ.

Those living under the curse of darkness cannot rejoice in the light. So do you rejoice in the light? Do you long for the Christ to come? Do you eagerly expect Him through Word and Sacrament? Do you long to be in God’s house to hear Him?

Shouldn’t your sins trouble you? And do they? Too often sinners ignore or excuse their sins and so do you. You are not troubled over them nor do you seek the Christ as you should.

Repent. God is troubled over your sins. He has sent His Son to take your place under the judgement. Rejoice that God loves you. Rejoice that your Savior has come. Rejoice that He still comes to you through Word and Sacrament. Fear not, but rejoice.

Prayer: Father, I am sinful before You and before man. My sins should trouble me but often they don’t. I should seek the Christ but often I don’t. Forgive me O gracious Father and cover me with the blood of Your Son. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

December 17

And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he [Herod] inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. Matthew 2.4

For selfish motives Herod seeks the Christ. If he can find the Christ he can destroy him. Herod knows that he has the power and authority to put an end to this pretender king. He will use whomever he needs in order to find the Christ.

What are your motives for seeking the Christ? Do you seek Him to show Him your piety? Do you seek Him to request help with this or that? Do you seek Him to look good before others? Regardless of your motive, it is sinful.

What? Isn't that unfair? How can that be? It is because of who you are: you are just as sinful as wicked Herod. From the moment of your conception you were sinful. You were born with sin and live in it still. All you do is tainted with sin, even your motives for seeking the Christ. You are sinful.

Repent. Know that you cannot seek the Christ. He seeks you. To His disciples He says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you (John 15.16)." He chooses you. While you could never find Him, He dies in your place, suffering your fate under the wrath of God. God finds you and destroys your sin. He redeems your life and grants you peace as He uses His authority to declare you forgiven.

This Jesus is no pretender king. He is King upon the tree granting you life. So serve Him. Seek Him in Word and Sacrament. Receive Him and live in Him.

Prayer: Father in heaven, my motivations are often sinful because of who I am. Forgive me through the death of Your Son and grant that I live in Him eternally. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

December 18

They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." Matthew 2.5-6

The chief priests and scribes of the people know the Scriptures, but they don't *know* the Scriptures. They know enough to answer Herod

appropriately, but they don't know enough to interpret what is going on. The King has come and they are missing it all! Here wise men from the east are seeking the King, while the scribes in Jerusalem sit at home.

The gentiles seek the Christ, while the Jews sit home. Can that be? Did not God rescue the Jews from Egypt and Babylon? Did He not save them time and time again from their enemies? Did He not send prophets, priests, and kings to them? Did He not have mercy on them? And is this how they act?

Indeed, sinners are entering the kingdom of heaven before the so-called righteous. Jesus came to call sinners to repentance for the healthy have no need of a doctor. Do you need Jesus? Have you any sins or are you good enough? Your sins cry out to you as the blood of Abel.

You need Jesus. Confess your sins. Be covered with His righteousness. Hear the mercy of God, "you are forgiven!" See the mercy of God as you travel back to your Baptism. Taste the mercy of God as you receive the Supper. Jesus shepherds you with His mercy and grace. He forgives your sins. Know this and interpret what all this means: God loves you.

Prayer: Father, I see Your mercy shown to me through Your Son. He came for a sinner like me and He forgives me all my sins. I rejoice in Your mercy and love. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

December 19

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." Matthew 2.7-8

Herod cared nothing for this Christ. He did not want to worship Him, much rather he would have killed Him. But Herod would give lip service to this Christ. He pretended to want to worship Him. He pretended to have faith.

Herod's faith was nonexistent, but the wise men had faith. They left the capital city and made their way for small Bethlehem. They

wanted to worship the Christ. They had traveled far and their journey could not have been easy, but still they wanted to worship.

Your sinful self demands that you be like Herod. Just give lip service to God, isn't that enough? Isn't it good enough to make a show of worship, but really to live how one wants? Does God even care how you live or how halfhearted your worship might be?

God does care. Drown your sinful nature and destroy your sinful desires. Be not like Herod, but desire to worship. Make worship a priority. For the wise men this was not easy, and it won't be for you either. Your sinful nature will get in the way. Life will get in the way. The devil will tempt you that you would abandon Christ.

So worship. Receive the gifts of God through Word and Sacrament. Confess your sins and failures before your Lord. Realize how much God loves you for He has given you His Son to die in your place. This, what Jesus has done, is enough.

Prayer: Father in heaven, my worship of You is often filled with sin, yet Your Son worshiped perfectly as He offered Himself upon the tree. Cover me with His death and forgive me my sins. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

December 20

After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. Matthew 2.9

Did the magi really find the Christ on their own? Well, they were directed to Jerusalem by the star, then they were helped out by Herod who directed them to Bethlehem, and the star kept showing them the way. They had help.

Wouldn't it be nice if we had help. After all, life is confusing. Times are difficult. Sin gets in the way too easily. It would be great to have help like the magi did. But don't we? We have far more help than they.

We don't have a star leading us but we do have Scripture. God's Word points clearly to the Christ. It shows sinners all we need. Yet, does your sinful nature trust this source? God gives us more to direct us. He grants us Baptism to wash us clean and show us His love.

Through Baptism the sinner has confidence that his or her sins are forgiven. Even more the Lord gives you His Supper. He feeds you with His own body and blood to forgive your sins.

All this should lead you. You should realize your sins and rejoice in the mercy of God. This is better than any star or the help of Herod. You have God's mercy given in Word and Sacrament. Let nothing in life get in the way. Receive the gifts of Christ continually.

Prayer: Father in heaven, You give me all I need to direct me to Jesus. Strengthen my faith as I receive Your gifts and forgive me my sins. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

December 21

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. Matthew 2.10

The wise men did not care about the star. No, that was not what they wanted. The star was nothing in itself. They knew that the star would lead them on to the true treasure, the Christ. That's what they wanted. If this star would not have led them to the Christ, they would have not rejoiced with that great joy.

They were close and now they would soon find the Christ. The Savior of the world, and their Savior, they would see in the flesh. This is why they traveled. This was why they had come.

Do you share this joy? Is this the way you feel as you are traveling to church? Isn't that where the Christ is for you? Do you feel the same as the wise men traveling to Bethlehem? Shouldn't you rejoice with even more joy since you know all that the Christ has done for you? The wise men hoped in what He would do, but you know all He has done.

Perhaps your joy on entering the Lord's house is not as great as their joy. This shows you sinfulness. Shouldn't being in the Lord's house be the high point of your week? But it often isn't. Shouldn't you find true joy there? But often you don't.

Confess that your joy is often lack luster. Confess that you often take your Lord and His gifts for granted. Confess and be forgiven. The Christ has come for you. He has died on the tree to cover your sins. He took the Father's wrath. You are forgiven. So rejoice!

Prayer: Father in heaven, my joy is often missing when I consider all You have done for me. Grant me to know Your love for me shown upon the tree and rejoice in Your mercy. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

December 22

And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. Matthew 2.11

This was the moment the wise men had been waiting for; the moment when they saw the Christ. They came prepared, of course. They had come to seek the King and they brought kingly gifts. Their gifts were laid before the Christ. What joy!

But this really isn't about their gifts. They had come before the God of the universe. This Jesus had all power, all rule, all authority. What does this Jesus need with metal or spices? This is the same one who would calm storms, walk on water, feed thousands and raise the dead. What need has He of spices? This is the same one who told Peter to catch a fish and use the coin in its mouth to pay the temple tax. What need has He of gold? No, this is not about the gifts of the wise men.

This is all about the gift that the Christ would give them. They knew that He was their King, that's why they had come to worship. They knew that they had nothing appropriate to offer this King, so they gave the best of what they had. But Jesus gave better.

The Christ would give them Himself. That's why He was born. That's why He worked miracles and spoke sermons. That's why He was rejected and mocked. That's why He was crucified. Jesus gives Himself.

What other gift compares to that? Through the giving of Jesus upon the tree men are saved. By His sacrifice the wrath of God is turned to mercy. This Jesus gives you. He has not just died for the wise men, but for you also. He gives you better than you can give Him, He gives you salvation.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son has given me the gift of salvation through His death. Grant me to rejoice and give of myself and my treasure to You and my neighbors. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

December 23

And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. Matthew 2.12

The Father saves the wisemen from evil Herod's schemes. Herod would find out from them the location of the Christ and then try to kill the Christ and possibly even the wisemen. Thus, as they are warned, the wisemen depart by a different rout.

Why all this danger at the time of the birth of Jesus? If the Father had arranged history, couldn't He have allowed His Son to be born in a time of peace? Although, there was peace in the Roman Empire at large, the unbelieving world is never at peace with God.

The unbelieving world always wants God removed. The forces of evil align against the Christ at His birth and remain set against Him His whole life. Would not the devil tempt Jesus? Would not the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes continually question Him and seek ways to kill Him? Would not the crowd shout, "Crucify Him!"

The world hates the Christ. But the time for His death has not yet come. So Herod will not kill Him. This evil world is why Jesus came. He came to give Himself for those who would revile Him, hate Him, and want Him dead. He dies for sinners, even a sinner like you. This was all the Father's plan, the Son is spared this time to travel on to the tree for you.

Prayer: Father in heaven, You spared Your Son from the evil intent of Herod only to give Him over to death upon a tree for my sake. I thank You that You love me so much as to cover my sin with Your Son's sacrifice. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

December 24

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Matthew 2.13

To Egypt the children of Jacob went. They went because there was a famine in the land and to stay would mean death. They went because Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and now ruled Egypt under Pharaoh. They went because there was life in Egypt.

To Egypt Joseph travels with Mary and Jesus. To stay would be death as Herod sought kill all the male children in Bethlehem. This flight to Egypt would recall what the Israelites went through so long before. Like Joseph, Jesus would be sold by one who should love Him. Like Joseph, Jesus would save a family that hated Him. Like Joseph, Jesus would forgive where there should be no forgiveness. Old Testament Joseph foreshadows the greater work of Jesus.

Jesus travels through the plagues of your sin. He takes on the wrath of God. He is the lamb who was slain to cover you with His blood. He brings you up from your slavery to the promised land. He leads you day and night and gives you your daily bread. He calls you to simply trust in Him.

All that the people of Israel lived through is a foreshadowing of what Jesus would do for you. He has done it all! He grants death to pass over you. He declares you forgiven. He sets you free from your slavery to sin. He gives you Himself and life eternal through Word and Sacrament, so receive!

Prayer: Father, Your Son is the fulfillment of every Old Testament Scripture. Grant me to see your loving promises and how they are kept in Jesus for my sake. He has delivered me from the slavery of sin and grants me new life even now. In His Name. Amen.

December 25

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. Matthew 2.16

Not the best way to end our little Advent devotional? Here on Christmas day you are reading of death. With the Christ came death. All the boy babies were killed in Bethlehem because of Herod's evil

decree. Hardly seems fair. After all, Joseph was warned in a dream to leave. So why not everyone else too?

Ultimately, we don't know why God would permit this to happen, but we do know why the Christ was born. He was born for all the sinners in this world. He lived among sinners. Taught sinners. Worked miracles for sinners. Healed sinners. Loved sinners. He died for sinners. He died for the children killed by Herod. He has died for you too.

At the birth of Christ death reigned. But the Christ was born to overturn the rule of death. He came to die and through His death sinners would receive new life and hope. He takes the sins which cling closely to you and pays the full price for them upon the tree. He dies that you might live.

The time was not yet right for the Christ to die. That time was coming fast, but for now it was the Father's will to let Him grow up in Egypt. Soon enough it would be the Father's will to crush Him on the tree for you.

So rejoice in the Father's will. As you look around and see sin upon sin in this world and evil upon evil, rejoice in the Father's will. His will is to save you. He has sent His Son to die in your place that you would not die, but live.

Prayer: Father, You sent Your Son that He would die in my place and pay for all my sins. Grant me joy this Christmas as I consider Your great love toward me. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.