



**This Advent devotional guide comes
from Keep Believing Ministries.**

You can find us on the Internet at www.KeepBelieving.com.

**Questions or Comments?
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How This Happened

This Advent devotional series is a joint effort.

In fact, it's the first time we've done a writing project together. How did it happen? It wasn't exactly when Ray hit the pavement last January and ended up in the hospital because he rode his bike on the ice. But that's part of the story because Knox and Violet came to see him in the hospital, hoping that Gpa (their affectionate name for him) was okay.

It wasn't exactly when Marlene went in for her *second* knee-replacement surgery in nine months. But that's also part of the story because all our grandkids checked in to make sure she (Gma to Knox and Violet, Grandma to the rest) was okay. Our grandkids prayed for both of us as we spent a big part of the last year in the hospital or in rehab or just trying to get life back to normal.

Along the way we talked a lot about what it means to be closer to 70 than to 60, and a long way from 40 or 30. We're not as young as we used to be, certainly not as young as we were during the happy, hectic days when we raised our three sons.

Ah, the joys of growing, if not old, at least older.

We know we won't be here forever. It's easy to ignore the truth, but the calendar doesn't lie. We aren't young anymore. The days are long, but the years are short.

That's where these letters come from.

We have eight grandchildren with ages ranging from 9 to 1. While we have a chance, we want to do our part to help them understand what Christmas is about. These letters are not profound, and they don't cover everything. But they do cover the main points.

We hope you enjoy reading these letters. Perhaps you'll get some ideas you can use in explaining Christmas to the children and grandchildren in your life.

With that in mind, we happily dedicate this Advent series to our grandchildren (age in parenthesis):

Knox (9)
Eli (8)
Penny (6)
Violet (6)
Zoe (4)

Hannah (4)

Josh (2)

Niko (1)

Each letter ends with a prayer and a link to a YouTube video of a Christmas song. Take a moment to recite the prayer out loud and then watch the video. Those two things will point your heart in the right direction.

We're going to do a Facebook Live daily broadcast that goes along with each day's reading. You can watch it on Ray's Facebook page each morning. We'll archive the broadcasts so you can watch them later if you can't watch live.

If you're ready, let's turn the page and get started!

December 1

A Star in the Sky

Dear Knox,

Do you ever look at the stars in the sky?

Scientists tell us there are over 100 billion stars in the Milky Way galaxy. That's a lot, but that's only one galaxy. They say there may be over 1 billion trillion stars in the universe.

That's a lot of stars!

We're thinking right now of one very special star that shows up in the Christmas story. It first appeared to the Wise Men who came from a distant land. They saw the star and knew it meant a very important baby was about to be born.

What was the star? It helps to remember the Wise Men were students of the sky. A new star would not frighten them. If it appeared suddenly, that wouldn't bother them either. The star—whatever it was—would make sense to them and would fit what they already believed. If God wanted to get a message to these pagan priests, he picked the perfect way.

When the Wise Men talked about it, they called it "his star" (Matthew 2:10), and they were very happy when they saw it. That's why they made a long journey across the desert to meet this baby in person.

They followed the star until it came to rest over the place where the child was. The word "until" means the guidance was very precise. The star was a kind of divine GPS that led them all the way from Persia in the east to Jerusalem in the west. It led them from Jerusalem to Bethlehem and then to the house where Jesus was staying with Mary and Joseph.

Go outside tonight and look up at the stars in the sky. God created them all, including the Christmas star.

Knox, we pray you will be like the Wise Men who followed the star that led them to Jesus. Keep following the Christmas star, and you will end up in Bethlehem.

We love you!
Gpa and Gma

Lord Jesus, may we be like the Wise Men who followed the star that led them to you. Give us wisdom to seek you and light to find you. Amen.

Musical bonus: Let's start our Advent journey off on an up-tempo note. Here's a rousing version of [Ding Dong! Merrily on High](#) by Rend Collective.

December 2

Let's Go Straight to Bethlehem

Dear Hannah,

We are writing this to you because you are always on the move. We imagine you waking up and saying, "Hello, world! Here I come!"

It's good to be in a hurry if you are excited about something that really matters. Nothing in all the world matters more than the birth of Jesus.

That's what Christmas is all about.

When Luke tells the story of Jesus' birth, he talks about what the shepherds saw and heard and felt the night Jesus was born. The shepherds spent many long nights by themselves in the fields watching over their flocks of sheep. They had to stay awake so they could keep the sheep safe from other animals that might attack them--like wolves!

One night while the shepherds were watching their sheep, something happened that terrified them.

Light filled the sky!
An angel spoke to them!

The angel said a baby had been born in Bethlehem. That wasn't far away at all. Just over the hill and down the road. But there was more! The angel told the shepherds to go and see for themselves because that baby was "the Savior" who is "Christ the Lord."

Then the angel choir began to sing! That was amazing. Suddenly the angels disappeared, and the night became dark and quiet again.

Hannah, what would you do if the angels appeared to you one night? Would you get scared? We think you would do what the shepherds did. The Bible says they talked it over and said, "Let's go straight to Bethlehem." So they hurried on their way to see the baby born that night.

Let's go straight to Bethlehem and see the baby Jesus. We're going, and you're going, so let's go together!

No messing around. No detours. No excuses. "We're on our way to see the Savior."

Let's go to Bethlehem because that's where Jesus is. He is waiting to meet us there.

We love you!
Grandpa and Grandma

Lord Jesus, open our eyes so that we can see you clearly at Christmastime. Amen.

Musical bonus: In 1872 Christina Rossetti wrote a beautiful Christmas poem Gustav Holst put to music in 1906. Let's listen as James Taylor sings [In the Bleak Midwinter](#).

December 3

Angels Everywhere!

Dear Niko,

Have you ever seen an angel?

We've never seen one either. At least, we don't think we've seen one.

That's the thing about angels. They can be all around us, but we may never see them.

Angels are special messengers from God who travel to and from heaven. Most of the time they are invisible to us, which means we can't see them.

But sometimes we can.

That's what happened when Jesus was born. There were angels everywhere!

An angel tells Mary she will give birth to Jesus.

An angel tells Joseph to call his name Jesus.

An angel warns Mary and Joseph to flee to Egypt.

An angel tells them when it's safe to return to Israel.

An angel announces the birth of Christ to the shepherds.

An angelic choir sings to them.

But that's not all, Niko. A mysterious star led the Wise Men from some distant land all the way to Bethlehem to the very house where they found the baby Jesus. The Wise Men were warned in a dream not to return to Herod but to go home another way. So there you have it—angels and stars and dreams. Supernatural stuff everywhere.

The angels show up to let us know God is at work. He sent his Son to earth so that we could have a Savior. The angels brought good news of great joy, the best news the world has ever heard.

Niko, you may not know it, but the same angels that appeared in Bethlehem are watching over you today.

Let's thank God for his holy angels, and let's pray for faith to believe every part of the Christmas story.

We love you!

Grandpa and Grandma

Lord Jesus, open our hearts so that we will believe in the Christmas story all over again. Amen.

Musical bonus: It's fun to hear a traditional Christmas carol infused with a smooth jazzy twist. Let's listen as Mandisa sings [Angels We Have Heard on High](#).

December 4

Leaping for Joy

Dear Eli,

Did you know you used to do backflips in your mother's womb?

Well, maybe not backflips, but your mother says you moved around a lot. She told us that whenever she was sitting in church, you would start moving around in the womb when your dad stood up to preach.

You recognized your father's voice even though you hadn't been born yet!

That reminds us of the time when John the Baptist first met Jesus. Luke tells the story of how Mary (Jesus' mother) visited Elizabeth (John's mother) when both of them were pregnant. The Bible says John the Baptist leaped for joy when Mary greeted Elizabeth.

Just like you knew the sound of your father's voice, John the Baptist knew Jesus was nearby even though both of them were in the womb at that moment.

John started his ministry early.

His whole purpose was to point people to Jesus.

That's why he leaped for joy in his mother's womb.

This should not surprise us. If God could conceive Jesus inside Mary's womb, then he certainly could cause the preborn John the Baptist to leap for joy.

This little story tells us something important about the birth of Jesus. He was born on Christmas Day, but his human life began nine months earlier. He came into the world in the same way every child comes to the world. He was like us even in the womb.

This story also reminds us why God put us on the earth. We are all called to be like John the Baptist. Just as John loved to tell people about Jesus, we should tell others about Jesus too. We can tell them who he is, why he came, and then we can tell them why we love him.

Eli, you can do what John did. You can tell someone else about Jesus. That will make them happy, and it might just make you leap for joy.

We love you!

Grandpa and Grandma

Lord Jesus, help me to tell someone about you today. Amen.

Musical bonus: Here's a new song called [Come to Save Us](#) by All Sons and Daughters.

December 5

The Promise

Dear Josh,

Do you know what it means to keep a promise? It's what happens when your dad and mom say they will take you to Gompers Park to play on the swings.

When they say that, they are making a promise.
When they take you to the park, they are keeping their promise.

It's important to keep the promises you make. If you make promises but don't keep them, people won't trust you. But if you keep your promises, people will know you are reliable. That means they trust you to do what you said you would do.

Christmas is all about God keeping his promises. Long before Jesus was born, God promised to send a Savior to the world. For thousands of years people wondered when God would keep his promise.

They looked for Jesus.
They waited for him.
They prayed he would come.

Parents told their children, "One day the Savior will come!"
The children told their children, "One day the Savior will come!"
Those children told their children, "One day the Savior will come!"

Word passed from generation to generation: "Get ready! God is sending a Savior to the world!"
At exactly the right moment, when Joseph was ready, and Mary was ready, when everything was ready, that's when God sent his Son into the world. It was the perfect time!

At Bethlehem God kept his promise.
A baby was born who would be the Savior of the world.

No one knew exactly when the Savior would come. But God always intended to keep his promise. That's why the angel told Joseph, "Call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

Josh, we don't expect you to fully understand what we are saying. But just remember this. We can explain Christmas in four words:

Promises made.
Promises kept.

You smile when you get ready to go to the park because you know your parents are going to take you there. We ought to have that same smile at Christmas because God always keeps his promises.

We hope you have the best Christmas ever this year!

We love you!
Grandpa and Grandma

Lord Jesus, thank you for coming to our world to rescue us. Thank you for being the Savior we need! Amen.

Musical bonus: In 1715 Isaac Watts wrote the words and music to today's song. Let's listen to this folk music version of [Cradle Hymn](#) by Elizabeth Mitchell and Friends.

December 6

Waiting on the Lord

Dear Knox,

Did Gpa ever tell you about the time he was flying to speak in Louisiana?

The man who was supposed to meet him at the airport couldn't make it, so he asked his assistant to go in his place. He told him, "Just look for a man who is tall, wears glasses, and looks like he's in a hurry."

His assistant found Gpa instantly.

Young people seem to always be in a hurry. Life goes fast, and you have to run to keep up. But now that Gpa and Gma are a little older--let's be honest, quite a bit older--we see the value of slowing down. When we were your age, we never wanted to wait for anything.

But waiting is a good thing if you are waiting on the Lord.

There once was a man named Simeon who was waiting for the coming of the Lord. Even though he was an old man, the Holy Spirit had told him he would not die before he saw the Lord.

One day Joseph and Mary brought baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem. Simeon was there waiting and hoping to see the Lord. When he saw Mary carrying Jesus in her arms, the Holy Spirit whispered to him, "There he is. That's the Lord!"

But Mary and Joseph didn't look the part. Joseph was a poor carpenter from Nazareth, and Mary was a country girl. They didn't have much money. No one who saw them would have given them a second look.

Jesus looked like any other baby. He didn't have a glow or a halo, as some people think. But appearances can fool you. That baby in Mary's arms was the Son of God from heaven!

Simeon walked over, introduced himself, and asked if he could hold the baby. As Mary gave him baby Jesus, the thought hit him, "I'm holding the salvation of the world in my arms."

Simeon waited and waited, and his waiting finally ended that day in Jerusalem.

Waiting time is never wasted time if you are waiting on the Lord.

Knox, right now you are waiting for Christmas. Guess what? It's not long now. Just wait a few more days.

We love you!
Gma and Gpa

Lord, give us faith to keep on waiting when we feel like giving up. Amen.

Musical bonus: Melanie Penn wrote a song that seems perfect for these early days of Advent. Here's her rendition of [Love's Coming Down \(Isaiah's Song\)](#).

December 7

The ABCs of Christmas

Dear Eli,

Do you remember learning your ABCs?

You were a lot younger then, and it took you a while to remember all the letters. These days when we come to see you, you tell us about all the books you are reading. The last time we visited your home, you sat on your bed and explained a new book to Grandpa. And then you read him a chapter.

That's why we learn our ABCs. Those letters help us put together the words that become sentences, and the sentences become paragraphs, and the paragraphs become books.

Have you ever heard of the ABCs of Christmas? It comes from 2 Corinthians 8:9. That verse tells us why Jesus came:

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”

First, there is the A: He was rich. When he was in heaven, Jesus sat at the right hand of God the Father. All things belonged to him. He could create a planet, or he could make a star shine in the sky. When he spoke, the birds flew, the rabbits hopped, and the fish began to swim. He was richer than any man has ever been. All the glory of heaven belonged to him.

Then, there is the B: He became poor. He left heaven for a remote village in a forgotten province, to join a despised race. He left heaven to be born to a teenage girl, in a stable, wrapped in rags, placed in a feeding trough instead of a crib. Although he was richer than the richest man on earth, he gave it all up when he came to earth.

Finally, there is the C: We become rich through him. This is the good news we call the gospel. He became like us so that we might become like him. We who were poor are now rich because of Jesus.

Eli, we hope you'll say this to yourself:

- A. He was rich.
- B. He became poor.
- C. We become rich through him.

That's the ABCs of Christmas, and it's why we celebrate Jesus' birth every year.

We love you!
Grandma and Grandpa

Dear Jesus, thank you for becoming like us so that we might become like you. Amen.

Musical bonus: Jean Watson and Phil Keaggy join together to produce this lovely arrangement of [Do You Hear What I Hear?](#)

December 8

Will You Trust God?

Dear Penny, Violet, Zoe and Hannah,

One of the most important characters of Christmas was a young girl named Mary. She was only a teenager when she did something very special for God.

Mary lived in Nazareth and was engaged to a young carpenter named Joseph. She dreamed about marrying Joseph and setting up their home behind his carpenter shop. She would cook good meals for him and keep their home neat and tidy. One day they would even have sons and daughters to fill their home with laughter. The girls would help Mary with the housework, and Joseph would teach the boys how to make tables, chairs, and beds out of wood.

One day an angel appeared who said God had chosen her to do something special. The angel told her she would soon be pregnant and give birth to a son whom she would name Jesus. He wouldn't be an ordinary baby. He would be the king of Israel and the Savior of the world. The angel's message confused and frightened Mary. She couldn't have a baby because she and Joseph weren't married. Nothing made sense.

The angel explained that God would be the father of the baby that would soon be growing in her belly. Mary was still confused, but she told the angel she was willing to do what God wanted her to do.

It wasn't easy for Mary. She was pregnant but not married, and people said unkind things about her. They whispered about her behind her back. Some people crossed to the other side of the street because they didn't want to be around her. But Mary was willing to do what God wanted her to do even though it wasn't easy.

Penny, Violet, Zoe and Hannah: Will you trust God when it's hard? That's the real test of faith. If you trust him, you can do whatever God asks you to do.

We love you!
Grandma and Grandpa

Here's a prayer for all of us:

Lord, help us to be willing to do anything you ask us because we know you will be with us and help us even if what you ask us to do is very difficult. Amen.

Musical bonus: We have a special treat today—a [Christmas Medley](#) performed by Anthem Lights.

December 9

Man of Honor

Dear Eli, Knox, Joshua and Niko,

We are so proud of all of you! You are fine boys, and we are praying you will all become men who love God and are willing to do whatever he asks of you.

Joseph was such a man. He and Mary were engaged to be married. While they were waiting to be married, an angel told Mary she would soon be pregnant and have a child. That shocked Mary because she wasn't married to Joseph yet, and to be pregnant would be impossible. The angel comforted her and told her God would be the father of the baby growing inside her.

What was she going to tell Joseph? Joseph would think she wasn't faithful to him. He would be angry. He might say bad things about Mary to his family and friends. But Joseph loved Mary, so he decided he would break up with her quietly and not tell everyone the reason. He was very sad because he loved her so much.

While he was thinking about this, an angel appeared to him in a dream. He told Joseph not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife because the Holy Spirit was the father of the baby. The angel told him to name the baby Jesus, which means "Savior."

Joseph chose to believe God. He showed confidence in what God told him through the angel. He loved Mary and was willing to marry her and be baby Jesus' earthly father. He believed God even though he didn't understand everything. He knew other people wouldn't understand either, but he chose to believe God and obey him.

There will be times when you don't understand what God is asking you to do. He may ask you to do something very difficult. It might cause people to wonder what you're doing. We are praying that you will always listen and be willing to obey.

We love you!
Grandma and Grandpa

Lord, please help us to have the courage to follow you and be obedient. Amen.

Musical bonus: In 1865 William Chatterton Dix wrote the words to today's song. The tune is the 16th century English melody "Greensleeves." Let's listen to [What Child is This?](#) by Future of Forestry.

December 10

No Room

Dear Penny,

Last summer you went on a long car trip with your family. On the longest day, you traveled from Cannon Beach, Oregon to Sacramento, California. That trip took so long that you didn't arrive until after midnight. You traveled many miles and were looking forward to getting to your hotel so you could sleep, take a shower, and get ready for the rest of your journey.

A long time ago another family traveled a great distance. Their leader told them they must be counted in their family's hometown.

Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth, but their hometown, Bethlehem, was 100 miles away. Mary was very pregnant with Jesus. It was almost time for her to give birth. They had a donkey, but the donkey had to carry their supplies so Mary couldn't ride the donkey all the time. And even when she rode the donkey it wasn't comfortable; she walked much of the way. It probably took them two weeks to make the journey.

During the day they visited with relatives who were also going to Bethlehem to be counted. At night they camped along the road. The ground was hard and very uncomfortable for Mary. It was a very difficult journey, and they were looking forward to finally being in Bethlehem where they could find a room in an inn.

They arrived in Bethlehem to find all the inns were already full. Some people camped beside the road. But Mary was ready to give birth and needed a warm, comfortable place to spend the night. Joseph tried to find an inn that had room for them. The answer was always the same. No room! Not even for a pregnant mother. Finally, one innkeeper saw Mary and told them they could stay with the animals in the stable.

It wasn't ideal. It didn't smell very nice. You had to be careful where you stepped. It was noisy: mooing cows, neighing horses, braying donkeys, bleating sheep, clucking chickens. But it was warm. Joseph found straw and made a bed for Mary. Mary and Joseph settled in for the night, thankful for a place to sleep.

Penny, God provided a place for Jesus even when there was no room for him in the inn. God made room for his Son when the world had no room for him.

We pray that there will always be room in your heart for Jesus!

We love you!
Grandpa and Grandma

Lord Jesus, you are always welcome in my heart and my home. Amen.

Musical bonus: Keith and Kristyn Getty have led a revival of worship music. Here's a new Christmas song by the Gettys called [Oh Children Come](#).

December 11

Excited to See Jesus

Dear Knox and Eli,

Do you remember the story of the Wise Men who were watching for Jesus?

When you see a Christmas play, the Wise Men usually have beautiful robes and crowns on their heads. Sometimes they're called the Three Kings or the Magi (as they are called in Matthew 2).

The Magi were special priests from the Persian Empire. Do you remember another Bible character who lived in Persia? That's right! Daniel. In fact, when Daniel was serving King Nebuchadnezzar, he was the leader of the Magi.

They were the most educated and respected men in Persia. They studied medicine, history, religion and astronomy (the study of the stars, planets and galaxies). Since Daniel was their leader, he no doubt told them all about the prophecies of the coming Messiah – Jesus:

That he would be born in Bethlehem.
That he would be born to a virgin.
That he would be King of the Jews.

500 years before Jesus was born, the Magi – or Wise Men – began looking for him. They watched for changes in the planets and stars.

One day they saw a star that was different from anything they had seen before. They believed it was the sign that this Messiah, Savior and King had been born and decided to investigate. In Christmas plays, there are usually three Magi or Wise Men. There were probably many more Magi plus their servants, animals and provisions. They made quite a scene setting off across the desert following the star.

When they found Jesus, they worshipped him. Of all the things they studied, they understood Jesus was the most important. They left their families and country to worship a little child who would change the world.

Knox and Eli, we hope you always keep looking for Jesus above anything else. If you do, you'll always find Him.

We love you!
Grandpa and Grandma

*Lord, may we always look for you and be as excited as the Wise Men were when we find you.
Amen.*

Musical bonus: Here's an acoustic arrangement of [O Come, All Ye Faithful](#) by Jess and Gabriel.

December 12

God Can Use Anything

Dear Violet,

Remember last year when we would count to 100 while bouncing a ball back and forth? That was fun, wasn't it? Counting can be fun, and sometimes it plays an important purpose, just like the census in the Christmas story.

A census means counting people who live in or are from a particular place. In the days before Jesus was born, Augustus, king of the Roman Empire, demanded everyone in the empire be counted. Israel was part of the Roman Empire. Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth, but their family was from Bethlehem, so they had to travel to Bethlehem to be counted.

It would have been so much more convenient for Mary to have her baby in Nazareth. She wouldn't have to make the long journey when she was very pregnant. She would have been able to have Jesus in her own home instead of a stable in Bethlehem.

But God had another plan. From the very beginning, God always intended that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. King David from the Old Testament was from Bethlehem, and Jesus was King David's descendent. That's why he had to be born in Bethlehem.

God used a pagan king named Augustus to get Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem so they could take part in the census. It all happened so that Jesus, God's Son, would be born at the right place at the right time.

God can use anything – even a census – to accomplish his plan!

We love you!
Gma and Gpa

Dear God, help us to be thankful for the hard times because they are part of your plan for us. Amen.

Musical bonus: Check out this beautiful arrangement of [O Come, O Come, Emmanuel](#) by the Annie Moses Band.

Commented [RP1]:

December 13

The Shepherd Spirit

Dear Penny,

Have you ever wanted to be a shepherd?

We know you love animals. You love to ride horses, and you helped your dad when he brought home a deer from a hunting trip.

Being a shepherd is a good job if you don't mind spending the night in the fields watching the sheep. You have to make sure they don't wander off, and you've got to stay alert so that no one comes to steal your sheep. Robbers do that sometimes. They sneak in at night and steal the sheep.

That's why the shepherds were watching their sheep on a cold night on a hilly field near the little town of Bethlehem.

You never know when God will show up. It usually happens when you least expect it. If we were going to announce Jesus' birth, we would probably start in Jerusalem because that's where the important people lived.

But God announced the birth of Jesus to some simple shepherds who were tending the sheep. We ought to learn a lesson from this. Our Lord didn't come for the rich or the famous. He came for ordinary people like those shepherds. Rich people often have no time for Jesus, but the poor understand that Jesus is their friend.

Shepherds weren't famous or popular, but they were the ones who first heard the good news. God loves to surprise us by showing up in unexpected places.

Some people looked down on shepherds because they thought it was a lowly job. But God doesn't look at the outside. He looks on the inside. Those shepherds were the first ones to meet Jesus when he was born. They were also the first ones to spread the news.

Penny, if you had been one of those shepherds, you would have run fast to see the baby Jesus in Bethlehem. We could use more of the "Shepherd spirit" today. We need their faith to go to Bethlehem and their eagerness to spread the news that Christ has come.

Christmas is full of surprises. For the shepherds, the great surprise came while they were tending their sheep. That's what we mean when we say you never know when God will show up.

That's still true today.

We love you!
Grandpa and Grandma

Lord, keep us watching and waiting for you. Give us a "shepherd spirit" to go quickly to Bethlehem and then to tell the world Christ has come. Amen.

Musical bonus: In 1844 Adolphe Adam composed a carol based on a French poem by Placide Cappeau. In 1855 John Sullivan Dwight produced the English version. Let's listen as Josh Groban sings [O Holy Night](#).

December 14

No Worries, Mate!

Dear Violet,

Do you ever worry?

Every time we see you, you come running over to hug us, and then you whisper to Gpa, "Dinosaur videos." Then you take his phone and watch dinosaur videos for kids on YouTube.

You smile nearly all the time, so maybe you don't worry very much yet. Don't worry about worry because you will learn to worry soon enough.

We all do.

As we get older, we tend to worry more because it seems like there is more stuff to worry about. What does all this worry talk have to do with Christmas? Most of us worry about things we can't control. Christmas is the ultimate reminder we aren't in control of anything.

A long time ago we discovered the First Rule of the Spiritual Life: *He's God and We're Not*. That means we aren't running the universe. God is. And that's okay.

Think of what God did at Christmas. He arranged everything:

A king who ordered a census.
A virgin who became pregnant.
An inn that had no room.
Angels that showed up at night.
Shepherds who were afraid.
A stable.
A feeding trough.
A bundle of rags.
More angels.
Wise Men from the east.

Violet, if you ever do worry, we hope you'll remember what happened at the first Christmas. God arranged all the details so that it all worked out perfectly. He took a tiny baby and made him the Savior of the world.

If God can do that, why should we worry about anything?

We have a friend from Australia who likes to say, “No worries, mate.” We smile when we hear him say that because we think that’s what God says to us when we get afraid: “No worries, mate!”

We can always trust God, even when we are scared.

We love you!
Gpa and Gma

*Lord, help us to remember that you know what you are doing even when we don’t have a clue.
Amen.*

Musical bonus: Amy Grant recorded [Hark! The Herald Angels Sing](#) early in her career. It stands up very well almost 40 years later.

December 15

Away in a Manger

Dear Zoe,

Do you remember the first time we met?

It happened not long after you were born. You came to our home so we could meet you. Your mom wrapped you up in blankets because it was winter, and she wanted to keep you warm.

That's what Mary did for baby Jesus. But she didn't have nice blankets. Because Jesus was born in a stable, Mary wrapped him in strips of cloth we call "swaddling clothes." You could even say Mary wrapped Jesus in rags. When Jesus needed to sleep, Mary put him in a manger, which is a fancy word for a feeding trough, the kind they use to feed horses and cows and sheep.

In those days mangers were often carved out of stone, which doesn't sound very comfortable. But it worked well for Jesus.

If you think about it, you might decide Jesus deserves better than being wrapped in rough cloth and put in a feeding trough. That's not how we would do it today. But God was sending us a message by the way his Son was born. Jesus didn't come to be rich or famous. He was born into a poor family.

It was a sign of how his life would go. He was born outside because they wouldn't let Mary and Joseph come inside. He owned nothing but the clothes on his back, and after the soldiers crucified him, they gambled for his robe. When he died, they buried him in a borrowed tomb.

He was an "outsider" in every sense—he came from "outside" this earth, he was born "outside" the inn, and he died "outside" the city walls.

Jesus was born this way for our benefit. God could have made a palace or a hospital in Bethlehem. Our Lord arrived as an outsider so that all those who feel left out would know Jesus was left out too.

The world had no room for Jesus in the beginning and still has no room for him today. But the good news is that whenever we open our hearts to him, he comes in to stay.

Zoe, maybe you know this verse from "Away in a Manger." Let's sing it together right now:

*Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask Thee to stay
Close by me forever, and love me I pray
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care
And take us to Heaven to live with Thee there*

We love you!
Grandpa and Grandma

May God grant to each of us faith to believe and an open heart to say, "Yes, Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for you!"

Musical bonus: Christmas is almost here. To get your heart in the right place, listen to this lovely version of [Away in a Manger](#) by Mindy Smith.

December 16

The Best Gift

Dear Hannah and Josh,

Isn't it fun to look at the Christmas gifts under your tree and try to guess what's inside? Your Daddy loved trying to guess what was inside his Christmas presents. Sometimes he would even peek. Every year he would sort the gifts, putting his in one stack, Uncle Josh's in another and Uncle Mark's in another. Maybe he was wondering who was going to get the best present.

Your Mom and Dad have been thinking about your Christmas presents too. They choose each gift carefully because they want you to like what you receive.

As wonderful as the Christmas gifts under your tree are, Jesus is the best Christmas gift.

He was born in a stable in a little town named Bethlehem. His parents were Mary and Joseph. The angels and shepherds and Wise Men came to see him.

The Bible says he came to save us.
But why do we need a Savior?

We all do naughty things, don't we? Sometimes we're unkind. Sometimes we disobey. Sometimes we tell lies thinking we won't get into trouble. The Bible calls that sin. Because we are all sinners, we can't be friends with God. God is perfect. He was never naughty. But God loves us so much that he wants us to be his friends forever. That's why he sent Jesus.

Sometimes when you disobey, you get a time out. That's not fun, but it's what happens when you do the wrong thing. Our sin must be punished.

What can we do?
How can we be forgiven?

The most famous verse in the Bible tells us the good news of Christmas: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Jesus died for our sins on the cross. He took our punishment. Because of Jesus, our sins can be forgiven, and we can be God's friends and live with him forever. We are praying that when you are old enough to understand, you will accept God's best gift--Jesus!

We love you!
Grandpa and Grandma

Lord Jesus, thank you for taking our punishment so we can be friends of God and live with him forever. Amen.

Musical bonus: The Sidewalk Prophets tell the Christmas story in their upbeat arrangement of [Oh What a Glorious Night](#).

December 17

The Other Side of Christmas

Dear Knox,

Did you know not everyone was happy that Jesus was born?

There once was a man named Herod. He was the king in Jerusalem when Jesus was born. He met the Wise Men when they came from a faraway country looking for the baby who was the King of the Jews. He asked them to go to Bethlehem and then report back to him so he could go and worship the baby.

He was lying, but the Wise Men didn't know that. He pretended to love Jesus when he really hated him. He secretly wanted to kill him. That's hard to understand, but when people get angry, they sometimes do terrible things.

An angel warned Mary and Joseph in a dream to take their baby and flee to Egypt for safety. It was so dangerous that they left during the night and made the difficult journey from Bethlehem to Egypt. That meant traveling south and then west across the desert and then crossing the Nile River.

They stayed in Egypt until Herod died, and then they returned home. God planned this trip to Egypt to protect Jesus from Herod's evil plans.

Even Jesus had to escape to Egypt in the middle of the night. If that happened to him, it will also happen to us. But God always has the last word. When Herod died, Jesus returned with Mary and Joseph. This time they moved to Nazareth where Jesus grew up.

This story teaches us to trust God even when life seems to go in a zigzag. Sometimes we end up in Egypt when we didn't plan to go there. God can take care of us in Egypt even though we are far from home.

Let's trust God even when we don't see the big picture of life. By faith we go down to Egypt, knowing that at just the right time, we will come out of Egypt. Both the going and the coming are part of God's plan for us.

We love you!
Gpa and Gma

Dear God, when my way seems dark, light my path so that I may follow you. Amen.

Musical bonus: Most of us know “The First Noel.” Here’s a recording by TobyMac that offers a new take on a familiar English carol. Let’s listen to his contemporary arrangement of [The First Noel](#).

December 18

Where is Jesus?

Dear Hannah,

Do you remember when we used to play, “Where did Grandpa go?”

Grandpa Ray would go and hide while you covered your eyes and counted to five. Then you started to look for him. But where did he go? Maybe he was hiding in the kitchen. Or maybe he was in the bathroom. Or maybe he was hiding behind a bed. You would say, “Grandpa, where are you?” And he would say, “Here I am.” That was the sign you needed.

The shepherds needed a sign to find Jesus in Bethlehem. The angel told them the sign was a baby wrapped in rags and resting in a manger.

What kind of sign is that?

He came as a baby so we would know Jesus was truly like us. He was born the same way you were born.

He was wrapped in rags to show his humility. Even though he came from heaven, he didn’t look rich or powerful. He was a helpless baby, wrapped tightly in strips of cloth.

He was laid in a manger to show his poverty. He was born in a stable, wrapped in rags, and placed in a feeding trough. It was not an easy beginning for Jesus. The world paid no attention to him. No one except Mary and Joseph cared that he had been born.

But that baby was God’s sign to us. Jesus came to the earth in a most unusual way. We would never expect him to arrive in a stable. The angels appeared to the shepherds but not to Mary and Joseph the night Jesus born. Nothing seemed special about that night in the stable in Bethlehem.

Hannah, God chose that sign to show us his ways are not our ways.

He is the God of great surprises.

God’s surprising sign is a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and resting in a feeding trough in a cave behind a village inn.

Never look down on the small things of the world.
Jesus was once a “small thing” himself.

This is the ultimate surprise of Christmas. God did what we would never have done when he chose for his son to be born in a dirty stable. But because of that, he opened the door to heaven for all of us.

We love you!
Grandpa and Grandma

Lord Jesus, you came to make a way to heaven when there was no way. Help us to trust you today. Amen.

Musical bonus: Here's a video of Glad singing [In the First Light](#). This song joins the message of Jesus' birth with the moment he returns to the earth. Listen and enjoy!

December 19

Mary Had a Little Lamb

Dear Zoe,

How well do you know your nursery rhymes?

I wonder if you know the one that begins this way:

*Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow.
And everywhere that Mary went,
The lamb was sure to go.*

Did you know Mary in the Bible really did have a little lamb? That's right. Jesus was God's lamb sent from heaven to earth.

It all goes back to Egypt when God's people were slaves to Pharaoh. God wanted his people to leave, but Pharaoh wouldn't let them go. One night an angel came through Egypt, and the firstborn son of every family died. But God's people, the Jews, were spared because God had a plan for them.

He spared his people using the blood of a lamb. When the blood of the lamb was sprinkled on the doorpost of each Jewish home, the angel would see the blood and would literally "pass over" that house. But if God didn't see the blood, he would take the life of the firstborn in judgment.

The blood of the lamb saved the people of God that night. When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he cried out, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

Mary really did have a little lamb. Here's a Christian version of that nursery rhyme:

Mary had a little Lamb,
He was born on Christmas day.
She laid him in a manger bed
To sleep upon the hay.

Mary had a little Lamb,
But He wasn't hers, you know,
He was the very Son of God,
The One who loves us so.

Why do I love this precious Lamb?
What can the reason be?
The answer is quite plain to see,
It's because He first loved me!

Zoe, Jesus is the Lamb you need. He is God's Lamb who died for you. And he is God's lamb for the whole world. That's the happy news of Christmas.

We love you!
Grandpa and Grandma

*Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us the Lamb of God who takes away our sin forever.
Amen.*

Musical bonus: Edward Sears wrote today's song in 1849. The final verse looks forward to the day when Christ returns to the earth. Let's listen as Meredith Andrews sings [It Came Upon a Midnight Clear](#).

December 20

Moving into a New Neighborhood

Dear Penny and Violet,

It can be hard to move into a new neighborhood.

Violet, do you remember when you moved to China a few years ago? That move took you to a new country with people you had never met. They spoke a language you didn't understand.

Penny, several years ago you moved from California to Montana. That meant you had to start all over with a new school, a new climate (it's colder in Missoula!), and you had to make new friends.

No one ever made a bigger move than Jesus did when he left heaven to come to earth. John 1:14 says the Word (that's Jesus) "became flesh and dwelt among us." It means he moved into our neighborhood.

Let's play a little game. We're thinking of a word. Can you guess what it is? Suppose you say, "Biscuits." We'll say, "No, that's not it." Then you say, "Pony." We'll say, "No, that's not the word." Then you say, "Pink dinosaurs." Well, that's two words, plus we've never heard of a pink dinosaur, but anyway, that's not the word. So you make a few more guesses: "Milk. Car. Feather. Pickle." No, not even close. We were thinking of the word "beach," as in "Cannon Beach," where we had a family get-together last summer. It would take you a long time to guess "beach," if you guessed it at all. When we're thinking of a word, we have to say it out loud for you to get it. Words must be spoken for others to understand. That's what John means when he says, "The Word became flesh." Jesus is God's Word to the human race. Jesus is the visible Word of God. He is God in human flesh.

When God wanted to say, "I love you," he didn't mail a letter or shout from heaven. He did the one thing we could understand. *God himself came down as a baby and entered the human race.* He moved into the neighborhood and became just like us so that we would hear him saying, "I love you."

God was always a God of love, but when Jesus came to the earth, love was wrapped in human flesh. Jesus was God with skin on. It wasn't easy. You had a frightened father, an exhausted mother, a stable in wintertime, rags for diapers, and a feeding trough. There he is, ignored by the mighty and powerful—a tiny, helpless baby. That's our Savior!

It's so simple that you know it must be true. Only God would have done it that way.

We love you!

Grandpa and Grandma

Lord Jesus, we are glad you moved into our neighborhood. Thank you for making us part of your forever family. Amen.

Musical bonus: Alison Krauss and Joshua Bell team up to provide a hauntingly beautiful rendition of [God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen](#).

December 21

King in the Cradle

Dear Josh,

What do you want for Christmas?

You might want a remote control dump truck or maybe a Noah's Ark with animals or some bright plastic building blocks. Maybe you would like a toolbox with toy tools so you can help your dad fix things around the house. Those are gifts that fit a very active 2-year-old boy.

When the Wise Men finally found Jesus, they gave him gifts fit for a king. The Bible says they brought him gold, frankincense and myrrh. Before we think about that, let's ask a question. After their long journey, were the Wise Men disappointed when they finally found Jesus?

He had no fancy robes.
His home did not look like a castle.
He had no throne.

There was nothing to make you think he was a king. From one point of view, he was nothing but a peasant child born in dire poverty.

But to the Wise Men, he was a king.

There is a difference between what we see with our eyes and what we see with our faith. The Wise Men had eyes of faith, so when they looked at the tiny baby Jesus, they knew he was the King they were looking for.

They saw beyond the present and looked into the future.
They knew this child would one day rule the whole world.
That's why they bowed down and worshiped him.

They gave him gold because he was a king.
They gave him frankincense because he was the Lord.
They gave him myrrh because he would one day die on the cross.

Those were gifts fit for a king!

Each year at Christmas, the Lord invites us to return to Bethlehem. A baby lies there who is King and God and Sacrifice. Let's pray to be like the Wise Men. Let's ask the Lord to give us eyes to see Jesus as he really is--the King in the cradle.

Josh, what Jesus wants for Christmas is your heart. We're praying for you every day.

We love you!
Grandpa and Grandma

*Lord Jesus, grant me eyes of faith to see you as you are--King in the cradle and Lord of my life.
Amen.*

Musical bonus: Most versions of "We Three Kings" tend to be on the somber side. Here's an up-tempo recording of [We Three Kings](#) by Go Fish.

December 22

Faith Makes You Strong

Dear Zoe,

Do you remember when we came to visit your family in Missoula? We made the long drive from Kansas City to western Montana to spend a few days having fun together.

Your mother told us this story after we had returned home. You were trying to pull something very large. As you strained to drag it to your room, your mother said she thought it was too heavy for you. With fierce determination, you replied, "No! Grandpa told me I was strong."

That reminds us of the moment when an angel named Gabriel told Mary six amazing things:

- 1) You will conceive and bear a son.
- 2) You will call his name Jesus.
- 3) He will be great.
- 4) He will be called the Son of the Most High.
- 5) He will rule over the house of Jacob forever.
- 6) His kingdom will never end.

(You can read the whole story in Luke 1:26-38).

That's when Mary replied, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" She was a sensible, practical girl who didn't see how it was possible. This was the angel's reply: "Nothing is impossible with God."

We hope you'll always remember that.

Whatever God calls you to do, you can do. For Mary, that meant believing God even when she didn't understand. She needed to trust in spite of her doubts. By herself she could never give birth to the Son of God, but with God all things are possible.

Zoe, you're stronger than you think you are when you trust God. He gave you all that energy, and he gave you your happy smile. He designed you exactly the way he wanted you to be. Sometimes the hardest part of life is believing God can help you do things you could never do on your own.

Mary's reply to the angel changed the world: "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have spoken come true." She didn't know how or when or where, but she knew the Lord could do whatever he said.

Mary said yes to God, and with those words Christmas came to the world.

Keep believing, and you will see what God can do!

We love you!
Grandpa and Grandma

Lord Jesus, make us like Mary, who was willing to believe in spite of her doubts. Amen.

Musical bonus: If you need an extra dose of joy today, check out [Joy to the World](#) by Faith Hill.

December 23

Glory to God in the Highest

Dear Josh and Niko,

You are the two youngest grandchildren. That means you haven't celebrated Christmas very much yet. As we write this, Josh is two and Niko is one. So anything we say about Christmas is something you will understand later.

Let's talk about what the angel said on the night when Jesus was born:

**"Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth *peace*, good will toward men"** (Luke 2:14).

As you grow up, you'll discover that things on earth are not what they should be. We were made for glory, but our glory faded long ago. We live in a world that isn't the way God made it, and we're the ones who messed it up.

Jesus came to make things right.

He came as a baby, but when he grew up, we killed him.
We hung him on a cross, and then we buried him.
On the third day, he rose from the dead.

Right now, you boys can't see what that means, but someday soon you'll understand.

C.S. Lewis said, "The son of God became a man to enable men to become the sons of God."
That's the good news of Christmas: *God has done it all!*

Jesus came to reverse the curse we brought upon ourselves. In heaven he is crowned with glory and honor. One day everyone who believes in Jesus will share that glory with him.

Christmas matters because truth matters. And the heart of the truth is that God did not leave us alone, but he came to visit us one dark night 2,000 years ago.

Josh and Niko, we're looking forward to explaining this to you one of these days. But for the moment, just know that we love you very much, and we're very proud of you.

When you see the manger, you always see light shining out from it. That's exactly right because the light of God shines from the manger in Bethlehem. One day soon that light will fill the whole earth.

Glory to God in the highest!

We love you!
Grandpa and Grandma

O Holy Child, let your light shine in us and fill this dark world with your glory. Amen.

Musical bonus: Michael W. Smith tried to imagine how Mary felt as she and Joseph made the difficult journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. You can share in the journey as we listen to [Almost There](#) featuring Amy Grant.

December 24

Happy Christmas Eve!

Dear Eli,

Happy Christmas Eve!

The long wait is almost over. Before you know it, Christmas will be here at last.

This is the day before the day when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. You've probably heard a reading called *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*. It begins this way:

*'Twas the night before Christmas when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there.*

That poem is fun to read, but it's not as exciting as the real story of Christmas. That story tells us about Caesar's decree that sent Mary and Joseph on a hard journey to Bethlehem and the angels who spoke to the shepherds in a field. We enjoy reading about the reindeer clattering on the roof and Santa's belly that shook like a bowlful of jelly, but the real Christmas story is better because it is true.

God arranged all the circumstances so that his Son was born . . .

At exactly the right time,
In exactly the right place,
To exactly the right people.

It all happened just as the Father planned.

Eli, we hope you'll remember Jesus Christ came to be your Savior.

This is the real meaning of Christmas. God has a Christmas gift for you—wrapped not in bright paper and with fancy ribbon, but in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

Christina Rossetti wrote these beautiful words:

*What shall I give him, Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I'd give him a lamb.
If I were a wise man, I'd do my part.
What shall I give him, I'll give him my heart.*

On this happy Christmas Eve, let's thank Jesus for coming from heaven to earth for us.

We love you!
Grandpa and Grandma

Lord Jesus, we love you, and we thank you for being our Savior. Amen.

Musical bonus: After visiting the Holy Land in 1865, Pastor Phillips Brooks wrote a poem about his visit to Bethlehem. Several years later, his organist composed a tune to go with the poem. Let's listen as the Gaither Vocal Band sings an a cappella arrangement of [O Little Town of Bethlehem](#).

December 25

God With Us!

To all our grandkids:

Do you know what the name Immanuel means?

It comes from a Hebrew word that means “God with us.” When Jesus was born, God moved into our neighborhood. He came down from heaven and lived on our street. He became one of us.

The people who write big books use a big word to describe this. They call it *incarnation*. That means God in a human body.

Jesus was a real person just like you.
He looked the same.
He acted the same.

When he got hungry, his mother fed him. When he got sleepy, his mother wrapped him up tight and put him in the manger.

He started his life as a tiny baby boy. Later he grew up big and strong. Eventually he became a teenager. Then he became an adult.

One day he was baptized, and then he began preaching and teaching. He traveled from village to village, helping people, telling them about God, and when they brought sick people to him, he healed them.

Not everyone loved him.
Some people hated him.
Eventually they put him to death.

On the third day he rose from the dead.

You know all these things because your father and mother have told them to you. We’re just telling you one more time. Jesus was always God, and he was always God with us.

That’s why they call him Immanuel.

We dedicate this final devotional to all our grandchildren because he came for all of you:

Knox.

Eli.
Penny.
Zoe.
Violet.
Hannah.
Josh.
Niko.

God loved you so much that he sent his Son to be “Immanuel--God with us.” That’s the best news in the whole world. God wrapped his gift in swaddling clothes and placed it in a manger. Jesus is God’s gift to you.

Merry Christmas!
The happy day is here at last.
Joy to the World, the Lord is come!

We love you!
Grandpa and Grandma

Heavenly Father, make my heart a manger where the Christ child can be born. Amen.

Musical bonus: Here’s a song perfectly suited for Christmas Day. Let’s listen to this joyful version of [O Come, All Ye Faithful](#) by Pentatonix.

We hope you have enjoyed this journey through the Advent season
with us!

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