



The King is Near!



Advent from the
Gospel of Mark

Ray Pritchard

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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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When the King Comes to Town

Advent from the gospel of Mark?

Yes, but it's not what you expect.

Matthew and Luke invite us to linger at Bethlehem. John goes all the way back to the beginning of everything.

Mark takes a different approach. He directs our attention to Jesus, whose coming marks the beginning of Good News for the world. Consider this verse:

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe in the gospel!" (Mark 1:15). This is God's message to the human race:

No more waiting.

The Kingdom is near because the King has come.

It's your move now!

One more thing. *Mark is preeminently the gospel of action.* Jesus is always on the move, healing, teaching, confronting, inspiring, and challenging men and women to take up their cross and follow him.

That theme fits perfectly with Advent. In these days leading up to Christmas, we're challenged to get ready for the coming of the Lord.

Good News!

The King is near.

Are you ready to meet him?

Get ready for an Advent journey unlike anything we've done before. Together, we'll walk through Mark's Gospel and learn a little more about Jesus each day.

To help you go deeper, we'll post a daily video for each devotional. You can view those videos on Facebook, YouTube, X, LinkedIn, and the Keep Believing website.

Each devotional ends with a prayer and a link to a YouTube video of a Christmas song. I hope you'll take time to read the prayer aloud, then watch the video. Those two things will point your heart in the right direction.

The King has come to town! Let's hear what he has to say.



December 1

Where Good News Begins

The beginning of the gospel of
Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

— MARK 1:1

“Let’s start at the very beginning.

A very good place to start.”

So said Julie Andrews when she sang “Do-Re-Mi” in *The Sound of Music*.

She’s right.

If we want to journey with Mark during this Advent season, we must start where he starts.

At the beginning.

Not in the distant past, like John.

Not in Bethlehem, like Matthew and Luke.

Mark’s story begins when Jesus suddenly steps out of the shadows and onto the center stage of history.

Mark may have written the very first gospel. If so, this is an early witness to the story of Jesus.

Early Christian tradition says Peter and Mark were well acquainted. One writer calls Mark “St. Peter’s secretary.” If true, that means Mark was relying on first-person testimony as he unfolds his gospel.

But don’t expect all the answers upfront.

He wants his readers to wrestle with one central question: *Who is Jesus and what does it mean to follow him?*

Look at his first two words: “The beginning.” We’re supposed to think of Genesis 1:1 because for Mark, the coming of Christ is as momentous as the creation of the universe.

Jesus is God's answer to a world gone rogue. He came because we messed things up so badly. He came because we started killing each other, and then we decided we liked it.

Advent starts not with our search for God, but with God's good news in his Son, Jesus Christ.

He didn't come in the usual way; he came by means of a virgin birth. *No one before or since ever entered the world as he did.* He is the ultimate "seed of the woman" since no man was involved in his conception.

When God wanted to save the world, he didn't send a committee; he sent his Son.

When God wanted to say, "I love you," he wrapped his love note in swaddling clothes.

When God wanted to crush Satan, he started in a stable in Bethlehem.

As we begin our Advent journey, let's remember Christ came to fulfill a promise made amid the wreckage caused by our sin. I came across this quote from Whitney Houston that speaks for all of us:

The biggest devil is me. I'm either my best friend or my worst enemy.

We're not as smart as we think we are.

We're not as clever as we think we are.

We're not as strong as we think we are.

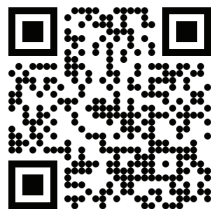
Here is what keeps us going: Jesus is a wonderful Savior, and he is everything we are not.

That's why Mark begins with the Good News that Christ has come to save sinners.

Lord Jesus, you bring Good News from heaven to our broken, bleeding world. As we begin this Advent journey, open our eyes to see your glory and worship you today. Amen.

Musical Bonus

Let's kick off our Advent journey with Skillet's reimagined version of one of the oldest Christmas carols: *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*
<https://youtu.be/SWhijMozDUE>





December 2

A Voice in the Wilderness

Behold, I will send My messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare Your way. A voice of one calling
in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for Him.

— MARK 1:2-3

Are you ready for Christmas?

It's a little early in our journey to ask that question. After all, we've got another three weeks to buy gifts, wrap presents, make candy, decorate the tree, put up the lights, go to parties, watch a thousand holiday specials on TV, and otherwise do the things we have to do to be ready for Christmas.

That's a very modern way to put it.

But that's not the preparation Mark meant. He was thinking of a man named John the Baptist, who called Israel to repentance. If you read the rest of Mark 1, you'll discover that he wore a garment made of camel's hair and ate locusts, which you probably won't eat at any Christmas party this month.

He was an unusual man, to say the least.

But that's how God works. The nation flocked to the wilderness to hear this strange man telling them to get ready for the coming of the Lord.

Let's suppose you are having a Christmas party tonight. You've already sent out your invitations, you've been getting the house ready, you have festive Christmas treats prepared, you've picked out your

outfit, and your guests will arrive soon. What would you do if Jesus showed up at your party?

Would you be glad to see him? Would you welcome him in your home?

Robert Boyd Munger wrote a little booklet called *My Heart, Christ's Home* in which he imagines the believer's heart as a home with many rooms. Many believers keep Christ in the entryway, as if to say, "Jesus, I've got you in the door. Now stay there and don't bother the rest of my life." But the Lord wants to enter every room. He wants to enter your kitchen, your bedroom, your library, your TV room, your computer room, and he wants access to every closet and even to the "attic" of your heart. As long as you keep the doors locked, he can never be "at home" in your heart. And you will never be happy as a Christian.

Early in this Advent season, before we get any busier than we already are, it's time to do some housekeeping of the heart. We need to "declutter" our soul by getting rid of anything that hinders us from welcoming the Lord.

When Revelation 3:20 says Jesus is standing at the door and knocking, it means he's waiting for us to welcome him again.

It's time to get ready. Jesus is coming!

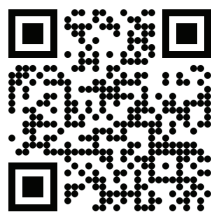
Can you hear him knocking at your door?

*Lord Jesus, I long to know you better. Come in
and make yourself at home in every part of my
heart. Amen.*

Musical Bonus

Our friends at Sovereign Grace Music ask us to ponder the unexpected way Jesus came in their song called *Who Would Have Dreamed*.

<https://youtu.be/3LbzC0pii-s>





December 3

He Must Increase

After me will come One more powerful than I,
the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to
stoop down and untie.

— MARK 1:7

Recently I spoke at the installation service for a new pastor. During my message, I noted that he was the seventh pastor of the church. I said there would be an eighth, a ninth, and a tenth.

Someone comes before us.

Someone comes after us.

In the case of John the Baptist, the one coming next was Jesus Christ. No wonder he said he wasn't worthy to stoop down and untie Jesus' sandals.

That wasn't an exaggeration.

John the Baptist was great, but Jesus was infinitely greater.

Not long after, John added these immortal words: "*He must increase, and I must decrease*" (John 3:30). Again, no exaggeration.

John had a job to do. He was the forerunner who announced the coming of the Lord. He was like a herald who entered a village and loudly announced, "The King is coming! The King is coming! If he did his job well, people would remember the king rather than the messenger.

Count Zinzendorf, whose Moravian brethren helped found the modern missionary movement, sent his young men into the ministry with this charge:

"Preach the gospel. Die. Be forgotten."

Do your part and let God determine your legacy.

If you know who you are, you don't have to waste time pretending to be someone else. Once you have a good grasp of God's calling on your life, you won't try to fool people into thinking you're something you're not.

John the Baptist knew who he was.

He's not the Messiah.

He's not Elijah.

He's not the Prophet.

He's a voice for God.

Nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.

God raised up this man for this ministry, at this moment in history. John knows that, and because he knows it, he can be content with who he is, where he is, and what he is doing.

Like John, we can leave the results in God's hands.

The happiest people are those who say, "I've decided to let go and let God take charge." So many of us go through life with a clenched fist, trying to control the uncontrollable, mastermind every circumstance, and make our plans work. But those things we hold so tightly never really belonged to us. *They always belonged to God.* He loaned them to us, and when the time comes, he will take them back again.

Advent reminds us that it's all about Jesus.

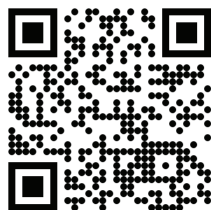
If we understand that, we can serve him with gladness.

If we do his will, everything else is just details.

Holy Father, we want to serve you with gladness. May Jesus be magnified in us today. Amen.

Musical Bonus

Paul Baloche combines a familiar carol with a newer chorus, and the result is very singable: *Hark the Herald Angels Sing / King of Heaven Come*.
<https://youtu.be/T3IghOn18VY>





December 4

From Water to Blood

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee
and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

— MARK 1:9

Why was Jesus baptized?

The answer is not simple.

Matthew 3:15 says Jesus was baptized to “fulfill all righteousness,” but what does that mean?

It means it was the right thing to do, at the right time, and for the right reason.

One thing is certain. *Jesus was not baptized because he was a sinner.* John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance, but Jesus did not need to repent because he had not sinned.

The only sinless man in the crowd stepped into the water with sinners.

Ponder those final words: “with sinners.”

More than anything else, baptism is a sign of identification. The Jews who followed John the Baptist were baptized as a way of saying, “You’re right, John. I’m a sinner, and I agree with what you are saying.”

Baptism means you are changing teams.

Once you were on the devil’s team.

Now you are part of Team Jesus.

When Jesus stepped into the water, he identified himself with the people he came to save. The Savior was baptized so that we would know he stands with us.

Only a step separates baptism from the cross. Water leads to blood, and the blood saves us.

When the Father said, “You are my Beloved Son,” he gave his divine stamp of approval to all that Jesus came to do.

He who knew no sin stood with sinners in the water of baptism.

He who knew no sin would soon die for sinners.

Jesus did not stand far off, shouting to a rebel world, “You must be born again!” He left the glories of heaven to be born in a stable and laid in a feeding trough. He came to our planet, lived with us, ate with us, talked with us, and wept with us.

You can trust the One who willingly stepped into the water. He stood with sinners to bring sinners to God.

Come with your doubts. Come with your pain. Come with your fears.

You can trust him.

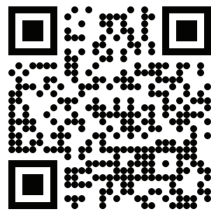
Gracious Lord, you entered our world and brought light into our darkness. You became a man so that we might become the children of God. May we never doubt your love for us. Amen.

Gracious Lord, you entered our world and brought light into our darkness. Welcome to our neighborhood! We hope you feel at home because we need you so much. Amen.

Musical Bonus

Check out Vince Gill’s moving rendition of *What Child Is This?*.

https://youtu.be/zi-_H4qwM8Q





December 5

Jesus Meets the Devil

At once the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness.

— MARK 1:12

What an odd choice of words.

The Spirit “drove” Jesus into the wilderness.

It doesn’t mean Jesus went unwillingly, but it does indicate that this showdown with the devil doesn’t happen by accident. We should think of it this way: *The Spirit led Jesus to the wilderness, through the wilderness, and out of the wilderness.* This conclusively refutes two wrong assumptions often made about the temptation of Jesus:

Wrong Assumption #1: That Jesus was not truly tempted. Hebrews 2:18 says Jesus suffered when he was tempted. As a man, he felt the full force of the devil’s temptation. He suffered as we suffer when we are tested, but he did not give in.

Wrong Assumption #2: That the devil controlled the whole situation. The Spirit intentionally led Jesus into the wilderness to do battle with the devil. Jesus did not shrink from this desert warfare. Think of it this way. In Eden, the serpent came to Eve and deceived her. Then Adam deliberately sinned. But Jesus came to the devil, and although weakened by 40 days of fasting and having lived with the wild animals (only Mark makes this point), he defeated the devil with the Word of God.

If Jesus was the Son of God, why did the Father put him in the position of being tempted by the devil? Consider this sequence:

1. He was led that he might be tested.

2. He was tested that he might be prepared.
3. He was prepared that he might be empowered.

The battles we face are not ours. They are the Lord's. God allows us to be tempted so that we will have an opportunity to develop godly character. It's part of God's training program for our lives.

Satan is like a football coach studying the opposing team. He has "game film" on us, he knows our weaknesses and our strengths, and he uses what he knows against us.

When the devil comes knocking, send Jesus to answer the door.

Fight back with the Word of God.

Fight back by singing great hymns.

Fight back by praying to Jesus.

Fight back by leaning on your brothers and sisters.

Fight back by confessing Christ openly.

Fight back by coming to the Lord's Table.

Fight back by fleeing every temptation.

Believe, and you will see the victory. Stand strong. Fear not. Stand up for Jesus in the power of the Spirit, and victory will be yours.

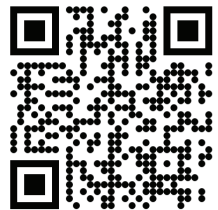
Lord Jesus, when temptation comes knocking, give me courage to stand firm. When I am weak, remind me that you have already won the battle. Amen.

Musical Bonus

This might be the most upbeat song on our list this year. Listen as Phil Wickham sings

Angels (Glory to God).

<https://youtu.be/NXQJDsubsO0>





December 6

The King is Here!

“The time is fulfilled,” He said, “and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe in the gospel!”

— MARK 1:15

Fulfilled is a beautiful word.

It means whatever you’ve been waiting for has finally happened.

You graduated from high school.

You got accepted into college.

Your wedding day has come at last.

Your first child has been born.

You hold your grandson in your arms.

You got the job.

Your proposal was approved.

For centuries the Jewish people waited for the Messiah to come. They hoped and prayed and waited for his appearance. Through long years of struggle, warfare, exile, and suffering, they never gave up that hope. One of our familiar carols contains this thought in its title: “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus.”

Now, at last, he has come.

The Messiah is here.

The King is near.

“When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son” (Galatians 4:4). Every detail was minutely planned in the courts of heaven. Nothing happened by chance.

The story begins amid the wreckage of Eden, as God gave the first promise of the coming Messiah. Abraham “saw” this day, Moses pointed to it, Balaam predicted it, Rahab showed the forgiveness it brings, Malachi helped us discover the gospel power of Jesus’ coming, John the Baptist leaped for joy in Elizabeth’s womb, Herod tried to kill

Christmas, the Magi proved they were truly wise men, and Mary and Joseph believed in God when it surely seemed impossible.

None of this happened by accident. It was all part of God's plan from the beginning.

The clock God had been winding since Eden has struck the hour. *Christmas was no accident of history.* It was an appointment kept right on time.

Only one thing remains for us to do.

Repent and believe the gospel.

Those two verbs form the doorway to heaven.

God made salvation simple so that anyone, anywhere, could be saved.

This invitation isn't a burden. It's the best news. The waiting is over, and the King has come near.

Turn to him and believe.

Lord Jesus, you came at exactly the right time. You left heaven's glory to walk among us, to suffer, and to die so that we might live. Give me faith to welcome you as my king. Amen.

Musical Bonus

O Come, All Ye Faithful started as a Latin hymn hundreds of years ago. Here's a modern version by Page CXVI.

<https://youtu.be/xtOLdS6nD6g>





December 7

Walking the Jesus Road

Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men
— MARK 1:17

Think about the men Jesus called to be his first disciples.

He didn't go to an executive search firm or visit the placement office at the local college. He started by calling men with dirt under their fingernails, blue-collar types, men without much education, men who knew about hard work and the value of perseverance.

Why did he start with fishermen?

The answer is simple.

Fishermen understand this story very well. To be a fisherman, you need patience above everything else. Sometimes wives will ask their husbands, "How can you stand there by the bank or in the boat or in the water for hours on end, waiting for a fish to bite?" The answer is, "It's easy." That's what fishing is all about. And if you can't handle getting "skunked" occasionally, you're probably better off not fishing at all.

This is what Jesus is saying: "You've been fishing for fish, and you're good at it. From now on you will be fishing for men."

The same thing happens to all of us sooner or later. When we respond to Christ's call, he changes us, and then he changes our personal agenda. If we decide to take Christ seriously, we may end up doing something we never thought possible.

"What if Jesus asks me to do something I can't do?" He will! He always does.

When he asks us to do something we can't do, he gives us the power to do what we thought we could never do. And we end up doing it, and he gets the credit.

Letting go must always come first. Anything that hinders our walk with Christ must go. Even good things must go so better things may come from the Lord.

The word for “followed” means “to walk the same road.” That’s what a disciple does—he walks the same road as Jesus. He gets on the “Jesus road” and follows it wherever it may lead. No promises of an easy life. He simply walks that road every day, following in his Master’s steps.

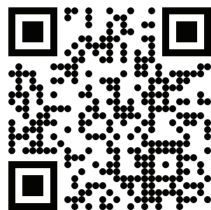
Don’t be afraid to follow Jesus. You’ll never regret starting down the “Jesus road.” You’ll only regret you waited so long to do it.

Lord Jesus, give me courage to follow wherever you lead. Keep me walking with you on the Jesus road, one day at a time. Amen.

Musical Bonus

Seph Schlueter and Leanna Crawford offer a contemporary version of a familiar carol in *We Sing (Joy to the World)*.

<https://youtu.be/u2LG4zLWUf4>





December 8

He Took Her by the Hand

So he went to her, took her by the hand,
and helped her up.

— MARK 1:31

You never know when a miracle will happen.

This one happened in the middle of a busy day.

Jesus had just healed a man with an unclean spirit who somehow wandered into the synagogue in Capernaum. While Jesus was speaking, the man interrupted the service. When Jesus cast out the unclean spirit, the whole place went up for grabs.

After the service, when order was restored, Jesus joined the disciples at Peter's house. No doubt they were still talking about what happened in the synagogue.

But when Jesus found out Peter's mother-in-law had a high fever, he healed her. The text says she got up and began to serve them.

Jesus went to her and helped her up. In this case, he got personally involved in solving the problem. It involved a very personal touch.

It was not easy because Jesus had a mission to accomplish. No one would criticize him for not having the time. But he paused to help one very sick woman.

Don't miss the point. The King comes near personally.

Perhaps you've heard it said that "no one cares how much you know till they know how much you care."

Jesus cared enough to help a sick woman.

That evening, "the whole town gathered at the door" (v. 33). Genuine compassion is so rare in this world that when it happens, the world will beat a path to your door. You shouldn't do it for that reason,

but don't be surprised when acts of kindness open more doors for you than you ever dreamed possible.

One writer tells of one frustrating day when he kept complaining about so many interruptions. "I can't get to my business," he said. "People are your business," the Lord replied. This isn't an argument for letting others control your agenda, but God often uses interruptions to help us do his will.

This brief miracle reveals the character of Jesus' ministry. He is not distant from ordinary suffering. He draws near, touches what is weak, and restores what fever has stolen. The hand that will later bear nails is already the hand that lifts the afflicted.

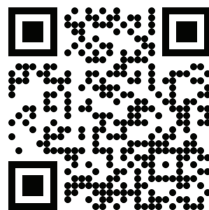
Grace came in her weakness, and the result was immediate freedom.

Lord Jesus, we desperately need your healing touch because we are weak. May the power of heaven give us strength to serve you with joy. Amen.

Musical Bonus

Andrew Peterson offers a thoughtful, quiet version of Mary's *Labor of Love*.

<https://youtu.be/DBmWtX9k6VY>





December 9

A Quiet Time at the Right Time

Early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up and went out to a solitary place to pray

— MARK 1:35

Most of us think prayer and solitude are like the pre-game warm-up.

For Jesus it was the exact opposite. *Prayer and solitude were the battle; his ministry was the post-game celebration.* In Gethsemane, his anguish was so great that his sweat became like drops of blood. He never struggled like that when he was facing down his enemies. He won the battle alone and then came out to his followers and led them in the victory parade.

I don't know anyone with an effective prayer life who prays by accident. If you're waiting to feel like praying, it's won't happen. You need a plan. My own practice has varied over the years. In pre-computer days, I would use a 3 x 5 index card. I wrote a verse and notes on one side and my prayer list on the other side. I've used a Quiet Time Diary, and I've kept a journal. These days Marlene and I keep our requests in a prayer journal that we consult every morning.

What's the best plan? It's the one that you will actually use.

We know God hears us whenever we pray, but something powerful happens when we start the day with him. I can testify that my day always goes better if I take the time to start it with the Lord.

The old hymn says, "Take time to be holy." It won't happen if we don't.

Prayer is where we win life's battles. Again and again, Jesus withdrew to be alone with his Father. His ministry flowed from that communion.

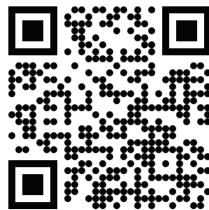
Jesus got alone and prayed to his Father. Go and do likewise.

*Lord Jesus, teach us to pray, and as you do, give us a
heart to pray like you. Amen.*

Musical Bonus

Here's a fresh take on a well-known Christmas carol. Chris Tomlin sings *Midnight Clear (Love Song)* and adds the beautiful idea of Jesus as the "love song of God."

<https://youtu.be/E4tGVUX3YqI>





December 10

The Leper's Prayer

If You are willing, you can make me clean

— MARK 1:40

Jesus doesn't treat us all the same way.

This is evident from a study of the miracles of Christ. He can heal instantly or in stages. He heals one with a touch, another with a word, another with a glance, and yet another at a great distance. He touches one and never sees the other, and yet both are healed.

In this case, he touched a leper.

That would have shocked his audience because leprosy was considered incurable. No one understood its origin, and no one knew how to treat it. The ancients feared it so much that anyone suspected of having the disease was banned from society. The rabbinic writings contain remedies for various diseases. But nothing is listed for leprosy. The rabbis said curing it was like raising the dead.

The leper's faith seems remarkable. He does not question Jesus' power. His question is whether Jesus is willing. Somehow, this poor outcast, rejected by his neighbors, knows that Christ can do for him what no doctor can. No doubt he has heard of other miracles Christ has performed. He thinks to himself, "If only I can get myself to Christ, he can heal me."

Jesus rewards his hesitant faith with something unexpected. He touched the leper. Instead of uncleanness having the final word, the man was made clean. Christ's compassion reached someone everyone else avoided.

Christ touched him to identify with him and to show the crowd that he was not afraid to touch a leper. That touch, brief as it was, proved Christ was the true "end of the law" for those who believe because with our Lord there are no hopeless cases.

In this story we see the compassion of Christ reaching out to heal a man filled with hesitant faith. Let no one say, “Jesus would never have anything to do with someone like me.” You may be the worst sort of “moral leper,” but Jesus will reach out to you if you call out to him.

He came for sinners.

Are you a sinner?

If so, then he came for you.

Lord, we need to feel your healing touch today. Come and heal us from the inside out because no one can help us but you. Amen.

Musical Bonus

Three brothers from Oklahoma make up
Consumed by Fire. They bring a country music
flair to *Happy Birthday Jesus*.

<https://youtu.be/fsy9NdFNKP8>





December 11

Rise and Walk

Which is easier: to say to a paralytic,
'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say,
'Get up, pick up your mat, and walk?'

— MARK 2:9

This is a trick question, sort of.

It was Jesus' way of making his critics think and think some more. Anyone could *say*, "Your sins are forgiven." It's not hard to utter those four words. But how would anyone know those words had power? Jesus healed the paralytic so that his critics would *know* he had the power to forgive sin.

You can almost see them scratching their heads over that question. In one sense, the answer is neither, because you could *say* either statement. But which is easier to *do*—to forgive sins or to heal a paralytic? They are both impossible by human power alone.

Then on a third level, the question works this way: It's harder to say, "Rise and walk," because everyone can check the results for themselves. Either the man gets up or he doesn't. Jesus healed the man as a kind of side benefit to his forgiveness so that even his opponents had to acknowledge who he was.

All of that from one well-crafted question.

By the order in which he does things, Jesus is teaching a crucial lesson. *Our greatest problems are spiritual, not physical.* As important as healing is, it is not as important as forgiveness.

The healing itself is instantaneous and complete. The four who brought the paralytic could testify how sick he had been; the whole crowd could testify how well he was now. The healing was so complete that the man picked up his bed and began to walk home. As he did, the crowd parted to let him through. The point is clear. *Both healing*

and forgiveness flow from the word of Jesus. He has authority to do both because he is the Son of Man.

What does your heart say? Who is this man? Is he just a carpenter or is he something much greater? Is he just another religious leader or is he the Son of God from heaven?

If he is a blasphemer . . . then join the crowd that crucified him.

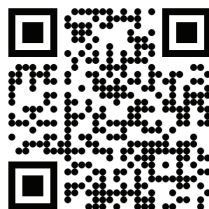
If he is the Son of God . . . then crown him the Lord of your life.

*Our Father, open our eyes and help us see Jesus as he really is.
Grant that we may give him the honor that is his due. Help us to
crown him King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Amen.*

Musical Bonus

Here's a newer song that might serve as the theme for "The King is Near!" Anna Golden joins with Aodhan King to sing *King of the World*.

<https://youtu.be/P6MntAvrTSE>





December 12

Where Is Jesus When We Need Him?

Jesus was in the rear of the boat,
sleeping on a cushion
— MARK 4:38

It seemed like a good idea at the time.

After a long day of ministry, Jesus told his disciples to get into a boat so they could cross the Sea of Galilee. A quick trip across the lake, a leisurely nighttime sail, and before morning they would be on the other side.

It didn't exactly work out that way.

Whose idea was it to get in the boat in the first place?

Jesus told them to get in the boat, knowing the storm was coming. After they got in the boat, he went to sleep. Suddenly a great storm arose, the wind rushing down across the mountains and whipping up waves that crashed into the boat. The little fishing boat bobbed like a cork as wave after wave crashed into it.

Finally, the disciples woke Jesus and asked a question that may seem impertinent, one we have all asked in moments of desperation: "*Don't you care if we drown?*"

Lord Jesus, don't you care that my child is sick?

Lord Jesus, don't you care that my marriage is falling apart?

Lord Jesus, don't you care that my friends have deserted me?

Lord Jesus, don't you care that I have no money?

Lord Jesus, don't you care that I feel so alone?

Lord Jesus, don't you care that my husband died?

Lord Jesus, don't you care that I lost my job?

We never question the Lord's compassion when things are going well. But God's compassion isn't measured by our circumstances, nor is his kindness limited by our understanding. His mercy is not limited to the sunlight or to the stillness of the waves.

When he awoke, Jesus spoke three words: "Peace, be still!" In an instant, the winds died down and the sea grew calm.

Take heart and do not despair. *Christ is Lord over all the storms of life.* He sends the storms, and he rides the waves with you. The Master of the sea is by your side.

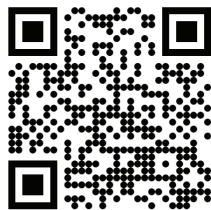
When the time has come, he will say, "Peace, be still!" and the storm will run out of breath, and the sea will become like glass. Eventually the day will break, and the sun will shine again.

We thank you, Master of the wind and waves, that you control the storms of life. Increase our faith so that we will trust you when the waves threaten to overwhelm us. Amen.

Musical Bonus

The group Casting Crowns ponders what it was like for Jesus to be born in the "little town" of Bethlehem, unnoticed by the world. Let's listen together to *While You Were Sleeping*.

<https://youtu.be/QjjzmDq6sDk>





December 13

My Name is Legion

“My name is Legion,” he replied,
“for we are many.”

— MARK 5:9

This is the story of Jesus and a man with a “legion” of demons.

The word “Legion” refers to a Roman military unit of roughly 6,000 soldiers. Is the man saying there are 6,000 demons inside him? Not necessarily.

He merely says “many” spirits at work inside him. In effect, he is saying, “I am so full of demons I don’t know who I am.” An invading army has taken over his personality, and that’s all this man knows.

The Lord begins by asking the demon who speaks through the man, “What is your name?” This is more than a simple request for identification. It means something like, “Do you know who you are?” The man answers, “My name is Legion, for we are many.”

The words of Martin Luther’s famous hymn “A Mighty Fortress” come to mind at this point:

*And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us.
The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him,
His rage we can endure,
For lo! His word is sure;
One little word shall fell him.*

What is that “one little word” that defeats the devil? Think of it this way. The demons not only recognize Jesus, but they must also bow to his authority. When he casts them out, they must go.

Out of this man and into the pigs.

From the land into the lake.

All by the name of Jesus.

He is far stronger than six thousand (or six million!) demons.

It's not a matter of geography, and you don't have to be demonized to experience the liberating power of Jesus Christ.

No evil habit is beyond Jesus' power.

No sin is beyond his forgiveness.

No human situation is beyond his healing touch.

If your life is a mess, ask Jesus to deliver you. Admit you can't change and then cry out for his mercy. Ask him to chase the demons out of your life. Ask him to take away the torment. Ask him to change you from the inside out.

Run to the cross. Lay your burdens, your cares, your worries, and your fears upon the Son of God. Lay your sins, faults, and failures on his strong back.

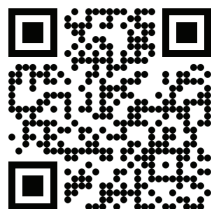
If you come to Christ, he will not turn you away.

When Christ answers, and he always does, go and tell others what he has done for you.

Lord Jesus, you are stronger than every power that binds us. Have mercy on us, set us free, and make us new. Then give us courage to tell others what you have done for us. Amen.

Musical Bonus

While researching songs for this list, I came across Dolly Parton singing *Mary, Did You Know?* Enjoy!
https://youtu.be/5JAW_7BAs-g





December 14

The Sensitivity of Jesus

Turning to the crowd, He asked,
'Who touched My garments?'

— MARK 5:30

It seems like an absurd question.

Jesus was surrounded by his disciples and by a crowd of people clamoring to see him, to speak to him, to touch him.

That's what happens when you can heal the sick.

People come from everywhere to touch you.

Note one little detail in this story. Before he asked the question, Jesus knew that power had gone out from him (v. 30).

There is a universal truth here. *If you follow Jesus and get involved with the needy people of this world, you will be conscious of power flowing out from your life as well.* By definition those in need lack the strength necessary to face the challenges of life. The only way they can get strength or power is from those who have more than they do.

This poor woman had suffered for years with a serious blood disorder. Mark even adds this sad detail:

She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse (v. 26).

Sick, suffering, destitute, having no other hope than to touch the edge of his cloak, she reached out to Jesus in utter desperation. Jesus felt the tug, saw her need, and even though he was on the way to see a dying girl (who was in fact dead by the time he got to her—vv. 37-43), he was not offended by her touch.

He didn't see her as an interruption.

For one moment, it was just a sick woman and the Savior. When Jesus heard her story, he spoke words that changed her life: “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be free of your affliction” (v. 34).

Strength went out from Jesus to heal this hurting woman.

If you follow Jesus, the same thing will happen to you. Strength will go out from you into the lives of the people you help.

Caring for others comes with a high price tag.

But you will die satisfied because you have lived your life for others.

Lord Jesus, give me a heart like yours—sensitive to the hurting, willing to be interrupted, and ready to spend myself for others.

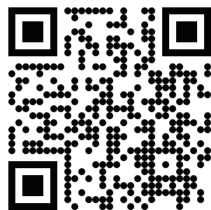
Let me hold nothing back but gladly pour out my life in love.

When my journey is finished, may I have the joy of knowing I gave what I had for you. Amen.

Musical Bonus

Here’s a Polish Christmas carol that was translated into English in 1921. Let’s listen as Elevation Worship gives us a beautiful a cappella version of *Infant Holy, Infant Lowly*.

https://youtu.be/_QmL_NUoqKw





December 15

Crumbs for the Dogs

For it is not right to take the children's
bread and toss it to the dogs.

— MARK 7:27

This may be the strangest thing Jesus ever said.

It happened in the region surrounding Tyre, a Gentile city in Phoenicia, in modern-day Lebanon. It had a reputation for idolatry, but the God they had rejected had a heart for them nonetheless.

The woman Jesus met proves the point. At first, he refused her request to heal her demonized daughter, saying he had come only for the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 15:24). But falling on her knees, she begged the Lord to help her. Something about her desperate plea moved the Lord Jesus. When he compared the Gentiles to “dogs,” he used a term that would have offended many people.

But when you need a miracle, you can't be choosy.

Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the table. By saying that, she was in effect accepting that, as a Gentile, she was outside the covenant God made with Abraham. But she believed that, somehow, Jesus could heal her daughter. When the woman went home, she found her daughter lying in bed and the demon gone.

This ought to give us great hope as we pray for the lost. We all have friends who seem to be “living in Tyre,” apparently far from God. But that distance is only from our point of view. It takes no more grace for God to save an idol-worshipping pagan than to save someone raised in the church. Desperate times call for desperate prayers born of desperate faith.

Ponder these words of J. C. Ryle:

“We are sometimes tempted to think that we get no good by our prayers, and that we may as well give them up altogether. Let us resist that temptation. It comes from the devil. Let us believe, and pray on.”

These are good words for all of us today. “Let us believe, and pray on.”

*Lord Jesus, give us the faith of this woman who received a great answer to her prayers. Grant us faith to believe and to pray on.
Amen.*

Musical Bonus

Today we’ve come to one of the most beloved Christmas carols. Let’s listen as Lauren Daigle sings *Silent Night*.
<https://youtu.be/0pByPI0oyeY>





December 16

Are You All In?

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but
whoever loses his life for me and
for the gospel will save it.
— MARK 8:35

You have to make up your mind sooner or later.

That's always true, isn't it? You can think about a job offer for a while, but eventually you've got to say yes or no. You can interview at six different colleges and be accepted by four of them, and then you can agonize over your decision. But eventually you've got to say yes to one and no to all the others. You can dream about where you're going to move, and you can even visit Rock Springs, Charleston, St. Paul, or Norwalk, but somewhere along the line, you've got to choose a city.

You can't sit on the fence forever.

The same is true in the spiritual life. Jesus is meeting with his men at Caesarea Philippi, a city north of the Sea of Galilee. There Peter makes the great confession: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God*" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus then reveals his coming crucifixion in Jerusalem.

What's left to say? Only one thing.

We all have just one life to spend. The challenge is the same for all of us. In the few years we have on planet earth, what will we do with the life God gave us?

You can "save your life" now only to lose it later, or you can "lose your life" by following Jesus only to save it in the end. Here's the kicker. You've got to decide, and when you do, everything will change.

At some point you've got to go "all in." The martyred missionary Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

If you live for your career, what difference will it make ten seconds after you die? If you spend your life in the service of the kingdom of God, the road may not be easy, but 10,000 years from now you'll never regret your decision.

So what's it going to be? Are you "all in" for Jesus?

Lord, may we not be ashamed of you, not even a little bit. Grant us courage to go "all in" on following you today. Amen.

Musical Bonus

If you need a little pick-me-up today, I've got the song for you. Check out *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day* by We Are Messengers.
<https://youtu.be/hAUIjHqNRps>





December 17

The Transfiguration: More to Come!

His clothes became radiantly white, brighter than
any launderer on earth could bleach them.

— MARK 9:3

Jesus is going to die.

His men struggled with the news.

When Peter rebuked Jesus (a daring thing to do!), the Master famously replied, “Get behind me, Satan!” (Mark 8:23).

Soon they would all know the truth.

We should read the account of the transfiguration in light of the shocking news about the coming crucifixion. Jesus is transfigured as a sign to his followers that there was more to the story than they had ever imagined.

At the transfiguration Jesus did not cease to be human. But there on the mountaintop, for a brief moment, James, Peter and John saw the glory that had been hidden from their sight. The light shining was light from within, light that had always been there, light that suffused his being from the moment of his earthly conception.

Jesus was always the light of the world.

During his days on earth, that light was largely hidden from men so that he seemed to be just a man and nothing more. The transfiguration reveals the essence of his divinity that was always there but mostly invisible.

There is always a danger we will underestimate Jesus. On the mountain, just for a brief moment, the Father pulls back the curtain and says, “This is my Son from heaven. Listen to him!”

We need to hear this word today. Most days are like today, a day of routine busyness. Off we go to do what we have to do, checking things off our list one by one. But a day is coming when “business as usual” will be no more. When Jesus returns in great glory, the world will see him as he truly is.

The Lamb of God will be revealed as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. When authors write mystery stories, they end each chapter on a cliffhanger, as if to say, “More to come!” On the mountain Jesus is transfigured, and God says, “This is my Son. Do not take him for granted. There is more to come!”

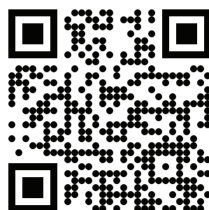
Lord Jesus, open our eyes so we might see you as you are. Help us to live in great hope of your coming glory. Amen.

Musical Bonus

Today we get to enjoy a newer Christmas song:

Peace Has Come by Hillsong Worship.

<https://youtu.be/7BFXCd2pWtM>





December 18

Help My Unbelief

I believe; help my unbelief!

— MARK 9:24

It's always easier to say what couldn't happen.

On October 9, 1903, the New York Times published an editorial predicting that a workable flying machine might take “from one million to ten million years” to develop. That made sense at the time.

Sixty-nine days later, on December 17, 1903, the Wright brothers flew at Kitty Hawk.

Sometimes you have to “suspend disbelief.”

As Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, he was met by a man whose son (his only child) had been under the control of a demonic spirit. When he asked the disciples to help his son, they could not. Now he turns to Jesus as his last hope. Distraught by a hopeless situation, the man bares his heart, mixing pain, faith, fear, hope, and doubt.

“If you can do anything to help us, have compassion on us” (v. 22). To which Jesus replies (partially quoting the man): *“If you can!’ All things are possible for one who believes”* (v. 23). Then the father utters some of the most honest words any man ever spoke: *“I believe. Help my unbelief!”* (v. 24).

I find the father's reply honest—and heartening. How often do we all say, “I believe—help my unbelief.” Our faith is often a mixture of belief and unbelief. Yet that little belief was more than enough for Jesus to perform a mighty miracle of healing.

It is easy to look down on this poor, tired father who saw no hope for his afflicted son. But he deserves our respect. The words “Help my unbelief” expose his inner turbulence. He believed but he also doubted. Hope and fear waged a fierce battle in his soul. When Jesus healed

this man's son, he was made whole that very hour. It was a marvelous display of Christ's power over demonic invasion and human despair.

Sometimes you have to suspend disbelief in order to believe. How else are we to understand the miracles of the Bible? How else will we face the overwhelming trials of life?

The father did not pretend his doubts were gone. He brought them to Jesus. We can do the same. Faith does not require us to hide our weakness; it calls us to trust the One who is stronger than our doubts.

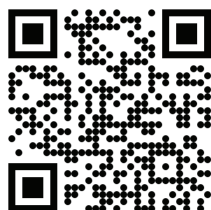
When we do, we discover that Jesus can change the most hopeless situations.

*Lord Jesus, may I reckon my problems in the light of your power
and my weakness in the light of your strength. Help me to bring
my doubts to you so I may trust you more. Amen.*

Musical Bonus

I love this solo rendition of *O Holy Night* by
Stephen McWhirter.

<https://youtu.be/EWPr3-njNSY>





December 19

Be Careful What You Ask For

Can you drink the cup I drink?

— MARK 10:38

It was a strange request.

James and John came to Jesus asking for a special favor. They wanted to be seated next to him when he comes in his glory.

If you're going to ask, you might as well go for the gold.

The two brothers have been roundly criticized for their request. No wonder the other disciples were indignant when they heard about it (v. 41). *But Jesus doesn't rebuke them for their audacious question.* He wants to know if they know what they are asking for.

James and John underestimated the cost of following Christ, and they overestimated their own importance. They didn't ask for work in the coming Kingdom (a nobler request). They asked only for a place of honor. Perhaps seniority was their plea: "We've been here longer than anyone except Peter!"

They probably thought the Kingdom was coming soon, so they wanted to get their applications in early. To use a phrase from the college admissions process, they wanted "early decision" by Jesus. And perhaps they intended to trade on family ties and friendship to get a high place.

Jesus doesn't turn them down and he doesn't put them down. He doesn't say, "Forget about it. You'll never have a place of honor at my table."

Not at all. He merely raises the bar. "You want to sit next to me? Fine. Here's what it will cost you." James and John may have assumed their suffering was over and their work was done. If so, they were wrong

on both counts. Their suffering was still ahead of them, and their work was just starting.

It's almost as if he's saying, "You want to be on my right hand and my left hand? Great! Stay with me for a few days and you'll see who is on my right hand and my left—a dying thief on one side and a dying thief on the other. I'm about to be crucified and the Romans have got two empty crosses. You guys want to make a reservation?"

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

Do you want in or not?

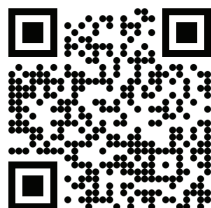
We can talk about crowns later.

Lord Jesus, forgive us for misguided ambition, small dreams, and selfish plans. Grant us steady hands and stout hearts to follow you even though the road you take always leads to a cross. Amen.

Musical Bonus

Time for a change of pace. I think you'll enjoy this pop/gospel arrangement of *God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen* by Blanca.

<https://youtu.be/MfWbd1Dvc0M>





December 20

Royal Order of Servants

Whoever wants to become great among
you must be your servant.

— MARK 10:43

Who wants to be a servant?

Think before you answer.

Everyone wants to be a servant until you get treated like one.

Here are three insights we all need to ponder:

1. *Being a Servant Is an Attitude, Not an Action*

So many of us think, “Tell me what I need to do if I’m going to be a servant.” Being a servant doesn’t start with what you do; it starts with the attitude of the heart. It’s not *what* you do, but *why* you do it that matters.

2. *Servants Come in All Sizes, All Shapes, and All Colors*

Servants of God may be very ordinary people with a very ordinary manner of life.

3. *Anyone Can Be a Servant If They Have a Servant’s Heart.*

How do you spot a servant? Perhaps the simplest answer is that you know a servant when you see one. Is it visiting a nursing home? Is it coaching a youth baseball team? Is it giving money to those who are in need? It’s all that and more, but motivation matters.

Being a servant is not difficult if you have the right kind of heart.
If you don’t, it’s impossible.

No doubt the disciples recoiled at the thought of taking the menial role of a servant. After all, these were the geniuses who had just been arguing about who was the greatest (Mark 9:33-34). The whole point of picking the seat of honor is to have someone else serve you.

“It shall not be this way among you” (v. 43). With those words Jesus turned the world’s values upside down and established a new fraternity—the Royal Order of Servants. Want to join?

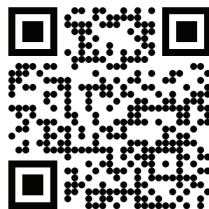
True leadership isn’t about having a title, a position, or an overwhelming personality. *Leadership is a matter of the heart.* Who is the leader we need? The one who is a servant. Find the servant, and you’ve found your leader. He’s not the big shot sitting at the head table. He’s the one out in the kitchen serving the meal.

Lord Jesus, when I see ways to serve, help me to do it, no matter how costly or how inconvenient. Grant that I might have your servant’s heart today. Amen.

Musical Bonus

Chris Tomlin offers us a live version of a song that is both a Christmas song and a beloved worship song: *He Shall Reign Forevermore*.

<https://youtu.be/R-P8pUCV5MI>





December 21

Jesus Makes a Ruckus

Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving
out those who were buying and selling there.

— MARK 11:15

Sometimes you've got to clean house.

In this case, Jesus decided to clean his Father's house.

It happened during Passover when Jerusalem was crowded with Jewish pilgrims. Some local merchants (supported by the High Priest and his friends) saw a chance to make big money. So they set up stalls near the temple and charged exorbitant rates for the animals offered for sacrifice.

The money changers inflated the exchange rate for temple currency to gouge poor pilgrims who had no other option if they wanted to worship at the temple. They also charged exorbitant fees for the animals needed for sacrificial offerings.

Jesus cleansed the temple because its leaders were corrupt and greedy. The priests made money off the backs of the poor people who had no other option. They had turned the temple from a house of prayer into a noisy, money-grubbing circus.

He hated the exploitation of the pilgrims.

He condemned the corruption carried on in God's name.

Jesus despised what these profiteers were doing.

Injustice is always wrong, but injustice in God's name is doubly evil. *Jesus would not stand for it.* A plaque at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. contains this quote from Yehuda Bauer: "*Thou shalt not be a victim, thou shalt not be a perpetrator, but, above all, thou shalt not be a bystander.*"

Good words to ponder as we near the end of our Advent journey.
Are we bystanders as life passes by?
Or will we care enough in Jesus' name to get involved?

Lord, forgive us for caring so much about ourselves that we care so little about the hurting people of this world. Give us eyes to see, a voice to speak, and the will to act. Amen.

Musical Bonus

Matt Boswell and Matt Papa have given us a song whose title fits perfectly with Mark's picture of *Jesus: Come Adore the Humble King*.
<https://youtu.be/mCQ4uqg34Yw>





December 22

Stay Awake!

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know
when the master of the house will return.

— MARK 13:35

Whenever I speak on Bible prophecy, one question always comes up eventually: When is Jesus coming back? No matter what else people want to know, it always comes back to timing. “How close are we to the Second Coming? Do you think these are the last days? Could the Rapture happen soon?”

God’s answer is always the same: “*You do not know when that time will come*” (Mark 13:33).

It’s a fair question, and not just for 21st-century Bible students. *Two thousand years ago, the disciples asked the same question: “When will these things happen?”* And despite his answer (“You can’t know the time so you must be ready at all times”), they never stopped wondering about it.

We can summarize things in three simple statements:

1. Jesus is coming again.
2. We can’t be certain when he will return.
3. We should always be ready because he may come at any moment.

It’s like taking a college course where the teacher announces the grading plan this way: “I will determine your grade by a series of pop quizzes. I can’t tell you when or how many pop quizzes there will be. I may give you one every week, or I may skip four weeks and then give you five in a row. Since you don’t know when or how many I’ll give, you must come to class always ready for a pop quiz. If you are always ready, you’ll get a good grade no matter how many pop quizzes I give.”

I believe the coming of the Lord must be near. Many Christians before me have said the same thing. I'm taking my stand with them. I'd rather expect Jesus to come in my lifetime and be wrong than to be so in love with the world that I'm not ready to see him when he comes.

Adrian Rogers said it this way: "We ought to be living as if Jesus died yesterday, rose this morning, and is coming back this afternoon." He's right!

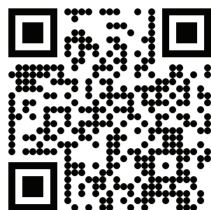
When we think about the Second Coming, we ought to adopt the Boy Scout motto: *Be Prepared*. Jesus is coming. No one knows the day or the hour, so be ready, be prepared, live as if it might be today, and you'll be glad to see him when he comes.

Lord Jesus, keep us awake while we wait for your return. Help us to live with our eyes fixed on you. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!
Amen.

Musical Bonus

Kings Kaleidoscope recorded one of our oldest carols and gave it a new musical setting. The result is a beautiful sense of anticipation as we draw near to Christmas Day. Let's listen to *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*.

<https://youtu.be/9P9ucV-sNEE>





December 23

She Has Done What She Could

She has done what she could to anoint
my body in advance of my burial.

— MARK 14:8

Some things can't be explained rationally.

This is one of those things.

Nard was an oil extracted from the root of the nard plant, grown in India. It was extremely expensive. A pound of nard equaled more than 300 denarii as Judas reckoned it, meaning it cost the equivalent of a year's salary for a working man in Jesus' day.

It's hard for us to fathom that, or to think about it properly. Imagine spending a year's salary on a bottle of perfume. Who does that?

Not only does she have a jar of expensive oil, she also pours it on Jesus' head. John 12 says the fragrance filled the house. I'm sure it smelled wonderful. It ought to smell good for that kind of money. Judas objected to this "wasteful" extravagance, but Mark makes it clear the other disciples joined in. They were indignant that Mary would spend so much on perfume that was poured out on Jesus' head. Why not use the money to feed the poor?

Mary responds this way to Jesus because he performed the amazing miracle of raising her brother Lazarus from the dead. That miracle proved Jesus was much more than a teacher or a prophet. She knew he had power and authority that could only come from God.

Her desire to honor Jesus moves her to violate the customs of the day. It was a very private act that others were permitted to see. Jesus' comment that she anointed him in view of his coming burial would not

have made much sense then. It was true, of course, but they wouldn't understand it until after the crucifixion.

True love, deep love, honest-to-goodness love can't be explained. Even when you see it, you don't understand it. Love has its reasons, and those reasons can't always be spelled out.

Mary's gift to Jesus was so extravagant and so radical that his top men couldn't understand it. I'm sure I would have reacted as they did. But if my faith never leads me to do things that make no sense to others, including my Christian friends, perhaps I'm playing it too safe.

If everything I say and do seems perfectly comprehensible to the world, then I need to do some soul-searching. The world says Mary was a fool to do what she did. Would the world ever say that about me?

That's too close for comfort, which is one reason this story is in the Bible.

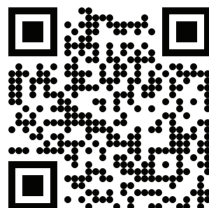
*Spirit of God, shake me up so I wake up and am not ashamed to
be counted a fool for Christ's sake. Amen.*

Musical Bonus

The Gaither Vocal Band shares a powerful message about the miracle of the Incarnation in

Glorious Impossible.

<https://youtu.be/a7njx-UH73w>





December 24

The Centurion's Testimony

Truly this man was the Son of God!

— MARK 15:39

The centurion wasn't just any soldier.

He was a proven leader of men.

This centurion played a key part in the death of Christ. Perhaps he knew Pilate had declared Jesus innocent three times. If so, he would wonder why Jesus was being crucified. He must have heard Jesus say, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." He heard him promise heaven to the penitent thief. He witnessed the darkness that fell on the earth, and he must have heard Jesus cry out, "It is finished!"

Mark 15:39 tells us he stood facing Jesus and saw *how* he died. All of that must have made a huge impression on the centurion. Finally, he felt the earthquake split the rocks in two. Taken together, he came to a conclusion that could only have come from the Holy Spirit, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

Here is the answer to the schemes of Caiaphas, the frivolous curiosity of Herod, and Pilate's cowardly vacillation. Here is the answer to the taunts of the crowd. Here is the answer to the Jewish leaders who wanted him dead. Here, too, is the answer to Judas who betrayed him.

They were all wrong about Jesus.

The centurion got it right.

He somehow saw through the blood and gore and the smell of death that hovered over Golgotha. A Roman soldier figured out what the priests and the politicians missed altogether. They saw a radical, a mystic, a troublemaker. But the centurion saw the Son of God.

On this Christmas Eve, let's take our stand with him and say for all the world to hear: "*Truly this man was the Son of God!*"

*Heavenly Father, today we behold our Lord nailed to a cross.
From his scarred visage a light shines that death cannot destroy.
Glory to Jesus forever, the mighty Son of God! Amen.*

Musical Bonus

I found a song by Phil Wickham that starts with the manger but goes on to include the whole story of Jesus. Amazing! Let's listen to *Behold*.
<https://youtu.be/6CP08HOcWGY>





December 25

From Stone to Stone

But when they looked up, they saw
that the stone had been rolled away.

— MARK 16:4

When Jesus was born, Mary laid him in a manger.

The word means a feeding trough.

It wasn't a crib or a nice clean bassinet like mothers use today.

The region around Bethlehem was hilly and rocky. Archaeologists have discovered numerous examples of stone “mangers” from the land of the Bible. The “manger” of Luke 2 may very well have been a rough stone feeding trough.

To say it properly, Jesus was wrapped in strips of cloth and laid in a feeding trough where he could safely sleep.

What a way for the King to enter our world!

Now run the clock ahead to the end of the story. Jesus has been betrayed, arrested, abandoned, denied, tried, sentenced, crowned with thorns, and beaten within an inch of his life.

He was crucified between two thieves.

He died in agony.

His side was pierced with a spear.

Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea took his broken body down from the cross. After wrapping the corpse, they buried his body in a borrowed tomb.

After a massive stone was rolled into place, Pilate ordered it sealed and a guard posted.

No one could get in—or out.

Or so it would seem.

Then Sunday came, and the world changed.

Jesus had risen from the grave.

On this happy Christmas Day, we ponder the story of Jesus.
From the manger to the empty tomb.
From stone to stone.

At his birth, they laid him down. At his death, they laid him down again. The first time, perhaps in a stone trough; the last time, certainly in a tomb cut from stone. But the second stone could not hold him.

Christmas always leads to Easter.

Merry Christmas!
He is risen! He is risen indeed!

Lord Jesus, you came from heaven to a manger, and from the manger to the tomb. You were laid down in death, but the tomb could not hold you. Fill us with Christmas joy and Easter hope today. Amen.

Musical Bonus

How about some upbeat bluegrass music to wrap up our Advent journey? Check out the Petersens singing *Go Tell It on the Mountain*.
https://youtu.be/W_GgZsUyzHA



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

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