

the water's edge  
CHURCH

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# Why Christmas?



Advent Study Guide

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edge

# Why Christmas?

The story is well-known. The pregnant virgin and her loyal fiancé. The inn without room.  
The barn and the manger. The shepherds and the wise men.  
And the baby boy named Jesus.

We know who, what, when, and where, but do we know why?  
Why did the Christmas story happen?  
Why did God send his only Son to earth?  
Why did Jesus come to earth knowing the pain and rejection he would experience?  
Why does Christmas matter at all?

If we want to celebrate the real reason for the season,  
If we want to experience the full joy of Christmas,  
If we want to be changed by Christmas,  
We need to know why Christmas happened.

## A Prayer for **Advent** by Craig Finnestad

Dear God,

I walk down paths of pessimism.  
I drive down streets of despair.  
But I know Hope is on His way.

I hang out with companions named stress and anxiety.  
I long for balance and harmony.  
But I know Peace is on His way.

I invite You more and more into my life.  
Give me patience as I wait and expect.  
Let me listen to what You believe about me  
and how You believe in me.  
Fill me with hope, love, joy, and peace.

Amen.



# Week 1: To Bring Light to a Dark World

## The World Before Jesus

The world lived in darkness. When life fell apart, people had to figure out how to put it back together on their own. When tragedies happened, there was no reason for hope. When life got dark, people couldn't see a way out. There was no light at the end of the tunnel. The world was filled with fear, anxiety, and uncertainty.

**I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.**

-John 12:46

## The World Because of Jesus

Jesus shines a light of hope in a dark world. People can see God more clearly. Jesus exposes the lies of the world and replaces them with grace and truth. Jesus brings hope to the hopeless. Now when life feels dark, there is a light shining with the hope of recovery, redemption, restoration, and resurrection.

*In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

-John 1:4-5

## Questions to Reflect On

1. What does it mean to live in darkness?
2. Where do you see darkness in the world today?
3. Jesus said one of His reasons for coming to Earth was to be a light. What does it mean that Jesus is the "light of the world"? How is Jesus light?
4. When we experience dark times, how does Jesus give us hope?
5. Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus also told us to be "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). How can we live as lights in a dark world?
6. How would the world today be different if Jesus had never come to earth to be a light in the darkness?

# A New Way to Celebrate Christmas

## See the Light

Christmas is not always a happy and bright season. Maybe there's family drama, financial stress, unmet expectations, or someone missing at the table. Our modern-day Christmas celebrations can bring more darkness than light.

This year, let's focus on celebrating the light. Light a candle in the middle of the room. Take some time to fill out the prayer below. Invite your House Church members, family, or partner to share their responses to the following prayer, as they are comfortable. Keep this prayer with you throughout the rest of Advent as a reminder of the light of Christmas.

Jesus, You are the Light of the World,

This Christmas season, \_\_\_\_\_

is creating darkness in my life.

Shine a light of hope.

Amen.

*Examples:*

*This Christmas season, **trying to manage family schedules** is creating darkness in my life.*

*This Christmas season, **the loss of a loved one** is creating darkness in my life.*

*This Christmas season, **materialism and wanting more** is creating darkness in my life.*

*This Christmas season, **perfectionism is creating darkness** in my life.*

## Be the Light

Jesus says we are the light in this world too. We shine the light of Jesus with our words, acts of kindness, compassion, generosity, joy, and more.

Who in your life needs more light right now?

\_\_\_\_\_

How will you be a light in their life this week?

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Zechariah and Elizabeth are promised a son**

**Zechariah asked  
the angel, “How  
can I be sure of  
this? I am an old  
man and my  
wife is well  
along in years.”**

**-Luke 1:18**

# **The Christmas Story**

Read Luke 1:1-25

1. Zechariah and Elizabeth’s prayers for a child were answered, but much later than they wanted. It was hope delayed. How can we keep hope when God seems to be taking too long?
2. Hope often requires trust, even if we don’t understand how it will happen. Zechariah wanted proof. How can we continue to have hope even when we don’t understand the plan?

## **Five Days of Hope**

Read John 1:1-5: What does this passage teach you about who Jesus is?

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Read Isaiah 9:1-7: Which line of this prophecy stands out to you and why?

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Read Psalm 27: How does the Psalmist describe how God gives him hope?

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Read Matthew 5:13-16: How do we hide our light? How can we shine our light?

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Read Hebrews 6:13-20: Try The Message Bible translation. What does this passage teach you about hope?

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# Hope

by Craig Finnestad

Dear God,

Faith is waiting. Waiting is faith.  
Sometimes I wait impatiently.  
Sometimes I wait patiently.

I think of a pregnant woman waiting for new birth.  
I think of a captive waiting for freedom.  
I hope. My hope is You. My hope is in You.

I have faith my present struggles are not permanent.  
I have faith Your vision for my future is better than  
my present reality.  
I have faith my struggles today will make me  
stronger tomorrow.

Like a person lost at night unable to see a  
faint flicker of light  
I stumble through the night because I believe  
Somewhere and sometime the morning will come.

Help me be joyful in hope, patient in affliction,  
faithful in prayer.  
Help me trust in You that I will find new strength.  
I will soar high like an eagle.  
I will run and not grow weary.

Make it so clear and comforting to me that  
You are with me as I faithfully wait with hope.

Amen.



# Week 2: To Forgive and Restore Sinners

## The World Before Jesus

People believed their value was based on their own righteousness and good works. A relationship with God meant following the rules. Outward actions and appearances were more important than inward attitudes and intentions. If you had a past full of mistakes, you were not worthy of a relationship with God. Only those judged as good enough were invited to be a part of the community.

**I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.**

-Luke 5:32

## The World Because of Jesus

Jesus replaces condemnation, judgment, and perfection with forgiveness, acceptance, and grace. He doesn't label the sinner a lost cause. He makes them his most important cause. Jesus welcomes the outcast and restores the broken. Our failures and mistakes don't permanently scar us. Jesus offers us redemption. We no longer need to be perfect to have a relationship with God. We can bring our imperfections to a perfect God.

## Questions to Reflect On

1. Do you ever find yourself still living with the beliefs of the world before Jesus? How so?
2. **Read Luke 5:27-32.** Jesus did not spend most of His time with the religious people who believed they were good enough. He spent more time with those labeled as sinners who believed they weren't good enough. Why do you think Jesus spent His time this way?
3. The religious leaders weren't more righteous than other people. They just saw themselves as more righteous and were blind to their sin. How can we have a greater awareness of our sins and their impact on our lives?
4. Jesus doesn't want us to be aware of our sin to make us feel bad. He wants our awareness to lead to repentance. What does it look like to repent? Why is it important for us to regularly repent?  
*(Read Acts 3:19-20 for more on repentance).*
5. How would the world today be different if Jesus had never come to earth to forgive and restore sinners?

# A New Way to Celebrate Christmas

**The Practice of Daily Reflection** is designed to help us stay aware of any sin in our life and how its impacting us and others. This reflection is not intended to make us feel guilty, but to lead us to repentance and transformation.

Turn on a favorite worship song. Take some time to go through the **Practice of Daily Reflection** individually.

1. Take a few deep breaths and invite God's presence into your reflection time.
2. Review your day from beginning to end. What experiences, interactions, and decisions stand out from today?

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3. What thoughts, words, or actions may have fallen short of God's standards or caused harm to yourself or others. Allow yourself to honestly acknowledge any sinful behaviors or attitudes.

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4. Confess your sin and ask for God's forgiveness.

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5. Where do you need to make amends or seek forgiveness?

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6. Conclude your reflection time with a prayer of gratitude and surrender to God's transforming work in your life.

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## Share with your group:

What was it like for you to go through this Practice of Daily Reflection? How could using this practice regularly change you and your relationship with God?



## The Birth of Jesus Foretold

**Do not be afraid,  
Mary; you have  
found favor with  
God. You will  
conceive and give  
birth to a son, and  
you are to call  
him Jesus.**

-Luke 1:30-31

## The Christmas Story

Read Luke 1:26-38

1. Mary started as troubled (v. 29) and ended at peace about the situation (v. 38). How did Mary move from worry to peace?
2. Gabriel's news was hard to believe, yet Mary trusted God anyway. How can we trust in God even when the circumstances don't make sense to us?

## Five Days of Peace

Read John 14:23-27: Reflect on the teaching that peace is a gift, not something we create.

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Read Numbers 6:22-27: Write a prayer asking for the gift of peace.

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Read Psalm 37: Which line of this Psalm stands out to you this week and why?

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Read John 16:16-33: How does Jesus try to give the disciples peace?

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Read Philippians 4:4-9: How can we have more peace in our lives?

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# Peace

by Craig Finnestad

Dear God,

Prince of Peace – Take my burdens and give me rest.  
Wonderful Counselor – Show me the way to peace.

Through the deepest valleys. In the darkest places.  
During the times I am alone.  
Show me the way to peace.

Peace with You  
Peace with others  
Peace with the world  
And peace with myself  
Give me Your peace.

Dysfunction, dismay, and despair  
They exist in the world.  
But You have overcome the world.  
Help me to be an overcomer who embraces Your peace.

I give You my fears.  
I offer You my failures.  
My heart is no longer troubled because of Your peace.

You are God and Your peace surpasses all understanding.  
Guard my heart and my mind.  
Teach me once again Your presence is greater  
than my struggles.

Amen.



# Week 3: To Give Us Life to the Fullest

## The World Before Jesus

The thief was working in the world to steal joy, kill dreams, and destroy lives. Evil was damaging people, relationships, and the world. People searched for meaning in meaningless places. People chased unfulfilling purposes. People looked for long-lasting joy in things that could only provide temporary happiness.

**The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.**

-John 10:10

## The World Because of Jesus

Jesus shows us a better way to live. Jesus teaches us that a meaningful life is found in serving and loving God and others. He gives us a purpose that is fulfilling and significant. A relationship with Jesus leads to a joy that can be experienced in any and every circumstance. Jesus overcomes the evil that is trying to destroy lives and offers us life to the fullest.

## Questions to Reflect On

1. How does the thief steal, kill, and destroy?
2. What does it mean to have "life to the full"? What does a full life look like?
3. What are some examples of life purposes that people often dedicate themselves to, but ultimately find unfulfilling? How does Jesus give us a fulfilling life purpose?
4. What are some common sources of happiness that people often pursue but ultimately find unsatisfying? How does Jesus give us true joy that can be experienced in any circumstance?
5. Read **John 10:1-21**. What is Jesus trying to teach the Pharisees and us in this passage?
6. How would the world today be different if Jesus had never come to earth to give us life to the full?

# A New Way to Celebrate Christmas

We usually write a Christmas list of material gifts that only make us happy for a season. This year, let's write a Christmas list of gifts that could give us real, lasting joy and help us experience life to the fullest. Take some time to fill out your list individually.

## All I Want for Christmas

1. I want Jesus to help me overcome these habits or circumstances that are stealing my joy:

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2. I want to grow closer to Jesus by

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3. I want to serve and love others by

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4. I want...

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5. I want...

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6. I want...

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**Share with  
your group:**

What is one thing on your Christmas list?

How will you receive this gift this Christmas?

## Mary and Elizabeth

**As soon as the  
sound of your  
greeting reached  
my ears, the baby  
in my womb  
leaped for joy.**

-Luke 1:44

# The Christmas Story

Read Luke 1:39-56

1. Mary was in a tough situation. She was judged and ostracized. How did she find joy anyway?
2. Mary expresses gratitude in verses 46-55. What specifically does Mary thank God for?

## Five Days of Joy

Read James 1:1-12: How can trials bring joy?

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Read Psalm 100: Thank God for the things that bring you joy.

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Read John 15:1-17: How will our joy be complete?

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Read Psalm 30: What line of this Psalm do you relate to and why?

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Read 1 Peter 1:3-9: How can we still have joy during tough times?

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# Joy

by Craig Finnestad

Dear God,

I have experienced loss in my life.  
I am experiencing loss in my life.  
I have been hurt by people I love.  
I have hurt people I love.  
I have hurt myself.  
People I love have been hurt or are hurting.  
I know what it is like to have a loved one die.  
The pain of the world is evident to me.

Yet in the midst of despair Your voice still speaks.  
It is a voice of hope.  
It is a voice of peace.  
It is a voice that promises joy.  
Fill my life with joy.

When my life seems boring – fill me with joy.  
When my life is full of fear – fill me with joy.  
When I am sad – fill me with joy.  
When I am overwhelmed – fill me with joy.

May my joy not depend on others, but on You.  
May my joy not depend on me, but on You.  
May I be as faithful in asking for joy as You are in giving joy.  
May I accept and share Your gift of joy.

Amen.



# Week 4: To Seek and Save the Lost

## The World Before Jesus

People were spiritually lost. They felt confused by God and far from God. People were lost in life. They didn't have a clear sense of who they were, where they were, or where to go next. People were morally lost. Even if they wanted to do the right thing, they found themselves consistently making poor choices and falling back into bad habits.

**For the Son of Man  
came to seek and to  
save the lost.**

**-Luke 19:10**

## The World Because of Jesus

The lost are found. The lost are embraced, welcomed, and included. Jesus chases after us because He loves us. He meets us where we are and accepts us. He forgives us for taking the wrong path and points us to the right path. Jesus invites us to follow Him and gives us directions to a better life.

## Questions to Reflect On

1. Read Luke 19:1-10. What does it mean to be "lost" in this verse?
2. Have you ever felt spiritually lost or disconnected? How so?
3. How does Jesus seek people?
4. What happens when we are "found" by Jesus?
5. In what ways did Zacchaeus go from lost to found?
6. How can we be more like Jesus by seeking the lost?
7. How would the world today be different if Jesus had never come to earth to seek and save the lost?

# A New Way to Celebrate Christmas

The song "Amazing Grace" is not your typical Christmas song, but it's a beautiful song about the lost being found and Jesus' purpose in coming to earth. When Jesus seeks and saves the lost, He offers them grace.

Play your favorite version of "Amazing Grace" and reflect on these lyrics. Commit to listening to and reflecting on this song every day until Christmas.

*Amazing grace how sweet the sound,  
How have you experienced Jesus' grace?*

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*That saved a wretch like me,  
In what ways have you been lost or still feel lost?*

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*I once was lost, but now I'm found,  
How has Jesus changed your life?*

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*Was blind but now I see.  
How has Jesus given you insight, direction, and guidance?*

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**Share with  
your group:**

Do you think about your past mistakes very much?

Is it easy for you to accept God's forgiveness?



## Zechariah's Song

**And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him.**

-Luke 1:76

# The Christmas Story

Read Luke 1:57-80

1. What reasons does Zechariah give for why Jesus came to earth?
2. John's purpose was to prepare people's hearts for Jesus. How can we prepare our own hearts for Jesus' arrival on Christmas?

## Five Days of Love

Read 1 John 4:7-12: How can we love others like God loves us?

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Read Romans 8:31-39: Do you feel separated from God's love? Why?

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Read Psalm 139: Reflect on how God loves and accepts you for who you are.

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Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13: What characteristic of love do you need to focus on?

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Read John 3:16-21: What does this passage teach you about God's love?

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# Love

by Craig Finnestad

Dear God,

You are love.  
I am created in Your image.  
Restore me to Your likeness.

I am grateful You are love and You love me.  
Remove any obstacles in the way of me accepting Your love.  
Let me live as one who is loved by You.

May I love You first.  
May I love myself for who I am  
and not who others want me to be.  
May I love others for who they are  
and not who I want them to be.

Help me to forgive and not carry hurts from my past.  
Help me to seek justice for those who can't help themselves.  
Help me never give up and always keep loving.

May I be more loving day by day.  
May I love people like You love people.  
May I continually move people closer to You.

Bless me with joy as I embrace the duty of loving others.  
Let me make no exceptions as I love. Let my love be blind.  
And may I love like Jesus  
sacrificing and giving my life for others.

Amen.



# The Christmas Story

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

*"Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."*

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

*-Luke 2:1-21*

# Jesus

came to bring light to a dark world

came to forgive and restore sinners

came to give us life to the fullest

came to seek and save the lost

## *A Prayer for* **Christmas Day**

*by Craig Finnestad*

God,

You have given us your Son.  
You have given us Yourself.  
Emmanuel. God is with us.

You give us the Hope of the World.  
Bring hope to the world.  
You brought joy into the world on this day  
so many years ago.  
Help us accept this gift and share it with others.  
You give us love in the person of Jesus.  
Help us to experience Your love and be more  
loving to others and to ourselves.  
You give us the Prince of Peace.  
Bring peace to the world and to our world.  
You give us Resurrection and the Life.  
Raise us to new levels of life.

Amen.

