



5

PRAYERS

FOR CHRISTMAS



5 Prayers to Prepare Your Family's Hearts for Christmas



READ: LUKE 1:46-56

We meet Mary in this first chapter of Luke, just after an angel revealed a glimpse into her future: *“Don’t be afraid, Mary,’ the angel told her, ‘for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus”* (Luke 1:30b-31, NLT).

Naturally, Mary was confused, since there was no biological way she could be pregnant. *“Mary asked the angel, ‘But how can this happen? I am a virgin”* (Luke 1:34, NLT). That’s when the angel explained the son whom Mary would carry was in fact God’s Son.

This is the part of the story where Mary should freak out. But, according to the Bible, that’s not what Mary did. Instead, *“Mary responded, ‘I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true”* (Luke 1:38a).

A few chapters later we find Mary, now very pregnant, on another unexpected journey from her hometown to Bethlehem. It was a dangerous trip — one not made by plane or car. As if that weren’t enough, she had no place to stay when she arrived.

Surely, when she imagined the day of her delivery, a stable was not the setting for the birth. This must have felt like such a mess to Mary. Yet in God’s view, it was all going according to plan.

Sometimes our lives feel like they’re spinning out of control. In our hearts we scream, *this is not the way I imagined it!* But even when our plans don’t seem to match God’s path, we can still count on His purpose.

God knew just what needed to happen — and when and where it should happen — that night in Bethlehem. He knows today, too! God’s ways had purpose then, and they still have purpose today. For Mary’s life and for ours.



ADVENT ONE

PRAYER:

Dear God, I admit I like to know what the future holds. It’s hard not to try and fix things or figure them out. Help me rest in the inexpressible joy found in Your presence. I know the things of earth will only leave me hungry and dehydrated. Remove from me the things that I allow to intrude on seeking You first and with all my heart. Oh Lord, our hearts are glad because we trust in Your holy name. Thank You for the hope we have in You! In Jesus’ name, Amen.

REFLECT:

Look up and read Romans 11:33 and Psalm 33:11. Allow these verses (and any others you find) to become anchors for your soul in the midst of life’s surprises.

READ: LUKE 1:67-80

Today we read the second of four hymns recorded in Luke's Gospel - this one, a song of Zechariah after the birth of his promised son, John. In this hymn, the past and the future converge as it points back to the promises of the Old Testament (Luke 1:68-75) and looks forward to the hope of their fulfillment. (Luke 1:77-79)

The days of the nation of Israel during which Zechariah prophesied would have likely felt particularly dark. The Roman empire oppressed Israel and there had been no recorded prophecies for hundreds of years. One scholar noted that despair and pessimism would have been the prevailing principles of the day. But Zechariah's words would have brought a glimmer of hope in their present darkness.

Twice in this hymn, Zechariah mentioned a visit. (Luke 1:68; Luke 1:78) The word for visitation is the same in both verses, however its use in verse 78 looks toward the future, anticipating the Messiah. Jesus would be the light to the dark world, and John would prepare His way. (John 8:12; Luke 1:76)

Even after a miraculous birth that no one believed to be possible, Zechariah's song was not about John; instead, he sang about Jesus. When Zechariah spoke of John, he spoke only of John's role in Jesus' life and ministry. (Luke 1:76)

Zechariah's song shows us how God's mercy to Zechariah became a conduit for him to tell about God's mercy to Israel and the whole world. (Luke 1:58; Luke 1:67; Luke 1:77) Just as Zechariah allowed his life to be a passage for God's mercy, we too can allow God's mercy to move through us.



ADVENT TWO



PRAYER:

Dear Jesus, we need the Light of the World as much now as they did in the days of Zechariah's song. Thank You for the gift of Your mercy and the hope of Your light. Forgive me for ever keeping it to myself. Move me today to relay Your mercy to someone I meet. Help me today to be a vessel for Your light to shine to others so that they, too, may know You and walk in the light. In Jesus' name, Amen.

REFLECT:

How can you be a passage for God's mercy to someone today?

READ: LUKE 2:8-15

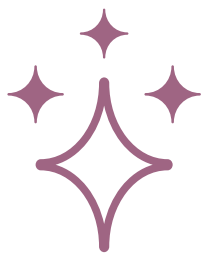
In today's passage, we find the announcement of the birth of Jesus, *"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them ..."* (Luke 2:8-9).

God didn't announce Himself to the kings of earth. He didn't even orchestrate a banquet for His unveiling. Instead, God sent a chorus of angels to a forgotten field, and He invited shepherds to share His story.

In a world where love and acceptance are often performance-based privileges, it seems love must be earned ... and once earned it must be kept. Love from the world comes based on your status or what you have to offer. And if you have nothing, you receive nothing.

God's love is very different than human love. God isn't waiting for us to get it right to approach Him. Just as God extended the miraculous birth of His one and only Son, Jesus, to a group of shepherds on a hillside, He extends His gift to us today.

The angels announced. The shepherds responded. And when they went, they met the Savior, Christ the Lord. Today, let's exchange our efforts to earn God's love for the invitation to encounter Him right where we are.



ADVENT THREE



PRAYER:

Dear Jesus, I admit that in the rush of the season, I can miss Your miraculous entrance to earth. I don't want to miss the riches of Your Word because I'm in a rush to get to something else. Today, I pause from all my efforts and accept the invitation into Your presence. Refresh me with Your Word and renew my thirst for You. Thank You for sending Jesus so that I may draw near to You and be transformed by Your presence. May my actions reflect my thankfulness as I worship You with awe today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

REFLECT:

How have you measured God's acceptance with your personal performance? In what ways are you striving to be good enough for God? Take a moment to talk to God about these self-imposed expectations.

READ: LUKE 2:25-35

Today's passage records the last of four hymns surrounding the birth of Jesus in Luke's gospel. In accordance with the Old Testament Law, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple in the days that followed His birth (Leviticus 12:1-8) prompting a song of praise from the prophet Simeon. (Luke 2:29-32)

The Bible describes Simeon as righteous and devout, and as a man who had been waiting. Simeon believed God's promise and took Him at His Word. Therefore, Simeon lived in expectation of God's fulfillment of His promise.

We're not told how old Simeon was or how long he had been waiting, but Scripture implies he had been waiting a long time. (Luke 2:29) Yet, even in the extended time of waiting, Simeon remained faithful, expectant, and led by the Spirit. (Luke 2:26-27)

Like Simeon, King David also wrote of times He waited for God to act. In Psalm 40, for example, as David waited for God's deliverance, he chose to pray and remember the truth of who God is. Recalling what God had done for him in the past gave David hope for what God would do for him in the future.

Here are a few things David recounted:

God hears us. (Psalm 40:1)

God has multiplied His wondrous deeds in the past. (Psalm 40:5)

God has plans for us in the future. (Psalm 40:11)

No one can compare with God. (Psalm 40:5)

God delivers us from our sins and our enemies. (Psalm 40:9)

God is righteous, faithful, and full of love. (Psalm 40:10)

With David's example and Simeon's song in mind, we can celebrate God's wondrous works while we wait in hopeful expectation for Jesus' second coming. We can think of His righteousness, steadfast love, justice, and faithfulness. As we do, He will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus and give us His peace. (Philippians 4:7)



ADVENT FOUR

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for the hope of Your deliverance. Today, as I reflect on Your first entrance to earth and look forward to Your second coming, help me look for Your glory displayed all around me. As I wait for Your return and final deliverance, help me choose to pray and remember the truth of who You are. Let me recall what You have done in the past and hold fast to the hope of what You will do in the future. Remind me of Your faithfulness and put a new song in my mouth. In Jesus' name, Amen.

REFLECT:

What is something you are waiting for today? Recount God's past faithfulness and ask Him to give you peace as you trust Him with your needs today.

READ: ISAIAH 9:2-7

In Isaiah 9, Israel faced a coming Assyrian invasion and the exile that would follow. (Isaiah 8) The outlook was bleak, but in the midst of the darkness of their circumstances, God revealed the coming Light. (Isaiah 9:2)

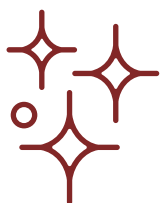
During the time of Isaiah's prophecy, the birth of an heir to the throne would have been a momentous occasion. The new king ascending to the throne would also take a name for himself or a title to embody his qualities, accomplishments, or attributes.

Isaiah 9:6 described the coming king of Israel who would be called *"Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* A few chapters later Isaiah described Jesus' reign of peace with a beautiful scene where natural enemies dwell in harmony together. (Isaiah 11:6-7) In that day, there will be no fear of harm or hurt, because the earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord. (Isaiah 11:8-9)

The Bible tells a story of the greatest gift ever given or received. Today's passage reveals the gift of Jesus. God loved the world so much He gave his Son. The Son He chose, He named, and He loved.

God knew some would not call Him by His Name. Some would not call Him Savior. King. Emmanuel. Yet because He loved us, God still gave.

It's this gift — the greatest gift ever conceived — that prompts us to do more than scour countless stores at Christmastime in search of the perfect gift. Instead, this greatest gift compels us to rejoice and offer our lives back to God as His gift of love spills over.



CHRISTMAS EVE



PRAYER:

Dear God, thank You for providing the way to come to You through Jesus! Your love and pursuit of me are hard to comprehend. I pause today not just to remember, but to rejoice in the Love that left Heaven many years ago for me. May the truth of Your gift grace my heart in a new way. As I unwrap the gift of Jesus, show me how to share it with others. May Your greatest gift of love spill out of my life into the world around me. Let this season be filled with Your presence. In Jesus' name, Amen.

REFLECT:

The word "rejoice" means "to feel or show great joy or delight." What's one thing you can do today to rejoice in God's gift of love to you through Jesus?

