

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

HEAVEN HEARS

OUR GREATEST CRY

HEAVEN'S GREATEST GIFT



ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

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INTRODUCTION

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

Advent is a season in the Christian calendar that lasts about four weeks. It begins four Sundays before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve, thus there is some variation in its length. The word “Advent” comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means “coming” or “visit.” During the season of Advent, we’re reminded of how much we need a savior and we’re invited to renew our longing for his coming into our lives and into his world.

The season of Advent is marked by two postures of the heart. First, Advent is a time of preparation. In the same way a couple prepares for the birth of a baby, we ready ourselves for the coming King. We prepare ourselves by creating space and time to reflect on our need, observe the darkness, and long for the light. Secondly, Advent is a season of waiting. It’s a journey over the course of four weeks where we’re reminded how some of the best things in our life don’t happen quickly. Some of God’s best work in our lives happens in-between departure and arrival. In a culture and time that loves quick fixes and microwave spirituality, Advent declares to our soul that waiting is part of the process.

This year, we’ve used the great hymn *O Come, O Come Emmanuel* as our theme. The devotions partner with the sermon series entitled *Heaven Hears* preached at South Fellowship Church during this season. As you embark on the Advent season, our hope and prayer is that the devotions included in this book would help you prepare and wait for the coming of Jesus the Messiah.



O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

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JESUS CHRIST THE SAVIOUR, ADVENT

VENI EMMANUEL

Latin Hymn, c. 12th Century
Trans. by John M. Neale, 1818-1866

Ancient Plain Song

O COME O COME EMMANUEL

1. O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, And ran - som cap - tive
2. O come, Thou Rod of Jes - se, free Thine own from Sa - tan's
3. O come, Thou Day - Spring, come and cheer Our spir - its by Thine
4. O come, Thou Key of David, come, And open wide our

**O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny
From depths of Hell Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Un - til the Son of God appear, Re - joice! re - joice! Em -
And give them vic - tory o'er the grave. Re - joice! re - joice! Em -
And pierce the clouds of night, Re - joice! re - joice! Em -
And close the path to misery, Re - joice! re - joice! Em -
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, O come, Thou Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times did'st give the Law,
In cloud, and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

A-MEN.



HEAVEN HEARS

EXILES WEEK 1

MATTHEW 1:1-17

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.



EXILE

WEEK 1 | SUNDAY

by Ryan Paulson

Imagine the enemy's army approaching the gates of your city. Fear, pulsating through your veins. Life, about to change forever. The city gates fall, and you're forced to walk miles - beaten, separated from your family and friends, and exhausted beyond belief. Now, arriving at your new 'home' you realize reality will never be the same.

Exile. It may be hard to relate to because it's not something many of us in the United States have probably ever experienced, but it's a reality for many in the world today. People driven from their homelands suffering the loss of their hopes, dreams, and aspirations for what life would be like. While exile might be foreign to us, it was not foreign to the Israelite people. They were refugees driven from their homes. In 586, the Babylonians stood at the gates of Jerusalem, tore them down, destroyed the city, and took the nation 500 miles away where they were forced to establish a completely new life.

Christmas isn't just about a baby, Christmas is about an exiled people finding home.

When Matthew introduces us to the story of Jesus, he includes exile as a part of his narrative. In Matthew 1:17 he writes, "So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations." Exile is a part of the Christmas narrative because exile is where Jesus steps into our story. Christmas isn't just about a baby; Christmas is about an exiled people finding home.

While the reality of physical exile is something you've probably never experienced, the feeling of exile is something you might relate to.



LONGING

WEEK 1 | MONDAY

by Rich Obrecht

Separation often shows us the things in life that matter most. Trips to a distant city, away from those we love, have an interesting way of helping us understand what is most important to us. Loved ones, friends, and places are reminders of where we enjoy spending our time. When a time of separation reaches a certain length, we realize the things we miss and the things we desire because we begin to long for them.

The prophet Micah is experiencing this kind of longing as he waits attentively and longing for God. He knows, when God arrives, things will change, and he will be vindicated in front of those who ridiculed his longing. No longer will they be able to ask, “Where is the Lord your

God?” But, until then, Micah hangs onto his faith in God, believing the promise of deliverance will come and in a time he will witness. Micah wasn’t the only one waiting. For years, the people of Israel waited with hearts filled with longing. The genealogy in Matthew 1 shows us just how many generations passed as they waited.

Just as Micah longed to see the horizon of the first coming, we long to see the dawn of his second.

Now, we wait, hoping Jesus will return. Christmas is a season of anticipation and helps us remember we’re still waiting – still

longing for complete deliverance. Perhaps you experience longing most profoundly when facing huge decisions or when you know calamity is headed your way. Perhaps with the loss of a job, significant financial issues, or finding out a loved one is now diagnosed with a terminal illness. Most times, we just don’t want to face these tragedies. Neither did Micah. But, in the middle of all the bad things going on around him, Micah directed his longing toward God because he knew his cry



WAITING ON FULFILLMENT

WEEK 1 | TUESDAY

by Rich Obrecht

Many emotions arise during this time of year. Some are happy and joyful, anticipating friends and family will gather together and celebrate. We anticipate gift sharing, eating, laughing and having a great time. While we all long for these experiences, they are not always fulfilled, and the painful holidays of the past are doomed to be repeated. The season will come and go, leaving some expectations and deep longings unfulfilled. Perhaps, like Abraham and Sarah, they will try to smile and laugh, thinking it'll be alright, but, deep down, there's hurt, pain, and silent suffering no façade of happiness can fix.

Twenty-four years elapse between the promise God makes to Abraham, the reaffirmation we read about in Genesis 17. Patience must have been wearing thin. Both Abraham and his wife were now past the age where children were possible. They believe God could come through, but they feel the pressure to move the process along by having a child by another mother (Genesis 16). In this passage, God reminds Abraham and Sarah of his original promise. Sarah would be the mother of the heir, and although Ishmael will receive God's blessing, he would not be the true, promised heir.

**In the waiting,
our trust in
God is tested.**

Often we want promises to be fulfilled in a time that fits our calendar. We think God should attune his work to our schedule and deliver when it is most convenient and desirable for us. Nevertheless, God's timing is God's timing. Rarely does God move at the pace we prefer, and we all know the time between the promise and the provision can be challenging. This is purposeful. God does this for a reason, but there's no simple answer as to why. But, in each of our lives, this sort of waiting on fulfillment is necessary. In the waiting, our trust in God is tested. Waiting requires faith. Faith that God will complete the work he's already begun. Faith that the path is



WAITING IN THE MESS

WEEK 1 | WEDNESDAY

by Aaron Bjorklund

Scripture is honest about the brokenness of the world. The story of Tamar is just one example. As you read Genesis 38, be prepared for a biblical soup opera. When Tamar was chosen to be the wife of Jacob's oldest son, her future was filled with hope. She held the potential of influence and significance after giving birth to a child who would inherit the lineage, wealth, and promise of God's chosen family. In her day, women were valued and honored based upon their ability to bear male children to carry on their family's legacy.

Lineage was so important in those days, and it was the duty of a brother-in-law to marry his brother's widow. He was supposed to give her children to carry on his brother's line. But, when Tamar's husband dies, Er's brother didn't want to fulfill this duty. He knew that if his

deceased brother had offspring, it would diminish his own children's influence. Unfortunately, his actions cause his own death. Now, after the death of two sons, Jacob sends Tamar back to her family with the empty promise – perhaps, later in life, he would give Tamar to his youngest son.

**Life can be
brutal, messy,
and unfair.
Scripture
acknowledges
that.**

Tamar's hopes were dashed. Her future was shattered. She was sent back to her family – childless and a hazard to be married to because

every husband she had died. In her hometown, she carried the stigma of being cursed in some way. Her life was filled with shame.

Jacob sent Tamar away because he didn't want to deal with her. Although it was his responsibility, he swept her under the rug and ignored his duty to care for her. Years later, Tamar decides she needs to take matters into her own hands. She seduces Jacob, her father-in-law, by disguising herself and pretending to be a prostitute. She demands



WAITING IN LOSS

WEEK 1 | THURSDAY

by Rich Obrecht

Naomi's story begins as a tragedy with little hope of recovery. To say the death of all men in her family was unforeseen would be an incredible understatement. Sometimes the events in our lives follow a similar pattern. While they may not be as tragic as Naomi's, each sharp turn in life has an impact and each loss leaves a hole. Our experience could be the death of family or friend, a close relationship lost, or perhaps financial disaster. In any of these, we find ourselves staring up at God with clenched fists demanding answers. We ask for reasons why, only to hear silence.

In times like these, the decision to remain faithful can be a challenge. Because those who have experienced loss, like Naomi, feel emptied. Yet, toward the end of Naomi's story, we see that God brought about a wonderful conclusion to redeem Naomi's great loss. Through the faithfulness of a daughter-in-law, heritage was restored. Through the simple act of gathering seeds from Boaz's field, the lives of Ruth and Naomi were dramatically affected. While it's true Naomi lost everything her culture considered important, her waiting wasn't inactivity nor was it pity. Boaz was able to redeem Ruth and Naomi, and we can read the joyous end of this story in Ruth 4:13-22.

**while waiting,
we can still
experience the
working of the
Father in our
commitment
to ongoing
faithfulness.**

This story provides a bright ray of hope for us during times of waiting in loss. Yet, just as Naomi didn't have the opportunity to witness

the wonderful end to her story, we don't get to see the result of our own story either. Yet, while waiting, we can still experience the working of the Father in our commitment to ongoing faithfulness. Small activities that don't appear all that important can bring us healing. Sharing our

WAITING IN THE UNKNOWN

WEEK 1 | FRIDAY

by Rich Obrecht

Living where you don't want to be is difficult, especially if it wasn't your choice. When differing customs or unfamiliar practices are involved, further difficulties arise. This is where the Israelites found themselves when Jeremiah wrote these words. They were in Babylon, exiled.

After being violently removed from their cities and villages and forced to march to an unfamiliar place, they didn't know what to do. They lost family and friends as well as homes and jobs. They had new prophets claiming to speak in the name of God. Life was confusing and unsettled.

**God doesn't
change our
circumstances;
he wants to
change
our heart.**

We can find ourselves in similar situations of confusion and fear of the unknown. When we seek advice, sometimes it's not always valid. But, Jeremiah's advice came from God. He told them to get on with life. The Israelites had a seventy year promise of return which may have lightened the burden of this strange place but that didn't diminish their loss. Sometimes we don't have that stake in the ground to hold on to. The only thing we have is our need to continue where we are – knowing God's been faithful to us in the past, and his faithfulness will continue.

As we wait in periods of unknown for God to reveal his plan for our lives, we need to make sure we're not passive. Just as Jeremiah tells the exiles to continue on with their daily lives, these words echo down to us to continue on as we wait. Simply put, we need to "get on with life." We need to feed our souls, work on expanding God's kingdom, be a blessing to those around us, and pray for their needs. Certainly some of the exiles didn't survive the seventy years, but they made the most of



VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

WEEK 1 | SATURDAY

by Ryan Paulson

Driving in-between the beautiful states of Colorado and California, you'll notice a whole lot of desert. It's possible to go hundreds of miles without seeing a substantial city. Every once in a while, you'll pass by a town in the middle of nowhere and you may wonder, "Who lives in these places?" It's dry. It's desolate. It has to be a struggle to find work, and it must be incredibly lonely. The wilderness is like that - when strength is pushed to the limit, hope for vitality falls by the wayside, and despair seems easier than survival. Yet, the wilderness is often where we hear the voice of God.

The Christmas story isn't just about a baby being born, it's about God stepping into the dryness, the chaos, the questions and the wilderness of our lives.

The wilderness is where many people throughout Scripture encounter the Almighty. Elijah is one example. When Elijah first comes into the picture as a prophet for Israel, he prophesies there would be no rain for years. After declaring this, he enters the wilderness (1 Kings 17:3-4). There, God meets him and feeds him and sustains him. God uses the wilderness to prepare him and shape him in the silence. It was in the wilderness God "spoke tenderly to him" (1 Kings 19:9-18).

In the Old Testament, Isaiah prophesies of a time when the Messiah will come and when he comes, he'll meet people in the wilderness. Isaiah says, "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (Isaiah 40:3). Ironically, Jesus doesn't come to people in church. He doesn't come to people reading their Bible. He meets people in their desert.



O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

24

JESUS CHRIST THE SAVIOUR, ADVENT

VENI EMMANUEL

Latin Hymn, c. 12th Century
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Ancient Plain Song

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2. O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free Thine own from Sa - tan's
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And ransom captive Israel
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And give them victory o'er the grave
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Make safe the way that leads on high,
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In ancient times did'st give the Law,
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Un - til the Son of God appear
And give them vic - tory o'er the grave.
And pierce the clouds of night,
And close the path to misery.

Re - joice! re - joice! Em -
Re - joice! re - joice! Em -
Re - joice! re - joice! Em -
Re - joice! re - joice! Em -

man - u - el
man - u - el
man - u - el
man - u - el

ra - ell
ra - ell
ra - ell
ra - ell

A - MEN.



HEAVEN HEARS

ENEMY WEEK 2

1 JOHN 3:8-11

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.



ENEMY

WEEK 2 | SUNDAY

by Ryan Paulson

If you pick up a Bible and start reading in Genesis 1, you're in for a beautiful read in the first two chapters with the repeating refrain, "it is good." But, by chapter 3, the enemy steps on the scene, deceives humanity, and God's good creation is marred forever. From that time forward, humanity is at war. Like any good story, there's conflict. We're born with the innate desire to live in the Genesis 1-2 goodness and peace we're designed for, yet we find ourselves pulled in by the war of Genesis 3 – running contrary to that peace. We sense the war on the inside and all around us. We feel the warring passions and desires within, and we only need to turn on the evening news to recognize there is an Enemy, and he is on the move.

John, a good friend of Jesus, writes in one of his letters, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). That's probably not a passage you're going to find on many Christmas cards this season, but it's one of the central reasons Jesus clothes himself in humanity and comes to earth. The incarnation is a declaration of confrontation! Jesus is the good shepherd and longs to rescue his creation from the liar, slanderer, accuser, stealer, and killer known as the Devil. Since the beginning of time, the Devil has made attempts to destroy humanity, but John claims Jesus comes to destroy the works of the Devil.

**The incarnation
is a declaration of
confrontation!**

Was Jesus effective? Did he accomplish what John claims he came to do? Has the work of the Devil been destroyed or has the plan of God been thwarted? Yes... but it's not been

fully realized yet. The Enemy has been defeated (Colossians 2:13-15), but at times we still find ourselves enslaved. We need to fight to remind ourselves that Jesus ultimately rules and reigns. Even though the

STEALS

WEEK 2 | MONDAY

by Donna Burns

Jesus alerts his listeners to a robber sneaking around. His name is Satan. Scripture calls Satan the thief, and his goal is to steal and kill and destroy. The thief enters the sheep pen in any way but the door. He comes in by surprise and takes what is not his because he cares only about himself and his schemes.

As Jesus describes the scene, he creates a contrast between the thief and the shepherd. The shepherd comes in through the door, not over the fence or by any other means. Of course, the gatekeeper lets him in because he recognizes his voice as he calls his sheep by name.

Each sheep has a special name and knows the personal sound of the shepherd's voice. The shepherd comes to intentionally lead his sheep. He doesn't drive them away or take them against their will. The shepherd cares for his sheep and is willing to even give his life to protect them.

In the struggle to identify our shepherd's voice, we can keep crying out, and we can keep listening, knowing our good shepherd is listening.

In this parable, Jesus is saying he is the shepherd. But, we still have to deal with one pesky robber. Satan is still a thief, and he continues to scheme against us. He desires to take

us as far away from the shepherd as he can. He doesn't want us to see the shepherd let alone hear his personal call. He wants to steal the truth of God from you and rob you of the joy and pleasure of a relationship with Jesus. In the struggle to identify our shepherd's voice, we can keep crying out, and we can keep listening, knowing our good shepherd is listening. He will hear your cry.



KILLS

WEEK 2 | TUESDAY

by Donna Burns

Experiencing the death of a loved one tops the list of stressors. The pain and hurt of saying goodbye to someone you dearly love touches the depths of every human soul at some point. Death simply doesn't feel right because we weren't designed for it. Our lives were created for grand fellowship with the Father God. But unfortunately, harmonious fellowship with God was broken in the garden – initiated by the enemy.

The devil's been sinning from the beginning, and he's been out for our death both physically and spiritually ever since. His goal is to kill and for the dead to feel separation from God in the depths of Hell.

He starts by tempting Eve in the garden which brought death to all humankind. Then, the devil continues to destroy and kill our relationship with God. Sorrow is the result of both. Eternal death and broken relationship bring deep sorrow.

**Our hearts
long for life.
We yearn for
comfort and
relief. We cry
for rescue.**

Death and sorrow go hand-in-hand and Jesus knew this well. John 11 records a story of Jesus losing a good friend, Lazarus. His sisters, Mary and Martha, experienced deep grief and loss. When Jesus came to visit, he felt their pain, was deeply troubled, and wept (John 11:35).

Often the holidays remind us of our sorrows and losses. They remind us we weren't created for death. We were created for life. Yet, the enemy of our souls wants to keep us in the place of separation and sorrow. He wants to kill our joy and our hope. We long for the release from the curse of sin and death. We're looking for someone to rescue us from the dark consequences of sin and someone to win back life and harmonious fellowship with God. Our hearts long for life. We yearn for comfort and relief. We cry for rescue.



DESTROYS

WEEK 2 | WEDNESDAY

by Donna Burns

Hide and seek is an all time favorite childhood game. Kids love to play it with a parent, a friend, or even a babysitter. For some reason, the thrill of hiding, being found, and then being chased fills kids with howls of delight. Perhaps knowing it's just a game and bonding with the person chasing you makes it fun. But, what if you were being chased and you didn't even know it? That's what our enemy is hoping for because he's described as a lion chasing someone whom he may devour.

Peter lovingly warns his church to be on the lookout. The devil's chasing us all the time. He is determined to destroy us and everything the Kingdom of God is trying to build. Destruction is his goal for every healthy church, family, and marriage relationship. Damage beyond repair is his desire for your reputation, your dreams, and your life. Often the devil employs the covert strategy to destroy us. He tempts us to chase "good things." The world does have many good things to offer, but as long as we're distracted with other pursuits, the enemy can succeed in his theft, murder, and disastrous results.

Alertness makes us aware of temptations, more resistant to pressure, and careful in our responsibilities.

Satan's out to steal, kill, and destroy our satisfaction and contentment. And, we become vulnerable to his attacks when we're less

vigilant. When we're alone, feeling weak or walking through suffering, we can become focused on our own troubles. In these times, we forget to watch for danger. Alertness makes us aware of temptations, more resistant to pressure, and careful in our responsibilities. No one wants to be chased and destroyed, but the devil is conniving. We must be sober-minded and watchful as Peter advises knowing the enemy's threat to destroy is real.



LIES

WEEK 2 | THURSDAY

by Yvonne Biel

No one has to teach us how to lie. Children are born with an innate ability to sneak around to find hidden treats, to cover up disobedience with a devious smile, or to shift blame to nearby siblings. It's obvious we're born into a world deeply influenced by the "father of lies."

However, as children, we don't yet know how to think about the process behind our suspicious behavior. But, there is a process. We think, "I don't want to get into trouble, so I'll try to cover up what I did to free myself from punishment." Unfortunately, no one who tells himself or herself this is off the hook because it's a lie. We can't cover up or avoid punishment forever. The truth always finds us out (Numbers 32:32).

Jesus purposely refers to the enemy here as the "father of lies" to describe his character. Satan has been a liar from the beginning. That's why when we read the narrative of the Garden of Eden, we know the serpent is Satan because he shows up as a mischievous liar, twisting the words of God and crafting deception to tempt both Eve and her husband. If Jesus gives Satan the title "father," those influenced by his

character are his children. Jesus pointedly calls out those who are listening to the world's father – the liar – and names this relationship as the reason for their hostile, deceptive behavior and lack of connection with God.

we can't hear Jesus' voice because the enemy's lies drown out the voice of our shepherd.

If we're honest, the father of lies all too often influences us as well. Without

being conscious of the deceptive schemes under the surface, we run around as children directed by the way of the world and its father – the devil. Deception is the enemy's trick to keep us responsible for our sin. Paul says, "God gave [us] up in the lusts of [our] hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because [we]



ACCUSES

WEEK 2 | FRIDAY

by Yvonne Biel

Although the enemy is never mentioned in this story, his deceptive influence saturates the entire narrative. Cain reacts in anger and complete dejection when God uses a simple offering as a teachable moment. Cain must have been listening to lies because he seems to believe that God liked him less and would not accept him due to the fact that he wasn't enough. Instead of humbly admitting his behavior was not exactly what God wanted, he questioned God's character and saw the offering as a major failure that began to define him and even control him.

If you've ever taught children, students or young adults and seen them over-react to a teachable moment, you'll recognize what this would have looked like. Someone goes from admitting wrong behavior to becoming consumed by the shame of it. From that point on in the story, Cain

we, too, are under the accusations of the evil one. He continues to try and turn our guilt into shame

only uses personal pronouns which indicates his focus – himself. This is the distinction between guilt and shame. Guilt focuses on behavior. Shame focuses on self. Guilt says, "I did something bad." Shame says, "I am bad."

No wonder Cain's punishment seemed overwhelming to him and he wanted to hide his face from God. Cain's identity and his character were brought into question. But

not from God. It was from the enemy. Satan successfully convinced Cain it was all his fault, that God was no longer safe, and that God did not love him. In Revelation 12, Satan is named "the deceiver of the whole world... who accuses [the brothers] day and night before God" (Revelation 12:7-12). This means we too are under the accusations of the evil one. He continues to try and turn our guilt into shame so that we, like Cain, will feel completely responsible for becoming lost in lies

 **FEAR**

WEEK 2 | SATURDAY

by Yvonne Biel

**as long as we
stay in hiding,
fear continues
to win.**

In *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis uses a fictional satire to imagine how Satan schemes, undermines the faith, and promotes sin. In this book, Screwtape says, “There is nothing like suspense and anxiety for barricading a human’s mind against the Enemy (God). God wants men to be concerned with what they do; our business is to keep them thinking about what will happen to them.” There is no mention of Satan working in Antioch, but his influence is notable. With one

sniff of fear, Satan was at work in keeping Cephas focused on himself and afraid of what might happen to him.

Satan delights in causing confusion and disorder between Christian brothers and sisters and infecting the testimony of Jesus amongst onlookers,

and he’ll use whatever open doors we give him. Fear may be one of his best tactics. C.S. Lewis goes on to imagine Satan saying, “It is far better to make them live in the future... it is unknown to them, so that making them think about it we make them think of unrealities...” Fear does just that – it causes us to act according to ideas that are not real. If Satan can take our ideas and convince us they are real when they are not, he’s done his job. This is where he leaves us stuck running around in anxiety.

Cephas’ ideas about what might happen to him began to control his every move. He was increasingly worried about what other people might think of him and what they might do when they found out about his behavior – so much so he draws back and separates himself from his community. This is what fear does. It paralyzes us from forward movement and makes us want to run and hide. But as long as we stay in hiding, fear continues to win. And when fears wins, Satan wins. We must recognize he takes pleasure in seeing us flounder in our faith, become paralyzed by fear, and live enslaved by unrealities.



O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

24

JESUS CHRIST THE SAVIOUR, ADVENT

VENI EMMANUEL

Latin Hymn, c. 12th Century
Trans. by John M. Neale, 1818-1866

Ancient Plain Song

O COME O COME EMMANUEL

1. O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, And ran - som cap - tive
2. O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free Thine own from Sa - tan's
3. O come, Thou Day - spring, come and cheer Our spir - its by Thine
4. O come, Thou Key of David, come, And open wide our

O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny
Is - ra - ty - an - ad - heaven - ly home
From depths of Hell Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Un - til the Son
And give them vic - tory o'er the grave.
And pierce the clouds and shadows
And close the path to misery.

O come, Thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Re - joice! re - joice! Em -
Re - joice! re - joice! Em -
Re - joice! re - joice! Em -
Re - joice! re - joice! Em -

O come, O come, Thou Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times did'st give the Law,
In cloud, and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

man - u - el
man - u - el
man - u - el
man - u - el
- ra - ell
- ra - ell
- ra - ell
- ra - ell
A - MEN.



HEAVEN HEARS

ETERNITY WEEK 3

JOHN 3:16-21

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”



ETERNITY

WEEK 3 | SUNDAY

by Ryan Paulson

Scripture gives over 20 reasons Jesus came clothed in humanity. Of all the significant reasons for the incarnation, none may be as important as giving eternal life to humankind. The great sage in Ecclesiastes says, “God has put eternity into humanity’s heart” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). The desire for eternity is not a Christian longing; it’s a human longing. As humans, we know intuitively we’re created for eternity, and for that reason, it shouldn’t surprise us when Jesus gets into numerous discussions about eternal life. It’s the first question the rich man asks Jesus, “Rabbi, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

We may try to ignore the fact we’re made for eternity, but we’re reminded of our eternal longing every time we say goodbye to someone who passes away. There is something about death that just feels unnatural. But when Jesus comes, he opens the way to eternal life. Sin separates us from the life that flows from the Author of Life, but Jesus initiates the way home. Jesus said, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Christmas isn’t just about a baby being born, it’s about eternal life being given.

Christmas isn’t just about a baby being born, it’s about eternal life being given.

Unfortunately, we have a misunderstanding about eternal life. We often think of eternal life as life in heaven with God. While that’s true, that’s not the only dimension of eternal life.

We don’t have to wait until we get to heaven to start living in eternal life with God! Dallas Willard wrote, “Eternal life is the interactive covenant relationship among the Trinity with a human being. It is a life lived in interactive, cooperative, and communicative relationship with God in God’s present and coming kingdom. The fullness of its dimensions is achieved over time through human effort and God’s



OPENING HEAVEN

WEEK 3 | MONDAY

by Donna Burns

If you've climbed to the summit of Mt. Rainer, scaled the volcano on the tiny island of Saba in the Caribbean, descended into the depths of the Grand Canyon or ascended the trail of any Colorado 14er, you've experienced the exhilarating feeling of accomplishment. The nation of Israel knew only one who had accomplished such a feat. The patriarch Moses ascended up Mt. Sinai and came back down. We, like Moses, can go up as many mountains as desired, but there is only one who has tasted the heights of heaven and brought heaven to earth. His name is Jesus.

Jesus opened the path and blazed the trail for us to meet God.

Jesus is the only one who has ever come down to earth and then went back up to heaven. His descent and return is a grander feat than anything we might imagine accomplishing.

Jesus came down to show us the way back to God. He came down, identified with our humanity, walked in the tensions of sin and went through with the work God set before him to do. Then, just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so that the people would recognize God, the cross lifted Jesus up for all to see God's redemptive gift (Numbers 21:9). Jesus is the gift of redemption Israel was longing for all along.

We go up and down mountains. Jesus comes down but before he returns to heaven, he tore the curtain in the temple, ripped it from top to bottom, opening the way into the holy of holies and the presence of God. Because of this, Jesus opened the path and blazed the trail for us to meet God. Jesus is the guide who has come down from heaven to lead us back by his redemptive work on the cross. The trail is clear. The

MOTIVATED BY LOVE

WEEK 3 | TUESDAY

by Donna Burns

Every morning, there's a point when indigo floods the horizon and the sun first breaks through the darkness. Rays of light begin to blaze. The first spring of a new day. It's dawn. Unlike the moon, which comes and goes in phases, the sun rises every morning without fail. The dawn is evidence of God's unfailing love. A love that shines like the day-spring and a beautiful gift we simply receive.

Christmas is also a day-spring. Jesus' birth is one point on the horizon of history where human destiny is changed forever. God, motivated by love, sent his son from heaven to be the Savior of the world – to pierce every sinful heart with the light of his forgiveness. Just like we can do nothing to bring or stop the dawn, there's nothing we can do to earn, buy or change God's love. He is the source of love, and he gives it graciously to all who are willing to receive it.

**Baby Jesus
opens a new
day with
new life.**

Creation speaks of God's love. Not only does God go to such lengths to create the beautiful dawn each day, but he reveals his never-failing, always-shining love for us. As Ephesians 2 explains, "But God... because of the great love with which he loved us... made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Baby Jesus opens a new day with new life. He is the day-spring and offers us the light of his love and forgiveness. This is the greatest evidence of God's love. Jesus is God's greatest gift of love for you.

SHAPED BY GENEROSITY

WEEK 3 | WEDNESDAY

by Yvonne Biel

Looking down into your child's eyes and hearing them ask, "Daddy, can I have a candy bar?" is heart-melting. But then, seeing a child enslaved in the horrors of evil and hearing them cry, "Mister, can you take me out of here?" That's heart-breaking. Anyone moved by love wants to respond in both situations. Giving the first child the candy bar and freeing the second child are responses to a child's request – both gifts offered in generosity from the overflow of love. Yet, having the perspective of adulthood, true love is not giving the child simply what they want in the moment, but what they truly need in the timing they need it.

Generosity is the response of any loving father's heart. John 3:16 begins, "For God so loved the world, that he gave..." As the Heavenly Father hears the deepest cries of his children, his heart melts and his heart breaks. His affectionate, compassionate, and adoring love for his children moves him to action. With an eternal perspective, our Heavenly Father responds in true love and generously gives us what we need – his Son.

**our
Heavenly
Father
responds in
true love and
generously
gives us
what we
need – his
Son.**

Now, some people look at the times they've offended God or sinned against him and they think what we actually need is judgment. But, look how Jesus responds. It's as if he says, "What loving father would really give their child a stone when they asked for bread? What loving father would send his one and only Son just to point fingers?" That's not love. God didn't give us Jesus for our condemnation (John 3:17). Neither did he give us Jesus to merely be a transaction

for the forgiveness of our sins. Christmas reminds us that God generously gives us Jesus because he actually loves us. He passionately

INVITED INTO BELIEF

WEEK 3 | THURSDAY

by Yvonne Biel

God answers humanity's greatest cry with the greatest gift of all time – himself. God opens heaven, motivated by love, and generously offers us the best gift we could have ever asked for – reunion. But, herein lies the crux of the matter. God gives. But, how will we respond? God took the risk. He put his love on the line when he offered the gift – with no guarantee it would be received. And, God's love didn't require either. God's gift is freely given and freely received. If we want it, it's ours.

God's gift of Jesus is waiting for every soul who desires it. And the way we receive it is by faith. Just as Abraham walked with God by faith, stepping into the promise God made him, we can step into the promise

**God's gift of
Jesus is
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who desires it.**

God gives us. By faith, we can receive the gift of Jesus when we believe the gift was intended for us, and we can demonstrate our belief as we walk with God in this new reality. God's greatest gift of Jesus is available at any moment as well as God's greatest invitation – to live by faith.

Throughout all time, God has offered this gift of reunion. Some have chosen to receive it and reap its benefits. Abraham believed, and he walked by faith. By faith, his lawless deeds were forgiven.

By faith, his sins were covered. By faith, the Lord did not count his sin against him. This was his righteousness. We, like Abraham, are invited to believe. We can receive the gift of Jesus as the substitution for our punishment and begin to live freely with our slate wiped clean. When we do, we can stop beating ourselves up. Instead, we can claim the same blessing of a life fully forgiven, fully made right, and fully reunited with our Creator and Lord.

LIGHT INTO DARKNESS

WEEK 3 | FRIDAY

by Yvonne Biel

Light may be one of the most powerful elements in our universe. Scientists and brilliant minds through the centuries have recognized its incredible momentum and have attempted to harness its power. Not only does light travel over 185,000 miles per second, its energy actually generates life. It's no wonder God made light first. Then, he used it to create and sustain a world filled with spectacular color, energized creatures, and a marvelous diversity of plant life.

It's by no accident Jesus is named the Light of the World. He created it because he is light. Just imagine the Trinity brainstorming together how they might creatively express themselves. Their conclusion was to shine; to breathe life and to energize a new world filled with living creatures who might share in the same fellowship of light and life. When John says, "The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world" (John 1:9), he wasn't lying. Jesus, the origin of light, was going to appear in the likeness of the very world he created.

**it's possible
to miss the
invitation
to live in the
fullness of
Light himself.**

Yet, many still remain in the dark – metaphorically speaking. Although we practically live and breathe and have our being from the origin of light, it's possible to miss the invitation to live in the fullness of Light himself. We attempt to hide from his presence, in fear and shame, refusing to receive the invitation to live in his glow. Instead of shining as children of Light, we tuck ourselves away in our own darkness, afraid to let him expose everything. That's the intimidating nature of living in the light. It demands that our darkness is drawn, illuminated, and purified. But, that's what we're created for – to bask in the pleasure and union of God's Light – fully purified and free to run in and with Light himself.



GIVING HOPE

WEEK 3 | SATURDAY

by Ryan Paulson

In the narrative of Jesus' birth, Luke records the angel's declaration to the shepherds in the field, "Behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." Now, in order to grasp the gravity of this scene, it's helpful to know some about the life of a shepherd. Back in the first century, shepherding was a lowly profession which meant shepherds were second-class citizens. A shepherd wasn't allowed to testify in a court of law because their word couldn't be trusted. Shepherds knew discrimination and the pressures of society's pecking order. Yet, God comes to the lowly and discriminated to pronounce "good news of great joy for all people." Imagine the hope in this statement.

One famous but anonymous quote says, "Man can live about 40 days without food, about three days without water, about eight minutes without air, but only for one second without hope." The need for hope is a part of being human, and hope is a gift from God. Luke's gospel reminds us that Christmas isn't just about a baby being born, it's about God breathing hope.

Christmas isn't just about a baby being born, it's about God breathing hope.

When God speaks into the desperation of humanity, he delivers hope and hope exhibits great joy. The angel's declaration reminds us that God longs for his people to walk in vitality and life. And, not just for some people – for all people. God breathes hope, not just into those whom society would deem as worthy, but into all of humanity. There's no discrimination or favoritism in God. He showers hope in the form of joy down on all of his creation. God gently delivers this hope in the form of a baby lying in a manger. Jesus is the hope of the world.



O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

24

JESUS CHRIST THE SAVIOUR, ADVENT

VENI EMMANUEL

Latin Hymn, c. 12th Century
Trans. by John M. Neale, 1818-1866

Ancient Plain Song

O COME O COME EMMANUEL

1. O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, And ran - som cap - tive
2. O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free Thine own from Sa - tan's
3. O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer Our spir - its by Thine
4. O come, Thou Key of David, come, And open wide our

**O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny
Is - ra - tyr - an - ad - heaven - ly home
And give them victory o'er the grave
And give them victory o'er the grave
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
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O come, Thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

**O come, O come, Thou Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times did'st give the Law,
In cloud, and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
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man - u - el
man - u - el
man - u - el
man - u - el
ra - ell
ra - ell
ra - ell
ra - ell
A-MEN.



HEAVEN HEARS

EMMANUEL WEEK 4

HEBREWS 1:1-4

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.



EMMANUEL

WEEK 4 | SUNDAY

by Ryan Paulson

Since the dawn of creation, humanity has strived to define God. Different cultures, throughout the ages, suggest various ideas about what God is like. The Hebrew people, even with their Scriptures, struggled to get a complete picture of the divine. At times, they believe God to be angry and vindictive toward his creation. At other times, they describe God as being longsuffering and steadfast in his love. New Testament writers say, “For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities.” The Torah, or Old Testament law, was a shadow of a reality yet to come. No wonder the ancients had a hard time understanding what God was like; they only had a shadow, not a complete picture.

However, as New Covenant believers, we get the whole picture, and we have the privilege of knowing God in a complete sense. The Scriptures make this clear in Hebrews 1:3, stating, “[God’s] Son... is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.” The author of Hebrews claims that we have the fullest picture of God in Jesus. Jesus is what God is like. And, Jesus doesn’t come to appease God, he comes to reveal God. From behind all of the shadows, all of the partial pictures, and all of the mysteries, emerges Jesus. Christmas isn’t just about a baby being born, it’s about God revealing his truest nature and character!

Christmas isn’t just about a baby being born, it’s about God revealing his truest nature and character!

If it’s true, as the Scriptures state, that God is like Jesus, then what do we learn about the nature of God from this revelation? We learn God hears the cry of his people and longs to rescue all of humanity. Matthew’s gospel describes the birth of Jesus by writing, “She will bear



PROPHETS

WEEK 4 | MONDAY

by Rich Obrecht

Throughout the history of the Israelites, prophets shared God's messages – good and bad. Good messages of victory or relief from oppression and bad messages of trouble and exile. The words of the prophet Isaiah were given during the onset of great loss and exile. His words echoed of a coming savior. Yet, their troubles weren't over after returning from exile. Prophets continued to speak of a Messiah, but Israel continued to be ruled by evil and oppressive regimes.

Now, we've all had expectations about gifts we wanted. We've all dreamed of certain toys or new realities. And, we've gotten excited for a day when our dreams would come true. But, we've all probably also felt the hit of reality. When on that day, we got something that didn't meet our expectations. Rather than getting what we wanted, we received what we needed.

We long for comfort, stability, and safety – but maybe that isn't what we need most.

This was what happened when Israel's Messiah finally came. Rather than freedom from their oppression, he offered freedom from sin's oppression. Rather than returning them to days of glory, he taught them to be servants and live in humility. They didn't get what they wanted. They got what they needed.

The Messiah was revolutionary but not in the expected way. Many people walked away holding on to their misguided desires for a political king. The same is true of us today. What we want may not line up with what we need. We long for comfort, stability, and safety – but maybe that isn't what we need most. We must remember that what we need can't be supplied by our own hands. New "things" and new "techniques"



RADIANCE OF GLORY

WEEK 4 | TUESDAY

by Yvonne Biel

Some people in this world carry a room-changing presence. A person of great stature or intentional body language can masterfully command attention. Another person filled with joy can splendidly illuminate a room. Others have the surprising ability to disarm you with just one glance steeped in genuine compassion. There is something about these kind of people. They seem to carry a weight of influence – a weight of glory.

Hebrews 1 describes Jesus as having the “radiance of God’s glory.” Yet, he lived in an earthen vessel like you and me. He had human skin while carrying the weight of God’s glory, fully God and fully human. It’s fascinating to imagine what this might have looked like or felt like. But glory is one of those words that escapes us. It’s hard to define or nail down because it’s mysterious, elusive, and ethereal. That’s also what makes it so glorious and why people walked away utterly amazed after meeting Jesus.

**Jesus carried
100% grace
and 100%
truth wherever
he went.**

So, what was it about Jesus that made his presence elicit such a response? For the woman at the well, it was his perfectly unified simplicity. In that moment, his perfection of love was palpable – through the simultaneous reality of offering both grace and truth. Jesus carried 100% grace and 100% truth wherever he went. Just stop and think about this

for a moment. There is a weight when you encounter someone who is 100% truth – but without grace this weight is cruel. There is also a weight when you encounter someone who is 100% grace – but without truth it’s disingenuous. Jesus was both at the exact same time. That weight would have been glorious to encounter first-hand in the flesh. Thankfully, we can experience this glory every time we go to Jesus in



EXACT IMPRINT

WEEK 4 | WEDNESDAY

by Donna Burns

At the Denver Mint, tourists can participate in the process of making a penny. Inside the giant machine is a metal carved stamp invisible to the eye. When each person pushes a button, the machine imprints a coin with the stamp's carving. In America, we have coins with images of U.S. Presidents on them. In the Roman Empire, coins would have the imprint of Caesar.

God uses a similar process of imprinting to make himself known to us. We were created in God's image as a way of knowing God, but when Jesus comes, he is said to be "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). Not only that, he is the "exact imprint" of God (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus was not only a human being, he had all of the character of the Godhead in Him. As Jesus came to earth, he was fully God and fully man.

**If we want
to know God,
we can look
to Jesus.**

God gave the clearest picture of himself possible when He sent Jesus to the earth as a man. It might seem impossible to know God. It might seem like he's far away. The Israelites would have felt this too. They couldn't see God. They only had shadows of him. But, when Jesus Christ finally came down from heaven, he made it possible for finite man

to finally see what the infinite God is like. God made himself visible to mortal eyes in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus lived God's holy character. His kindness showed God's love. His healings showed God's care. And Jesus said, "whoever has seen me has seen the Father" – in body and spirit (John 14:9).

Unlike staring at the imprint in a coin, Jesus Christ doesn't just represent the likeness of God, he is the full manifestation of God



SUSTAINS

WEEK 4 | THURSDAY

by Rich Obrecht

Imagine Mary visited by the angel Gabriel, standing in the presence of God. For her to be 'greatly troubled' certainly seems like an understatement. Then, to learn the angel is sent by God to her, to tell her she would give birth to the Son of God. She must have been one brave girl to find out that she was to be the mother of the Messiah, the salvation of Israel!

As the child begins to grow within her, she goes through all the normal things mothers do. She carries the child feeling him move, kicking and punching. And as mothers do, she wonders about the child she carries. But, the Son of God, Creator of the universe, who sustains all things

To think this baby boy, who coos and sleeps and makes funny faces, is upholding the world.

lives within her. How could she wrap her mind around this? After she gives birth to Jesus, she wraps the little boy in rags and holds him in her arms. Looking into the eyes of baby Jesus, reality begins to dawn. She, the created, holds the Creator.

This tiny infant staring up at his mother is the Son of God. In John 1:1-5, we read an amazing description of who Jesus is. It speaks of Jesus being eternal. He's always been, and he's always

been God. As a person of the trinity, he's been with God, creating and breathing life because he is life (John 14:6). He shines into the darkness, and the darkness can't overcome him because he's the light of the world (John 1:5). He brings the Kingdom of God to Earth because he is Messiah. To think this baby boy, who coos and sleeps and makes funny faces, is upholding the world. As we reflect on baby Jesus during the Christmas season, our confidence is in him, sustainer of all creation, brought to us from heaven, in complete humility. While powerfully upholding the world, he allows his creation to gently hold him.



SEATED

WEEK 4 | FRIDAY

by Yvonne Biel

Look what happens when the door to heaven is finally open and God gives us a glimpse inside. In this vision, God invites John to come and see the throne room of heaven, and what he sees is other-worldly. An iridescent throne flashing in a kaleidoscope of color. He experiences the rumbles of thunder and the warmth of blazing torches, while observing the most beautiful, crystal clear water unmoved, completely at rest. Then, looking a little closer, John sees strange but familiar creatures all proclaiming the holiness and infinite characteristics of God to a mysterious “him – who sits on the throne.”

**having been
raised to life,
he is the only
one worthy
enough to take
the throne, to
receive glory
and honor
and power
forevermore.**

When John wakes up, he must have been immensely curious – wondering about the throne and the creatures and the words uttered on endless repeat. But especially about the “one – seated on the throne” (Revelation 4:2). Later in the same book, John mentions another vision of the throne. This time, he sees a Lamb standing between the creatures and the throne (Revelation 5:6). The Lamb reappears at the end of Revelation too, but this time on the throne (Revelation 22:3). All the creatures – the lion, the ox, the eagle, the man, the elders with their crowns – will bow down to the Lamb who sits on the throne and proclaim him to be the holy and infinite God.

Hebrews 1:3 describes Jesus as the mysterious one – seated on the throne. It says, “after making purification for sins, [Jesus] sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Jesus Christ became the lamb – sacrificed for the purification of sins. His death was the acceptable substitutionary punishment for sin because he was the only one divine enough to accomplish it and human enough for it to work. Now, having



HEAVEN HEARS

WEEK 4 | SATURDAY

by Ryan Paulson

Life can be difficult – that’s an understatement. We live in a broken world, and this means life will inevitably be impacted by sin and by the realization that things are not as they should be. Many people walk through seasons of loneliness and heartache. Others suffer great loss and hopelessness. Nevertheless, followers of Jesus are called to be “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Corinthians 6:10). If you’ve walked through a difficult season, you know just how hard it is to be sorrowful while rejoicing. The confidence that heaven hears is the only thing that gives followers of Jesus the ability to rejoice and hope in the midst of a broken world.

Christmas isn’t just about a baby being born, it’s a declaration that heaven hears.

The prophet Jeremiah pointed to a day when God would hear and respond to the longing of every human soul. He wrote, “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land” (Jeremiah 23:5). At Christmas, we celebrate that King Jesus has come and Scriptures declare that Jesus now reigns with justice, righteousness, and wisdom. On this journey of Advent, we’ve seen that God hears us in exile, in conflict with the enemy, and in our longing for eternity. God not only hears the

deepest cries of our soul, he responds by sending his son – Emmanuel. Christmas isn’t just about a baby being born, it’s a declaration that heaven hears. Our greatest longing has encountered his greatest gift!

Now, even in the brokenness of the world, it’s safe to hope. Christmas reminds us our prayers don’t bounce off the doors of heaven, they pierce the heart of God. The immovable and unchanging One is moved by the longings of His creation. While God doesn’t answer every prayer in

