



HOME
Advent
DEVOTIONAL
2020

As we approach the Advent and Christmas seasons, we are confronted with the many ways 2020 will be different than previous years. We will not be able to visit friends and family with the same abandon. Hospitality and Christmas parties will have to be reimagined. Spreading Christmas cheer will happen through masks from a respectable distance. But even with the loss, the anxiety, and the frustrations of this year the light of the Gospel still breaks through. The Good News of God's love and power are true, and the Spirit is still transforming lives with the radical hope of God made flesh.

This year, instead of the usual spate of Christmas parties, we invite you to a virtual party with each of the four writers of the Gospels: Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John. We will be using the book *Christmas in the Four Gospel Homes* by Cynthia M. Campbell to guide us, but you will not need the book to use this devotional. Each week we will visit the imagined home of one of the authors of the four Gospels, exploring what part of the Christmas story they are focusing on and hearing the different perspectives on why we celebrate the birth of Jesus. This devotional will provide scripture passages to explore and questions to ponder as we approach the hallowed story of God becoming human.



November 29

Read Mark 1:1-11. Mark's Gospel does not begin with Jesus's birth, but with John the Baptist preparing the way for the Messiah. How are you/will you prepare to celebrate this year?

November 30

John the Baptist offered people a baptism of repentance. What is something you would like to change (repent of)?
An attitude?
A behavior?
A broken or frayed relationship?

December 1

The Gospel of Mark chooses to focus on the life, death, and the resurrection of Jesus rather than his birth. The emphasis is on God's power over the forces that harm and scare us: God is more powerful than death, sickness, than crowds of angry people. Where do you need to be reminded of God's power?

December 2

The symbol of Mark's Gospel is a cross rather than a manger. How do your Christmas celebrations and decorations reflect your hope? Do you have any decorations that hint at the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus?

December 3

One verse of the carol *Good Christian Friends Rejoice* says that Christ was born to save, emphasizing the connection of cross and resurrection with Jesus's birth. Find a version of this carol to listen to (and maybe sing along with) today.

December 4

The next part of Mark's Gospel tells of Jesus praying and fasting in the wilderness. Jesus's ministry begins in a place of barrenness and need. Why do you need Jesus this year? Where do you need the love of God to shine through?

December 5

With no birth narrative in his Gospel, we can speculate that Mark would not have put up many Christmas decorations. Mark highlights how Jesus's presence with us is not seasonal – but permanent. What Christmas decoration could you leave up year-round to remind yourself that Jesus is always with you?

December 6

Read Matthew 1:1 (optional 2-17). Matthew's Gospel begins with a genealogy linking Jesus back to Abraham. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise God gave Abraham – that through Abraham all people of the world would be blessed. How can you be a blessing to someone this week?

December 7

By starting with a genealogy, Matthew's Gospel builds a foundation from which to share the good news. Matthew is claiming the long tradition of God's presence and involvement with God's people – he is using the past to inform the present. What traditions do you have that anchor you to the love of family and the faithfulness of God?

December 8

Read Matthew 1:18-25 and 2:19-23. God communicates with Joseph through dreams. Jesus's earthly father was a man who heard God's voice in his dreams and responded, much like a different Joseph in Jesus's family tree. How does God speak to you? Take time today to listen for God's voice.

December 9

Read Matthew 2:13-18. Matthew's Gospel highlights the part of the birth story connecting Jesus with Moses. The parallels: lives threatened by a powerful and cruel ruler and a return home from Egypt. What can we learn about Jesus by comparing him to Moses? When you have found refuge when returning home?

December 10

Jesus's genealogy also includes women – Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary. These women were people who fought against injustice, were loyal and brave and are instrumental in the story of Jesus's birth. What stories of loyalty, bravery and people who demand justice inspire you?

December 11

Read Matthew 2:1-12. Even though Matthew's Gospel focuses on Jesus's Jewish ancestry and traditions, it also makes room for outsiders. The Magi – astrologers from the East – were not followers of the Hebrew God, but they followed the star and responded to Jesus with worship and wonder. When is a time you have experienced something or someone new and responded with wonder?

December 12

Listen to or sing along with *Joy to the World*. Ask God to show you how to be light for the whole world.

December 13

Read Luke 1:5, 2:1-2. Luke's Gospel is rooted to a specific time, place, and political context. How does the good news of Jesus's birth speak to our current time, place, and political context? Where do you find hope for here and now?

December 14

Read Luke 1:5-24. Luke's story begins with Elizabeth and Zechariah – faithful people that feel forgotten and left out. God's love breaks through in the form of a long-desired son. Can you think of someone who is feeling forgotten or left out? How can you reflect God's love to them?

December 15

Read Luke 1:57-80. God's promise to Elizabeth and Zechariah came true and Zechariah responds with song. Think of a few things that you are grateful for and make a point of praising God for them today – you could even sing your praise if you are feeling bold.

December 16

Read Luke 1:26-56. When the angel Gabriel tells Mary of Jesus's birth, she also responds with song. Her song describes her confident hope that, through Jesus, the injustice and systemic wrongs of the whole world will be righted. Read Mary's Song again and make it your prayer for the day.

December 17

Listen to and sing along with *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear*. Take a moment today to "rest beside the weary road, and hear the angels sing."

December 18

Read Luke 2:1-14. The Angels announcement to the shepherds is not just startling and outrageous in form but in content too. Their proclamation elevates Jesus to the place Caesar Augustus would have held. What governmental/societal/entertainment structure in your life is elevated above Jesus?

December 19

Read Luke 2:15-21. Luke's Gospel invites everyone to hear and revel in the good news of Jesus's birth – God with us. What does hospitality look like for you this season? How might you invite someone to celebrate with you in a new and creative way?

December 20

Read John 1:1. For John the Good News starts not with the birth of Jesus or the beginning of Jesus's ministry but with creation. The Good News is that God made us and continues to love and interact with us. Take some time today to appreciate all that God has made.

December 21

Read John 1:1-4. Jesus is given the title of the Word. Genesis says that God spoke creation into being – God's Word made all that is. Jesus, then, is literally the author of creation. Words are powerful. Be intentional about the words you use with the people around you.

December 22

Read John 1:5-9. Jesus is also the light that shines in the darkness. As the days get shorter, the power of light becomes more obvious. Take time to enjoy Christmas lights or even do some star gazing. Offer a prayer of thanks and praise for the gift of Light and the reminder of Light's power over darkness.

December 23

Read John 1:14-18. The Word made flesh – God is with us in the human experience. Jesus has given us access to God in an unprecedented way. Because of Jesus, we pray with confidence. Because of Jesus, we have seen God's grace and truth. Because of Jesus, we hope for redemption. Lay the brokenness of our world at God's feet in prayer knowing that the Word made flesh hears you.

December 24

Read John 1:10-13. In Jesus, God becomes human. When we receive Jesus, we become part of God (part of the Body of Christ and therefore part of the Communion of the Trinity). We are transformed to reflect the love and light of Jesus. Alleluia! Amen!

Merry
Christmas!