



A RESOURCE FROM
ROLLING HILLS COMMUNITY CHURCH



## READ ~

Word, and the Word was with God, was life, and that life was the light of and the Word was God. He was with all mankind. The light shines in the God in the beginning. Through Him all darkness, and the darkness has not things were made; without Him nothing overcome it.

JOHN 1:1-5 In the beginning was the was made that has been made. In Him

## → REFLECT < → </p>

We begin a journey today. We will walk through Scripture toward the birth of Christ. In this journey, we set aside time daily to meet God in His Word and let Him work in our hearts through the story of the coming of Christ. In the coming weeks, we will see how He came, why He came, and what it means for us today. I pray that God can focus our hearts and minds, amidst the distractions, on the glorious truth that God came down to earth to be with us, show us how to live, and give His life for us.

In today's passage, we see that Christ (the Word) was with God, active in creating the world, and is the Light of the world. He was Light before He came into the world, while He was in the world, and even now. Feel the weight of the last line of verse 5, The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Where there is light, there is hope. That is the story of Advent. Hope came as a light in the darkness.

As we start this journey together, sit in truth that darkness has not and will not overcome the light. You will see this thread woven throughout the story of Christ. Jesus came to be our light. Jesus came to be our hope.

Take a moment and pray the heart of this verse:

Lord, thank you for your Word.

Lord, thank you for creation.

Lord, thank you for light.

Lord, thank you for hope.

WRITTEN BY

**JACOB SCRIMPSHIRE** 

DISCIPLESHIP PASTOR

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WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS?
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ADDIV -



JOHN 3:16-21 For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds

were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

**JOHN 8:12** When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

## • REFLECT •

As I prepare my heart for the upcoming Christmas season, I find that I am so thankful for the best gift God could have ever given me: **Jesus!** I'm so grateful that He saved me and that I have eternal life. However, today's verses give us the opportunity to think about God's big-picture plan for humanity as a whole. I am blown away when I think about how He loved the whole world so much that He sent His one and only son to save us. God has always loved us, and His plan has always been to save us.

He gave us Jesus, who is the *Light of Life*, so we would no longer walk in darkness. Jesus said, *I am the light of the world*. Genesis 1:1-3 says that in the beginning, the earth was formless and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the deep. Creating light was God's first step in the creation of the world. He brought it out of darkness. **It was part of His plan for humanity.** 

Isaiah 9:2 says, The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. Those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them. The prophet Isaiah was telling the people that Jesus was coming and would bring them out of darkness. It was part of His plan. The birth of Jesus ushered in the Light of the world. He is the source of light. Light brings life, warmth, wisdom, guidance, and hope.

As we remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus this season, let's also give thanks for God's plan to save humanity, to bring us out of darkness, and that we have a living hope in the Light of the world... **Jesus.** 

WRITTEN BY

MIRANDA KOKES
WOMEN'S DIRECTOR

# • APPLY • WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS? WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO I AM? WHAT PRACTICES ARE THERE TO EMULATE?



## **→→ READ ←**

**GENESIS 1:1-5** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness He called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

**PSALMS 104:1-4** Praise the Lord, my soul. Lord my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.

The Lord wraps Himself in light as with a garment; He stretches out the heavens like a tent and lays the beams of His upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds His chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. He makes winds His messengers, flames of fire His servants.

## **→→ REFLECT ←**

During Advent, we celebrate the coming of Christ - *Immanuel: God with us.* He is the promised Messiah whom the prophets declared and the angels announced to shepherds on the hillside. But, we also celebrate the truth that Christ is coming again to finally restore all that sin has broken. Today, in the two passages that we are meditating on, we are reminded that the Christ who has come and is coming again is also the Creator of all things. **Everything is under His control.** 

Read Genesis 1:1-5 again. Out of nothing, **God spoke and created everything** we can see, taste, smell, touch, and hear.

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of His mouth. (Psalm 33:6)

For He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm. (Psalm 33:9) By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. (Hebrews 11:3)

Now read Psalm 104:1-4 again.

I love the words of the psalmist of Psalm 104:1 where he instructs his own soul. One translation says, Let all that I am... Let every molecule, every particle, and every atom that makes up this body, mind, and spirit give praise to the Lord. Why? Because He created it all, and all of it is ever under His perfect control.

Let these words be a comforting reminder for us today that our God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things and that everything is under His perfect control at all times. Let these words cause us to reflect on God's greatness, glory, majesty, and splendor as Creator and Sustainer. **He is worthy of all our praise, honor, and adoration.** 

WRITTEN BY

T LUSK
COLUMBIA CAMPUS PASTOR

*** APPLY ***
WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS?
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**ISAIAH 5:20** Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.

**GENESIS 3:1-15** Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die."

"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

"Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

**1 TIMOTHY 1:15-17** Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His immense patience as an example for those who would believe in Him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

## ": REFLECT:

Man was once in the garden of delight, enjoying full fellowship with their eternal King and Father, tasting and seeing His goodness and beholding His perfection. Then the serpent inserted himself and presented Eve with a deadly lie... a lie that led to man substituting the light of the true knowledge of God for dark blindness and deafness to the glory of God.

But God promised to send the seed that would soon crush the serpent's head.

Yahweh, in Christ, became a mortal man taking the form of a lowly bondservant and set aside equality with God in order to make us co-eternal heirs with him. He took on sinful flesh yet remained sinless and became the wrath-satisfying sacrifice, so we could become sons and daughters.

This Advent season is not only about us joining in with the Old Testament saints as they anticipated the coming of their Messiah. It is also a time that we enter into a period of anticipation of our own, as we look forward to His glorious return to restore all things and bring us back into the garden of delight.

As John says in Revelation 22, And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

What then shall our response be but to **rejoice, praise,** and **worship!** Our God has done it, He is faithful, and He is coming back for us to do what He said He would. Take heart, endure, and fix your eyes on Jesus!

JOHN JEDNEAK
HIGH SCHOOL PASTOR

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## READ ~

JAMES 1:16-18 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all He created.

**PSALMS 136:1-9** Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of gods. His love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord of lords: His love endures forever.

To Him who alone does great wonders, His love endures forever. Who by His understanding made the heavens, His love endures forever. Who spread out the earth upon the waters, His love endures forever. Who made the great lights—His love endures forever. The sun to govern the day, His love endures forever. The moon and stars to govern the night; His love endures forever.

**HEBREWS 13:8** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

## **→** REFLECT **→**

Many things in your life change each day. Your schedule, your plans, what you're going to eat for dinner... even how much traffic is on the road when you head to work! Especially after all that we've experienced in the past few years, you may have felt like I did, continually asking myself, Why should I bother making plans when I know they're going to change?

Change can be scary, stressful, and downright sad sometimes. And if there is no constant in your life, the fear of the unknown and uncertainty that will certainly occur can be overwhelming and disheartening. Phew. I feel like this is hitting close to home for me today, too, friends.

Then we come to these verses in today's Advent devotional.

...The Father of lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. (James 1:17) His faithful love endures forever. (Psalm 136)

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)

What a special and kind gift this is from our God. While change is ever-present in our lives, our Jesus is faithful and constant. While uncertainty turns our hearts toward fear and despair, our Jesus remains the same, bringing us peace and calm assurance. While our world is filled with chaos and noise and destruction, our Jesus has conquered it all. When nothing else stays the same, our Jesus always does. It's simply who He is.

Jesus came down from heaven to our earth. He left the comfort of a place that is filled with all good things – no sin, no tears, and no pain. He entered into a world of hurt, discomfort, and constant change. Why?

**He did it for you and for me.** And now, while we remain on this earth, He offers to us Himself as our Constant. Will you accept this generous gift from Him?

WRITTEN BY

## CHLOE ROJAS

DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT DIRECTOR

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**ISAIAH 42:5-9** This is what God the Lord says—the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: "I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

"I am the Lord; that is My name! I will not yield My glory to another or My praise to idols. See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you."

**GALATIANS 3:7-9** Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the Gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

## • REFLECT •

The word **Advent** means "arrival or appearing." The Advent season before Christmas is a time to prepare our hearts for the great reminder of His first coming with anticipation of His second. In Isaiah 42:5-9, we see the Lord's promise to bring forth a Servant who would open the eyes of the blind and set the captives free.

What great anticipation has been set forth to give hope to the world! The Lord also reminds Israel that He has done in the past what He said He would do, which gives them the confidence to believe that a future Ruler is coming. The entire storyline of Old Testament Scripture points to the coming of **a promised Messiah**. Advent helps us stay focused well before Christmas arrives so we are not scrambling at the last minute to worship.

Galatians 3:7-9 reminds us that those who are in Christ are spiritual *children of Abraham*. The Gospel was announced to Abraham with the Good News that all who would believe in Christ would be saved — not just the Jew.

Advent brings our thoughts into proper alignment with the Gospel by giving us time to reflect during the four weeks before Christmas. So, let's prepare our hearts to worship the only One worthy of worship, our Lord Jesus Christ.

WRITTEN BY

MIKE MINTER
ASSOCIATE TEACHING PASTOR

# APPLY WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS? WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO I AM? WHAT PRACTICES ARE THERE TO EMULATE?



## **→→ READ ←**

**JOHN 1:14** The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

## **→→ REFLECT ←**

When the Apostle John says, *The Word* became flesh, he is referring to God taking on humanity through Jesus. People found it easy to disregard the message of an invisible God and continued in their sin and rebellion. So, the Message became flesh, took on human form, and came to dwell among us.

Talk about a game-changer! The event described is the most spectacular event in history. God — being completely **just, holy, infinite, sovereign, and loving** — clothed Himself in humanity and lived among us in the person of Jesus. Jesus lived as both God and man, fulfilling all the Old Testament prophecies. And He came full of grace and truth, meaning He came to make right what was wrong and to provide a way for humanity to be with God the Father. *Why?* Because of His great love for His creation. This is a foundational truth of the Christian faith: **God came to us so that we can experience Him.** 

As we go throughout this Christmas season, let it not be lost that God, Creator of the universe, came to *us*. He didn't pass on humanity. He didn't give up or ignore His people. But, in His love for His people, He extended grace by showing up. Let's be reminded of this amazing gift of Jesus that we have, and let's allow this truth to dwell in our hearts so that we will live as grateful people.

WRITTEN BY

**CHASE BAKER** 

**FAMILY PASTOR** 

→ APPLY ←
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message as something completely dark place, until the day dawns and the reliable, and you will do well to pay morning star rises in your hearts.

**2 PETER 1:19** We also have the prophetic attention to it, as to a light shining in a

### "REFLECT "

If 2 Peter was summed up in a word, it would be **remember.** As we prepare for Christmas, we are called to remember the miraculous incarnation of Jesus through the virgin birth. But, is that all? Today, let's meditate on 2 Peter 1:19.

- 1. Past So we have the prophetic word made more sure... In verses 16-18, Peter recounts Christ's transfiguration. Peter saw Jesus' divine radiance with his own eyes! Can you imagine that? How powerful! But Peter is not saying God's Word was made more powerful because of his experience. Actually, Peter is saying God's Word is even more powerful than his experience. In other words, the truth of God's Word does not rely on our experiences. Scripture alone is complete, permanent, and authoritative.
- 2. Present ...to which you do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place... Sin is dark. It blinds the world. Even Christians still have a fallen nature. If we become careless, sin will blind us, too. So, what do we do? Peter tells us to pay attention to the Scriptures. Remain in it. Study it. Meditate on it. Memorize it. It is the shining lamp of truth. It exposes sin. It drives out the dark. It crushes false doctrine. It makes us more like Jesus.
- 3. Future ...until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. Some prophecy in Scripture has not been fulfilled. Peter alludes to it here. The day dawning is the Day of the Lord. The morning star is Jesus (Rev. 22:16). Peter is talking about Jesus' second coming. In verse 19, he is saying Scripture is perfect, but our understanding of it is not. When Christ returns, however, three things will happen: We will be made like Christ (1 Jn. 3:1-2), we will have perfect knowledge (1 Cor. 13:8-10), and prophecy will be done away with (1 Cor. 13:8-10).

Now, back to our original question: is Christmas only about remembering Christ's birth? No. It's also about remembering His second coming. Jesus came first as a baby. He will come next as King and Judge. Let that truth encourage you today.

WRITTEN BY

## **ETHAN FOSSETT**

MINISTRY RESIDENT

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## READ ~

**GENESIS 15:1-6** After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision:

"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

But Abram said, "Sovereign Lord, what can You give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

Then the word of the Lord came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then He said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to Him as righteousness.

**PSALM 147:3-5** He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power; His understanding has no limit.

**HEBREWS 11:8-16** By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would

later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered Him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

## → REFLECT →

Have you ever won one of those "Guess How Many" contests? You see them at school carnivals. We've been known to do them a time or two in Family Ministry moments at Rolling Hills. It was even a fall object lesson in our curriculum this year. There is always that one kid (maybe it was you) who tries to count the bottom ring of the candy in question in order to multiply it by some number of rows in order to make the closest guess. Smart, right?

Imagine if the item to be guessed wasn't candy in a jar, but stars in the sky. According to NASA, there are likely more than 200 billion stars in our galaxy alone. When God instructed Abraham to look up and count the stars, He remarked, "If indeed you can." There is simply no way Abe could have completed the task. Even our most modern astronomy can only estimate. NASA also asserts that each one of those stars, including our sun, is billions of years old. Side note: imagine if one of the very same stars you've stared at and wished upon, is one that Abraham counted!

Consider the stars. Almighty God not only placed each one but knows them by name (Psalm 147:4). As numerous and named and loved as each of those stars are, the saints of God who, in Christ, are a shiny fulfillment of God's great promise to Abraham. In Jesus, we join however many billion other believers who have lived, are alive, and will one day be born and then born again. We can only guess (and we'd likely not come close) how many might know Him. Yet, God chose and loves each one. All because of Jesus. **All because of promise.** 

WRITTEN BY

## **NIC ALLEN**

NASHVILLE CAMPUS PASTOR

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**MATTHEW 1:1-17** This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:

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

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife, Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa, Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram, Jehoram the father of Uzziah, Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon

the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Akim, Akim the father of Elihud, Elihud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

**REVELATION 22:16** "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

## • REFLECT •

Matthew 1:1-17 states the genealogy of Christ Jesus. This is a passage that we tend to overlook because we do not believe that this is something that relates to us today. But, this passage is still Scripture, and there is a lot that we can take away!

First, the fact that Jesus has a genealogy at all shows that He was both God and man. The God of this universe came to this world as man, taking on all the limitations and struggles that we have to face. Therefore, Christ can empathize with those who follow Him. He loves us so much that He stepped down from heaven to take on the weight of our sins.

Second, in Jesus' time, women did not have a very significant role in the church. But, this didn't stop God from using them to advance His Kingdom. Ruth and

Rahab were both mentioned in His bloodline, acknowledging the role they played in God's story. With God, those whom the world considers unworthy are exalted.

Third, Matthew's inclusion of the genealogy of Jesus highlights the messianic prophecy He fulfilled. As Revelation 22:16 tells us, I, Jesus, have sent My angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star. The genealogy we're so tempted to overlook reveals that Jesus of Nazareth was a descendant of David. He is the bright Morning Star, God Almighty, our Messiah!

When we look at Jesus' bloodline, we don't see perfect people. We see people like us — *sinners*. They weren't all the most powerful; they weren't all religious elites. Yet, God used them and brought them into His story. **Just like He does with us**. How sweet is it to know we have a seat at His table this Christmas season.

WRITTEN BY

## **ASHLEY MORGAN**

MINISTRY RESIDENT

• APPLY •	
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## **≫ READ ⋘**

**EXODUS 3:1-15** Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."

When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then He said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of My people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached Me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am

sending you to Pharaoh to bring My people the Israelites out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

God said to Moses, "I Am who I Am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I Am has sent me to you.'"

God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you."

"This is My name forever, the name you shall call Me from generation to generation."

ACTS 2:1-4 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

## **→→ REFLECT ←**

One of my favorite Christmas traditions is driving as a family, while sipping on hot chocolate, to look at decorations. I especially enjoy lights that outline a roof line. Lights evenly spaced and attached to the edge of the roof really show off the beauty of the home. To be honest, the beauty makes me a little jealous. I wish our home had those lights.

In today's readings, we have the presence of God's Spirit manifesting as a flame of fire. It is amazing that the almighty, eternal, self-existing *I AM*, the Creator and Sustainer of all things appeared to Moses. Truly, the ground upon which Moses stood was holy ground. God saw, heard, and rescued His people in order to bring them to Himself for worship. God appeared in the burning bush, then as a pillar of fire, and at the close of Exodus, His glory filled the tabernacle.

This pointed to the amazing day of Pentecost when the Church was born. As a crowd of disciples gathered in an upper room waiting on Jesus' promise to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, tongues of fire appeared and rested on them. Each follower of Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit and became living tabernacles of God's presence. In an instant, they were empowered for worship, community, and ministry.

We, the Church, as the living tabernacle of God, display the presence, the holiness, and the beauty of God when we are connected together. On mission together, through inspired worship, in genuine community, and with passionate ministry, we can transform the world because of He who is in us. This season as we look at Christmas lights, let's be reminded of the light we have within. A light that **overcomes the darkness**. A light that **gives life** to mankind. A light that **represents God with us.** A light that creates a holy jealousy, causing others to desire what we have.

WRITTEN BY

## PATRICK HAMILTON

HAYWOOD HILLS CAMPUS PASTOR

→ APPLY ««
WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS?
WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO I AM?
WHAT PRACTICES ARE THERE TO EMULATE?



**Psalms 18:1-19** For the director of music. Of David the servant of the Lord. He sang to the Lord the words of this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. He said:

I love You, Lord, my strength.

The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

I called to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I have been saved from my enemies. The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me. The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me.

In my distress I called to the Lord: I cried to my God for help. From His temple He heard my voice; my cry came before Him, into His ears. The earth trembled and quaked, and the foundations of the mountains shook; they trembled because He was angry. Smoke rose from His nostrils; consuming fire came from His mouth, burning coals blazed out of it. He parted the heavens and came down: dark clouds were under His feet. He mounted the cherubim and flew; He soared on the wings of the wind. He made darkness His covering, His canopy around Him— the dark rain clouds of the sky. Out of the brightness of His presence clouds advanced, with hailstones and bolts of lightning. The Lord thundered from heaven: the voice of the Most High resounded. He shot His arrows and scattered the enemy, with great bolts of lightning He routed them. The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare at Your rebuke, Lord, at the blast of breath from Your nostrils.

He reached down from on high and took hold of me; He drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the Lord was my support. He brought me out into a spacious place; He rescued me because He delighted in me.

**Ephesians 5:8-17** For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said:

"Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

## "REFLECT "

He rescued me because He delighted in me. - Psalm 18:19

Christmas is busy, y'all. Between the packed calendars (school functions, family gatherings, work parties, etc.), gift giving for an ever-increasing list, decorating the house, planning menus for special dinners, and more... It's just a lot. **How do we find the time to remember Jesus?** 

Sometimes when I read Psalms and I see the word "enemy," I don't think of a human foe – I think of my busyness. In our reading today, we see the Lord furious at any enemy trying to harm His child. It says He literally parted the heavens and mounted the cherubim and flew to the rescue of His child. He wants to fight off any enemy.

And what if in this season, your enemy, like mine, is **busyness**? What if the packed schedules and unreasonable expectations are distracting you from Jesus? What if the Christmas "must dos" on your list are keeping you from the whole point of Christmas? Allow the Lord to fight off that enemy. Ask Him to help remove the unrealistic expectations you put on yourself.

Psalms 18:19 gives us such a beautiful and life-giving reminder: He rescued me because He delighted in me. He loves you. Not your full schedule, not your Pinterest-worthy holiday spread, not the perfect gift wrapping – you. Give Him you this season. Give Him your attention, your focus, your worship. He sent His Son, Jesus, to this earth because He delights in you. Take some time today to allow that truth to quiet your mind, to increase the joy in your heart, and to diminish the voices always saying we need more. He doesn't need more of your efforts; He wants more of your presence.

WRITTEN BY

JENNIFER AKERS

ASSOCIATE WORSHIP PASTOR

" APPLY :
WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS?
WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO I AM?
WHAT PRACTICES ARE THERE TO EMULATE?



## READ >

**Exodus 34:29-35** When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the Lord had given him on Mount Sinai.

When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the Lord.

Matthew 17:1-7 After six days Jesus took with Him Peter, James, and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If You wish, I will put up three shelters—one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to im!"

When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," He said. "Don't be afraid."

## **→ REFLECT →**

In the presence of God, Moses' face was radiant. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John saw that Jesus was not just an ordinary man. At the center of both of these Biblical accounts is God making Himself known. Because of the radiant light of God, normal, flawed humans were able to see and experience the power of God at work.

Throughout the Bible, God makes himself known in a myriad of ways. Not only through the still, small, gentle whispers, but also through the miracles that can only be described by Him. However, these experiences are not a world away but are available to me and you today. As we set our hearts and minds toward Christmas, may it never be lost on us that **Christmas is the greatest reminder of God making Himself known to the world.** 

Through the precious Christ child, we literally see God coming to us and showing us His power. By becoming a man, like us, Jesus identifies with us on every level. He is tempted, broken, and hurts; and yet, because He is not just a man, His power triumphs over death, resulting in us receiving life. God has always made His power known, and we can see it so clearly in this season if we are looking for Him.

WRITTEN BY

## **JASON HALE**

NOLENSVILLE CAMPUS PASTOR

◆ APPLY ◆
WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS?
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2 Corinthians 3:7-18 Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that brought condemnation was alorious, how much more alorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses,

who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord. the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

## • REFLECT •

We have all been in situations where we hear, I've got good news and bad news. Which do you want to hear first? Depending on your personality, you may always opt for the good news first. I lean towards wanting to hear the bad news first, so I can end on a more positive note. Sometimes, we have to hear the bad news first to appreciate and truly understand the good news.

In this passage, Paul gives us the bad news first, then the good news. The bad news is that the ways of the Old Covenant were glorious but temporary and led to death. The good news is that the ways of the New Covenant lead to eternal life and reconciliation **because of Jesus.** 

Verse 17 tells us that the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom. Christmas is not just a wonderful time of year for decorations and gifts. We can truly celebrate that through Jesus, **we have freedom.** This season, we celebrate not just the birth of a baby, but the arrival of a Savior who made the ultimate way for us to be with God.

WRITTEN BY
KENLEY TEIGE
KIDS PASTOR

* APPLI *
WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS?
WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO I AM?
WHAT PRACTICES ARE THERE TO EMULATE?



## **≫ READ** ≪

**Isaiah 60:1-3** "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the

peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and His glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

## → REFLECT ←

The flicker of lights for me started at an early age. In the mornings, my dad would turn the light switch on and off in my bedroom as fast as he could and would sing, "Happy face in the morning!" Well, we knew what that meant – it was time to get out of bed. Lights on, feet on the floor, time to wake up because the glory of the Lord is shining!

I think back to all the ways light has played a role in my life. The sun rising – it's a new day! Nightlights – give me a sense of comfort when it is dark. Stars – their twinkling brightens the night sky. Lightning bugs – means summer is here. Stage lights – oh, the show is about to begin! Candles – I love candles. It's crazy how one single flame of a candle can light up even the darkest room. And, there's Jesus. *He is the most important Light in my life.* 

God has called each of us to be light bearers. Are you letting your light shine? We live in such a troubled world that grows dimmer and darker every day. There are people who are lost, confused, sad, and broken. They are looking for peace, even just a glimmer of hope. Maybe it is someone at school, at work, your neighbor across the street, or just your friend. God can and will change lives through you as you shine His Light. "Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!"

WRITTEN BY

## JENNIFER MILLIGAN

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT TO SENIOR PASTOR

# **\*\*\* APPLY \*\*\*** WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS? WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO I AM? WHAT PRACTICES ARE THERE TO EMULATE?



**JOHN 12:46-50** "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in Me should stay in darkness.

"If anyone hears My words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for the one who rejects Me and does not accept My words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last

day. For I did not speak on My own, but the Father who sent Me commanded Me to say all that I have spoken. I know that His command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told Me to say."

**JOHN 14:6** Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

## ": REFLECT :

In a season of gift giving and receiving, it's so important to stop and remember the ultimate gift we have been given in God's Son, Jesus, and the hope of eternal life with Him. All throughout the year and all through Scripture we see reminders of the many ways that God's plan always had us in mind in offering us **true, unconditional love.** 

Today's verses describe Jesus as these four things: a **light**, the **way**, the **truth**, and the **life**. Often, our world looks so different from these things. We seek truth, hope, and light in the darkness. Jesus' words in our passage today remind us that *God's commands lead to eternal life* and that no one can come to that relationship with our Heavenly Father except through the Son.

We can't help but stop, rejoice, and say thanks! Despite our sin and despite our wandering, God made a clear way for us to know and follow Him. Our lives are forever changed because of this truth! Today, let's take some time to **stop and thank Jesus** for being the light in our dark world, the way to eternal life, the truth that we search for, and our abundant life!

WRITTEN BY

JENN HENDRICH
MIDDLE SCHOOL PASTOR

## ": APPLY : WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS? WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO I AM? WHAT PRACTICES ARE THERE TO EMULATE?



## → READ →

**JOHN 9:1-7** As He went along, He saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of Him who sent Me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

After saying this, He spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," He told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

**ACTS 26:12-18** "On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the

chief priests. About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

"Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?'

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of Me. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."

## **⇒** REFLECT < **⇒**

When reading the account of Jesus healing the blind man, it is interesting to see how the disciples see this man. The disciples' first inclination — as it was with most in that day — was to ask, Who's to blame? Whose fault is this? Is it the man's or his father's sin that caused this? They saw this situation as a riddle to be solved but showed no interest in actually helping him.

It's easy to point fingers at the disciples, but don't we do this, too? We see the homeless man on the corner and wonder what mistakes he made to get him to that spot, instead of looking for ways to help and show love. Jesus explains that his blindness is neither his nor his father's fault and then miraculously heals him. This man who had spent his entire life blind and begging now could see clearly. Not because he has sight — **but because he met Jesus.** 

In Acts 26, we see the story of Paul who was as *spiritually* blind, while the man Jesus had healed was physically blind. He had spent his adult life persecuting Christians. The life he lived before coming to Christ was one of being a highly-ranked official with power, money, and the approval of the most "important" people in culture.

When he met Jesus, everything changed. He had been blind, but now he could see, and for Paul, everything changed after that. He left his former life of power, money, and notoriety and sought one of being poor, persecuted, and powerless. Yet, for the first time in Paul's life, he had purpose. For Paul, to live was Christ and to die was gain. My prayer for each of us is that we will see clearly enough to seek a life not filled with prosperity but with purpose.

WRITTEN BY

## **BRANDON BILLUPS**

**COLLEGE & YOUNG ADULTS PASTOR** 

◆ APPLY ◆	
WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS?	
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WHAT PRACTICES ARE THERE TO EMULATE?	



**PROVERBS 4:18** The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.

**1 THESSALONIANS 5:5** You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.

1 PETER 2:9-10 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

## • REFLECT •

One of the features I love about cell phones is the flashlight! It's so convenient. Earlier this year, I was dining out with some family members, and we were in a very dark restaurant. So naturally, I pulled out my cell phone flashlight to read the menu. The light was bright. *Like, really bright!* One of my younger, more hip, and slightly embarrassed family members quickly educated me that I shouldn't be using the bright flashlight. Instead, I should turn my phone over and use the softer glow from the screen. Who knew a flashlight could be too bright?

In reading these three passages, the theme of light caught my attention. In Genesis 1:3, the spoken words of God create physical light to brighten a dark world. Light was the first thing He spoke into existence! From the very beginning, God never wanted us to be in darkness. Jesus says in John 8:12, I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life. Jesus brings spiritual light, and through Him, we are light bearers.

When we make Jesus both our Lord and Savior, the One who entered time and space as a baby in Bethlehem comes in and turns the light on, and life begins for us. We can be a part of bringing God's light to those who have hidden from Him. And unlike our cell phones, as believers, our light can never be too bright.

WRITTEN BY

LAURA CHAPMAN
CARE & CONNECTIONS PASTOR

# APPLY • WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS? WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO I AM? WHAT PRACTICES ARE THERE TO EMULATE?



## **≫ READ** ≪

MATTHEW 5:1-6 Now when Jesus ISAIAH 49:6-7 He says: "It is too small saw the crowds. He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, and He began to teach them.

He said:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek. for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

This is what the Lord says—the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel-to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: "Kings will see you and stand up, princes will see and bow down, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

## **→→ REFLECT ←**

The book of Isaiah is considered by many to be the "Fifth Gospel." Why? Because this prophetic, sometimes-obscure, Old Testament book points to Jesus, When God chose Abraham to father His people, He set a plan in motion by which the entire world could be redeemed. The Redeemer and Holy One of Israel, descending from the tribe of Judah, would be the means by which God reconciles nations - He would bear our sins and be despised by many.

Fast forward to the Sermon on the Mount and we see what implications this has for us today; these beatitudes describe a people who are looking forward to something eternal, something that can only be found in Jesus. As God's people, we are poor in spirit because we know there's a greater Kingdom ahead. We mourn for those who don't know Jesus, and our meekness strengthens our testimony to Him. We hunger and thirst for that which is only found in Him, and we show mercy to the poor and imprisoned. We strive for purity in all things, we make peace with others, and we suffer persecution on behalf of God.

When we grow closer to God, these characteristics will begin to shape our lives. What's the result? Salt and light. We are to bring salt and light to a world that is decaying in darkness. We recognize what God is doing through the Gospel and proclaim it on the hills to be a shining beacon for others to follow.

As we walk through this Advent season together, ask yourself how you can be salt and light. What can you be doing differently from the rest of the hustle and bustle of Christmas schedules and budgets? How can your time spent with loved ones point to Jesus, so they may know Him through the way you model godliness?

WRITTEN BY

## **JACOB THOMAS**

NOLENSVILLE STUDENT DIRECTOR

→ APPLY «
WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS?
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WHAT PRACTICES ARE THERE TO EMULATE?



**ISAIAH 9:1-7** Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past He humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future He will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered

the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over His kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

## : REFLECT:

Have you ever looked up the meaning of your name? Let me take a brief moment to brag that my name, *Matthew*, is derived from a Hebrew name which translates to *Gift of Yahweh*. My parents sure made an optimistic choice, and my momma would be the first to tell you I haven't always lived up to it! And yet, I am thankful for this name which I haven't chosen, because it represents my parents' intention for God to use my life to bless others.

As I read today's Scripture, I am drawn to the four names the prophet Isaiah uses to describe our Lord and Savior in verse 6. Our God is so beyond our comprehension that we need a multitude of names to even begin to grasp His nature. Each name reveals and reveres one picture of His greatness; yet, even as we shift our focus from one name to another, He remains fully each of them, **simultaneously and everywhere and always.** 

He is **Wonderful Counselor**. The same Jesus who calmed the storm in Mark 4:35-41 says, *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest* (Matthew 11:28). Jesus works supernatural miracles that command our wonder, and yet He's not too busy to advise us and console us in our personal struggles.

He is **Mighty God**, who nonetheless stepped down from the perfection of heaven to live amongst us in our sinful world, choosing to be born like His people in the lowly stature of a baby.

He is **Everlasting Father**, who created time itself, and knows and cares for us more deeply than the best of earthly fathers. He invites us into His Family; He protects and provides for us unconditionally.

He is **Prince of Peace**, who knows our troubles, and tells us, *Take heart, for I have overcome the world* (John 16:33). He offers us peace today, and He will bring the whole world to peace upon His second coming.

I was born with my name, but the Lord chose His, and He's always as advertised. The Lord is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. **That's His identity and His promise.** I pray that, in this Advent season, you will be in awe of all that He is.

WRITTEN BY

## MATTHEW MEYER

MINISTRY RESIDENT

·: APPLY :-
WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS?
WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO I AM?
WHAT PRACTICES ARE THERE TO EMULATE?



## READ ~

**Micah 7:8** Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light.

**Psalm 27:1-6** The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?

When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.

One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His temple. For in the day of trouble He will keep me safe in His dwelling; He will hide me in the shelter of His sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.

Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at His sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord.

## → REFLECT < → </p>

I don't know about you, but my favorite part of Christmastime is the twinkling lights. They're all around us this time of year; lining homes, adorning Christmas trees and garlands — adding whimsy and illumination to the dark winter nights. I love seeing those soft lights reflected into the eyes of the people I love the most as we walk the streets downtown or decorate the tree at home.

All those things are so magical and special to me, but the thing that I love most about the constant shimmers of light throughout this season is the reminder that Jesus, **the Light of the World,** was the One who sparked hope in a world that was desperate for this promise to be fulfilled.

I wonder, what are you desperate for right now? Are you desperate for healing in your family? Is there fear in your heart you're longing to be freed from? Is there a person in your life you miss so much it feels overwhelming? Does that desperation feel a lot like darkness? I know it does for me sometimes, but I also know the moments of deep darkness are the exact times when even just a flicker of light feels like a beacon.

Right in front of you now is a **promise**: a promise that the Lord is your stronghold, your salvation, your confidence, your safety, your shelter, and your light. My encouragement to you today is to allow your soul to sit with the Lord in His light.

Bask in the beauty of your King Jesus and let Him remind you that He is more than strong enough to carry what's weighing you down. Day by day, the darkness in your life will start to break and the Lord will turn the bitter things into sweet if you look toward the light of our King.

APPLY <</p>

WRITTEN BY

## KYNDAL KEARNS

CREATIVE PROJECT MANAGER & WORSHIP LEADER

HAT DO THE	SE PASSAGES	TEACH ME	ABOUT WHO G	OD IS?	
HAT DO THE	SE PASSAGES	TEACH ME	ABOUT WHO I	AM?	
HAT PRACTI	CES ARE THEF	RE TO EMUL	ATE?		



**MATTHEW 4:16** The people living in darkness have seen a great light.

## • REFLECT •

What does light do for darkness? It brings clarity, reveals things, and highlights a path. Jesus came to be the Light of the world! In the same way that Jesus came to be the Light for the world, He came to be the Light for you. When you find yourself needing clarity on a situation, turn to Jesus! He cares for you, and He came to bring light, or *clarity*, where you need it.

If you are faced with circumstances that seem out of your control, **Jesus will reveal a way**. He is trustworthy and compassionate, always at your side to make the impossible become possible. When you're unsure of which direction to go, Jesus illuminates the path. His Word tells us, *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path* (Psalm 119:105).

**Put your trust in Jesus**, and He will help guide you down the path He created, just for you. Jesus is the Light in the dark and the Hope to the hopeless, and darkness cannot overtake Him. May this Advent season richly bless you and remind you of the great light we have in Jesus.

WRITTEN BY

**CHRISSY HUFFMAN** 

NOLENSVILLE KIDS DIRECTOR & OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR

• APPLY •
WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS?
WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO I AM?
WHAT PRACTICES ARE THERE TO EMULATE?



## **≫ READ** ≪

**LUKE 1:5-25** In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous-to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

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

The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

When his time of service was completed, he returned home. After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days He has shown His favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

**MALACHI 3:1-4** "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before Me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty.

But who can endure the day of His coming? Who can stand when He appears? For He will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.

## **→ REFLECT** ← ←

God is doing miracles all around us, but often we write them off, citing them as happenstance. I encourage you to take a moment, close your eyes, and think deeply. What miracles has God done in your life that you are writing off? Could it be that a family member is now healed from disease and able to attend family Christmas? What about that friend you thought would never stop running from God, yet is now asking questions about faith? **These are miracles.** 

Considering the fast-paced lives most of us live, especially around Christmas, I believe it's vital to take time to sit and reflect on these miracles. In today's reading of Luke 1:5-25, Zechariah and Elizabeth are blessed with a son named John, who was righteous in God's eyes. They were both of old age, and Elizabeth was unable to conceive up to that point. John the Baptist turned into one of the most well-known Christians in Church history. What a miracle God did through an unexpected circumstance!

Both Zachariah and Elizabeth had given up hope of conceiving a son. But God wasn't done working. When Jesus comes back, I want Him to see me as someone who believed in His miracles. This Christmas, I am going to choose to see things through the lens of Jesus. As it says in Malachi, I want to endure the day of His coming and be able to stand when He appears. The miracle of Jesus' return could happen at any instant, and the last thing I want is to be worried about worldly things when **eternity is coming**. I want to be like Zachariah and Elizabeth. **I want to be on guard all my life.** Will you be?

WRITTEN BY

## SUTTON MAGEE

MINISTRY RESIDENT

→ APPLY ←	
WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS?	
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WHAT PRACTICES ARE THERE TO EMULATE?	



**LUKE 1:26-38** In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "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. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; His kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the

Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

**ISAIAH 7:14** Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel.

**DANIEL 7:13-14** "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

## :: REFLECT :

In the dark of night, the flame of a single candle can be seen from 1.6 miles away. Light is the mixing of red, blue, and green colors in the visible spectrum, while blackness is the absence of all three.

When looking at this moment in Mary's life, she is trying to comprehend how a virgin can have a child. The angel responds that "The Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be called holy-the Son of God." And she responded, "Let it be to me according to your word." In this instance, overshadow means "to cover with a cloud," and throughout Scripture, the cloud was a visible manifestation of the glory and presence of God. The birth of Jesus brought the physical manifestation of God - the Light of the world.

Think back to the story of Moses when the Israelites were fleeing Egypt. Exodus 13:21 says, The Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to lead them on their way during the day and in a pillar of fire to give them light at night so that they

could travel day or night. When we accept Jesus as our Savior, we are inviting Jesus, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit into our lives, to go before us and to lead our path. It's the presence of these Three that allows us to be lights in this dark world.

In this season of Advent, I encourage you to think about what it means to be a light to the world and how that can set us apart. Even the light of one small candle can make a huge difference.

WRITTEN BY

## LAURA ANNE HAYWOOD

COMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATE

	: APPLY:
WHAT DO T	HESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS?
WHAT DO T	HESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO I AM?
WHAT PRAC	CTICES ARE THERE TO EMULATE?



## READ -

**ISAIAH 11:1-9** A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

## → REFLECT <>

Lights are strung, trees are decorated, presents are wrapped, Christmas music is playing, and plans are made. Maybe you've been intentional this season to prepare your heart for the truth of Christmas, or perhaps you just happened to decide to start today. Wherever you are, know that **the hope of Christmas is for you**.

Take a few moments to read Isaiah 11:1-9. One of the many beautiful things about the Old Testament is we get a picture of Jesus before He ever came into the world. His story is present from the very beginning. We learn about His character, attributes, and promises... and therefore, we learn about hope, peace, and joy.

At first glance, this may not be the passage you would think fits into the story of Jesus' birth, but it's filled with the promise of who Jesus is and will always be. It's significant to note that Jesus is the "shoot" from Jesse's stump. Jesse was a simple farmer, but many years later, out of his line came Jesus. God uses the ordinary for extraordinary things! Jesus carries wisdom and understanding, strength and direction, justice and joy – and He is faithful. Jesus came to bring peace.

Take time to reread the passage, and this time, mark the words that tell us who Jesus is. You see, we can be reminded of who He was promised to be and who He is today. His birth was unassuming and simple, yet it was the promise of hope fulfilled. Jesus is the greatest gift to us. Wherever this Christmas season finds you, lean into Jesus and trust Him. **He brings hope, peace, and joy.** 

WRITTEN BY

**ANNA TOWNSEND** 

PRESCHOOL PASTOR

→ APPLY
WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS?
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LUKE 1:39-56 At that time Marv got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill His promises to her!"

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has been mindful of the

humble state of His servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed. for the Mighty One has done great things for me- holy is His name. His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as He promised our ancestors."

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

## • REFLECT •

What a passage! The main word that pops out to me here in this story is **humility**, especially the humility that exudes from Elizabeth and Mary. Elizabeth says in verse 43, Why am I so favored that you'd come to me? Mary says in verse 48, The Lord has been mindful of the humble state of His servant. Everything from that verse on starts with the recognition that He has done all of this.

What a lesson there is to learn from Mary. She realizes what an honor and blessing it is for us to be used by God and continuously points back to Him. How does that look for us? First, we must start with a humble heart and mind. We must remember **He is the One who gives us our gifts.** Whether it be a talent, a resource, time, or family, all these things are gifts. We realize we did absolutely nothing to earn them for ourselves, but for some reason, the Gift Giver has blessed us with them.

I believe the main reason we are given these is to point back to God and His goodness. Humility screams, It's not me, but, man, I am grateful God would allow me to be used in this way. Let us live today pointing back to God with every gift our Heavenly Father has given us.

WRITTEN BY

DAVID CURTIS
NOLENSVILLE WORSHIP
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APPLY

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WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS?
WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO I AM?
WHAT PRACTICES ARE THERE TO EMULATE?



## **→→ READ ←**

**ISAIAH 40:1-5** Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the

rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

**JOHN 1:6-9** There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

## → REFLECT ←

These words from the prophet Isaiah were originally spoken to the people of Israel. As a result of their continual disobedience, the Lord warned that destruction was coming and they would soon find themselves living as slaves and exiles in the land of their enemy. And though it was a punishment well deserved, we see the incredible grace of God on display as He speaks these tender words of comfort and hope. The enemy would come but would not ultimately prevail. God's grace and faithfulness would be greater still, and He would restore and bless His people in a way that would impact not just them but the whole world!

Fast forward roughly 700 years later to the life of John the Baptist, and we see the one Isaiah described as a voice in the wilderness who was sent to prepare the way for the Lord. His life and ministry serve as a sign that Jesus is Israel's long-awaited hope for redemption — **and our hope as well!** 

We might not be exiles in enemy territory, but without Christ, we are slaves in a spiritual sense to sin (Romans 6:16) and **equally in need of rescue**. As we celebrate Jesus' birth, we celebrate the miraculous way that God provided for our freedom, too! Through faith in Jesus' death and resurrection as the penalty for our sin, we are given the gift of eternity with Him. No longer bound by sin, we are set free to live a new kind of life as we follow Him. As we celebrate this Christmas Eve, may the words of Isaiah stir gratefulness in our hearts for the incredible goodness of God, who fulfills all His promises and provides **true comfort and hope to all** who trust in Him.

WRITTEN BY

## SARAH FEHL

FAMILY PASTOR ADMINISTRATOR & HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATE

## → APPLY ← WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS? WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO I AM? WHAT PRACTICES ARE THERE TO EMULATE?

## → DECEMBER 25 ◆

## ": READ :

**LUKE 2:1-20** 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.

JOB 19:25-27 I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

## :: REFLECT:

Every Christmas morning, my family gathers around in our Christmas PJs to read the Christmas story. When the kids were younger, we would begin by asking them to share the reason why we celebrate this day. Our youngest child, Carson, at age three was a hardcore lover of all things Christmas. All was well in his little world. In his excitement, he quickly jumped up and boldly answered, "Christmas is when Jesus died for us, and Santa raised him from the dead!" (Yikes!)

You see, he knew that there was something bigger to Christmas than presents, cookies, and carols. He knew there was a greater purpose — albeit he was very flawed in his theology! (Don't worry, we cleared this up.)

In all the years of reading from Luke 2 on Christmas morning, it never occurred to our family to look at Job 19. *I mean*, why would we go back to a man experiencing the depths of pain, illness, tragic loss, and despair prior to opening presents and eating cinnamon rolls? But, there is something eternal that we can learn from Job. Amid the most dire of circumstances, Job knew that his Redeemer lived... a Kinsman-Redeemer who would rescue him. He trusted that his relationship with God would be renewed. He anticipated what was to come.

Guess what, friend? **Your Redeemer lives!** Jesus, that baby born this precious day, is the One who lived a perfect life, died in your place, and was raised to life by God (not Santa) so that you could be rescued. So that you could be renewed. So that you could be restored. Maybe today you have an energy and excitement similar to Carson's, or maybe today your life looks a bit like Job's. Either way, you have a God who loves you so much, and you can have hope in what's to come. Let's celebrate that today.

## **Merry Christmas, my friends!**

WRITTEN BY

KATHY KOON

COUNSELING DIRECTOR

·: APPLY :
WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO GOD IS?
WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH ME ABOUT WHO I AM?
WHAT PRACTICES ARE THERE TO EMULATE?

→ NOTES →	→ NOTES →

