

The

25 DEVOTIONS

Indescribable

FOR ADVENT

Gift

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Introduction

Christmas comes every year with its enticing seasonal delights: the familiar strains of classic Christmas songs, the aroma of cookies wafting from the kitchen, the twinkle of festive lights, the excitement in the eyes of the very young, the anticipation of visits from out-of-town relatives and friends. All of these things are rich blessings, no doubt.

But for us as Christians, the best part of Advent is the opportunity it gives us to focus again on the indescribable gift of Jesus Christ to a sin-cursed and desperate world. This worldwide celebration began with wonder and amazement when the angelic messenger first told the lowly shepherds of “good news of great joy that will be for all people” (Lk. 2:10, *ESV*). Ever since the shepherds decided to go into Bethlehem to see what the angel was talking about, poor sinners around the world have dropped what they were doing to investigate more closely the gift of the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the manger.

This Advent devotional is an opportunity for you to do that as well by meditating on, and even memorizing, various scriptures. It will take you across the entire range of God’s Word to prepare your hearts to receive the Christ child in a new and fresh way. We are told in

Luke 2:19 that, after the birth of Christ, “Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.” The word “treasured” implies her gathering together and protecting the words and deeds she had experienced. The word “pondered” suggests her effort to harmonize infinitely complex ideas concerning the birth of the Son of God into the world. This one verse is a pattern for what I would love each of you to do throughout this Advent season.

May God bless your reading, memorizing, and meditating on his Word as you grow in your appreciation for the indescribable gift of Christ to a lost world.

Practical Guidance for Scripture Memorization

Scripture memorization may be new to you. If so, you are about to discover and develop one of the greatest practical disciplines for the building up of your mind and heart in the Christian faith. Every one of the twenty-five devotions that follow will recommend a daily verse to memorize. They will take you through the account of Christ’s birth in Luke 2:1-20 and the great prophecy of Christ in Isaiah 9:6-7. The idea is for you to work on these verses each day so that, by the end of the month, you can recite all of them. The theme of each day’s devotional is related to this key memory verse.

Why should you do this? Two great reasons are insights and intimacy with Christ. Insights come from going over the verses again and again, day after day. God will show you new details you have never seen before. Intimacy with Christ flows from the work of the Spirit and the Word in your heart; your affections will be kindled powerfully.

How to do it? Each day, I recommend reading aloud the verse to learn ten times, then covering it over and reciting it ten more times. From day two onwards, before learning the new verse, revise

yesterday's verse by saying it ten times and then recite all the verses you have learned up to that point once.

So, on December 1, you will read Luke 2:1 ten times; then cover it and recite it from memory ten times. Done for the day.

On December 2, you will recite yesterday's verse ten times (checking the wording as you need to). Next, read today's new verse (Luke 2:2) ten times, then recite it from memory ten times. Done for the day.

On December 3, you will recite yesterday's verse ten times, followed by everything you've learned so far (Luke 2:1-2) once. You will then learn today's new verse in the usual way (reading Luke 2:3 ten times aloud, covering and reciting it ten times). Done for the day.

In this way, move through all twenty-five days of December, learning a new verse each day, but also revising and reciting everything you've learned up to that point. So on December 25, you will revise Isaiah 9:7b from the day before, and recite Luke 2:1-20 and Isaiah 9:6-7b, before learning Isaiah 9:7c.

Then, for the next hundred days, I recommend you say Luke 2:1-20 and Isaiah 9:6-7 daily. This will take you up to the end of March.

After those hundred days, you can begin a new scripture memorization project by kissing Luke 2:1-20 and Isaiah 9:6-7 goodbye to free up time for new verses. For more practical help on scripture memorization, I have written a booklet I would commend to you: Andrew M. Davis, *How to Memorize Scripture for Life: From One Verse to Entire Books* (Crossway, 2024).

Luke 2:1-20

¹In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ²(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴So 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. ⁵He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷and 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.

⁸And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

¹⁵When 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.”

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Isaiah 9:6-7

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

DAY 1

Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus

“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.” Luke 2:1

“... the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith ...” Romans 16:25-26

Long before Jesus was born, he was the Promised One. Long before his Advent in “the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4, *ESV*), God’s chosen people were waiting for him. Long before Mary and Joseph made their journey to Bethlehem following Caesar’s decree, a remnant of godly Jews was expecting him.

Little by little, God had laid out some of the details of his plan through the Old Testament prophets. God’s perfect foreknowledge of the future is based on his absolute sovereignty over all creation. It was on this basis that he challenged the false gods of Isaiah’s day to a contest: “tell us what the future holds, so we may know you are gods”(Is. 41:23). Could they rival the Lord’s knowledge? God knew very well that he could win such a contest for two reasons: 1) he exists and they do not; 2) the demons that lurk behind false gods do not know the future any more than any other creature does.

Any predictions an angel, a demon, or a human might make rely upon God’s permission. If the Lord says, “It will not take place, it will not happen” (Is. 7:7), then that ends the matter. Almighty God sits enthroned above the circle of the earth and its people are like

grasshoppers in his sight (Is. 40:22). All our plans and projects are subject to his sovereign will.

On the other hand, from before the foundation of the universe, God has made a detailed and comprehensive plan for the salvation of sinners from every nation on earth. And no power in heaven or on earth can stop it. “This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations. For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?” (Is. 14:26-27). Central to that plan is the birth of his Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, “in the fullness of time,” that is, at exactly the right time in human history.

Knowing that plan, God wisely revealed it a little at a time. First, to the serpent in the Garden of Eden, God said the seed of the woman would come to crush his head (Gen. 3:15). Then, to Abraham, God promised that through his offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed (Gen. 22:18). Then, to Abraham’s grandson Jacob, the exact same promise: all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through his offspring (Gen. 28:14). Then, to Moses through the Law, the purpose of the birth of Christ—the atonement of sins by the shed blood of a lamb (Ex. 12:7). Then, to King David, the promise of the coming Son of David who will rule over a kingdom that will never end (2 Samuel 7:12-13). Then, through David’s Psalms, many specific details including that this Messiah will not only be David’s Lord but a Priestly King (Ps. 110:1, 4). Then, through Isaiah, that the virgin would be with child and give birth to a Son named Immanuel, “God with us,” and that he would be a “Mighty God” and the “Prince of Peace,” ruling on David’s throne forever (Is. 7:14; 9:6-7).

Beyond these few references, there are numerous others. God’s meticulous plan for the birth of Christ at Bethlehem following Caesar’s decree had been set in place and foretold over centuries.

Therefore, Jesus was long expected by all who believed the prophets—the faithful remnant of Jews waiting for God’s rescue and restoration of Israel.

As you make your way expectantly through this busy month of preparations for Christmas, let your heart be filled with gratitude at the fulfillment of the prophetic promises in the first Advent (coming) of Christ. Also fill your heart with great expectation for the glories yet to come when Jesus returns at his second Advent and rules over his perfect kingdom forever.



Scripture memory verse: Luke 2:1

(For help on how to learn the verse each day, see Introduction.)

Application to reflect upon:

As the Old Testament Jews long expected the first coming of Christ, let us Christians expect and set our hope fully on the second coming of Christ. Think a lot about heaven today!

DAY 2

The Decree of Caesar Augustus

“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.)” Luke 2:1-2

I can picture Caesar Augustus sitting in a lavish hall, wearing a purple robe of the highest quality and doing the work of a mighty emperor. He looks at a map of his vast domains, fantasizing about even greater glory for Rome. At the end of his life he would boast, “I found Rome a city of bricks and left it a city of marble.”

What new conquests would further his dreams, what new plunder could he draw from the distant provinces? He decided a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. His decree would register vast populations. Some, like Joseph, would be required to physically travel to their home cities and towns to pay their taxes. For that income was ultimately the point of the decree—that and to increase his knowledge of populations for the strategic positioning of his mighty but limited Legions. So he ordered the decree written on a scroll and he affixed his seal to it, putting it into law.

But behind his decision was the eternal purpose of God. As Peter would later pray about the joint decision of the Jewish leaders and Pontius Pilate to put Jesus to death, “They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen” (Acts 4:28).

God’s eternal decree preceded Caesar’s. It was prophesied by Micah around the time of Isaiah that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah (Mic. 5:2). Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth and would

have had no reason to make the arduous journey to the ancestral town of David except that Caesar Augustus had issued his decree.

With transportation and communication being what they were in the first century, it is likely that Caesar's decree was made before Jesus was even conceived by the Holy Spirit in the virgin's womb. The wheels of providence had to begin turning at just the right time to accomplish God's eternal plan. Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will" (ESV). God's purposes were as different from Caesar's as the heavens are higher than the earth: God desired the salvation of people from every tribe and language and people and nation; Caesar desired more wealth from taxes.

But in some ways their purposes were similar. Caesar wanted those resources to flow to the capital, to adorn that so-called "Eternal City" with marble and gold for Rome's greater glory. God wanted the gospel of Christ to ring out to the ends of the earth for the eternal glory of the heavenly New Jerusalem—adorned with living stones from all those peoples, the true "Eternal City" that will shine forever and ever.

God's ways are wonderful, his purposes perfect, his plans inscrutable. And God is still moving worldly rulers, the "Caesars" of today, to make decrees that seem to serve their own purposes but are really serving his—to the glory of Christ.



Scripture memory verse: Luke 2:2

(Remember to review yesterday's verse first—
see Introduction.)

Application to reflect upon:

Look at a newsfeed today about some troubled region of the world. Pray for those leaders involved. But also thank God that he is sovereign over all the decisions of the “movers and shakers” on earth.

DAY 3

The Spirit Knit Jesus Together

“And everyone went to their own town to register.” Luke 2:3

*“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s
womb.”* Psalm 139:13

The marvels of the incarnation began from the moment Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit inside Mary’s womb. The miracle was that twenty-three of the chromosomes necessary for his physical body to begin—the part ordinarily contributed by the father—were supplied by the Holy Spirit directly. Then the process of growth that unfolded must have been the same as a normal human baby, just as later it would be said that “Jesus grew ... in stature ...” (Lk. 2:52).

Those who study embryonic development can tell us the stages. At four weeks, the cluster of cells is about the size of a poppy seed. By the end of week five, the baby has a heart that beats 110 times per minute. By week six, blood cells develop and circulation begins—the origin of the very substance that Jesus would shed on the cross for our sins. By week seven, bones begin to form—the bones that God would protect on the cross. By the end of week eight, all the major organs and body systems are developing. Hands and feet take shape—the hands that would touch lepers and heal them; the feet that would walk on water.

By the end of the second month, Jesus’ forming body would have been almost one inch long. By week ten, ears have begun to form, the ears that would listen to the cries of blind Bartimaeus for healing. By the end of week twelve, all of Jesus’ organs, limbs, bones, and

muscles were present. The Word was becoming flesh; a body God was preparing for him.

Even as, step by step, Mary and Joseph made their way to Bethlehem “to register,” step by step the Spirit knit Jesus together inside Mary’s womb. That wondrous little body was the means by which the glory of God would most perfectly be displayed in this world of sin and death. Jesus’ body would extend God’s saving grace to suffering sinners.

“Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me’” (Heb. 10:5). And Jesus’ body would ultimately bring an end to the animal sacrificial system forever, the last bloody sacrifice God would ever accept.

Through all these microscopic steps the Spirit knit Jesus’ body together, just like every other human body he ever formed. But this body was infinitely different in its purpose and outcome!



Scripture memory verse: Luke 2:3

(Remember to first recite both verses you’ve learned up to this point—see Introduction.)

Application to reflect upon:

Ponder the mystery of birth, how every baby is specially formed inside its mother’s womb from conception. But also ponder how Jesus’ body was unique in all of history, having a human mother but no human father.