



Devotions

Advent 2005



The Bethlehem Candle

Second Sunday of Advent

Each day light two candles, repeating their names, and say together: "Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"

The Bethlehem Candle reminds us that Christ was born as a human baby in a specific place and at a specific time in history. Let us never forget that He is also eternal God.

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

*O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie;
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.*

*For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above;
While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars, together, proclaim the holy birth;
And praises sing to God the King, and peace to men on earth.*

*How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given:
So God imparts to human hearts the blessing of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.*

*O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel, Amen.*



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This is one of the few well-known Christmas carols by an American author. Phillip Brooks was the Pastor of a small church, and he composed the poem while sitting on a hillside overlooking Bethlehem. On his return home he wrote the poem down and then took it to his church organist, Lewis Redner, for the tune. Redner had a dream of the tune Christmas Eve night, 1868, and hurriedly arose from bed and wrote the melody which was presented in church the following day.

Sunday—Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:1-6

Bethlehem was a very little town, yet it was from this small place that the King came forth. Sometimes God calls us to a small place or an insignificant (we think) task. Let us be faithful in whatever place God has given us.

Micah is a small book known as one of the Minor Prophets (called minor because of size, not because of its message). However, here plainly 700 years before Christ's birth, is the specific prophecy about His birthplace. In Matthew 2:1-6 when the wise men went to Jerusalem seeking Christ's birthplace, the scribes and chief priests knew that Bethlehem was where Christ was to be born. But they did not go to see Him there. They did not act on the knowledge they had. How tragic if we know of God's Word and Christ's salvation and do not act on these things. Knowing about Christ is not nearly so important as, "going to Bethlehem to worship Him." How can we worship the Lord today? Let's be "doers of the Word" and worship and serve Him.

Monday—John 6:35, 47-51, & 58

In Hebrew the word "Bethlehem" means "House of Bread." The little town is set amid wheat fields, so this is a fitting name; but it is even more appropriate because Christ came to be our Bread of Life. What does it mean to know Christ as our Living Bread? It means He sustains, satisfies and fills our lives. Just as we have to eat every day to maintain life and to function well, we also need to spend time every day in prayer and study of God's Word. This is how our spirits are fed. It would be a tragedy to feed our bodies and not our souls (that inner part of us that makes us a person and able to know God). Think about how your body would feel if you only ate one meal a week. You would be mighty hungry in between, wouldn't you? You wouldn't have any energy or vitality. If we want to be alive in Christ and tell others about Him, we need to read the Bible and pray every day, so we don't starve spiritually.



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Tuesday—1 Samuel 16:1-13

This is the beautiful passage of Samuel's anointing of David to be King of Israel after Saul. Let us notice that Bethlehem was the town to which Samuel went to find David's family. We noted from Jesus' family line that He was a direct descendant of David; so when Mary and Joseph went to be registered, they went to Bethlehem, which was David's home so many centuries before. One of the most important events in history, the birth of Jesus Christ, happened in Bethlehem. Samuel was obedient and went to Bethlehem to anoint David.

Mary and Joseph were obedient and went to Bethlehem to register. We must be obedient in going to whatever place or situation in life God has called us. Children, think about how you can be obedient in your school work or in cheerfully doing what your parents ask. Adults, how do you obey in your attitude toward your job, your church, your home and family? Think of specific ways. Verse 4 says Samuel did what the Lord said. What does God want you to do? Are you going to obey?

Wednesday—Luke 1:5-25

The Bethlehem Candle is a symbol of the preparation made for the birth of Christ. For the next four days we will talk about the preparation in the months leading up to Christ's birth. Today's passage records the announcement to Zechariah and Elizabeth that they would have a son named John (v.13) who would prepare the way for Christ. There are several interesting things to note about this passage. Elizabeth and Zechariah had gone through life with no children at a time in history when not having children was thought to be a curse from God because of sin. Yet verse 6 says they both kept God's commands and were blameless. God had a special reason for the timing of John's birth. The angel of God appeared to Zechariah as he was going about his regular duties of serving God. What a reminder to us to be faithful in the tasks God gives us no matter what is going on in our lives. From the beginning, they knew John would have a special goal for his life. Verse 17 says he was to make the people ready for the Lord. We are all called to do the same—to prepare people we know to meet the Lord. To let Zechariah know that this was for real, the Lord made him speechless for the nine months until John was born. Let us remember that God speaks specifically to us through His Word.



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Thursday—Luke 1:26-38

After six months, God sent the angel, Gabriel, to Mary to announce that she would be the mother of Jesus. Note especially verses 30-35. Jesus is great, Son of the Highest (God Himself), and He reigns over all. There will be no end to His Kingdom.

We don't know what's going to happen in the future. Many times we can't even understand what's happening to us right now. God knows and can see all of history at the same time. There was no way Mary could fully comprehend all that would be involved in being Jesus' mother; but she was willing to do whatever God commanded. Look at what she says in verse 38. "Behold Thy handmaiden. Be it to me as you have said."

Our attitude should be immediate obedience to God's Word and praise to Him for who He is. How can we praise God by the way we live? Too often we are sour or untrusting or complaining in our attitudes toward what happens to us. We must examine our attitudes in the light of God's Word. When we think about God's sovereignty and His love for us, surely we will learn to trust His will for us. (Discuss what sovereignty means with your children.)

Friday—Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:39-53

Mary was betrothed to be married to a man named Joseph. In Jesus' day, betrothal was much more serious than engagement is today. Once a person was betrothed, although they did not yet live together as husband and wife, the only way out was divorce. According to Jewish law, Joseph could have had Mary stoned when it was discovered that she was pregnant before they were married, especially since he knew the child in her womb was not his. Imagine how hurt and confused Joseph must have been. So, God sent the angel to comfort him and to explain what was going on. The angel told him that Mary had not been unfaithful, but that this was a very special event never to be repeated. How good the Lord was to help Joseph during this hard time. We must remember that the Bible has the answers we need today for the hard questions of life.

After the angel visited her, Mary went to see her cousin, Elizabeth, and stayed with her for three months. Luke records Mary's song of praise to God. She was not praising herself, nor should we praise her. She was praising God for what He had done. Do our souls magnify the Lord and our spirits rejoice in God, our Salvation? What are some practical ways we can show this attitude in our every



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day lives? What difference does this attitude make as we prepare for Christmas? What are our priorities?

Saturday—Luke 1:57-80

Finally, John was born. It was customary in those days to name a first born son after his father. Elizabeth and Zechariah did a very un-Jewish thing in naming him John rather than Zechariah. They were following the angel's instructions. When Zechariah was finally allowed to speak again after so many months of silence, notice his first words, (v 64) He praised God and then (v 76) gave a special word to his eight-day-old baby. Zechariah knew from the beginning that John was chosen to prepare for the Lord's coming by preaching repentance and to give light to those in darkness. How happy Zechariah and Elizabeth must have been to have a son whom they knew had a special place in God's plan. Think about how special you are to God, how much He loves you, and what He expects of you.