

***Linger at the Manger:
The 12 Days of the Nativity***
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INTRODUCTION

One of my favorite things about Christmas are the Nativity Displays. I have a collection of them, and if they weren't such a challenge to dust, I might be tempted to display them all year long. Nativity scenes remind us of the real reason for the season: the celebration of Christ's birth. But in the busyness of all the fun activities during the Christmas season, it is easy to push the story of Christ's birth to the backburner.

This 12-day Bible study is a way to slow down during the hectic pace of Christmas merriment, to focus on the story of Christ's birth, taking the time to linger at the manger. Each day will focus on a piece that is found in a typical nativity scene. No partridges in a pear

tree with this 12 Days of Christmas, but a journey through the Biblical account of Christ's birth.

Besides a Scripture reading, and a devotional thought, each day includes a Christmas song to help focus your thoughts on the real meaning of Christmas. It goes deeper too, giving questions to ponder and a place for you to write your own prayer of response.

This study can be enjoyed in one of two ways: Beginning December 13, read one a day up until Christmas. The other option is to begin on the 1st Sunday in December (which is the first Sunday of Advent in 2019) and do three readings each week for the four weeks in Advent. This study could be done as a WM group, in your personal quiet time, or used with your family during the Christmas season.

For added fun, you could add a piece to the nativity with each reading and complete the entire nativity just in time for Christmas.

Christmas Carol to Ponder:

Watch the video of the song *Just Another Christmas* by Laura Story

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eM8WquiWH10>

Questions to Ponder:

- What are you hoping to get from lingering at the manger this Christmas season?
- When will you do the 12-day study? Schedule it on your calendar!
- What steps will you take to make this not just another Christmas?

My Prayer of Commitment:

Day 1: Mary – An Act of Surrender

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:26-38

Mary, a young Jewish woman, was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. She was probably between the ages of 12-14, because that was the age when girls got married. She had plans – plans of getting married to Joseph, living happily ever after, having children, growing old with Joseph. She had probably planned what she would cook for Joseph, what she would name their children, dreamed of what the future held. All of that changed when the angel appeared to her.

Although her plans and dreams more than likely included children, I can guarantee you they didn't include a birth announcement like this. Anytime God interrupts your plans it is only because He has a better idea. God didn't completely throw out Mary's dreams and plans but altered them. Yes, she would still be a wife and mother, but now she would be the mother of God's Son, and that would have impact on all the world for all history.

Mary's story teaches us about surrender. We surrender our dreams and agendas for what God has in store for us instead, even if this means leaving our comfort zone. God does the best work in us and through us when we are out of our comfort zone. Mary would have been comfortable just being Joseph's wife, having children the natural way, and simply living as a wife and mother who cared for her husband, kids and home. But God had a different plan.

Did Mary have a choice? Yes, because God gave us all freewill to choose whether we are going to follow God's will or our own. Mary could have said, "This is too complicated, too changing and it will interrupt my life... I can't do it." But she did not respond the way.

Mary had no idea how God's plan would play out. Mary had no idea what would happen to her son one day, but she stepped forward in faith and surrendered despite not having all the details. Like Mary, we won't have all the details, but we can trust Him. A surrendered life says, "God, I am going to trust you no matter what and leave the details up to you!"

Mary's believing response was to surrender herself to God as His willing servant. Mary's response was that she lived to do God's will. No arguments. No complaining. No worrying about what others would say. Just reckless abandon.

When God calls us to do something, we need to simply surrender, and say "Yes, God." When He calls us to follow Him, we say "Yes, God." When He calls us to do something uncomfortable, we say, "Yes, God."

Christmas Carol to Ponder:

Watch the video of the song *Born in Me (Mary)* by Francesca Battistelli

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOPHkvbdOpw>

Questions to Ponder:

- What plans do you have for this Christmas season?
- What is God asking you to surrender to Him this Christmas season?
- Will you be like Mary and say, "Yes, God" this Christmas?

My Prayer of Surrender:

Day 2: Mary – A Song of Worship

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:46-55

Mary is so important to the Christmas story, we can't just spend one day focusing on her. After her visit from the angel Gabriel, Mary immediately goes and visits her relative, Elizabeth, who also is surprisingly pregnant. Upon Mary's arrival, before she has even said anything about being pregnant, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped inside her. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, realizes that Mary's unborn child was special; she knows that Mary is carrying the Messiah. In response, Mary responds with praise and worship.

We call Mary's song '*The Magnificat*.' The word Magnificat is a Latin word which means "he, she, or it glorifies or magnifies." Put simply, the Magnificat is the response of Mary to the revelation that she was the one appointed to bear and bring forth the long-awaited and promised Messiah, God's only Son.

Mary acknowledges that God is a God of favor. Mary is humble and realizes she is just a peasant girl. She did nothing special for God to choose her. She is a recipient of God's grace (getting something she does not deserve) and mercy (not getting something she does deserve). She didn't deserve God's favor or earn this privilege. No, God chose her.

Mary acknowledges that God is a God of fairness. Although life is not fair, Mary realizes that God's system is different. Mary now knows that God is a God of justice. Mary sees their fortunes are being overturned. God turns human attitudes and the order of society upside down. He acts with power and scatters the prideful. They are dispersed, dethroned and deprived. And the needs of the poor, whether physical or spiritual, are now met by God.

Mary acknowledges that God is a God of faithfulness. To God, a promise is a promise; He is faithful to keep His promises. All throughout the Old Testament, God has made promises to Israel – His chosen people. Prophets told of the coming Messiah. Christmas is the story of a promise kept. Mary understood that God is faithful to His covenant.

Mary's faith was so strong, note verse 55, that she considered God's promise as done! A completed action! God said it; I believe it; that settles it! She believed in the promises of God – that He would send the Messiah. She also believed in the power of God – that God would DO what He has promised.

In the New King James Version, Mary sings, "My soul magnifies the Lord." The word "magnifies" here is the Greek word meaning literally to cause to grow, expand or swell up. Our love for God should cause our worship to expand, grow and swell up within us.

Christmas Carol to Ponder:

Watch the video of the song *Breath of Heaven* by Amy Grant

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8_475FKJWQ

Questions to Ponder:

- What does God's grace (getting something we don't deserve) and God's mercy (not getting something we do deserve) mean to you?
- What promises of God are you holding on to that He hasn't fulfilled yet?
- How will you incorporate worship into your day despite the busyness of the Christmas season?

My Prayer of Worship:

Day 3: Joseph – A Matter of Obedience

Scripture Reading: Matthew 1:18-25

Personally, I think Joseph gets overlooked in the Christmas story. Yes, it was Mary who was chosen to bear the Son of God, but she was not alone. She was engaged to be married to Joseph. Joseph had a choice to make.

I am sure that Joseph was devastated about the news of Mary's pregnancy. He could have lashed out in anger; he knew there was no way he could be the father. But he didn't. He could have disgraced her publicly; he had done nothing wrong. She had broken the law and could have been executed for it. But he didn't.

Joseph planned to divorce her quietly. He was a righteous man – he was faithful to the law; he wanted to do the right thing, for the right reason, in the right way. Engagements in this era was different than engagements today. Engagements were legal and binding, which usually happened about a year before the actual marriage. They basically needed a court order to do so. He showed his love, kindness and forgiveness, by trying to keep the situation as quiet as possible.

Author Lynn Cowell writes this about Joseph's considering: *"In this place where Joseph slowed down to deliberate, he made a space for God to speak. Here he could hear if he was to move, wait or get out of God's way."*

Joseph had his plan, but God had a different – a better – plan! With a visit by an angel of the Lord in a dream to Joseph. God intervened and put Joseph's mind at ease. First, Joseph is told ***do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife***. Then Joseph is assured that Mary had done nothing wrong. Her pregnancy was special, different: ***what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit*** (v. 20).

Joseph was told that Mary would have a son, and his name would be Jesus. Joseph was told of what Jesus' purpose would be: ***he will save his people from their sins (v. 21).*** Joseph is also told that this is a fulfillment of an Old Testament promise from God to the Jews.

When Joseph awoke from his dream, he had a new perspective on life. He was no longer filled with anxiety about the future, but with the expectation of what would take place. The key thing is Joseph obeyed and did what the angel had told him to do. He married Mary. He obeyed God and fulfilled the role God had planned for him as well – to serve as the husband of Mary and the earthly father of Jesus. Just like Mary, Joseph had a choice and Joseph obeyed the Lord, just as Mary did.

Christmas Carol to Ponder:

Watch the video of the song *A Strange Way to Save the World* by 4Him

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBCVIJBB7o4>

Questions to Ponder:

- How will you make time to slow down, and ponder and deliberate on what God might be saying to you today?
- What is God calling you to do that you are hesitating to obey?
- What act of obedience will you make today?

My Prayer of Obedience:

Day 4: Stable – An Ordinary Place

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:1-7

One would expect that the King of the Universe, Jesus, would be born in some place of significance and importance. But God does things differently. Jesus was not born in Jerusalem, Alexandria, Athens or Rome. Jesus was not born in any commercial, educational, political, or socially significant city of the day. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which was five to six miles southwest of Jerusalem.

Even though King David was from Bethlehem, it never grew to be a prominent or significant city. Three hundred years after David was born, a prophet Micah, mentions this little town of Bethlehem: ***But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times***” (Micah 5:2). This prophecy was spoken 700 years before Joseph and Mary would be required to journey to Bethlehem, at an inconvenient time (right before Mary was due to have her baby), for an inconvenient reason (to be counted in order to pay taxes).

Not only was Jesus born in an ordinary town, he was born in an ordinary place. Bethlehem was busier than usual due to the requirement of everyone returning to their family home, so any guests rooms were full. Joseph and Mary had no place to stay but ended up in a stable where she delivers her first-born child. A dirty, smell barn surrounded with ordinary animals. The only place she had to lay her newborn Son was in a manger, an ordinary wood box used for feeding animals.

This ordinary place teaches us some important lessons. First, it reminds us that God is a God who is faithful to keep His promises. He promised a ruler would come from Bethlehem, and Jesus was born there. What God says will happen, happens!

Secondly, we get a glimpse at how God in His sovereignty is ruling and overruling in our lives. God orchestrated that Jesus was born in Bethlehem (as was foretold) even though Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth. Only an omniscient (all-knowing) and omnipotent (all-powerful) God could arrange these details. We can trust the same is true for us today!

Finally, we see that God does things unexpectedly. ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord*** (Isaiah 55:8). God can take the ordinary thing and turn it into something extraordinary. He can use an ordinary person (you) and do something extraordinary through you. No place is too ordinary that God can't use it for His glory. No place is too insignificant for God. He can use any circumstance.

Christmas Carol to Ponder:

Watch the video of the song *Born in Bethlehem*, by Third Day

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Av7fPUem190>

Questions to Ponder:

- When has God spoken to you in an ordinary moment?
- What ordinary things in your life will you thank God for?
- What steps will you take to look for God in the ordinary activities of this Christmas season?

My Prayer for the Ordinary:

Day 5: Angel – Filled with Praise

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:8-14

Angels appear often in the Christmas story; we have already read about how Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her the news of her birth and also of the miraculous pregnancy of her relative Elizabeth (an angel had appeared to her husband, Zechariah, with that announcement (*see Luke 1:5-25*), Joseph had an encounter with an angel in a dream, and now an angel appears to shepherds who were living out their daily lives, tending and caring for sheep, with the wonderful birth announcement that the Savior had been born!

The angel was praising God for the joy the Savior would bring. When you think about the circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth, there isn't much to make you joyous. The census was a burden. It wasn't like the people traveling were taking a vacation. And what was the purpose of the census? For everyone to be counted and pay taxes!

Think about Mary and Joseph. Did you think they were ecstatic to welcome their first child into the world in a dirty barn, with smelly animals? No, there wasn't much to be joyful about. But then the angels burst forth with this proclamation of joy.

For 400 years there has been no talk of the coming Messiah who would free God's people. There is not much joy – the world seems dark and hopeless. It is a message of joy because the Savior, the Messiah, had been born!

The angel was praising God for the peace the Savior would bring. Peace has come. How can that be? Wars continue to wage all around us. Was the angel wrong? A "war" did end that first Christmas. The lyrics of the angelic choir are true. Their song heralded the end of a WAR that has lasted longer than any other conflict and has cost more lives than all others combined. Why, because when Jesus came into the world he came to die

on Calvary's cross. He ended the war that began when sin entered the world with Adam and Eve's disobedience.

The angel was praising God for the inclusivity the Savior would bring. All throughout the Old Testament, the focus is on God's chosen people – the Israelites. But God had something greater in mind; salvation is for all mankind. Not just these few folks in the field, and not just the Jews! It is for all people. This baby was born for everybody!

Christ's birth is something to celebrate. We can have joy because God sent His Son to be our Savior – the payment for our sins would be taken care of through Him. We can have peace – a restored relationship with God. No one is excluded. One simply needs to choose to accept this gift.

Christmas Carol to Ponder:

Watch the video of the song *Joy Has Dawned*, by Keith & Kristyn Getty

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wz5_g80q_NM

Questions to Ponder:

- Are you exhibiting joy because you know the real reason for this season in all that you do?
- What peace do you experience because of the birth of the Savior?
- How will you praise God today for His gift of salvation?

My Prayer of Praise:

Day 6: Shepherd – Share the News

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:8-20

The first people to hear the wonderful news of the birth of the Savior were common ordinary shepherds. Shepherds were looked down upon - they were despised by orthodox Jewish society because shepherds were unable to keep the details of the ceremonial law: they couldn't observe all the meticulous hand-washing and rules and regulations. In those days, shepherds were not permitted to testify in court. But God used some ordinary shepherds to be the first human witnesses that prophecy had been fulfilled and the Messiah had been born.

When the angel told the shepherds the good news, they could have said, "That's nice; now let's get back to watching our sleeping sheep." But they didn't. They truly listened to what the angel said and then talk about it. Together they decided that they had to respond to what they had heard and go and see this baby for themselves.

The shepherds acted purposefully. They said, "*Let's go... and see.*" They had a purpose for going. They acted immediately. "*They hurried off*" to Bethlehem. They were determined, undeviating, and non-procrastinating. They wanted to dash to Bethlehem, because they were in a hurry to see the newly born Savior. They didn't say, "Let's wait until morning." They didn't meander to get there, stopping for a bite to eat or catching a short nap. They acted quickly!

They acted searchingly. This is evident in the words "*and found*" (v. 16). In Greek, the word "found" implies searching in order to find or discover something of great value. The shepherds searched and found the most valuable thing - Christ Jesus!

As a result of acting without delay, their lives would never be the same. The shepherds returned to their sheep and to their work, undoubtedly as changed men. They returned to their old job but with a new attitude. They “*returned glorifying and praising God*” (v. 20). To glorify God means to magnify Him through praising His name and honoring His commandments.

These shepherds were common men living very common and ordinary lives and they went back to their sheep, their little lambs, to their occupations and undoubtedly also to their families, but they went back changed men: Now that they were changed men, it was important that they didn’t keep that change to themselves. They told their story (v. 17-18). That is witnessing in a nutshell - to simply tell others what a difference Christ has made in your life.

Christmas Carol to Ponder:

Watch the video of the song *We Have a Savior*, by Hillsong United

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRJVh9REbdM>

Questions to Ponder:

- Have you heard and responded to the Christmas message?
- What difference has Jesus made in your life?
- Who will you share your story of Jesus with during this Christmas season?

My Prayer of Testimony:

Day 7: Lamb – The Perfect Sacrifice

Scripture Reading: John 1:29-36

This is not a typical reading for the Christmas season, but John the Baptist has a vital part to the Christmas story (*see Luke 1:5-17, 57-66*). John the Baptist had a specific purpose and calling. He prepared the Jewish people for the arrival of Jesus as the Messiah. He always pointed people to Jesus. Two times in the span of two days (John 1:29, 35) John sees Jesus and points people to Him, and declares that Jesus is the Lamb of God! John knew that Jesus was the promised Messiah, who came to be a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

The Jewish people would know the significance of the lamb. Every year the Jews would celebrate the Passover, where they remembered when their ancestors were slaves and the night that they were delivered from Egypt. God told them to take the blood of a perfect lamb and paint it over their doorposts. The angel of death would pass over the homes that were covered by the blood, and the plague of death would not impact them (*see Exodus 12*). They were spared the loss of their firstborns in the house because of the blood.

The perfect lambs that were sacrificed for the sins of the people for centuries, would paint a picture of what Christ was sent to do. Christmas is about God sending our Savior, to die for our sins. Jesus is the Lamb that would be our substitute. The Christmas Manger points us to the Easter Cross.

Seven hundred years before Christ, Isaiah prophesied about Jesus being like a lamb. Isaiah uses sheep to teach us lessons about sacrifice. First, Isaiah describes us sinful humans as wayward sheep. ***We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all*** (Isaiah 53:6). In verses 4-6, Isaiah emphasizes that it was our pain and suffering he bore. It was for our transgressions and

iniquities that He died. Our waywardness deserved punishment. The author of Hebrews tells us that *the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness* (Hebrews 9:22). Us lost sheep, would need someone to pay the consequence for our sins.

Isaiah then speaks of Jesus being like a lamb in verse 7: *He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.* Jesus went willingly and without a fight to the cross. He surrendered to God's plan for Him to be our substitute, to be our perfect lamb of sacrifice. Jesus did not die as martyr; He died as a sacrifice. He laid His life down His life for His wayward sheep (John 10:11, 17-18).

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, the lamb without blemish. He served as our substitute. By His death, we can have life!

Christmas Carol to Ponder:

Watch the video of the song *Messiah* by Kari Jobe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmElIII-8Rg>

Questions to Ponder:

- What does Jesus being the Lamb who was our sacrifice mean to you?
- How will you show your thankfulness for His sacrifice during this Christmas season?
- Who can you tell about Christ's sacrifice for our sins to this Christmas?

My Prayer of Thankfulness for His Sacrifice:

Day 8: Donkey & Ox – An Unexpected King

Scripture Reading: Matthew 11:28-30, Matthew 21:1-11.

Now the Bible doesn't say what specific animals were in the stable when Jesus was born, but one can assume because of all the activity in Bethlehem, the stables would be just as full as the inns. Many nativity scenes often include a donkey and an ox, ordinary beasts of burden.

Although most people think of Mary riding a donkey into Bethlehem, the Bible does not mention a donkey in the Christmas story, but the Bible does tell us that Jesus rode a donkey. In Matthew 21:1-11, we see Jesus riding on a donkey as He entered into Jerusalem, days before He would give Himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Zechariah had mentioned a donkey in a prophecy about the Messiah: ***Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*** (Zechariah 9:9). What is unusual about this prophecy is that a king would usually ride a stallion. A horse was a symbol of power, but a donkey was the symbol of humility. The promised Messiah would be a different kind of King.

Now one doesn't usually think of a cow or ox when you think of the Christmas story. Jesus doesn't mention ox, but He does mention a piece of equipment that oxen would wear – a yoke – in Matthew 11:28-30.

A yoke is a wooden beam which is used between a pair of animals to allow them to pull a load. A farmer would place the heavy part of the yoke on the stronger ox, and the lighter part on the ox that is not quite as strong. It is also used metaphorically to refer to submission to a teacher.

The yoke Jesus offers is different than the yoke of servitude that the Jews were living under. The yoke is a picture of connection. A yoke is made for two not one. We were not meant to go through life living apart from God. His yoke fits well and is lighter than what we've been trying to do on our own. He invites us to come to Him and lay down our heavy burdens. He is inviting us to let Him do the heavy lifting.

The yoke that Christ offers is easy. The word "easy" in Greek, *chrestos*, means well fitting. The yoke was tailor-made to fit the ox. The Lord has a tailor-made program for you – it is not one size fits all. The yoke is not the burden; the yoke enables me to carry my burden.

The donkey and the ox reminds us that Jesus does things unexpectedly. He didn't fit the picture of what the Jews had in mind for the Messiah. They envisioned a conquering king who would come and defeat Rome and release the Jews from their bondage. Jesus was a different kind of king who came humbly with the desire to lighten and take away the burden of sin in our lives.

Christmas Carol to Ponder:

Watch the video of the song *How Many Kings* by Downhere

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTYe9sWYKdo>

Questions to Ponder:

- How have you seen the Lord working unexpectedly in your life during this study?
- What load have you been carrying that Jesus is asking you to give to Him?
- How can you show humility and gentleness to someone this week?

My Prayer for the Unexpected:

Day 9: Wise Man #1 - A Fixed Focus

Scripture Reading: Matthew 2:1-6

In Nativity scenes we arrange the wise men around the baby Jesus along with the shepherds and the angels. But as we read the Bible text the wise men did not arrive on the night of Jesus' birth – it was later. Matthew uses “house” and “child.” Based on Matthew 2:16, we can infer Jesus was probably anywhere from 12-24 months old when the wise men visited Jesus.

Before we go further, let's spend a few moments talking about who these men were. What do we really know about the wise men? We know they came from the east, but we don't really know where they came from.

How many of them were there and what kind of men were they? In the Second Century, a church father named Tertullian suggested that these men were kings because of the Old Testament had predicted that kings would come to worship Him. He also concluded that there were three kings based on the number of gifts mentioned.

We don't even really know that they were wise. In the original manuscripts they are called the “magi” which is from the word where we get “magician.” Magi was a term given to the wise men, professors and scholars of ancient Babylon. If you had a good knowledge of natural things - whether it be land, animals, the weather or the stars, you were known as Magi.

What we do know about these wise men is that they were focused on their search. They had followed a star in search of Jesus. We don't know exactly how far these men traveled, but it is speculated at least 500 to 1000 miles away. It was a long and difficult trip

across the desert. They really wanted to come and worship Jesus. They were focused; they were serious seekers.

Contrast them with the chief priests and teachers of the law (v. 3-6). They weren't interested at all. They didn't notice or care about the star. And they weren't willing to travel 6 miles down the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to check out what was happening. They knew the right answers. They just weren't willing to make the effort to see if what they had heard was true.

As Christmas rapidly approaches, what are you focusing on? Hebrews 12:1-2a tells us what we need to focus on: ***Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.***

Wise men and wise women still seek Him!

Christmas Carol to Ponder:

Watch the video of the song *Wise Men* by Allen Krehbiel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pppy7thsK08>

Questions to Ponder:

- Where has your focus been during this month of December?
- What have you missed because your misplaced focus?
- What steps will you take to fix your focus on Christ in these remaining days before Christmas?

My Prayer for Focus:

Day 10: Wise Man #2 – A Desire to Worship

Scripture Reading: Matthew 2:7-11

The wise men were focused on finding the Lord, and they wouldn't let anything distract them. These men had come all this way with one purpose in mind - worship the One who was born King of the Jews. They came to worship the Son of God.

They didn't just set out for a leisurely ride in the desert, show up in Jerusalem and say, "We heard something was going on in this area. What's happening? We saw some bright star and thought maybe it meant something. What do you think?" No! They were definite and they were certain. "Where is He? We have come to worship Him."

The wise men came to worship and a part of their worship included giving (v. 11). Giving is an act of worship! We can learn something from the gifts the Wise Men gave. These are not the typical gifts you would bring to a new mom. These weren't gifts of clothes and toys for the child. These gifts had significance. They acknowledge who Jesus is and what He will do in our lives.

The first gift was gold, which is a gift for a king. Jesus was and is the King. God deserves the very best we can give. Gold has always been one of the most valuable commodities on earth. Gold represents our best. We need to give Him our first and our best.

The second gift presented was frankincense, which was a gift for a priest, and is very fitting for Jesus, who is our priest that brings us to God. Frankincense was one of the four sweet scents compounded together to make the ceremonial incense of the Jews. It was used in both sacrifices and prayer. Its aroma was always present in the Temple grounds.

As such, is a picture of praise and worship of Christ as the Holy One of God come down in flesh among us. Praise is always appropriate on the lips of God's people. God deserves our joyous worship. Eugene Peterson paraphrases verse 10 in *The Message* this way, "**They could hardly contain themselves.**" Like the wise men, when we bow before Jesus, there should be so much joy we can hardly contain ourselves.

The last gift was the gift of myrrh. This was a fragrance that was used to anoint a body before burial, and John 19:39-40 records that it was used on Jesus at His death. This gift signifies Christ's coming: He had come to die for the sins of the world!

Myrrh represents the need for us to offer Him our lives because He was willing to die for us. When you die to self and follow Him, you demonstrate He is the king of your life.

Christmas Carol to Ponder:

Watch the video of the song *How Far* by Matt Redman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wx3jQ-i3idl>

Questions to Ponder:

- How have you made worship of Jesus a priority this Christmas?
- What gifts can you give to Jesus?
- How will you worship Him today?

My Prayer of Worship:

Day 11: Wise Man #3 – Hope for Everyone

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10

The fact that non-Jews could seek the Messiah reveals that Jesus isn't just the Jewish Messiah; He came for everyone.

Yes, God had called Abraham to leave His country and to journey to a land He would show him. God promised Abraham that through his descendants “***all peoples will be blessed through you***” (Genesis 12:3b). Through Abraham's family line, the promised Messiah would come.

Isaiah prophecies about the root of Jesse in chapter 11. ***A shoot will come from the stump of Jesse*** (v. 1). This is a symbol of hope – new life is dawning. This shoot would be different: not dependent on his own strength, but God's strength, He will be able to deal effectively with the practical issues of ruling, he will judge with righteousness and faithfulness, and he will bring peace. Verse 6 says, “***and a little child will lead them.***” Isaiah has mentioned a child before (Isaiah 7:14, 9:6).

In verse 10 we see that the hope this shoot will bring is for all people: ***In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.*** He will be a banner of hope to the people.

Isaiah goes on to say in chapter 60, ***Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn*** (v. 3). The Messiah would bring hope for all nations – Jew and Gentile alike. With the visit of the wise men, we see other nations being drawn to His light; they had “***seen his star when it rose and have come to worship him***” (Matthew 2:2).

The Messiah would not only bring hope, He indeed would be our hope. Paul writes that Jesus Christ is our hope (1 Timothy 1:1) and He is our blessed hope (Titus 2:13).

Paul quotes Isaiah 11:10 in his letter to the Romans: ***And again, Isaiah says, “The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope.” May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit*** (Romans 15:12-13).

How does He bring hope, especially to the Gentile (the non-Jew)? Paul explains it in his letter to the Ephesians: ***Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ*** (Ephesians 2:12-13).

All were separated from God because of sin, but through Christ, we all can be reconciled and reconnected with God.

Christmas Carol to Ponder:

Watch the video of the song *Hope for Everyone* by Matt Maher

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tet7m0A7Yd0>

Questions to Ponder:

- How does the fact Jesus is for everyone encourage you?
- How has the Lord brought hope into your life this Christmas?
- Who do you know that needs some hope right now? How will you share the hope of Jesus with them?

My Prayer of Hope:

Day 12 – Jesus in the Manger – The Greatest Gift

Scripture Reading: John 3:16-18

Think back to last Christmas. What gifts did you get? Can you remember? Some of you might be able to. Try this – think back 5 years, what did you receive? You probably can't remember. The truth about Christmas is that only one gift matters. Sweaters, toys, jewelry, and any other gift that you may receive on Christmas morning doesn't compare to the true gift of Christmas: Jesus Christ.

Luke 2:10-11 tells what the best gift ever given is: ***But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.*** A gift usually has a tag on it to tell you to whom the gift is given. God's gift – Jesus – has your name on it!

Gifts are usually wrapped in beautiful paper, tied with a bow. God wrapped His gift to us as well. Our gift was wrapped in human flesh. John 1:14 proclaims: ***The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father full of grace and truth.***

What is the content of this gift? ***A Savior; He is Christ the Lord.*** Both Mary and Joseph were told to name this baby, Jesus which was an ordinary and common name in that time. The name means "The Lord is Salvation."

The angel used three names to identify God's gift to the world. First was "Savior," a Hebrew word meaning rescuer, then "Christ", a Greek word for "the anointed one, the chosen one." The third was a word used by Greek-speaking Hebrews to refer to God Himself. Jesus was to be the rescuer, the anointed One, God Himself.

Unlike other gifts that get broken, are out grown, and become out dated, this gift of God is eternal. Romans 6:23, begins with the bad news that ***the wages of sin is death***, but it concludes with fabulous news: ***but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

The words of one Christmas card stated, “If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent an economist. If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer. But our greatest need was forgiveness, so He sent us a Savior.”

Christmas Carol to Ponder:

Watch the video of the song *He is the Gift*, by Shawna Belt Edwards

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZ4JA3YZCj0>

Questions to Ponder:

- How is Jesus the best gift you could ever receive?
- What gifts has Jesus given you this Christmas, during this study?
- How will you remember the gift of Christmas in the coming New Year?

My Prayer of Celebration: