



# Jesus: Predicted, Presented, Proclaimed

## Advent Study

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### Day 1

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**Read: Genesis 3**

#### Introduction

It had been a wretched day. The man and woman used to walk together with God in the cool of the day, in Eden. But that close relationship was ruined now. The woman had been deceived by a serpent, an Eden-creature, and she and the man had stepped into sin. Everything had fallen apart. They no longer trusted each other; they didn't even know who they were any more. And the worst thing was that they were being sent out of Eden, the perfect place to be with God. Sin had taken hold of them, and they had exchanged the truth of God for a lie (see Romans 1:21-25). It was over.

There would now be great difficulty within all of creation, which was to be "subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it." It would be longing to be "set free from its bondage to corruption" (Romans 8:19-21). Nevertheless, before the man and woman walked out of Eden, God made what turned out to be an amazing promise. As He was explaining the results of the disintegration of their relationships, He said something to the serpent, (the Eden-creature who had started all the trouble), "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (v.15). And, it would happen through the seed of a woman (see Galatians 4:4).

It was an obscure promise to the man and woman, but it has been called the *proto-evangel*, or the first mention of the gospel. It also may seem obscure to us at first. But listen! Do you hear God's voice? He is promising that He will do something about the great chasm that has appeared between Himself and mankind. This wonderful promise becomes clearer as we read on in the Scriptures.

*R&D In Genesis 3:14-19, God pronounces two curses. On what or whom are they imposed? Can you see evidence of this today?*

*Prayer: Dear Lord, even when Your promises seem obscure to me, please help me remember Your faithfulness.*

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### Day 2

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**Read: Genesis 12**

#### The Seed-Line Continues

A seed-line is being created. The thread continues, and now, in Genesis 12, God narrows it down a bit. He has called Abram to leave the country of Ur of the Chaldeans, leaving his kindred and his father's house, to go to a land that He would show him. God promised Abram that He would make him a great nation, that he would have the land there, and that he would be greatly blessed. Blessed to *be* a blessing to the whole world. In a huge step of faith, Abram went, although

he took his family and possessions with him, hedging his bets a bit. On the way, Abram worshiped God.

God told Abram that his offspring would be as the stars in the sky. Abram believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. The problem was that Abram had no children, and his wife Sarai was barren. Yet God performed an unbreakable, everlasting blood covenant. He promised that the heir would be a son from Abram's own loins. After Abram and Sarai tried to "help God out" by producing a son by Sarai's maid Hagar, God promised it would be a son through Sarai. An heir would come from that very seed-line that God was making. A son of *promise*.

By the time we get to Genesis 17, God promises, "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an *everlasting covenant* to be God to you and to your offspring after you" (17:7). The offspring of Abram (now called Abraham) by Sarai (Sarah) was a son of the promise, Isaac (17:19). The seed-line continued through Jacob (Numbers 24:17) who became father of twelve sons, the nation of Israel. And through the tribe of Judah would come the Promised Son. As Jacob blessed his sons, he said, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until he comes to whom it belongs (Genesis 49:10). In Galatians 3:16, we read, "The promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring (his seed), who is Christ." Promise fulfilled!

*R&D When you see how the seed-line was established and carried on through the years, what are some of your thoughts about the attributes of God?*

*Prayer: Lord, help me believe that You are working all the time, even when I can't see it.*

### Day 3

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**Read: Numbers 22:1-6, 24:15-19**

#### "I See a Star"

There are times in the Scriptures where God uses unusual people to give a prophetic word, even if the person's intent is less than pure. This was the case with Balaam, son of Beor. Israel had already defeated Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, the king of Bashan, in battle. Balak, the son of Zippor, was king of Moab at the time, and he was more than a little nervous. He reckoned that he was next. So he sent some of his men to summon Balaam. Their mission? To call Balaam to curse the Israelites, so that Balak might defeat them.

But God had other plans. He can speak through anyone—even a donkey (22:28-30). After a few discussions, God's messenger told Balaam, "Go with the men, but speak only the word that I tell you" (22:35). The results of this were a series of four blessings upon Israel. The apostle Peter later explained that there are always those who forsake the right way and go astray, following "the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing" (2 Peter 2:15-16). But no one can outwit Almighty God. Balaam had to speak what he had heard. In today's reading, Balaam's final oracle was this: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab...And one from Jacob shall exercise dominion and destroy the survivors of cities!" The Light was predicted, and darkness could not overcome it.

In Matthew's Gospel, three magi from the East asked, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him" (Matthew 2:2). The "bright morning star" was coming (see Revelation 22:16).

R&D *Do you ever look at the stars and imagine what it must have been like to see “the” star, just as the magi saw it? If so, can you describe how you felt?*

Prayer: *Almighty God, creator of all things seen and unseen, please expand my horizons and help me listen for Your voice through all of creation.*

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#### Day 4

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**Read: Isaiah 7:1-15**

#### Born of a Virgin

At the time that Isaiah was called by God to prophesy to the southern kingdom of Judah, the northern kingdom of Israel was very involved in pagan worship. It would soon be taken into captivity by the Assyrians. Judah was close behind, although they at least performed the rituals of their faith outwardly. Still, immorality and lack of true worship were rampant. Ahaz, king of Judah, did not do what was right in God’s eyes. And he was frightened about a coming invasion. God sent Isaiah to Ahaz to tell him not to fear, and that God would be with Judah to protect them, even though He was still not pleased with their lack of heart worship. He said to Ahaz, “If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all” (v.9b).

God told him to ask for a sign, but Ahaz refused, as if to say, “I keep all the rules, I connect all the dots, and I will not put the Lord to the test.” The reply to Ahaz was, “Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (v.14).

How could Isaiah know about a virgin bearing a son more than 700 years before Jesus was born? Read Isaiah 6. And what about all those names? Isaiah’s very name means “Yahweh is salvation.” Immanuel is translated “God with us,” a description of the coming one, whose name means “Yahweh saves”—Jesus, the name above all names!

Hundreds of years later, a young Jewish girl named Mary, who loved God and listened to Him, was visited by the angel Gabriel. He announced that she had found favor with God, and that she would bear a son. As a virgin, she wondered how that would happen. Gabriel said, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). And Mary gave the second-greatest “Yes” in history!

R&D *Ahaz didn’t trust the power of the Most High. Mary did. Recall a time when you had to trust God with something beyond your capacity to do. What happened?*

Prayer: *Father, please help me develop a willing heart like Mary’s, even when things don’t seem possible, and keep me from doubting You as Ahaz did.*

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#### Day 5

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**Read: Micah 5:1-5a**

#### Bethlehem

Mary and Joseph were traveling the arduous journey to Bethlehem, the city of David, to be registered in their home town. It would be there that the Jesus, the son of promise, would be born as foretold by the prophet Micah. “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah...from you shall come forth to

me one to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days” (v.2). Bethlehem—*Beth lechem*, translated “house of bread,” was where the Bread of Life took on human flesh, born of woman, born under the law (see Galatians 4:4).

We sing of it at Christmas time: “All the hopes and fears of *so* many years are met *in thee* tonight.” On a hillside, the holy birth is announced by angels to lowly shepherds—the “good news of great joy” (Luke 2:9), the one who was to “stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, and in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God” (v.4).

“While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love. How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given.” No trumpets blasting, no band playing, no royal palace. Isn’t it amazing that mankind always seems to sleep while God works out His amazing plan for all people? For all of creation? When Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane and said “Yes” to his Father, the disciples slept (Luke 22:42-46). When God went into the Sacred *Beryth*, or blood covenant between man and God, Abraham slept (Genesis 15:12). God works. We enter His Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4:9-10). “Where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.”

*R&D Bethlehem was a very small town in the district of Ephrathah, yet both David and Jesus, the “Son of David” were born there. What qualities of God does this suggest?*

*Prayer: Almighty God, teach me that even the smallest of talents are not a barrier to You and that You will use any effort given in love, that Christ may be seen through it.*

## Day 6

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**Read: Isaiah 9:1-7**

### Hope

Israel was in a sorry state. During many years of prosperity, the people had slowly drifted away from their worship of the one true God. Immorality was rampant. They oppressed the poor and neglected the orphans. They consulted mediums. Illicit sexual activity and other carnal pleasures were being pursued. The covenant that had been reaffirmed on the plains of Moab (Deuteronomy 30:11-20) was all but forgotten.

It was in this context that God warned Isaiah not to walk in the way of the people but to honor God as holy and to wait for Him (8:11-15). Isaiah was to both warn the people and to encourage them—a task that could only be done in God’s power. He spoke to a rebellious people whose hearts were dull. But God is so gracious! He already knew what He was going to do. Hard times were upon them, but there was hope foreseen. A light was coming to the people who were walking in darkness (v.2).

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given” (v.6). *This* one would govern; *this* one would be sovereign. His government would be endless. His peace would be lasting! His name would be “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (v.6b). Such wonderful grace! Such marvelous hope!

Today, many are in the same “sorry state” we read about in Isaiah’s time. Even in these difficult times, God’s people have the same dual responsibility as he did. We are to honor God as holy and walk in His ways faithfully. The Prince of Peace has come. The Wonderful Counselor is with us—Immanuel. Yet many are those who still walk in darkness. They need to see the “great light.” So, “Let us *hold fast the confession of our hope* without wavering, for he who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23).

R&D *Do you see parallels between God's people of Isaiah's time and His people today? Explain.*

Prayer: *Lord, I ask that You tune my heart to Yours that I may walk in Your ways so that others see Jesus.*

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### Day 7

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**Read: Isaiah 42:1-9, 49:1-7**

#### My Servant

In today's reading, Isaiah is speaking of the coming of God's "servant" as if it has already happened. Remember that, in Isaiah 6, Isaiah had *seen* the Lord "high and lifted up." Now, he is speaking of him with passion as the one who would come as Savior. From the time of the promises of God to Abraham, God's intention was to provide a land, a nation, and blessing. Now, it becomes clearer that Israel was also blessed *to be* a blessing (see Genesis 12:1-2, 15:5-6).

God's intention has never changed. It has always been to call a people to be His own from *all* the nations of the world. Israel was to be a light amidst the Gentiles (the nations) so that they, too, could see God and come to Him. God was declaring a new thing (42:9b). *The Message* says it this way: "But that's not a big enough job for my servant, just to recover the tribes of Jacob, merely to round up the strays of Israel. I'm setting you up as a light for the nations so that my salvation becomes global!"

Jesus came "as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness" (42:6-7). When John the Baptist was in prison, he sent his disciples to Jesus and asked, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them" (Matthew 11:3-5).

May we all be quick of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken (see Luke 24:25).

R&D *Do you see any similarity between how much of Israel tended to keep God to themselves and how a large part of the Church of today does the same thing? How can we develop the conviction that God's salvation is global?*

Prayer: *Lord, I want to see that Your plan is to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth. Open my eyes to this (see Ephesians 1:10).*

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### Day 8

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**Read: Isaiah 53**

#### At the Cross

Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Man, the Wonderful Counselor and Prince of Peace, went to the cross on Calvary's hill at the expressed will of his Father. The one who had healed many and loved all, became despised and rejected (v.3), experiencing the ultimate grief of being forsaken by his Father, with whom he had been one from all eternity (see Mark 15:34). The sinless one—the author of life—died. In *our place*. Wounded for *our* transgressions; crushed for *our* iniquities (v.5).

He was mocked and insulted (Psalm 22:6-7), yet he said not a word, as a sheep before its shearers is silent (v.7b). He allowed his blood to flow, his side to be pierced, his body to be beaten.

“Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted” (v.4). He was stripped of his robe, and they cast lots for his clothing (see Psalm 22:18; Mark 15:24). While being scourged, he was stripped of much of his flesh, also, if you will, and the Lord laid *all* the world’s sin upon him. “For our sake, God made him to *be* sin, so that *in him* we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). He didn’t just carry our sins—he *became* sin! Ugly, deceitful, horrible, murderous sin died at the cross. And those *in him* can now walk in the light of the Lord’s righteousness—forgiven, saved, and redeemed!

“Our transgressions were as a yoke around our necks” (Lamentations 1:14). Yet the one who died for us, *as us*, broke that yoke. Now he calls us saying, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take *my* yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For *my* yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:18-30).

*R&D It is important to stop and meditate on what Jesus has accomplished. What verses in today’s reading pierce your heart the most? Why?*

*Prayer: Jesus, as I grow to know you more, help me see the depth of your love and the perfection of your sacrifice shown at the cross.*

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## Day 9

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**Read: Luke 2:21-40**

### Pondering

“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:4). The one who had been promised by the prophets, the Son “who was descended from David according to the flesh” (Romans 1:3), had arrived.

“At the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus” (v.21). “Then when the days stipulated by Moses for purification were complete, they took him up to Jerusalem to offer him to God as commanded in God’s Law: ‘Every male who opens the womb shall be a holy offering to God,’ and also to sacrifice the ‘pair of doves or two young pigeons’ prescribed in God’s law” (vv.22-24, *The Message*). Later in his life, he will consent to the baptism of John in the River Jordan, telling him, “It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15).

While at the temple, Mary and Joseph presented their infant Jesus to the Lord, and an amazing thing happened. A righteous and devout man named Simeon approached them. He had been waiting for the “consolation of Israel” for many years. The Holy Spirit had told him that one day, before he died, he would see the Lord’s Christ. He took the child in his arms “and blessed God and said, ‘Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace...for my eyes have seen your salvation’...and he told Mary, ‘a sword will pierce your own soul also’” (vv.28-30, 35).

What might Mary have thought when Simeon took her child? What could she have thought when he said that Jesus would cause many to rise and fall in Israel, and that the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed (vv.34-35)? It was still another prophetic word. And Mary might not have understood, but she continued to ponder and treasure these things in her heart (Luke 2:19, 51). One day she would understand.

R&D *When we have God the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of us, we begin to increasingly get glimpses of what God is doing. How do you acquire more insight?*

Prayer: *Father, when I don't quite "get it", I thank You for Your patience. Help me to listen.*

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## Day 10

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**Read: Matthew 3**

### Jesus' Baptism

Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist, had been preaching by the River Jordan, calling the people of Israel to repent and confess their sins. He wanted them to be cleansed and prepared for the coming of the kingdom of God. His voice thundered in the Judean wilderness. He even warned the Pharisees and Sadducees, saying that if they were *truly* repentant, they would be showing it by the way they lived their lives. He was the one Isaiah had spoken of—one who would come to prepare the way of the Lord (Isaiah 40:3).

John was unprepared to see Jesus wading toward him, ready to be baptized. He said, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus answered the way he had been taught all his youth by his earthly parents, and by his Father in heaven: "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

After he came out of the water, the Spirit of God descended upon him from heaven, like a dove, and the Father's voice spoke, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (v.17). The Trinity was working together as always: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The king had arrived! Can you imagine how John must have felt? God had told him to baptize with water, telling John that he would recognize the one who came to baptize with the Holy Spirit (John 1:33-34). The one who came to soak his followers, inside and out, with the Holy Spirit. The Son of God had arrived!

Of course, Jesus had no need to repent. Nevertheless, we do. Repentance, *metanoeo* in Greek ("to think again"), involves a decision of the mind to change course—realizing that we're going in the wrong direction and must change. The people who came to the Jordan and were baptized by John were convicted of their sin and fully intended to change. They would soon learn that it is only through the cross-work of Jesus Christ that real change is possible.

R&D *Have you ever known you were to change a certain behavior or way of thinking and resisted that change? If so, how did you deal with it?*

Prayer: *Dear Lord, is there a certain area of my life that I need to change today?*

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## Day 11

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**Read: Luke 4:1-13**

### Desert Temptations

After his baptism, and filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. Mark's Gospel says the Spirit *drove* him to go there. It was to be a time of testing. Jesus was there forty days and nights with no food. The devil appealed *first* to his flesh: If you're the Son of God, and if you're hungry, just turn these stones into bread. Jesus answered, "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4).

The *second* test: Appeal to what he sees. “I’ll give you all the things, all the glory, all the kingdoms of the world, if you’ll just worship me, and it’s all yours.” Jesus said, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve” (Matthew 4:8). Another successful resistance.

Test number *three*: Here the devil even quotes Scripture, as he appeals to the pride of life. The devil put Jesus on top of the temple and said, “If you’re God’s Son, jump. It’s written, isn’t it, that ‘he has placed you in the care of angels to protect you; they will catch you’” (Luke 3:10-11, *The Message*). “Yes,” said Jesus, “and it’s also written, “‘Don’t you dare tempt the Lord, your God’” (Luke 4:12, *The Message*). Temptations completed and resisted—for now. The devil would now wait “until an opportune time” (v.13).

One thing is sure: the devil is a dangerous deceiver and foe who can only be defeated in the power of the Holy Spirit and by the word of God. And he always uses the same methods. The apostle John warns us of these. Satan always appeals to one of three things. “For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world” (1 John 2:16). He will try to get at followers of Jesus in one of these ways.

*R&D Have you noticed the three ways the devil tempts us? Which is the one that gives you the most trouble? (Sometimes it is an area of our strength, not our weakness).*

*Prayer: Lord, please give me your wisdom to know where I can be most tempted, and help me resist with Your word and the power of Your Holy Spirit.*

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## Day 12

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**Read: Mark 3:31-35**

### Transitions

He had lived at home for about 30 years. He was working his father’s carpentry business. There were, by now, brothers and sisters in the family. The time had come for Jesus to step out into the work for which he had come—the work the Father had given him to do. But from Mary’s point of view, it was going to be a time for shifting gears. Did she remember what Simeon and Anna had said in the temple many years ago, or what Gabriel had said? Had she shared any of those things with Jesus?

Large crowds had begun to follow wherever Jesus went as he traveled about preaching and teaching. He had accumulated twelve disciples who traveled with him. His family were beginning to think he was somewhat out of his mind (3:21). As he was teaching in someone’s home one day, he was told that his mother and brothers were outside seeking him. One might have thought he would go to the door and greet them, but that is not what happened. Jesus was defining *real* family.

Jesus went on teaching, using the present circumstances as an illustration. He looked around at the people who were listening to him, and he said, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” Looking into the faces of the people, he remarked, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother” (vv.33-35). What did Mary think? She knew Jesus loved her, but what was he saying? What could she have thought? It was going to be a challenging transition—from mother/son to servant/Lord, from earthly family to spiritual family.

We all must make the transition from the earthly to the spiritual. We might have heard many stories of Jesus. He was a good man. He did wonderful things, even miracles. He loved all people. We’re told he loves us. He died for our sins. Yes, he is our Savior. But, is he *Lord*? Is he



the *Lord* of our lives? Is God our eternal Father? Are we brothers and sisters with each other? Is Jesus right or wrong here? What is family?

R&D *What are your feelings as you think of the transition Mary had to make? About the difference between the earthly family and the spiritual family?*

Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, I want to know you as Lord of everything I think, do, and say.*

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### Day 13

**Read: Matthew 16:13-20**

#### What Do *You* Think?

Perhaps the most important question a person must answer in a lifetime, asked by Jesus, is, “Who do you say that I am?” (v.15). In the four gospel accounts, we read what four disciples of Jesus said about the answer to this. Four men with four points of view. Matthew wrote mostly for Jews about Jesus as the long-awaited King and Messiah. Thus, his genealogical record went back to Abraham. Mark wrote about Jesus as a servant. No genealogy in his account. Luke presented Jesus mainly to non-Jews as the perfect *man*, and that genealogy went back to Adam. These three were the synoptic gospels. John, on the other hand, wrote of Jesus as God, the incarnate Word. He wrote, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God” (John 1:1)—the extent of his genealogy of Jesus.

Throughout the gospels, we see what Jesus did, what people said about him, what he said about himself, and the effects of these things. John wrote at the end of his account, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30-31). That was the goal of the gospel writers. They were witnesses of the life lived by Jesus. They bore testimony of that life.

Jesus himself let his words and his works bear the witness. He said, “For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has *himself* borne witness about me” (John 5:36-37). Therefore, it behooves us to look at Jesus’ works and listen to his words. We shall do that for the next several days. Have you heard the voice? Seen the works? “What think ye of Christ?”

R&D *How did you come to realize that Jesus is the Lord, the Christ sent for us? Do you now see his works and hear his words differently than before that time?*

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, thank you for being the one who opens our minds to know Jesus.*

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### Day 14

**Read: John 3:1-21**

#### How’s Your Understanding?

In his teaching and preaching, Jesus often told parables and made comparisons. He used different figures of speech to explain deep, spiritual truths. When talking to Nicodemus in today’s reading, Jesus told him that one must be “born again” to see or enter the kingdom of God. Nicodemus could not understand the idea of being born again, or born of the Spirit. He was only thinking in the natural, or earthly, way. Jesus said, “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” (v.12). This was demonstrating an

important way Jesus has used with *us* to help us understand: “Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual’” (1 Corinthians 15:45-46).

When his disciples asked him why he taught so much in parables, Jesus answered, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand...but blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear” (Matthew 13:11, 16; see also Isaiah 6:9-10).

We are so tremendously blessed to have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit! As Jesus often drew aside with his disciples to explain things more deeply, the Spirit now graciously invites *us* in the same way to draw aside, so he can open our eyes and ears to understand the things of the kingdom of God. Have you ever had an “Aha!” moment when you finally “see” something you never saw before? That is the moment the Spirit has opened the eyes of your understanding. I love those times! But it is only God, the Holy Spirit, who can open anyone’s eyes. This keeps us on our knees for others, knowing that prayer is the most powerful weapon we have.

*R&D Most Christians know several others who do not understand who Jesus is. Think of some whom you know, and pray for them by name.*

*Prayer: Holy Spirit, thank you for so graciously opening my eyes to know Jesus more.*

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## Day 15

**Read: John 4:1-42**

### Thirst

She was a Samaritan woman—a “fallen” woman. She had come to the well that Jacob had dug so many years ago. She was there at noon, since that was the best time to avoid the other women in town who came at the cooler times of day. Jesus and his disciples were on their way to Galilee and were passing through Samaria. The disciples were in town buying food when Jesus sat beside the well and asked the woman to give him a drink. She was surprised that a Jew was talking to one of the hated Samaritans, and a woman at that.

She questioned Jesus about it. She made small talk (possibly while drawing his water). He replied that if she realized who he was, she would ask him for “living water.” She asked where she could get that kind of water, obviously thinking of the earthly kind. But he was thinking spiritually. He talked about a kind of thirst that she had—one that would never be satisfied by well-water. She wanted that kind of satisfaction.

He said, “Go, call your husband” (v.16), and she confessed she had none. He responded that he knew about her first five husbands, and a current man who was not the sixth. Astonished, she avoided that subject and went onto a theological one. Oh, dear woman, you just didn’t understand, did you? Whether you worship in Samaria or Jerusalem, the day will come when you will worship God in spirit and in truth!

Her husband? Why, he was standing right in front of her! The Bridegroom! The one who would satisfy her thirst—that which drove her to seek fulfillment with many men. Jesus, seeking his Bride, is the Living Water. He cries out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink” (7:37). This echoed Isaiah’s call, “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters... Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” (Isaiah 55:1-2).

R&D *Some “labor” is necessary for living in this world. But perhaps we should regularly assess if we’re spending ourselves on what does not satisfy. What do you think?*

Prayer: *Jesus, I am so grateful that you are the source of living water. You are the only one who satisfies.*

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## Day 16

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**Read: Luke 22:35-53**

### Not My Will, But Thine

Treachery was at hand. “Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me” (Psalm 41:9). Judas—he was the one. He was off doing his deed of darkness. The others accompanied Jesus to the Mount of Olives, into the Garden of Gethsemane. He told the eleven, “This Scripture must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’ For what is written about me has its fulfillment” (v.37). He told them to pray that they would not enter into temptation, then he went to pray by himself to his Father.

Oh, the agony he suffered that night! “His sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground” (v.44). Three times he prayed, saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done” (v.42) He said “Yes” to his Father as the disciples slept. He called to them, “Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand” (Matthew 26:46).

The arrest was made. Jesus was taken. He had healed the sick, caused the blind to see and the deaf to hear. He had even raised the dead. He had told his friends, “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 13:31-32).

That night his most important work still lay ahead of him. *This* was why he had left the glory he had shared with the Father since before the world existed. He knew he had come from God and was going back to God. His hour had finally come.

R&D *Jesus knew abuse, betrayal, criticism, emotional and physical pain, mocking, and separation from God. Surely, we can trust him to understand whatever pain or disappointment we may suffer. Share with him anything you may be experiencing today.*

Prayer: *Jesus, thank you that you understand any of our painful circumstances, and that you can help us through them.*

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## Day 17

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**Read: Acts 1:1-11**

### You Will Be My Witnesses

They had walked with him for more than three years. They had watched him raise the dead and heal the afflicted. They had eaten with him and slept under the stars with him. They had heard him teach. All the while they had conversed with him and asked questions. They had seen him bleed and die on the cross at Calvary’s hill. And they had seen him after he rose from the dead. He had breathed on them and had said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22; see Genesis 2:7). They knew him...or did they?

Before his ascension, Jesus told his disciples that he would send the promise of the Father upon them. But they were to wait until they were “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). While they waited, they were filled with joy and were continually in the temple blessing God. Nevertheless, they didn’t quite understand Jesus’ mission. Was he now going to restore the kingdom to Israel? Jesus kindly told them that overcoming the Romans was not the point. He told them to wait: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

To the ends of the earth? It seemed an impossible task, no doubt. Yet they waited. “With one accord, they devoted themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14). And he came—God, the Holy Spirit. The power! The enabler, the comforter, the advocate, the teacher came upon them, filling them to overflowing. Soaking them, and giving amazing utterances so that all there could hear of the mighty works of God in their own languages” (Acts 2:11). God came, and they knew it! They had become witnesses.

R&D *Why do you think the disciples had to wait for the Holy Spirit to come?*

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, help me learn to depend on you rather than myself as I walk through this life. May I always do things your way.*

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## Day 18

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**Read: Acts 2:14-41**

### Up Close and Personal

The apostle John wrote, “That which was from the beginning, which we have *heard*, which we have *seen* with our eyes, which we *looked upon* and have *touched* with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made *manifest*, and we have *seen* it, and *testify* to it and proclaim to you the eternal life” (1 John 1:1-2). The apostles wrote out of personal experience: seeing, touching, hearing. These are the qualifications of a witness in any trial. No one can challenge that kind of testimony. It’s real—it’s personal.

So, when Peter stood and addressed the crowd at Jerusalem on that Pentecost day, he spoke in the power of the Holy Spirit, having had first-hand experience with the Savior. Salvation had come to the world, and Peter knew it. When he confidently rose to bear witness, his message was clear: “Men of Israel, hear these words...this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it...and God has made him both Lord and Christ” (vv.22-23, 36). The people were truly convicted by the Holy Spirit, and were “cut to the heart.” They asked, “What shall we do?” (v.37). And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (vv.38-39).

What, or who, was it that pierced the people’s heart? Truth had been spoken in a personal testimony. The Holy Spirit had convicted the people’s hearts. That’s what he does. He convicts the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (see John 16:8-11). It’s his office. Then he guides us into the truth and glorifies Jesus in our midst.

R&D *Do you have an up-close-and-personal testimony concerning your relationship with Jesus Christ? How would you share it with others who don’t know Jesus yet?*

Prayer: *Lord, I might like to share my personal testimony. Will you kindly provide the opportunity?*

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## Day 19

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**Read: Romans 1:16-32**

### Bad News First

The apostles continued to proclaim Jesus as the Christ throughout Jerusalem and Judea as Saul came onto the scene, breathing out threats and hate. He was out to get rid of this new sect of “Christians”, yet along the road to Damascus he came face-to-face with the risen Christ. It was a dramatic conversion for a man who would eventually become a major player in the spread of Christianity to the Gentiles. He became known as Paul.

In his amazing treatise to the Romans, Paul gives the bad news first. How else will anyone understand how wonderful the good news is? How else will the Holy Spirit convict people of sin if they don’t recognize it within themselves? Why would Jesus have had to come as Savior if no one realized he needed to be saved? And Paul is not ashamed of the gospel, “for it *is* the *power of God for salvation* for everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

Paul’s premise is that *everyone knows* there is a God. Everyone! God has made Himself known through what has been made. People see it. They have no excuse. What people have done is simply to have repressed the knowledge of God through their unrighteousness. They have decided to worship other “gods”. They have “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images...” (vv.18, 20, 23). So, God gave them over to their own ways and all kinds of sinful behavior. (My dad used to say, “You dug the hole, live in it”). “God gave them over”—what devastating words! Mankind would now live with a debased mind and give himself to dishonorable passions (vv.26-28).

Paul has systematically revealed through Scripture that “None is righteous—no, not one” (see Psalms 14:1-3, 36:1; Romans 3:1). How God’s heart was grieved! Yet, He would not leave His beloved creation without a Savior. The good news was about to break through.

R&D *Do we still have our idols, even after salvation has come to us? What are your idols?*

Prayer: *Lord, kindly reveal to me what my idols are, and help me take them to the cross.*

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## Day 20

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**Read: Ephesians 2:1-10**

### Good News for All

From the Garden of Eden to the cross, the scarlet thread has run. From the first flow of an animal’s blood in Genesis 1:21 to the precious blood of Jesus shed on Calvary’s cross (1 Peter 1:19; Romans 3:21-26), God has shown us that no other price could be paid for our salvation. In Hebrews 9:22, we read that “without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness for sins.” And Jesus, God’s perfect lamb—spotless, without blemish—came to take away the sin of the world. By his wounds we are healed, saved, and justified. Through Christ we have access once again to God the Father.

The apostles preached this gospel—this good news— everywhere they went. They couldn’t stop themselves. The work was done —finished! People needed to know. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son, that *whoever believes in him* should not perish but have eternal

life” (John 3:16). “You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked...you were by nature children of wrath” (vv.1, 3). But God! Oh, what wonderful words! “But God...made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved” (vv.4-5). By grace alone, through faith. This is good news, indeed. We cannot in any way achieve it by our own works. “It is the gift of God” (v.8).

What other response could we have but to offer all that we are and all that we have to Jesus, the one who saves us—the one who fills us with the Holy Spirit? “Jesus is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him *to reconcile to himself all things*, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:18b-20). “*In him* we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Is it any wonder, then, that Paul urges us to present our whole selves to God “as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which *is* your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1)?

R&D *In the face of such good news, what might stand in the way of our abandoning ourselves in our walk with Jesus?*

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, I truly believe this good news. Please help my unbelief.*

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## Day 21

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**Read: Acts 5:17- 42**

### **Growth Amidst Persecution**

The gospel was truly spreading beyond Judea and Samaria toward the ends of the earth, as Jesus had commanded his first apostles. After Peter’s first sermon, those who received the word had been baptized—about 3,000 of them. All the believers were continuing to “devote themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (2:42). And the Lord had been “*adding to their number* day by day those who were being saved” (2:47).

All the while, opposition had been increasing. It had begun in Jerusalem when the high priest and the Sadducees, filled with jealousy, had arrested the apostles, forbidding them to teach in the name of Jesus. The apostles replied, “We must obey God rather than men” (v.29). After they had been flogged, the apostles left, “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” (v.41). Stephen, full of the Spirit, became the first martyr, having been stoned for preaching to the “stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, always resisting the Holy Spirit” (7:51).

After Paul’s conversion, he began to preach the gospel with Barnabas. They preached to the Gentiles and Jews in those places. They traveled to Antioch and beyond. Later, Paul traveled with his mission team to Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, and finally to Rome. Opposition was always close at hand. There were beatings, riots, shipwrecks, and no end of hardships. Yet they rejoiced in the Lord, who continued to build His Church even more in the midst of persecution.

As we watch and read about world news today, we can see that nothing has changed. There is still great persecution in many places—imprisonment, beheadings, beatings. Yet the Lord continues to build up his church throughout the world. It remains true that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13).

R&D *A muscle becomes stronger as it meets resistance. How does this apply to the growth of the Church in times of persecution? Have you ever been persecuted for your faith?*

Prayer: *Dear Lord, thank You for calling me to be a part of Your Church.*

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## Day 22

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**Read: 1 Corinthians 1:10—2:2**

### The Bottom Line

It has been the heart of the Father from eternity. Since before Genesis 1:1, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have been in perfect communion. God has always desired to have a people to be His own special treasure—to be in union with Him, walking in His ways and in His holy presence. When the man and the woman turned from Him, they were exiled from Eden—until the “last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45) came to restore all things—“to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Ephesians 1:10).

When Jesus’ work on the cross was finished and he had ascended to the Father, they sent the Holy Spirit, who empowered those who were called out to begin the Church. As the gospel spread, there were not only some Jews, but also Gentiles, who believed—people differing in race, color, and socio-economic strata. They believed the gospel and received Jesus as Savior. Yet quarreling and confusion began between differing traditions and personal preferences.

Paul pleaded: “I appeal to you...that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10). Corinth was a wealthy, important, cultural, and worldly city in Greece, yet the gospel had penetrated it. Bible teacher Henrietta Mears said, “It was all right for the church to be in Corinth, but it was fatal when Corinth got into the church.”

Of course, the bottom line was the gospel: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Jesus Christ died on the cross to rescue us from the bondage of sin. He rose again for our justification. He ascended to heaven and “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3). He will come again to take his own home. Paul said, “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). What does that have to do with whether we “dip or dunk”, eat meat, use guitars in worship, or use incense? What would happen if all the church knelt to pray in the shadow of the mighty cross?

R&D *How do you deal with differences of opinion in your church? In your home?*

Prayer: *Father, you have done all the work necessary. Help us to be of one mind.*

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## Day 23

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**Read: Romans 12:1-18**

### Bound in Him

“Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love: The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above” (John Fawcett). This has been true for Christians for over 2,000 years. “That above” is the fellowship of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Spirit—always working as one in a relationship of love; bound in a covenant of redemption; working out the blood covenant with mankind, beginning with Abraham and continuing to Israel, to Jesus, and to the Church. The “tie that binds.”

We have been bought with a price—a very high one: the blood of Christ that cleanses us from sin (1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 John 1:9). On the night that he was betrayed, Jesus Christ took bread and wine and gave them to his disciples (including Judas, who betrayed him). He called those elements his body and his blood, with instructions to take eat and to drink. It was the *new* covenant in his precious blood. He was the Lamb of God who was taking away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

Paul told the Romans: “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (vv.4-5). One life flows through us. We all have differing gifts. Still, we all are members of one body—the body of Christ. With that in mind, we approach our “differences” with the knowledge that God has made us unique. He has plans for us within the mission of His Church. He distributes gifts and talents “as he wills” (1 Corinthians 12:11).

So, if we are all parts of the body of Christ, then we are also one life with each other (v.5). Jesus is “the head of the body, the church” (Colossians 1:18). Therefore, why would we want to disagree with each other? Why would we ever *not* listen to our head? It’s the head that directs the body. If we say “Yes” to the head, it’s a healthy body—equipped to fulfill the mission given by our Lord Jesus Christ (see Matthew 28:18-20).

R&D *Do you see the mission of the Lord being worked out through your church?*

Prayer: *Father, thank You for binding my heart with Yours and with that of Your people.*

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## Day 24

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**Read: Ephesians 4:1-16**

### Worthy of the Calling

Jesus said, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29). Paul wrote, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3). Paul instructed the Ephesian Christians to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love...” (vv.1-2). In other words, “Be imitators of God as beloved children” (5:1). We are to have the same attitude in us that Jesus had (see Philippians 2:5-11).

Have you ever tried being that way? Frankly, I am not known for my humility. So, I have found that living the life that Jesus has called me to live is an impossible task. How about loving our enemies? Again, impossible. *Unless...*he does it in me!

Remember that Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come to live *in us* (John 14:16-17), and give us the *power* to be witnesses for him (Acts 1:8). Jesus wants us to be grown-ups. He has given us his Spirit. He has told us to persevere in prayer. He has given us his word. He has given us each other. “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:3-4). “The Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us” (Romans 8:11). Now *that* should help us live a life worthy of our calling!

There are people out there who are literally dying without Jesus every day. There are many along the path that we are walking daily—people who need to see an authentic Christian life *being lived*. Do you see them? There is no greater witness than a transformed life.



R&D *In the last year, have you seen any change in yourself that signals a transformed life? In the last five years?*

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, your word tells me that the same Spirit that raised you from the dead dwells in me. Let me know that power in my life.*

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## Day 25

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**Read: Matthew 24:29-47**

### Home

Have you ever awakened in the morning and thought, “Lord Jesus, is this the day you return?” Have you had that sense of expectation and wonder? Are you one who has entered through the “narrow door” that Jesus told about (Luke 13:24)? Jesus told his own to “stay dressed for action” and to “be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Luke 12:35, 40).

So, what does the Lord expect *of us* as we watch and wait? He told the story of a “faithful and wise servant whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time,” and he added, “Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes” (vv.45-46). Serving the household of God. Serving those for whom Jesus died. Is that not what Jesus expects us to be doing when he returns? Reaching out to “the least of these” (25:40)? Worshipping him in spirit and in truth, and with our very lives?

I have imagined it as C. S. Lewis wrote in his *Chronicles of Narnia*: “The light ahead was growing stronger... Lucy forgot everything else, because Aslan himself was coming down, leaping down from cliff to cliff like a living cataract of power and beauty. It was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world... had only been the cover and the title page. Now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story... which goes on forever, in which each chapter is better than the one before.”

One day soon, “the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Death shall be no more. Nor tears nor pain. He will have made all things new. “It is done” (Revelation 21:6). Alleluia! “Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

R&D *Think about these above moments for a while. What do you hope to be doing when Jesus returns? What do you think Jesus’ return will look like?*

Prayer: *Dear God, some days in this world, all I want to say is, “Come, Lord Jesus.”*

*by Joan Fossum*

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