

# The Twelve Days of Christmas

A Testimony-based Devotional by Dayna Schoonmaker



## The Twelve Days of Christmas

A Testimony-based Devotional by Dayna Schoonmaker

For many of you, it may be old news that the twelve days of Christmas *begin* on Christmas day rather than *ending* on the 25th. But, somehow, I grew up with the idea that the twelve days of Christmas was part of the hype leading up to the arrival of Santa and the birth of Jesus. It's not surprising since the song 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' plays alongside 'Silent Night' and 'Have a Holly, Jolly Christmas' throughout December. Still, it was somewhat unsettling to find I'd been doing Christmas 'wrong' for years.

The problem with this misunderstanding is that Advent is the season that leads up to Christmas, while the twelve days of Christmas are meant to be celebrated beginning on the 25th. By pushing the twelve days of Christmas into the Advent season, we deny ourselves room to experience the longing that precedes Christmas, almost like skipping the pregnancy and going straight to the birth. And I get it. By December of each year, and this year in particular, I am ready for the holly, jolly part of the season to go ahead and get here. Once December 25th rolls around, I am usually ready to clean things up and move on. However, by denying the fullness of Advent with its tiny wonders amid the waiting, we also diminish the full revelation of Christmas, when Light bursts forth into the darkness and transforms everything. Just as we need all of Advent, we need all of Christmas, too. We need each new day that dawns after the long, dark night.

To me, one of the most fascinating things about Christmas and the arrival of Jesus is the fact that God chooses to use the people around Jesus to tell his story. Jesus grew and eventually spoke to the masses, but most of what we know about him comes from other people. From the day he was born, people gathered and then dispersed to share the Good News. These testimonies inform our own testimony about God. They impact the way we interact with Jesus and shape how we relate to one another.

In light of the testimonial nature of the gospel, I've spent some time reflecting on key stories in my life and the people God has used to illuminate Christ's love for me. These stories have helped magnify the meaning of Christmas for me during this season of disrupted community. The scriptures that accompany each story help reveal the way Christ's coming illumines each of us so that we can go forth as a light to the world.

So now, whether you've experienced this Advent as a season full of joy, or lived through the darkness in a very real way, it is time for Christmas. For unto us a Child is born. His name is Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. It is time for the Christmas story to continue in us, replete with fresh possibilities. May we enter into the new year intentionally, with anticipation for the ways in which the light of Christ will continue to transform our horizons while holding us steadfast in our commitment to love God and neighbor.



## Day 1 - December 25, 2020 - When Night becomes Day

*“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses’ arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you.” - Isaiah 60:1-5*

When I was in high school, my parents decided to take my sister and me on the proverbial family trip out west. My dad had taken a very meaningful trip across the country following his high school graduation and wanted to show us some of the special places he’d discovered all those years ago.

The problem with this scenario was that I was a moody 16-year-old who didn’t like being outdoors and didn’t see the point of traveling in the car day after day to spend half of a blazing hot day looking at various canyons and deserts. To say I didn’t get it is an understatement. By the time we arrived at the grand finale, the north rim of the Grand Canyon, I am sure my dad was questioning why he even brought me along. But he and my sister loved to hike, and despite my bad attitude, they were having a great time exploring the National Parks we visited. My mom, with the patience of a saint, spent days on canyon rims or in river valleys with me as I read my books and tried to pretend I was anywhere but there.

When we arrived at the Grand Canyon, it was dark, so we headed right to our cabin. My dad and sister went straight to bed. They’d planned to join a hiking expedition that departed at dawn. My mother suggested that she and I go for a walk and let them sleep. She had learned there was supposed to be a major meteor shower that night and she knew that even if I’d been a terrible kid for the entire trip, there might still be some magic if we could catch a smattering of shooting stars under the clear night sky.

It turns out there are few places better to view a meteor shower than the dark north rim of the Grand Canyon. The sky that night did not disappoint. Rather than catching one or two shooting stars, the sky was filled with them for hours on end. The two of us laid on the park benches head to head until 3:00 in the morning, often not saying a word but simply uttering an occasional “ooohhh” or “ahhh.”

The beauty, majesty, and mystery I was unable to comprehend during the daylight hours came alive for me that night. It was as if I needed the darkness to really see the light. All I had to do to experience it was simply open my eyes, lift my head, and look around. After sleeping late into the next morning, my mom and I enjoyed hearing about my dad and sister's morning hike and sharing with them about our previous night's adventure. One night beneath the stars brought me closer to my mom, and drew me back into the fold of my family. Things weren't instantly perfect, but they were better. It was a step in the right direction.

Time and again, my mother, father, and sister would each play a role in helping me find my way back to the light when I floundered in my own sea of darkness. The bond of family love is powerful. I think this is why scripture uses familial language to talk about the community of faith. As a church, we are a family, and we need one another.

There are times in life when we are covered in deep darkness and the darkness can feel overwhelming. It can even separate us from the good things happening around us, blinding us to the beauty right in front of our faces. Yet, that darkness is the very place where the glory of the Lord often appears. From the beginning of Genesis, where God spoke light into the chaos of darkness, to the cold Bethlehem night where a bright star illuminated the sky announcing the birth of God made flesh, light perpetually interrupts darkness. This revelation isn't just for individuals; it is for communities, nations, for the whole world. People are drawn together because of the light of God. Healing finds its genesis in the light.

Do you struggle with areas of darkness? Are there ways in which you can be more intentional about looking for the light around you? Where is healing needed in your life?

Even as we seek healing in our own lives, we have opportunities to come alongside others who are struggling, inviting them to experience the light as well. Whether it's family members whose moods could be lifted by a simple walk beneath a star-filled sky, or community members who can be drawn in by having their light bill covered, there are so many ways we can come together, leading one another toward the sustaining Light of Christ.

## Day 2 - December 26, 2020 - Burning Brightly

*“Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world. It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.” - Philippians 2:12-16*

Given yesterday’s reflections, it shouldn’t be surprising that this passage about shining like stars in the world became a life verse for me in high school. While my night in the Grand Canyon was a highlight, it was far from the only night I spent beneath the stars. I often felt a deep need to be out in the night air with a clear view of the heavens, so I would slip outside, sit on the sidewalk midway down our street, and lean back pondering whatever laid heavily on my heart. Being in the darkness always helped me remember to take note of the light.

As a teenager, I experienced a deep conflict between being who I was and being who people expected me to be in order to assimilate to the crowd. I suppose this process begins earlier than the teenage years, and I’ve certainly learned that it extends beyond them, but it seems most intense during those formative adolescent years. As I wrestled with my own burgeoning identity, I found myself often questioning why things were done the way they were done. This happened at home, at school, at church, at friends’ houses, pretty much everywhere. I had a lot of questions. I wasn’t looking to dismantle the status quo. I was merely trying to find a place for myself in it.

During that time, a college-aged Christian leader named Brad began encouraging me to continue asking questions, to stay grounded and confident in who I was, and not to conform to the world around me. He wasn’t offended that I was challenging the way things had always been done, but saw in me a kid who helped him believe that things could stand to look a little different. With Brad’s encouragement and heavy reliance on God’s direction, I continued walking a different course than the one prescribed to me by custom. I found great comfort in the words of Philippians 2. And yet, it was with fear and trembling that I petitioned my school for a new teacher who would respect my place in the technology classes as a female. It was with fear and trembling that I stood in front of my congregation on youth Sunday, not as the “preacher for the day,” but as a girl with a “message” in place of the traditional boy with a sermon. It was with fear and trembling that I challenged members of my friend group, as well as members of my extended

family, to consider whether their faith was real or just a cultural facade. As a youth, I was filled with my fair share of fire and brimstone. But mostly, I was just trying to follow God's leadership over my life. I was trying to shine as a star.

I must confess, though, that I did not always approach things in the best possible way. I was an outspoken advocate for change, but I was also a disenchanting teenager with plenty of angst and internal conflict. I put people off with my aggressive attitude as often as I drew them in with the light of Christ burning within me. I stepped on toes I shouldn't have, and I hurt people I meant to care for. I was zealous, sometimes without regard for the tenderness of the hearts around me. This is where repentance comes in. I've tried to right those wrongs where I could.

I don't know how I would have navigated those formative years without the support and encouragement of leaders like Brad who saw beyond what was to what could be, both for me as an individual and for the church as a whole. His willingness to reimagine the way things were made space for me at the table of faith. It's something I hope to continually pay forward. It's something I remember every time I hear young people bravely asking us to consider new perspectives on things.

At Christmas, Jesus arrived in this world not beneath the light of the sun, but beneath the glow of the stars. During his early days on earth, he would be surrounded by his family, but also by shepherds and magi, different types of people from various parts of the world with numerous life experiences. Some were poor, others wealthy beyond imagination. Each had a place in Jesus' birth story, a part to play in the unfolding gospel narrative. They helped usher in the light.

I think this is one reason why so many of us treasure the candlelight Christmas Eve service. As one light becomes two, the flame spreads until the whole room is filled with the flickering glow of light interrupting darkness. The light may be passed to us from a beloved family member or a complete stranger. At Christmas, the longtime member worships alongside the stranger who sneaks in the back door at the last minute. As the light spreads around us we find that we are no longer alone in our darkness, but we are together as one body beneath the light of Christ. In that moment, we have visual evidence of who we can be as Christians living harmoniously in a diverse world.

How can you shine as a star while also working to resist murmuring or arguing in the coming year? Can you burn brightly while being mindful not to consume those around you with your zeal? How might you work to hear the voices of those on the margins asking for space at the table, simply trying to find their place among us? We shine brightest when we stand together.

### Day 3 - December 27, 2020 - Contagious Character

*“Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ ” - Matthew 25:34-40*

During college, I was involved with several campus ministries. As part of these ministries we would participate in service projects. My junior year, we decided to serve food to the homeless population in downtown Atlanta. I remember spending the day before the trip making countless peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and then repacking the finished sandwiches in the empty bread bags. It was messy work but we loved it. The following morning, we caravanned two hours from Clemson to Atlanta and set up our make-shift distribution center at the edge of a city park.

The sandwiches I couldn't count the day before disappeared from our tables faster than I could have imagined. No one minded that the sandwiches were squished and sticky. With the food distribution finished faster than expected, we decided to pack up our tables, break into smaller groups, and spend the rest of the afternoon visiting with the people we'd come to serve. I remember going off with a group led by a guy my age that I didn't know well. He sat down and immediately started talking to one of the homeless men. After a brief conversation, we decided to walk around town with him, seeing the city from his perspective as we learned more about his personal story. We asked all kinds of questions and listened earnestly to his answers. A short while later, our group leader asked if he had any needs we could meet.

He said that he needed socks. He only had one pair and they were dirty and worn through, providing no protection or cushion for his feet as he walked around the city. My first thought was that it would be simple enough for one or two of us to run down the street to the drug store, grab a pair of socks, and be back in no time. I've always been good at efficiently getting things done in the least disruptive manner. But our leader had another idea. He spotted a major department store not far from where we were and decided we would all go there together.

I will never forget what it felt like to walk into an upscale department store with a homeless person. Our family didn't have a lot of money when I was growing up, and I'd been a "poor college kid" for the past few years, but I'd never had people look at me like I didn't have the right to be somewhere. That day, I watched as a man was judged in ways I'd never personally witnessed before. I watched as my friends and I were judged for daring to bring this man inside the fancy department store. I noticed, too, that no one asked my middle-class male friend, who was clearly leading the group, to leave. There was something about us being with the homeless man that lent him permission, even if just for a moment, to be inside this formerly forbidden territory. It was an eye-opening experience.

We walked conspicuously through the store to the sock department where our leader picked out a multi-pack of gold-toe socks and asked if they would be sufficient. The man looked shocked. These socks were going to cost someone some real money. But he said yes. So my friend took out his wallet, purchased the package of socks, and we walked right back out of the store onto the busy Atlanta streets.

I wish I could remember the homeless man's name. I did for a long time as I prayed for him nightly. I wish I could remember the name of the young man who led our small group through the city that day. Unfortunately, I never had the opportunity to get to know him back at school. What I will always remember, though, is my classmate's character. He taught me in one afternoon what it means to honor the dignity of another person, to treat others as equals no matter who they are, to listen to someone's story and really hear them, and to meet the needs that you can, not just in the quickest or most convenient way possible, but in a costly way. His character made me want to carry myself in such a way that even if people couldn't remember my name, they would remember my character.

After Jesus came into the world, his followers asked how people could get credit for serving him. In Matthew 25, Jesus taught that the best way to serve Him is to serve others, especially those most in need of help. Jesus came not to get more attention for himself, but to shine his light illuminating the desperate needs of humanity. Jesus honored the dignity of those he interacted with no matter their background. He listened intently to each of their stories. And he met people's needs, ultimately in the most costly way possible by laying down his own life.

What steps can you take to serve those around you in such a way that even if people don't remember your name, they remember your character for years thereafter? How do you think this type of selfless service honors the incarnational nature of God?



## Day 4 - December 28, 2020 - Preparing the Way

*Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."* - Isaiah 40:1-5

When I was in college, it was quite popular in Christian circles to have someone called a "discipler." The theory was that having an upperclassman or campus leader mentor you would help you grow in your own personal faith. During my first semester, I had two fantastic small group leaders from a local campus ministry who were passionate about their faith and energized by the opportunity to lead a small group of freshmen girls. We enjoyed being together, studying God's word, and discussing the ins and outs of college life. But, by the time we got to the end of the year, we realized our group had diverging schedules and interests. I learned through this experience that sometimes it is better to say something had a good run and then end it well, rather than continuing to force the relationship forward. At the same time, I was envious of other groups that had coalesced into what would turn out to be life-long friendships.

The local church I'd joined was also working to make sure people were being disciplined, so after leaving my first group, I continued the journey of being re-matched with various women in our community. I spent time with Stacy, who was a mother of two tiny babies. It was a whirlwind spending time in her chaotic living room with laundry everywhere, dishes piled high in the sink, and babies who sometimes did and sometimes did not take their nap during our meeting time. Her willingness to invite me into the chaos of her life prepared me for the reality I would face when I had babies of my own. But when Stacy went back to work, her schedule was understandably too busy to maintain our relationship. So I was passed off to Missy, our new church intern who'd just finished her degree in New England and had a mind like a steel trap. Our relationship turned into a battle of wills, an engaging, ongoing debate about the nuances of theology and faith. It was great preparation for divinity school, but, while invigorating, this relationship certainly didn't look like the nurturing discipleship the church intended.

By the middle of my senior year, I'd burned through multiple disciplers, from multiple campus ministries. I was learning from each of these relationships. But apparently, I was hard to disciple.

Around the same time, our church hired a new pastor. His wife, Miska, was a fascinating person, and the leadership team decided she would be good for their hard-to-disciple girl. Over the next several months, in the newly forming world following the events of September 11, 2001, I spent one day a week in her living room. I quickly learned one important thing about Miska: she doesn't talk much. She would light a single candle, ask the Holy Spirit to join us, ask an open ended question, and just let me go. She listened well. She made space for my chaos. She let me feel my anger. She humored my off-the-wall ideas. She supported my wrestling as I considered what to do after graduation. And most importantly, she didn't really need anything from me during that time. She simply received me as I was. I may have been tough as nails and prickly all over, but she went ahead and made space for me just as I was. Even if I was a disaster.

We were doing the work of leveling out my rough places to make room for the Lord to work. She helped me prepare space, even if it would be several years until I learned how to step into it. Her time investing in my life taught me to make space for others. It eventually led to God changing my life in faith-shaping, paradigm-shifting ways.

Who has helped you feel comforted and cared for? How can you thank them for the ways they carved out space for you? In what ways have those relationships helped clear the way for the Lord to work in your life?

Are there ways in which you can prepare the way for others so that they can step more confidently into their God-given identity? Just as scripture calls for one to prepare the way for the Lord, we learn from Jesus' example that the ground-breaking, path-making process is ongoing. Many people have the potential to make a major mark on this world. They may just need someone to help prepare the way for them, to open doors, to break down barriers. Can you be a way maker?

## Day 5 - December 29, 2020 - Singing a New Song

*"O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods." - Psalm 96:1-4*

As a young adult, I spent two summers working at a beach ministry called Summershine. This ministry partners with KOA campgrounds to provide manual labor to the campground and ministry to the campers. Having been a recipient of this ministry from ages 5 to 18, I was thrilled by the opportunity to serve in return. I knew the basics of the job. College-age students worked during the day in exchange for minimum-wage pay and a free place to stay. In addition, the students were allowed to use their freetime to provide ministry via skit shows, games, Bible studies, and worship services.

This ministry was my first real introduction to the full, all-encompassing love of God as a little kid. I couldn't wait to take my turn showing love to other sticky-faced, sun-tanned kids running barefoot around the campground. What they didn't advertise in big bold letters was what the "paid work" portion of the day entailed. For the opportunity to voluntarily provide ministry to those precious kids, and for a bunk in a trailer and a few bucks an hour, I would receive the privilege of maintaining public bathrooms, cleaning trailers after they were vacated by vacationers, mowing sandy grass, and driving a tram transporting vacationers and their belongings from their campsite to the pool or beach.

Ministry can seem glamorous from the outside, but no one tells you about scrubbing filthy toilets on your hands and knees in 100 degree heat to the glory of God.

I loved that job with my whole heart, even if I didn't love the filth. Part of the reason I loved it was because of my co-workers. On the days when I couldn't see past the grimy parts of the work, others would come alongside me and lift me up. I had one co-worker in particular who was absolutely wonderful.

Erin was from Connecticut, but was recruited to the staff from her college in North Carolina. We clicked instantly. When I was assigned a week of rounds with Erin, I knew it was going to be a great week. Our easy banter and general camaraderie made days pass quickly. She was even good at bringing me out of my shell during the skit shows we put on for the campers. Her greatest gift, however, was her singing.

Mind you, Erin couldn't really sing. She wasn't totally tone deaf, but she needed that proverbial bucket to help her carry a tune. When we were out in the hot summer heat

mowing the grass that was mostly just sand, instead of complaining about how bad the sand stung her legs, she would begin singing oldies like *Build Me Up Buttercup* at the top of her lungs. It was contagious. I'd join in singing and we would sing our way through the hardest of chores. We would sing and laugh and nod knowingly at campers who chuckled over our ridiculous joy in doing such tedious work. We may not have been singing explicitly religious lyrics, but we were singing to the Lord nonetheless.

There are a hundred stories I could tell you about those summers working at the beach. But among the most important was learning to sing praise, regardless of the circumstances. The Psalms remind us over and over again to sing a new song to the Lord. We are not exempt because of our circumstances. We are not exempt because of our physical condition. We are not exempt because of our internal conflict. We are to sing a new song to the Lord each day, whether we are cleaning toilets or cleaning up after babies, whether we are driving a tram or driving the commute, whether we are mowing grass or moving a loved one into assisted living. In all circumstances, we are called to give praise to the Lord. How much better if we can do it in a loud voice, with joy, regardless of our ability to carry a tune.

When Christ arrived on the earth, he was met with song. First the angels sang, and then humanity joined in, singing songs over him. Some of these songs are recorded in scripture. Other melodies are lost to time. The arrival of Jesus ushered in a whole new genre of music: a new song of praise to the Lord.

Has your praise of God ever been contagious to those around you? In what ways can you sing out to the Lord in the midst of your current circumstances?

## Day 6 - December 30, 2020 - Reconceiving the Plan

*"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."*

- Romans 12:1-2

After college, I decided to pursue a Master of Divinity. For four years at Clemson, I gradually detached myself from the deep desire to be an architect, explored ways to express myself more fully as an art major, and eventually began to feel a call to ministry through religious studies. The process that led me to grad school was a slow revelation that eventually led to the halls of Wait Chapel on the campus of Wake Forest University.

I'll begin by saying that once I began the master's program I threatened to quit every day. It was hard. After watching all my career aspirations shift in college, I thought stepping into divinity school would be a grand arrival. I would finally be doing what I was meant to do and everything would click into place to the rousing sound of angels singing hallelujah.

Instead, the program began dismantling, piece by piece, everything I thought I knew about myself, my faith, religious tradition, scriptural interpretation, social-economic implications of faith, and so on. Yet, in the midst of this overwhelming season, God saw fit to surround me with the most incredible group of friends. For the first time in my life, I had a solid community that I could talk to about anything. And we did a lot of talking, mostly over lunch at our favorite mexican restaurant or during a rotating game night. Ray and Christina, Charlie and Lindsay, Trey and Jennifer, Alan and Jenny, Ryan and Amy, Jessica, Maria, John, Josh and in the middle of them all, a guy named Noel.

My years in divinity school would stretch me in ways I didn't even know I needed to be stretched. It would also provide me with the type of friendship, love, and support that gets you through that type of stretching. As parts of my faith were being dismantled in order to be inspected and reassessed, God was also dismantling walls I'd constructed within myself. Despite my intention to go to school and go into ministry on my own, I was falling in love with a dynamic upper-classman who was so destined to be a preacher it was as if the call were etched across his forehead.

As a strong-willed, independent woman entering a field where gender automatically puts me at a disadvantage, I probably should have thought about the career implications of falling for another preacher. But I am not sure it was in the realm of possibility for me to



resist the feelings I had for Noel. Being with him brought out the best version of me. It was as if he'd known me long before he ever saw me. I found that I laughed more freely with him. I spoke more assuredly around him. I felt most like myself when I knew he was in the room.

And so, as Noel and I were being transformed by the renewing of our minds in a rigorous academic setting, surrounded by friends and colleagues on similar journeys, we watched as God also renewed our minds to pursue a collective calling, a life of ministry together. For me, the path was changing yet again.

When Jesus arrived in Bethlehem, the reality of God-made-man in the form of a vulnerable, innocent baby required a complete renewal of people's expectations. While people had been prepared for a mighty savior, they hadn't thought through the reality that even mighty people begin as mere babes. The Christmas season provides light not just to banish darkness, but to illuminate reality. Sometimes, it can be disorienting to see things as they really are. As we see God's reality, and as we see ourselves in light of it, we must be willing to adapt and change. The plan we thought we were pursuing can change in light of God's plan.

Working to better understand our faith can be challenging, but it can also be liberating. This type of work allows us to enter into new relationships and forge deeper friendships. God is wonderfully faithful, providing the support we need as we honestly investigate our faith.

Can you think of one area where God may be asking you to dig a little deeper and look at your theological understanding from new angles? Who are the people God is providing to accompany you on the journey? Look broadly, for they may be new friends, old friends, writers and speakers whom you may never meet, or even people you don't like very much.

## Day 7 - December 31, 2020 - Giving Good Gifts

*“When (the Wise Men) saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.” - Matthew 2:10-11*

Noel and I were fortunate to be able to travel to Romania as part of a school trip while I was finishing my last year of Divinity School. Midway through the trip, we were invited to travel out of downtown Bucharest into the countryside. During this outing, we visited a grade school located in a poor neighborhood. When we arrived, we were immediately surrounded by dozens of children eager to play with the visitors who'd stopped by their school. The children were at recess and our group was encouraged to join in pick-up games of basketball and four square. Noel was all-in on the basketball game and disappeared into the crowd. I, on the other hand, was more reluctant, so I hung around the periphery watching the games. At some point, someone tapped me on the shoulder and asked if I could help unload some boxes from the van and bring them into the school. I was happy to oblige and had no idea that a simple “yes” would lead to a major blessing. There were just three or four of us carrying boxes. Once we finished, we were invited to step into a classroom to see what we'd been unloading.

As we walked into the tiny classroom, we saw the faces of students sitting at their small desks, each with a carefully wrapped box on top of it. It was the middle of March, but it seemed that their Christmas gifts were just being delivered - by us! The kids were more than happy to receive them, regardless of the date. I stood near enough to one girl to observe the joy on her face as she unloaded her box. She carefully removed the contents, making an exclamation over each item. I asked someone nearby what she was saying. It turns out she was sorting the box. Of a pair of gloves - “oh my brother will love these;” of a small deck of cards - “my father will love these!” She went through each item sorting her gifts for brothers and cousins and parents, even aunts and uncles. In her mind, this bounty was meant to be shared. She at last drew a small doll out of the box. “Oh this,” she said, hugging it to her chest, “this is for me!”

I will never forget that beautiful, generous child or that day in the Romanian countryside. I've seen similar joy and humility when gifts have been given to hospitalized adults in South Africa, orphaned children in Brazil, and impoverished children in Appalachia. I know similar stories play out across West Virginia each year as Santa Bruce Hobbart delivers the gifts from our church members to the children there.

As I read about the wise men delivering gifts to the baby Jesus, I am struck by their immediate desire to share their treasures. We don't know for sure if these men originally set out with the intention of visiting Jesus, or if they were already on the road when they saw the star signaling his birth. Since they journeyed on after visiting with the Holy Family, I tend to assume that they'd set out on one journey and were interrupted by Jesus' miraculous arrival. It seems that when they saw the star arise, these wise men detoured from their scheduled plans, turning course to greet the new king.

When they arrived, you'll note that they opened *their* treasure chests. They didn't offer Jesus the treasure chest they'd brought specifically for him. Instead, from their own treasure chests, which served as their traveler's checks for the journey, they offered gifts to the baby Jesus and his family. Many have pondered the point of these gifts. Were they symbolic of Jesus' life, ministry, and death? Perhaps. Were they providential provision to help the family escape to Egypt? Perhaps. What we do know for sure is that they were gifts offered from what the travelers had readily available to share.

Do you think of sharing from your treasure as an offering to God? How does that impact your generosity? As you consider the contents of your treasure chest, how is God calling you to share what you have on hand with those around you?

\*It's New Years Eve, dear friends. I pray 2021 arrives with fresh revelation and goodwill for all humankind. Take a moment to think back over the good gifts of the past year. You may have to dig for hidden treasure, but identifying and naming those gifts is a worthwhile exercise. May we be tender with ourselves and with one another whenever we re-emerge after our long quarantine. We will each have a fresh perspective and so, so much to share with one another.\*

## Day 8 - January 1, 2020 - Bringing forth Life

*"In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." - Luke 2:1-7*

It is the first day of a new year. We made it! As 2020 gives way to the start of 2021, it seems appropriate to talk about new life and the associated blessings and risks of birth. *I want to make a note here that for some, discussions about pregnancy and birth are extremely difficult. If you feel it would be best to skip today's devotional, please honor yourself in that way.* In the story of my extended family, we know one thing to be true: babies are hard to come by. My mother and father are both the only biological children of their parents. None of my mother's cousins were able to have biological children. My father's uncle had no children of his own. As far as cousins go, I have exactly one, related through adoption. So, as Noel and I talked about marriage, I told him that marrying me meant that we may or may not be able to produce biological children. I needed him to be okay with the idea of being childless, of possibly suffering loss, and of potentially becoming adoptive parents. Thankfully, Noel was willing to partner with me.

It took a couple of years of marriage for us to gain the stability we felt was necessary to begin walking the road to parenthood, but once I'd secured a good job, with good insurance, we began the trek. I steeled myself for a long road, readied myself for disappointment, and asked God to sustain us through whatever lay ahead.

You can imagine my great surprise when I got a positive pregnancy test one month later. We were expecting! Still, I was hesitant to believe we would ever meet this child. Family history implied ours would be a story of loss. Beyond that, I knew several women who'd suffered miscarriages or lost their precious newborns. And I knew that for every story I knew, there were so many more unspoken. Bringing new life into this world is a risky endeavor, even in a country with excellent medical care. I had been so sure my story would be one of disappointment, I struggled to accept that it might go well for us. For a little while, we told no one. Eventually, we brought our family in on the secret. There was a baby on the way. Later we would share the news with our friends and church family. Yet my anxiety remained.

As the baby grew within me, I was amazed at how equipped my body was for carrying a child. My body felt strong. But my mind was a mess. I wasn't enjoying the pregnancy as much as I should have because I feared losing it at any moment. At our anatomy appointment, I struggled to believe the doctor when she said we were having a girl. This was partially because she sounded a little iffy about it, but in truth, it was also because knowing the gender made this baby even more real, and I was afraid to love her because I still thought I would lose her.

As the time for delivery approached, my family gathered in our home. They helped ready the nursery, but still the baby did not come. They helped prepare extra food to stock the fridge, but still the baby did not come. They helped count down to the due date, but still the baby did not come. It seemed that, as equipped as my body was for carrying babies, it wasn't particularly astute at registering the need to go into labor. As the week of my due date came and went, we worked with the doctor to schedule an induction. Early on a Monday morning, Noel and I drove into Nashville and checked into Baptist Hospital. It was all surreal. We got settled into our room and began the process of having a baby. It turned out that while my body refused to start labor on its own, it did not need much of a kick start. We'd arrived at the hospital at 6:30 am and I held a perfect, beautiful baby girl in my arms before 1:00 pm. We would call her "Maggie."

Three and a half years later, we would repeat an almost identical process of healthy pregnancy, delayed labor, and quick delivery with our second child, Nora. It took longer to get pregnant the second time, but it turned out our story was not to be one of loss.

Yet, even when things go smoothly, pregnancy and delivery are traumatic events. Growing a child reshapes the body and reforms the mind. Not only are you creating something new, but you yourself are being recreated. I am not the same person I was before I carried our two precious girls within me. My body paid a price for that privilege. The process fundamentally altered who I am. Maggie and Nora made me a new person.

Women know well the risk of bringing new life into this world. There are no guarantees. If I felt shocked to be pregnant after just one month, I cannot imagine the shock Mary felt when she became pregnant without trying at all. And when the time to deliver her baby came, I cannot fathom how surreal *that* moment must have been. In Mary, both humanity and divinity reshaped themselves to usher in the ultimate expression of God's love for us. Mary's body shifted shape and opened to deliver Jesus into the world. It was no neat, clean miracle. It was messy. It was bloody. It was costly. It mirrored the messy, bloody, costly way that same beloved son would precede her in death.

What does the messiness of delivering new life into the world invoke in you? What risks are you willing to take to participate in delivering God's ongoing revelation to the world?



## Day 9 - January 2, 2020 - Timeless Testimonies

*“There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.”*

- Luke 2:36-38

When we found out we were expecting Maggie, Noel felt an urgent need to “get a job.” For the past two years, he’d been in school full-time while I was working. Despite the urgent desire, getting a job takes time. In the meanwhile, after Maggie was born and after Noel finished up his final semester, we decided he would stay home as a full-time dad while I returned to work. This season, while deeply meaningful, confirmed that this wasn’t the pattern we desired for our family. We were overjoyed when Noel was offered a position as the pastor of First Baptist Church, Valdese, North Carolina. We packed up our 8-month-old baby and moved our little family from Tennessee to North Carolina.

The transition was wonderful, for the most part. We now lived in a quaint town with lovely church members. I would walk my little baby all around town in her stroller and then call my mother to remark just how much my life felt like the 1950’s game “Park and Shop” which I’d loved playing as a child. Perhaps this wasn’t supposed to be the goal of the modern woman, but we loved our sweet life, and I did not miss the hour commute each morning and evening limiting the time I had at home with Maggie and Noel.

Idyllic as it seemed, I was the only one living this reality. Noel was busy juggling a new church while writing a dissertation and trying to be a present father and spouse in the evenings. During the day, it was just Maggie and me. We stopped by the library for the children’s programming only to find out we were the only ones participating. We stopped into stores that were basically empty apart from a friendly cashier. We walked up and down the streets, but we were the only ones there, too. It seemed that in our small town, most families consisted of two working parents, frequently struggling to make ends meet, even on a double income. Kids were occupied in daycares and child development centers. The depressed economy of our town meant there were no “mommy and me” music programs, or gymnastics classes, or swim lessons for tiny tots.

Before long, the novelty wore off and I felt isolated. During this time, I was exceptionally grateful to get to know one of our new neighbors. Libby lived just four houses down from the rental house we were occupying and was a fellow church member. Libby and I bonded instantly. Her warm personality and slightly mischievous smile brought me joy

every time we got together. Libby loved Maggie, too. She often invited us to her house to sit in the sunroom for a chat or just to enjoy a change of scenery.

Even after we moved a couple of miles away, I still found myself drifting back to Libby's house whenever I could. She was one of those rare people who saw me exactly as I was and loved me unconditionally. She didn't care one bit if I was the pastor's wife and she had zero expectations for our time together. She just liked me. And I liked her. When we were together, I was in a safe space. Friends like that are priceless.

I probably should mention that Libby's children are not only older than Maggie, they are older than me, not that it mattered. Libby and I got into lots of fun trouble at church, too. We formed the Prayer Purls, a knitting ministry, where we occasionally knitted, but mostly chatted with the other ladies, sharing our joys and struggles together each week. We served in different capacities around the church, yet we continued to migrate back to her sunroom for our more intimate chats, Libby playfully shooing her husband Jim out of the room with that mischievous smile.

When I found out I was pregnant with Nora, I don't think anyone was more excited than Libby. She knew we'd been trying for a bit and she had been praying for us. She couldn't wait to get Nora in her arms. Unfortunately, during my pregnancy, we found out that Libby had cancer. Often, after treatments, while consuming the pints of ice cream she decided were the perfect antidote to her predicament, she would want to talk about Nora and her excitement to meet her. Some days, I thought Libby might be more excited to meet Nora than I was. I prayed God would sustain Libby until Nora arrived. Sadly, she lost her battle with cancer just before Nora was born. Her husband Jim and I would joke, in later moments of levity, that Libby just had to meet Nora first, so she stepped out of time altogether. Her testimony of love would outlive her.

When I read the story of Anna waiting for Jesus' arrival in the temple, I think of Libby. Yet Anna lived in expectation not just of a new baby, but of a child who would come and change everything, even the rules of life and death. God sustained Anna's waiting, not that it was always easy. She lived as a widow for decades, never leaving the temple. One could infer she lived a lonely life, but she was known, particularly for her devotion to prayer and fasting. Consider the countless women she may have befriended and encouraged over those years. Consider the way she may have used her loss as an opportunity to serve others in the community. Because of her faithfulness, her testimony would outlive her.

Who are you investing your life in? Are there ways that you intentionally offer presence to those who may be feeling alone? How can you spend your time and share your testimony in ways that might outlive you?

## Day 10 - January 3, 2020 - Speaking the Truth in Love

"I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all...Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ." - Ephesians 4:1-6, 15

During our time in North Carolina, the church went through the process of hiring a new minister to families named Allison. If Libby and I bonded instantly, Allison and I were oil and water. At first, I think we walked on eggshells around each other because we were figuring out our new roles in light of the other's presence. I'd previously been the interim in her position and the transition of responsibility is always a little tricky. From her side, her mom, a church member, had been telling her for months that she should move home and be my best friend ever, an idea Allison bristled at like any daughter being told what to do by her mother. Over time, the awkward start to our relationship became an awkwardness we lived in without even questioning it. We didn't have any reason not to get along, we just didn't try.

Though our relationship got off to a rocky start, one day I asked her point blank, "Why don't you like me?" She said, "I like you just fine; you don't like me!" We'd been tiptoeing around each other for over a year despite the fact our daughters had become best friends. We'd muddled through playdates, but we still didn't know how to comfortably occupy the same space. That day, however, we decided to be intentional about getting to know one another. It wouldn't be easy, but maybe we could even become friends.

The honesty we shared with one another that day, when we expressed aloud our assumptions about one another, shifted something within us. Eventually, we not only became friends, but to this day Allison remains one of my closest friends and confidants. What at first was an undeclared stand-off became a friendship that has lasted for years and survived multiple life transitions.

When Noel and I moved our family to Murfreesboro, I decided that I needed to be careful not to presume what people think of me. I decided to try to be direct and honest about how I was feeling and to listen carefully to what others had to say in return. I was far more invested in building healthy relationships, because I'd learned the harmful consequences of not getting off on a good foot with Allison. Those consequences were not feuding or conflict, but lost time with my best friend while we lived in the same town.

When I visited with the Second Baptist search committee in February of 2019, I again shared with them openly, knowing that the best way to start new relationships was to be honest and direct. I can remember sitting in Bob Riley's living room, surrounded by unfamiliar faces, wondering if they would become new friends in a new place that was already beginning to feel a little like home. I shared my concerns about moving the girls out of schools they loved and away from friends they treasured. I told them that our family rhythms were a sacred part of our life and that the church's schedule would need to allow for those rhythms to remain part of Noel's life. I expressed my passion for various aspects of ministry. And I listened as they told me about their families and about their own history with the church. It was a good meeting. Because of my relationship with Allison, I knew how to circumvent the need to approach new situations with suspicion. I felt free to be me and to allow others to simply be themselves in return.

Ephesians 4 tells us that we are all part of one body, a collective whole under the leadership of God. We may have different histories and life experiences. We may approach scriptural interpretation or religious tradition from different vantage points. But we are all one in Christ Jesus. The coming of Christ ushered in the reunification of the people of God. From the beginning, God intended for God's people to be one, but time after time, through sinful actions and selfish choices, people were scattered, separated, and divided until they no longer recognized one another as kin. Yet, in Christ, the dividing walls fall away. We are called to treat one another with humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another in love. Sometimes that begins with speaking the truth in love.

Is there someone in your life who serves as the oil to your water? How can you work to improve that relationship? Are there other relationships in your life that could be healed with a dose of loving honesty? How can you seek to overcome misunderstandings in order to be reconciled through the bond of love in Christ? Now is the perfect time to seek unity amid our diversity.

## Day 11 - January 4, 2020 - A Change of Perspective

*“For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.” - Matthew 11:18-19*

Much of my adult life has been focused on ministering to the churches we’ve served. I’ve taught Sunday school, led women’s ministries, worked with children and youth, discipled young adults one-on-one, written devotionals, volunteered on committees, participated in mission projects, served behind the scenes in various ways, and always supported Noel. My focus on growing the saints has been intentional. My role has been to equip others to go out into the community and make an impact for Christ.

I think this is a good focus. It’s seemed appropriate as a pastor’s wife, and it has helped me deal with being uprooted and starting over every few years by giving me an instant community and a place to belong. However, over time I realized that I wasn’t spending much time out in the actual community myself.

As I sought ways to look outward, ministering to the community and not just to the church, one of the biggest opportunities came when we got new neighbors. Charles worked long hours and we rarely saw him, but Ariana was the most gregarious person I’d ever met. I took a small rosebush next door as a welcome gift. By her reaction, you would have thought I brought an oversized check from Publishers Clearing House. I couldn’t have known how much Ariana loved plants. It was the perfect gift. We also had a dog at the time and Ariana was completely in love with her. She regularly asked if we could walk our dogs together. She even migrated over to visit with Maggie and Nora when they were playing outside and leaned over the fence to talk with Noel and me when we were on the porch. Over time, she became part of the family.

Our boisterous neighbor had a mouth on her, too. She cursed like a sailor at times. She watched things on television that embarrassed me just to hear about. She was respectful around the girls, but seemed to me to be a little rough around the edges. She had bright blue hair and a colorful wardrobe to match. Ariana stood out. She also had a tenured professorship at the local university, marched in protests to voice her dissent over social injustices in our community, and advocated regularly on behalf of others. Ariana not only stood out, she spoke out. She is one of the most real people I’ve ever known.

As Ariana and I got to know each other, she had a million questions for “the pastor people” next door. She made sure we knew that she was curious about faith, but she



wasn't "one of those churchy people." As it turned out, Ariana became one of my favorite people to talk to about faith. She had no presumptions, no ingrained preconceptions, and tons of thoughtful questions. She challenged me to figure out how to communicate "standard" concepts of faith in ways that made sense to someone with limited knowledge about the Bible and no fluency in Christianese. As we got to know one another, she would often comment that she was surprised to learn that we weren't rigid fundamentalists. In exchange for my teaching about the gospel and Christian faith, Ariana gave me an education on what the outside world thinks of Christians. She lived in a world where the church was questionable at best and dangerous at worst.

I'd been insulated. I was shocked to hear how people thought of Christians from the outside looking in. Apparently some people aren't big fans of God's people. And it isn't because of the mystical nature of our belief in a resurrected Christ or triune God, but because of rigid fixations on minutiae which appear to serve no other purpose than to keep people out of the fellowship. Instead of seeing loving, welcoming communities where people are safe to come just as they are, outsiders often fear houses of worship, assuming them to be houses of judgment. Despite coming from a skeptical point of view, Ariana let me teach her from the Bible. Week after week, I also listened as she told me what it was like to view the church from the outside looking in. We were both getting an education.

Over the next few years, Ariana kept coming by the house. We kept walking our dogs. She even attended our church now and again, especially when Noel was preaching on topics with a social edge, things she didn't think Baptist preachers would touch with a ten-foot pole. She was extremely interested in what it would look like for the church to address the social woes she cared so deeply about. But she also kept reminding me that while she was fascinated to learn all of this, she still wasn't a churchy person. I told her that was fine. You see, the fire and brimstone of my youth had given way to a more patient practice of discipleship. I had learned that I didn't need to scare anyone into heaven, but could trust conversion to the work of the Holy Spirit. I decided people should come to faith on their own terms, not mine. I became content to be a conduit leading others toward their own revelation without needing to earn any credit for myself.

However, when Noel began talking to the search committee at Second Baptist and the reality of our leaving Murfreesboro grew more likely, I started praying a selfish prayer. I'd been journeying with Ariana for three years. I'd led group Bible studies for Ariana and her church wary friends. I offered one-on-one Bible interpretation whenever she struggled to understand a passage she'd read on her own. I stopped my daily life whenever she caught me in the driveway with a deep thought or pressing question. I had been walking with her and watching her change as her language softened, her

countenance lightened, and her eyes gained clarity to see the unseen. I knew she was close to joining the church. I also sensed that my time to be there to witness it was running out. So I prayed, asking God if I could see Ariana enter the waters of baptism in case we were called to move to Richmond.

God would answer that prayer on the very day that search committee members from Second Baptist sat subtly in our sanctuary to hear Noel preach in person. She was baptized in the same hour that God was confirming our call to Richmond. I know that I was just one of many people whom God sent Ariana's way. I know it was a special privilege that God allowed me to be there for the moment when she professed faith and was baptized. It's a day I'll treasure as dearly as the day my own daughters entered those waters because Ariana showed me how expansive the family of God is.

It may have been unconventional for a Baptist preacher's wife to have a blue-haired protester hanging around by my side for years, but I'll take it. That's what the gospel looks like. Ariana might have looked odd to her own community for spending so much time with those 'weird religious fanatics' next door. But she loved us deeply and she loved us well, shaping us for the better with her unflappable spirit. I rejoice when I hear that Ariana is still attending church even though we've moved away. They've even got her signed up for a committee or two.

When I read passages like Matthew 11, it's easy to see the problems with scrutinizing people based on misperceptions and prejudice. For instance, someone says, "John is too anti-social. Something isn't right about that; he must have a demon!" Or, "Jesus went and ate with any odd person, even joining them for drinks and extravagant meals. Something isn't right about that; he must be a gluttonous drunkard!" People didn't understand John the Baptist and they didn't understand Jesus. They misinterpreted their motives and their relationships. Yet we are challenged to learn from these mistakes, looking past what we think we know, in order to see people as God sees them. "Wisdom," the scripture says, "is vindicated by her deeds." Skewed perceptions don't hold up under God's gaze.

Are there people in your life who could use someone to see them as a beloved creation of God? Are there members of the community who you may overlook because of their appearance or behavior? What could you learn from people who have an outsider's view of your faith? Are you willing to sit at the table and listen to what they have to say?

## Day 12 - January 5, 2020 - Surviving and Thriving

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." - John 1:1-5*

I've made reference to this passage from John 1 numerous times throughout this devotional because the hope of light shining amid the darkness is a sustaining promise.

It is impossible to pretend that this year has been anything other than difficult. When our family moved to Richmond sixteen months ago, we were full of hope for all we felt God was planning to do in and among us at Second Baptist. We couldn't have imagined that just seven months later the entire world would be thrust into a global pandemic, altering life as we know it in nearly every way imaginable.

As of this writing, I haven't set foot in the sanctuary for over nine months. I've spent the majority of my life in church, the last sixteen years at Noel's side. Yet we've worshipped separately for the better part of the past year. It is strange for us to sit on the couch watching dad preach on the television. My faith is invigorated through the rituals of the church, the Lord's Supper and baptism, the rhythms and movement of worship. It is hard to replicate that in the living room. I dearly miss our church family, too. I miss you!

Despite the concessions we've each had to make in order to maintain the health and well-being of our community this year, I am assured of this: the Good News of Jesus isn't limited by our context. The story of Christ isn't restricted to the sanctuary or the stage. It is a living, breathing story unfolding within us and infiltrating the space between us, whether it be a shoulder-breadth in a pew or miles across town as we worship physically apart but together in spirit.

While there are myriad things we miss about being together at church and ministering together from church, there is still so much we *can* do. Because Christ leads the church, we are not bound by our location. The Word of God goes forth regardless of human history. God has existed in every phase of history from the fall of Adam to the rise of the technology that enables us to stay connected throughout this pandemic. The Christian story has survived global pandemics in the past and this will be no different. Christmas may have looked different this year but Christ remains the same. The baby whose birth we celebrate brought forth the power to save us and with it the light that overcomes the darkness. May we go forth empowered to live in the light of Jesus our Lord.

