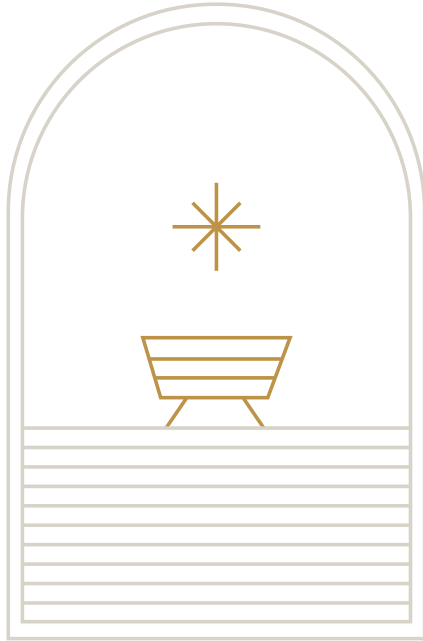


HIS NAME SHALL BE

Advent Readings for 2024



Written by Colleen Hewgill

Ryan's sermon series this Advent will look at Jesus through the lens of the well-loved carol "What Child Is This?". It is a question truly worth deep contemplation, as I am sure Mary did when she "...treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). The disciples also wrestled with this question. After Jesus calmed the storm they asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the wind and waves obey him!" (Matthew 8:27)

Names and titles tell us a lot about a person. You may be a parent, a sibling, an aunt or uncle. You may have a nickname, perhaps an intimate term of endearment between spouses, between friends or within a parent/child relationship. Even titles like Mommy or Daddy, or Grandma and Grandpa give a clue to who you are. Professional titles, like Teacher, Farmer, Doctor geographic titles like Canadian or Owen Sounder; faith-based titles like Christian or Christ-follower give further insight. This Christmas, come along with me as we dive into some of the names of Jesus. And let them give you a fuller picture of our Saviour as we contemplate together "What Child Is This?"

DECEMBER 1

Bread of Life

Suggested reading John 6:25-59

“Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35).

There is nothing quite like bread. All countries and cultures have some version of it, often as the main part of their diet. When Jesus says He is the Bread of Life, He is telling us that He alone can satisfy our deepest needs and longings. Picture biting into warm, freshly-made bread. The taste and the aroma envelop you. Comfort food at its best! But Jesus is saying far more than this. He is telling us that He is essential to truly living. He is the one who sustains us as believers. He is our fullness.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

Do we treat Him as bread in our culture? No longer essential, but one of many options in our day? Something to enjoy in church on Sunday, but not our daily sustenance? Or do we depend on Him, as other cultures depend on their daily bread? “Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him” (Psalm 34:8).

DECEMBER 2

Wonderful

Suggested reading Philippians 2:5-11

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6 KJV).

I found it interesting to note that the KJV puts a comma after *wonderful* when other versions do not. So I asked our local Hebrew scholar (Ryan Tudor), and he said the word translated “wonderful” is more often used as a noun so the KJV translators kept it as a separate name as opposed to a modifier. Commas are to guide English translation. Ryan thought both are correct according of the Hebrew text, and having a comma or not in this case is only to help our understanding.

The Hebrew word used in this text translated *wonderful* means “incomprehensible, full of wonder, beyond our understanding”. This is a mystery so profound, we can only wonder in awe. To us the phrase “a child is born” emphasizes Jesus’s humanity. He became fully human, the child in the manger. The phrase “to us a son is given” speaks of his divinity. He is given as well as born. He is fully God and fully human. He is infinite and yet an infant. He is eternal and yet born of a woman. He is Almighty, yet had to be nursed by his mother. He sustains and supports the universe, yet he needed to be carried in his parents’ arms. He is the King of heaven yet called the carpenter’s son. He is the heir of all things yet was born in a stable. He willingly accepted the cross, knowing fully what that meant, even though none of his followers understood. “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). This is the wonder of the cross. The wonder of our Saviour. He is truly surpassingly wonderful, beyond our comprehension. His name is Wonderful!

DECEMBER 3

Saviour

Suggested reading Romans 5:1-11

It is easy to think of salvation as a one time event at our conversion. We have been saved, we have come to faith, and so we think of Jesus our Saviour just in the light of that event. “For it is by grace you *have been saved*, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8, italics, mine throughout). We have been redeemed by the finished work of Jesus on the cross. Scripture also teaches us that the reality of Jesus being Saviour is so much bigger and richer. “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us *who are being saved* it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). We are currently being saved, being transformed into the likeness of our Saviour. This is an ongoing work within us.

“Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more *shall we be saved* from God’s wrath through Him!” (Romans 5:9). This is our hope as Christ followers, and we know that our hope in Jesus does not disappoint! (Rom 5:5) He is able to keep us from stumbling and will present us without fault before his glorious throne (Jude 1:24). He who was, is, and is to come, is the Saviour of our past, present and future.

DECEMBER 4

Prince of Peace

Suggested reading Luke 2:8-14

“His name shall be called...Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Prince of Peace. It is such a gloriously regal sounding title, befitting our King. However, to take it at face value in English only, we miss the richer implications that accompany the original Hebrew: *Sar Shalom*. We are familiar with shalom meaning more than just the absence of conflict, as peace often means in English. Instead, it carries with it a sense of completeness, wholeness and tranquility. The more interesting and perhaps unusual portion is *Sar*. This means more than a handsome figurehead—like a prince in a Hallmark movie—this title has serious militaristic tones. It conveys power, authority, even violence. It is not a friendly title.

When the shepherds had received the message from the angel of Jesus’s birth suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests” (Luke 2:13-14), this description of the great company of the heavenly host was another military term referring to an army. The *Sar Shalom* had come. Heaven’s army had been deployed to announce the birth of the King. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18). He has ultimate authority. How would he establish peace? Not in the manner of earthly tyrants. The blood spilled was his own, done willingly and strategically. He took the violence upon himself. “And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:20) Through him we have shalom with God, shalom with others and shalom within ourselves. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27).

DECEMBER 5

Mighty God

Suggested reading Colossians 1:15-20

“He shall be called... Mighty God” (Isaiah 9:6).

Jesus is God Almighty. He was not just a wise teacher or a great hero.

This title is saying that the child given to us is divine in and of himself. He does not just have the power of God, He is the power of God. Our salvation, past, present and future is dependent on the deity of Jesus. If he were not God, then our hope would be in someone of our own level, another human, and thus no hope at all. Only God could bridge the gap between God and humanity.

As the Nicene creed declares “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, only begotten of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made”. The concept of begotten not made is a profound one. He is begotten, meaning of the exact substance or nature of the Father, but it is an eternal begetting, in that he is from the beginning with the Father. There was never a time when he did not exist. “He is before all things, and by him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17).

DECEMBER 6

The Word

Suggested reading John 1:1-18; Hebrews 4:12-13

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14a). That is the whole wonder of Christmas. Jesus chose to take on a mortal body and live on earth with us; not in a lofty castle somewhere, but in the messiness and struggles of daily common life. Though all things were created by him, and he himself is without beginning or end, he came to a world that didn’t recognize or receive him. “Yet to all who believe in his name he has given to us the gift of being called children of God” (John 1:12).

The Greek word used in this text, Logos, appears in other passages too. Hebrews 4:12-13 tells us that the Word judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Jesus wrestled with life on earth and was tempted in every way as we are, yet was without sin. He understands us in our weakness and knows us more intimately than we know ourselves. He is both our judge and justification. Nothing is hidden from his sight. “Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given” John 1:16. Grace upon grace.

DECEMBER 7

Everlasting Father

Suggested reading John 4:19-26

“And he will be called... everlasting Father” (Isaiah 9:6).

This title seems especially confusing of all the names for Jesus, the Son. This title does not refer to Jesus’s place in the trinity—the Father and the Son are not interchangeable entities. The Father and the Son are distinct and separate while still being one the Godhead with the Spirit. This doctrine is foundational to our understanding of the Trinity. The title Everlasting Father reflects Jesus’s relationship with us. He is from everlasting to everlasting. He always was, is and will be for all eternity. Just as we may refer to Newton, Galileo or Einstein as the Father of Modern Physics, or Archimedes as the Father of Mathematics, Jesus is, in the same way, the Father of Eternity. He is pre-eminently eternal. He is also father in the sense that as Adam is the father of the human race and of the law, so Jesus as the second Adam, is the father of the covenant of grace. Thirdly, one can be considered a father as in the founder, or a father of the thing he invents.

Jesus is the one who initiated and taught us how to follow him, both in doctrine and in practice. For example when he taught us to pray, or when he explained to the woman at the well that the time had now come to worship in Spirit and in truth. In this sense, Jesus is the father of spiritual worship. He has revealed the way of faith. He is the father of the new covenant in his blood. He is the author and finisher of our faith. He is the Everlasting Father.

I found sermon notes from Charles Spurgeon particularly helpful to understand this name. If you would like to check it out: (spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/his-name-the-everlasting-father).

DECEMBER 8

Alpha and Omega

Suggested reading Isaiah 44:6-8

“I am the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (Revelation 22:13).

He is the beginning and end of all things. John’s gospel tells us that Jesus was there at the beginning, and all things were made through him.

Revelation reveals that he will be there at the end of all things. On a personal and individual level, Hebrews 12:2 says he is the *author and finisher* of our faith.

Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, Omega is the last letter. There is nothing before Him, and nothing is after him. He was before all things, and he will have the final say. He is timeless, he is the source of everything that has been made. He is self-existent. This profound truth gives us an anchor in all the storms of life. The storm will pass, but Jesus remains. Just as there is nothing that comes before Alpha, there is nothing that comes after Omega. You cannot find something that is beyond him. Nothing that could surprise him, there is nothing unforeseen. When he makes a declaration it is final.

DECEMBER 9

Son of Man

Suggested reading Luke 5: 17-26 and Matthew 26:62-65

“Jesus told him, “Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head”” (Matthew 8:20).

So far in our look into the names and titles of Jesus, we have focused on his divinity. Today’s name has a double meaning. It is the name our Lord Jesus most commonly used to refer to himself. In most references in the Old Testament, Son of Man was used as a synonym for human, a descendent of Adam. An exception to this is found in Daniel chapter 7, where the title Son of Man is clearly an exalted figure.

By using this title, Jesus quietly yet boldly declared his humanity and his deity. His claim of deity was clearly understood by the Sanhedrin in our second suggested reading passage today, as demonstrated by their shouts of blasphemy. However his humanity matters greatly. If he were not fully human, he could not have experienced temptation. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). If he were not fully human he could not have paid the penalty of sin because the wages of sin is death and only a human dies (Rom. 6:23). It was essential he was human without sin, otherwise he could not make atonement for others, he would have been paying his own debt.

DECEMBER 10

Son of God

Suggested reading Luke 1:26-38

“Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”” (Matthew 16:16).

Unlike yesterday’s title, this was not one that Jesus used to describe himself, but it is frequently used by others. Supernatural beings used this title, like Gabriel in the suggested reading for today. Also, whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God!” (Mark 3:11).

John the Baptizer said, “I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God” (Luke 1:34). The disciples exclaimed it when Jesus walked on the water. God the Father declared at Jesus’s baptism and also on the Mount of Transfiguration that “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” (Matthew 17:5). What more is there to say?

DECEMBER 11

Counsellor

Suggested reading Genesis 3:1-6; John 3:1-21

“...And he shall be called Wonderful Counsellor...” (Isaiah 9:6).

When we think of The Counsellor, we usually think of the Holy Spirit, since that is what Jesus called him. We know the Trinity is in unity, and each Person of the Trinity is complete in wisdom. Jesus was part of the council and decision-making before the world began. “Let *us* make mankind in *our* image” (Genesis 1:26, italics mine). In counsel and wisdom within the Trinity, the plan of redemption was set in place. “I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, ‘My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.’” (Isaiah 46:10).

The fall came about as a result of Eve (and Adam, who was with her), listening to and acting on bad counsel from Satan (Gen 3). It is necessary that restoration and redemption result from listening to and acting on wise counsel from Jesus, as he explained to Nicodemus (John 3).

For daily counsel, Jesus is able to empathize fully in our weakness and was without sin (Hebrews 4:14-16). His counsel has personal experience and is perfect. He promises to help us in our time of need. We are encouraged to have many counsellors (Proverbs 15:22), but unless their counsel is rooted in the Counsellor, it is folly. (1 Corinthians 3:19)

DECEMBER 12

Ancient of Days

Suggested reading Matthew 25:31-46

“As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgement in favour of the Holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom” (Daniel 7:21-22).

The title Ancient of Days appears only three times in scripture, all within Daniel chapter 7. The other two times, they refer to God the Father.

Both the Father and the Son are Ancient of Days, since both are without beginning. This verse refers specifically to Jesus returning to pronounce judgement on the world—what this will look like is described more clearly in today’s suggested reading. All authority for judgement has been given to Jesus. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgement to the Son, that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. “Whoever does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who sent him” (John 5:22-23). This same Jesus who will judge all mankind also provided the atoning sacrifice for us.

Tomorrow we will look to him as our Redeemer.

DECEMBER 13

Redeemer

Suggested reading 1 Peter 2:21-25

“But I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the end he will stand on the dust” (Job 19:25).

To redeem means to restore, to buy back, to free something from what brings it distress or harm, to buy the freedom of, to pay the required price to clear the debt. “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14). “For God bought you with a high price” (1 Corinthians 6:20a).

The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe, by CS Lewis tells the story of Aslan willingly laying down his life to redeem Edmund. When asked what it meant, Aslan stated, “if she (the witch) could have looked a little further back into the stillness and the darkness before time dawned, (she would have read) when a willing victim who has committed no treachery is killed in a traitor’s stead, the table itself would crack, and death itself would start working backwards”. This is an allegory of Jesus’ sacrifice to redeem us. “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus will redeem his creation. “He is making all things new” (Revelation 21:5).

DECEMBER 14

Lamb of God

Suggested reading Hebrews 10:1-18

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”” (John 1:29)

To understand the significance of Jesus being the Lamb of God, we have to look briefly at the old covenant between God and his chosen people.

God required the sacrifice of animals to atone for the sins of the people.

Also, when the Israelites were freed from bondage in Egypt, a lamb was slain, and its blood was painted on the doorposts so the angel of death

would pass over. Every morning and every evening, a lamb was sacrificed

in the Temple for the sins of the people. Even the priests had to perform

sacrifices on their own behalf as there was no one without sin. The

sacrificial system pointed to the need for the Saviour. Only the perfect,

sinless Lamb of God could provide a permanent solution (1 Peter 1:19).

Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after

day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. “He

sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself” (Hebrews

7:27).

DECEMBER 15

Good Shepherd

Suggested reading John 10:1-30

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me” (John 10:14).

Jesus is the Lamb of God as we discussed yesterday, but he is also the Good Shepherd. What does that look like for us? Psalms 23 tells us what it is like to have our Lord be our Shepherd. Here is my own paraphrase of that chapter: The Lord is my Shepherd, my Wonderful Counsellor and my Saviour. He always supplies everything I need. He provides a rest for me in his abundant love. His paths lead me to peace, the quiet streams of his grace. It is here the Prince of Peace restores and revives my soul. Here he teaches me contentment and leads me in his footsteps of righteousness so that I can bring honour to his name for he is Ancient of Days, and my Everlasting Father. Even when the path takes me through valleys of deep darkness, even to the shadow of death, fear will not overcome me because my complete trust is in you! You are Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. You will remain close to me and lead me through all. You are Mighty God, and your authority is my strength and my peace, and the comfort of your love takes away my fear. You sustain me as with a delicious feast, even when others oppose me, for you are the Bread of Life. You anoint me with the fragrance of the Holy Spirit; filling me until my heart overflows. Your goodness and love pursue me all the days of my life. Then afterward, when my life is through, I will live in your glorious presence forever!

DECEMBER 16

Immanuel / Emmanuel

Suggested reading Matthew 1:18-25

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

Have you ever wondered, like me, why there are two spellings? Perhaps you already know. Immanuel with an “I” is the Hebrew spelling, the primary language of the Old Testament (only Ezra, Daniel and one verse in Jeremiah used Aramaic instead). Emmanuel with an “E” is Greek, the language of the New Testament. Regardless of the spelling, the meaning is the same: God With Us.

John spoke of this when he said “the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). Jesus lived alongside the people of his day, doing life with them, healing the sick, casting out demons, preaching and teaching, challenging long held customs and traditions, and changing lives. When he was crucified, his followers were devastated not understanding what had happened. Some were skeptical or fearful when they heard he had come back among them. Jesus soon comforted them and conquered their fears, as he does with us when we abide in him. His final recorded words to his followers before he returned to heaven as he instructed them to make disciples was “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20b). Again he promised, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:4b). He is still, and will always be Immanuel, God with us.

DECEMBER 17

Son of David

Suggested reading Acts 2:29-33

“Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus, (which means son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”” (Mark 10:46-47).

Two questions come to my mind as I ponder this title. Why does it matter to us that He is called the Son of David? And, did Bartimaeus actually know Jesus’s lineage when he called him that? Let’s look at the second question first. From what I can find, it is unlikely that Bartimaeus knew the details of Jesus’s ancestry. The title Son of David was a Messianic title, indicating the promised Saviour, the Deliverer, the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. By calling Jesus the Son of David, he was declaring his statement of faith, acknowledging that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah. Now to look at why the title matters. Matthew 1 details the genealogy of Joseph, Jesus’s legal father. Luke 3 presents Jesus’s genealogy through Mary. Jesus is a direct descendant of David by adoption through Joseph, and by blood through Mary. Regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David (Romans 1:3).
(Continued)

DECEMBER 17^{CONTINUED}

Son of David

Suggested reading Acts 2:29-33

This detail fulfills God's promise to David, and fulfills the many repeated prophecies of his lineage. The Pharisees fully understood what the people meant when they called him the Son of David. Jesus challenged the Pharisees about their understanding of Messiah as both David's son, and David's Lord in Matthew 22:41-46. They were baffled by this and could not answer, as many thought the Messiah would be a political leader, an earthly king who would establish Israel as a strong independent nation. That was the general sentiment on Palm Sunday. Many who followed Jesus were disillusioned when he was arrested, not grasping that his kingdom was an eternal one. In Revelation 22:16 Jesus answers the question he posed to the Pharisees by declaring "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the Bright Morning Star." He both created David, and was a descendant of David. Only Jesus could be both, since he alone is both fully God and fully man.

DECEMBER 18

The Way, The Truth and the Life

Suggested reading John 14:1-21

“Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”” (John 14:6).

This statement is central and essential to our understanding of Christian theology. The definitive article “the” is paramount. He is not “a way” or “a truth” or “a life”.

Jesus is The Way. “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). He is the only mediator between God and mankind, the only one to bridge the gap and make it possible for us to be right with God. Because of this, the early church in Acts often referred to itself as the Way, acknowledging Jesus as the only way to the Father.

Jesus is The Truth. Jesus said to the people who believed in him, “You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). Jesus is more than just someone who always told the truth. He is the embodiment and fulfillment of the word of God. He is the creator and sustainer. There is no falseness in him. “Truth is not defined by our own subjective standards; it is determined by the Source of truth Himself” (RC Sproul).

Jesus is The Life. “For everything was created by him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and by him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16-17). He is the Source of life, both physical and eternal. He is the author of spiritual rebirth, as he told Nicodemus. He breathed the first breath into Adam, and he secures our eternity. “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:38).

DECEMBER 19

The Light of the World

Suggested reading 1 John 1:5-7; 2:9-11

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am *the light of the world*. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12, italics mine).

The very first act of creation in Genesis 1:3 was to create light and to separate it from the darkness. Throughout scripture light is used to describe God, his attributes and his ways; and used darkness to portray evil, Satan, and his schemes. Isaiah prophesied: “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned” (Isaiah 9:2). John the Baptizer came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him, all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. “The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world” (John 1:7-9). The Son becomes human and enters the scene! Would the people recognize the light? “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). So many chose or were blinded by darkness. “And no wonder! For Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). But the true Light of the World dispels darkness and reveals the Son. “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5).

What does that mean for us who have been made alive with Christ? “For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8). This is then how we should live. This is our walk, our way of being. “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

DECEMBER 20

King of Kings and Lord of Lords

Suggested reading Luke 1:46-55

“They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers” (Revelation 17:14).

There is no higher title to depict power, authority and dominion. “Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18). All authority. Absolute dominion. Jesus is “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Revelation 1:5b). “The kings of the earth wear their crowns and sway their scepters by license from Jesus’ throne” (Charles Spurgeon). “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will” (Proverbs 21:1).

This world can seem chaotic and out of control, but the King of kings is sovereign. He is directing the course of humanity. “No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay to down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded” (John 10:28). “People in positions of borrowed power used it to crucified Jesus . . . they were only doing what God was allowing them to do” (Jackie Hill Perry). The King of kings and Lord of lords used his power and authority to make himself nothing, came as a helpless baby, lived among us and then laid down his life to be the sacrifice for sin for us in order to redeem us. Let our souls magnify the Lord along with Mary! “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of a God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11). He is the King over all kings, and he is Lord of All!

DECEMBER 21

Christ

Suggested reading Matthew 16:13-20

“Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16)

The word Christ comes from the Greek, *Christos*. It means anointed one, chosen one, one who brings salvation, Redeemer. It is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word Messiah. Try substituting one of those definitions for Christ before or behind the name of Jesus to get a deeper sense of what we are saying when we say Christ Jesus or Jesus Christ. The suggested passage today tells of the exchange between Jesus and his disciples initially discussing who others thought Jesus was. Finally Jesus asks, “But you, who do you say that I am?” This is one of life’s most important questions, and how we answer has eternal consequences. When Peter answered, Jesus stated that God the Father had revealed this answer to Peter. It was not of his own thinking, or what another human had persuaded him to say.

One of my favorite quotes comes from *The Silver Chair* by CS Lewis, spoken by Aslan to Jill, “You would not have called to me unless I had been calling to you”. It is God who calls and reveals himself to us. Another profound mystery is that we as Christ followers are in Christ. The Anointed One has redeemed us. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are appointed to do the work he has called us to do. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10). We are being kept in Christ. “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen” (Jude 24-25).

DECEMBER 22

Messiah

Suggested reading Luke 2:25-35

Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

The long awaited, anticipated Anointed One, the Messiah was born and his arrival announced first to the shepherds. What a spectacular scene that would have been in the dark night sky! The other group that received a special invitation were the Magi. They stopped by Herod’s palace in Jerusalem to ask for directions. It is likely they were familiar with the writings of Daniel, and knew the child would be the Chosen One (Messiah) of Israel. “When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born” (Matthew 2:3-4). This was no small ordeal in Jerusalem. Notice all Jerusalem was disturbed along with Herod, and all the chief priests and teachers of the law were consulted. This was hot news, and it must have traveled fast for everyone in the city to be roused. Imagine if there were social media!

Those chief priests and teachers knew exactly where to find the answer. Anyone schooled in the Books of the Law and the Prophets would have known. All the Jewish population anticipated the arrival of the Messiah. In Mary’s encounter with the angel Gabriel, she asked a logistical question – how, not a “what are you talking about” question . The dialogue between Elizabeth and Mary, including Mary’s song, which she ends with “just as he promised our ancestors”. Luke 1:55b shows that they both understood that the prophecies were being fulfilled.

DECEMBER 23

Dayspring

Suggested reading Luke 1:57-80

“Through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace” (Luke 1:78-79 KJV).

This is a rather obscure but interesting name that Zechariah uses in his song of praise after the birth of John. We may be more familiar with this name from singing it every year:

O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer,
Our spirits by Thine Advent here;
And drive away the shades of night,
And pierce the clouds and bring us light!

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!

The word Dayspring is an old English word that would have been commonly used about 400 years ago. Like many other words, it has lost or changed its meaning with the passage of time. Originally it referred to the sunrise, that is, the metaphorical spring from which the sun erupts each day.

(Continued)

DECEMBER 23^{CONTINUED}

Dayspring

Suggested reading Luke 1:57-80

The original Greek word used in this verse is *anatole* which is translated: 1. a rising (of the sun and stars) or 2. the east (the direction of the sunrise). In the key verse above the NASB uses Sunrise, the Amplified uses Sunrise (Messiah), the NIV uses rising sun, the NLT uses morning light, other versions use Dawn. All of these translations equivalently point that “the true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world” (John 1:9). It is interesting that the verses preceding this one in John, and our key verse (see the suggested reading for context) both discuss John the Baptizer in his role of preparing the way for Jesus. Another thought to ponder, the Greek word *anatole* is also used three times in Matthew 2. In the recounting of the Magi from the east (v. 1) saw his star when it rose (v.2) and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them (v. 9). That journey took the Magi to the one who himself is the Risen Son.

DECEMBER 24

Bright Morning Star

Suggested reading 2 Peter 1:12-21

“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star” (Revelation 22:16).

In this statement, Jesus is again confirming his physical lineage through David as well as his divine nature to give us reassurance of the hope of his return in these last verses of the Bible. “On a long dark night, the appearance of the morning star means daybreak is imminent. In the long dark night of suffering on earth, Jesus being seen as the morning star means the eternal morning is about to dawn. Hence Christ as the morning star is a picture of great promise and hope” (Randy Alcorn).

But Satan has also been called a morning star. “How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations” (Isaiah 14:12). The contrast is that he is a fallen star, cast down, defeated, and will remain fallen. We see other times that Jesus and Satan are described with similar names. Such is the nature of figurative language, a single image can possess multiple meanings and sometimes it is the contrast that best helps illustrate a point. Physical stars fall too, some burn up and create black holes, consuming what is around them. In the scriptures, both Jesus and Satan were compared to a lion, but what different attributes of the lion they embody! Jesus is the Lion of Judah, full of majesty and glory; victorious! (Revelation 5:5) Satan is a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). “The one eternally destructive weapon that Satan had was stripped from his hand, namely, his accusation before God that we are all guilty and should perish with him. When Christ died that accusation was nullified. All those who entrust themselves to Christ will never perish. Satan cannot separate them from the love of Christ (Romans 8:37-39)” (John Piper).

DECEMBER 25

Jesus

Suggested reading Matthew 1:18-21, Philippians 2:5-11

“You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus”
(Luke 1:31).

The angel’s words to Mary contain the same instructions as those given to Joseph—name your son Jesus (see suggested reading in Matthew). God chose the name. It is the name that is above every other name (Philippians 2:9). “Then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:10-12). Jesus is the reason for our joy and hope today and every other day of the year! “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15).

Merry Christmas!