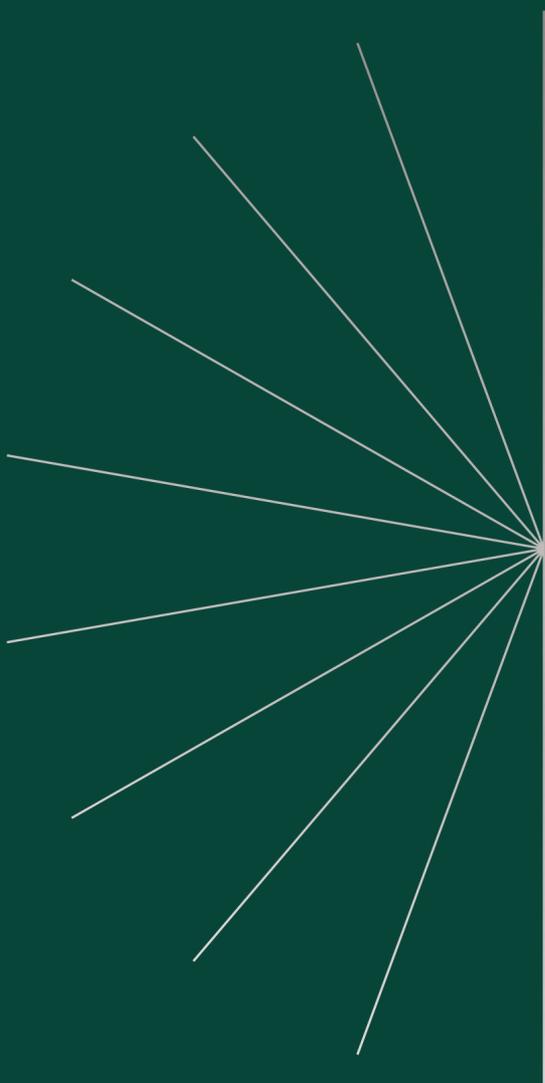
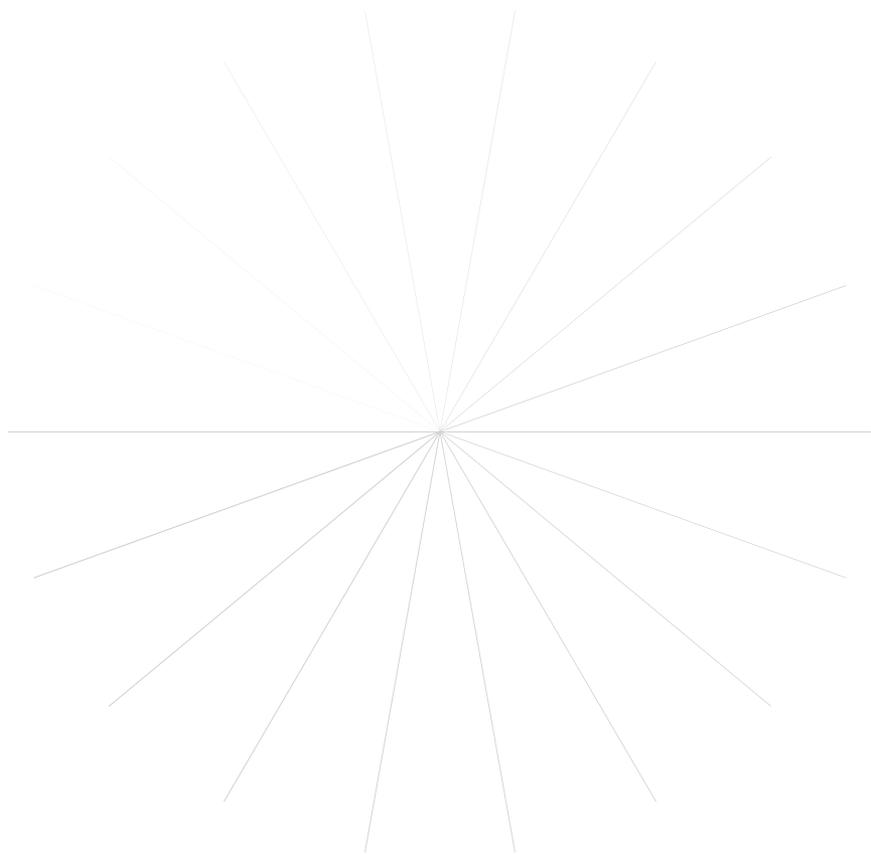


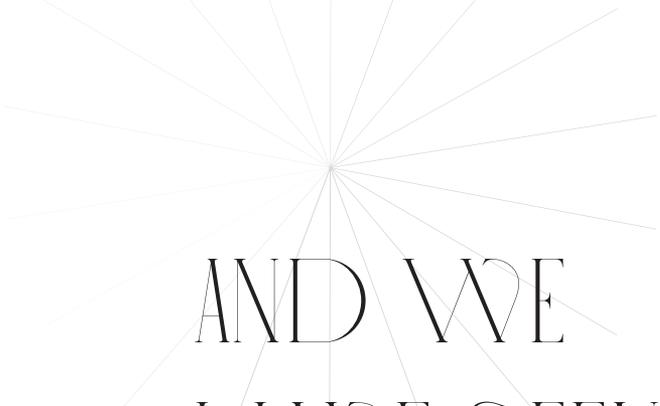
ADVENT



ADVENT PLAN *2019*

SECTION
ONE:
PROPHECY





AND WE
HAVE SEEN
HIS GLORY,
THE GLORY
OF THE
FATHER'S
ONE AND
ONLY SON.



DAY ONE

John 1:1-14

Our Advent reading begins in John 1, as a reminder that from the very foundations of the world and in all of Scripture, Jesus has been for us. He is the Creator who stepped down from His place in heaven to become like us, so that from the inside out He would conquer our sin and set us free again. We are living in the days that generations of people prayed and hoped for! These are the days the Spirit of the Lord has been poured out into the earth, the days of the Savior who has made a way for humanity to come back into relationship with our Father.

In the coming weeks, we will reflect on Scripture in both the Old and New Testaments that all point towards the coming of Christ. We will look at prophecy that came to ancient Israel, the months leading up to Jesus' arrival, and the events surrounding His birth. As we look at the story of Christ's anticipated arrival, our

prayer at New Life Church is that you would remember that Jesus came to be the embodiment of God's promises for salvation and redemption. All our hopes and prayers are answered in the Person of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.

PRAYER: JESUS, WE LOOK TO YOU. SHOW US MORE OF WHO YOU ARE AND WHY YOU CAME TO US AS WE STUDY THE STORY OF YOUR ARRIVAL.

DAY TWO

Genesis 3:1-15

The first indication of a Savior in Scripture can be found immediately after the fall of Adam and Eve. As they both shift blame for their sins to one another, God responds with truth and grace. Yes, Adam and Eve's choices have incredibly painful consequences that would alter the course of all humanity. But God's love would prevail! From the moment He meets them in the garden after their sin, He begins providing a way for His people to be saved and reconciled back to Him.

In Genesis 3:15, the Lord declares that although Satan will strike out at Eve's descendants, there will be One (the Savior) who will conquer and crush the deceiver. God's immediate response to Adam and Eve's sin isn't one of rejection or abandonment, but of provision. He first brings light to the situation by calling out what had been done wrong, then covers Adam and Eve, knowing they need shielding from their shame. This is the first sacrifice we see God make for His creation: He fashions clothing from animal skins for Adam and Eve, a foreshadowing of Christ being given for the sins of the world. God makes a way for us.

God's grace makes a way when we've burned all our bridges. He wants us not because we get it right, but because of His great love for us. We are His prize, His carefully formed creation. One of our core values at New Life Church is, "We believe in the value of a soul." This value didn't come from any self-derived conviction; we believe in the soul's value because the Word is clear in passages like this: God is adamant that we are of an incredibly high value. As you read about the great lengths God went to to bring us a Savior, we pray you would see how valued you are in the Lord's eyes. You are valued, not because you've earned it, but because of the love God has poured out for you!

Think about this: it's the souls of humanity that heaven and hell wage war for. When was the last time you thought of your value as something of eternal weight? What about the value of your family and the people around you each day? God gave the very best—the highest price He could for you. You are seen; you are loved.

As you pray today, ask God to remind you of your true worth and how you can show people around you that they also have eternal value.

DAY THREE

Micah 5:2-5

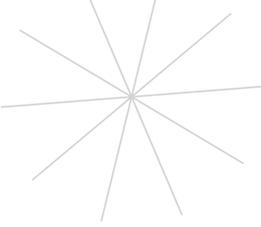
Bethlehem wasn't known for being mighty. It was a small, humble town known more for its past association with King David than anything current to the time Jesus was born. Yet how often does Scripture show it's the delight of God to bring greatness out of the unexpected?

In fact, it was in Bethlehem generations before Jesus' birth that God spoke to the prophet Samuel, "The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7) While the rest of the world may not have expected much of Bethlehem, God chose this quiet, unassuming place to be the first to encounter the long-awaited Messiah.

Just as many saw only their need for a physical (outward) freedom, God knew that without freedom in their hearts, they would never walk in the abundant and free life as He intended. He sees our hearts, too. He knows that our brokenness and need for Him go much deeper than our appearances. Our Savior didn't come to bring a temporary solution to physical needs that would come and go.

PRAYER: GOD, THANK YOU FOR SEEING ALL OF ME. SEARCH ME FROM THE INSIDE OUT AND SHOW ME WHAT YOU SEE. IS THERE ANYTHING I NEED TO CHANGE? IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WANT TO CELEBRATE AND FURTHER CULTIVATE IN ME?

Write down three things to celebrate and three things to change, along with a practical step to begin each one.

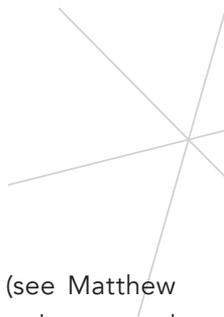


DAY FOUR

Isaiah 9:1-7

When Isaiah prophesied that a great light would come to free God's people, He didn't just speak as though it were a far-off, vague dream. Isaiah names the exact location where Jesus would begin His ministry of drawing people back to the heart of God. As he speaks of a light dawning on those who have been living in darkness, he specifically means the Messiah living in Galilee. This area was originally the land of two of the tribes of Israel, Zebulun and Naphtali, which were closer to the outer edges of the kingdom. Not only was Galilee a place at the fringes of the nation's territory, it also was home to a significant number of people who didn't believe in Israel's God and was a place that faced oppression for years.

Still, it's the place where God keeps His word. The Light of the World began His message and

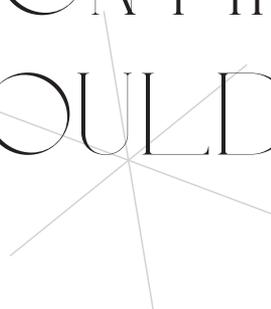
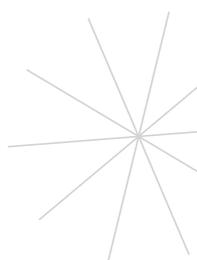


ministry in Galilee (see Matthew 4:12-25) and its people respond with repentance and faith, bringing the sick into His healing presence. God doesn't forget us—He is the God who comes to us! Pastor Rick and our campus pastors are always saying that our church isn't the best one; we're just one church that is part of the Church. Jesus didn't entrust us with the light so we could keep it within the walls of a building. We believe we are called to bring the light of Jesus into dark places, first in our own lives and then to others.

Where do you see people struggling in darkness around you today? Focus on one area that needs light and pray specifically for the hope of Jesus to fill that place. Next, choose a way to encourage or serve people in that area and do it before the day is over!



FOR A CHILD
IS BORN TO
US, A SON
IS GIVEN TO
US. THE
GOVERNMENT
WILL REST
ON HIS
SHOULDERS.



DAY FIVE

2 Samuel 7:10-13,

Acts 2:25-32,

Jeremiah 23:5-6

God called David a man after His own heart. (Acts 13:22) Even though David makes some incredibly big mistakes in his life, we see God honor His promise to forever uphold the throne of David by weaving Jesus' birth into his family line. In fact, we see this connection between the hearts of God and David even as Jesus died on the cross, when He quotes Psalm 22 as a cry to the Father in His suffering.

Just like in David's life, we may not see the promises of God come to pass in the timing we expect or want. (David's promise came generations after he passed away, and Jesus didn't sit on the political throne many assumed He would take.) But know that God keeps His word—in Jesus, we can see that God is faithful to us! His personal promise to David became an eternal gift to all the earth. God models follow through for us and, as His people, that same Spirit of commitment abides within us.

Faithfulness is a quality we see God embody through the fulfilled promise of Jesus.

Today, think about how you've personally seen God's faithfulness. Ask Him how you can model this to the people around you. Make good on that lunch commitment you keep talking about, or help a friend with the house project you said you could jump in on. Faithfulness is a gift for you, and is also your assignment as a believer in Christ!

DAY SIX

Isaiah 61:1-9

The people of Israel were broken in the days of the prophet Isaiah. They'd been taken captive, exiled to different nations, and they continuously struggled to remain united in their faith. As the Lord looked into the brokenness of not only Israel but all humanity, He knew what was needed. Through Isaiah, God spoke the hope of a Savior as a lifeline to believers who were desperate for change. This Savior would be anointed by God to bring joy that replaced mourning, freedom for captives,

comfort for the brokenhearted, and so much more.

But perhaps the most beautiful part of Isaiah's prophecy of Jesus can be found in chapter 61 verse 9. Here, it's foretold that the veil (a barrier in the temple between the people and the presence of God) would be torn and all people would then be able to approach the Spirit of God directly. Before Jesus came, the Israelites relied on priests to connect them with the Lord. But Jesus came to remove the barriers by giving His life for the sins that kept us separated. In doing so, He gave us direct access to the presence of our God at all times. "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace . . ." (Ephesians 2:13-14a)

We've seen a lot of growth at New Life Church as we've continued to expand into more cities across Arkansas. While we love gathering together at those locations, it's ultimately the people who make up the body of the Church and who carry the presence of God throughout the world. The Spirit of the Lord that

brings freedom, comfort, and healing is alive within us because Jesus has removed the veil. Our hope is that as you read these passages today, you would be reminded to daily abide in the presence of the Lord.

Isaiah lists powerful ways that the Lord will bring hope and healing to us. Which have you personally experienced? Spend five minutes in prayer, thanking Jesus for coming to us and bringing the hope of heaven to Earth.

I AM
THE LORD, THE
GOD OF YOUR
GRANDFATHER
ABRAHAM, AND
THE GOD OF
YOUR FATHER,
ISAAC.



DAY SEVEN

Genesis 28:10-14

As Jacob encounters heaven, the Lord promises him that his legacy would include a descendant through which all families would be blessed. In Matthew 1, we see that Jacob is included in the lineage of Jesus' earthly family, meaning that God did what He said He would. Through Jacob's descendants God gave His only Son, and whoever believes in Him will be saved. (John 3:16)

Jacob isn't a perfect man by any means, but he holds fast to the promises of God through the highs and lows of his family's story. He presses on to keep his family together in the face of death, tragedy, and failure.

Imagine where we would be if not for the perseverance of people like Jacob, who refused to give up on the promises of God. You don't have to be the perfect parent or perfect child to be used to bring the Father's love

into your home. Just keep your eyes set on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith. (Hebrews 12:2) From the beginning we've always wanted New Life Church to be a place of support for families. Whatever your family circumstance looks like, good or broken or lost, we believe there is healing and a home for you in the Church!

Have you caused pain in your family or been hurt by a family member? Bring it to God in prayer and ask Him to heal what has been damaged. There is grace for your brokenness!

DAY EIGHT

Psalms 40:1-5

This is the season leading up to Christmas Day—days of hope and expectation as we remember the arrival of a child that an entire nation of people once waited thousands of years for. Yet how often does an expectation turn to discontentment—or even pain—as our waiting starts to seem like it's no longer a part of the process but a permanent state of being? As if someone was paving a road through the wilderness and just suddenly decided to stop right in the middle.

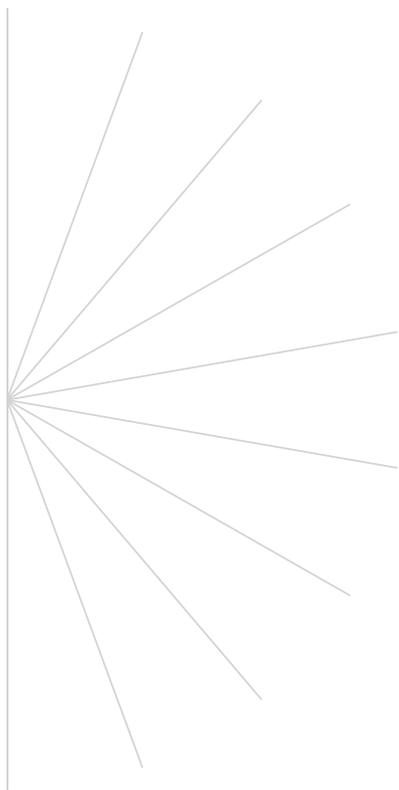
If we can see anything in the story of Jesus, it's that a promise so often comes through a process. That miracle you are waiting for would be amazing if it came in the snap of a second. . . . But there is a depth and richness in the process of walking with God faithfully, daily, side-by-side in the waiting. Lean into the presence of God in the quiet as well as in the chaos. How beautiful to find God in the promises fulfilled. But know that

He is just as real and available to you in the times of waiting.

Throughout the years of our church, we've seen so many people who were believing for a child, healing, or other dream, but they continued to have to wait for their miracle. As they watched the Lord move on behalf of others' desires, they took heart knowing that He could also do it for them. Waiting with this kind of attitude shifted these people from a perspective of helplessness to confidence. Let's learn from this example and, instead of waiting in despair or fear, let's be people who choose to wait in faith.

As you find yourselves in places of waiting today—whether it's in the grocery store or a meeting at work—take note of what's going on around you rather than focusing on where you can't be right then. How might God be moving around you? How can you move closer to Him in the waiting? Lean into the present.

SECTION
TWO:
PRE-BIRTH
OF JESUS



DAY NINE

Matthew 1:1-17

We don't have to be Bible scholars to see that Jesus' family tree had a few people who aren't what you'd expect in the line of a king. Judah was a natural leader but also used that strength for harm when he sold his brother Joseph into slavery. Ruth was an incredibly faithful and loyal woman, but as a Moabite widow she was both a foreigner to Israel and a reminder of ancestors who didn't remain faithful to the Lord. King Josiah restored the temple and the law of the Lord to his kingdom, but was only eight years old when he took the throne.

No one in the line was perfect or who we might expect to be there, but each person was included in the process of bringing a holy Savior to the world.

Your background doesn't disqualify you from the Kingdom of God. In fact, Jesus came in the manner He did—born to an average girl, nestled in a manger—in many ways to show the world that, like the prophet Samuel was told when he anointed David as king, He also wasn't the typical expectation of a king. God isn't looking for the typical person, or even popular, most unique, or most talented person. He's looking for a willing heart.

Think about what you consider to be your greatest disqualification from God's Kingdom, then ask Him to show you His perspective on it. What does your weakness look like in the light of Jesus? Our prayer is that you would begin to see the strength of His grace in your life and its power to redeem all things!

DAY TEN

Luke 1:26-38

As an angel visited Mary with a message and assignment from God, Scripture tells us that she was “disturbed and afraid.” God knew she would be frightened; He knew what He asked her to be a part of wasn’t normal or easy. So, He quickly reassures her that she doesn’t have to be afraid, and why. God dreams aren’t comfortable, but He does comfort us in them. (The phrase “do not fear” appears hundreds of times in the Bible.)

Through Mary’s discomfort and fear comes a season of celebration, the presence of peace, and the comfort of salvation for the earth. Her experiences, as difficult as they are, are a small foreshadow of the pain Jesus would face on the

cross and how He would suffer. Yet it confirmed again and again that out of great suffering God can shape goodness—for us and for those who come after us.

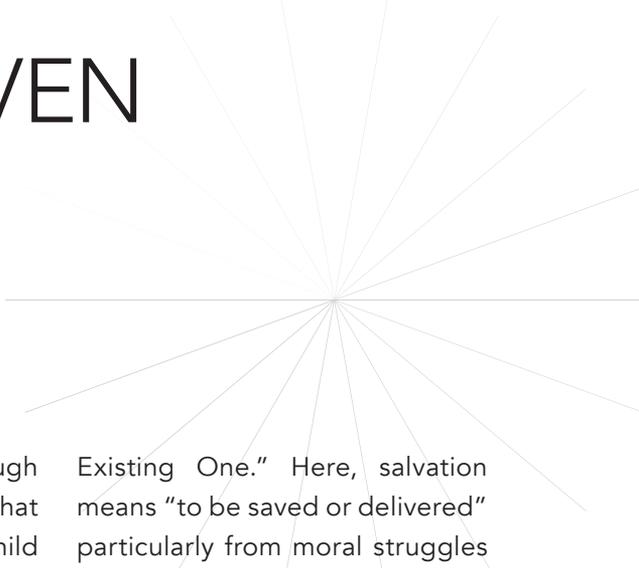
The tension isn’t comfortable, the process is painful and usually much longer than we want. But remember that this is the day that the Lord has made; this day doesn’t belong to your tension or fear.

Where in your life have you experienced tension or fear? What are some strongholds within you you’ve seen God break? Ask God to show you where He is building something in your story that could be a light for someone else to see the love and salvation of Christ.

AND
THEY WILL
CALL HIM
IMMANUEL,
WHICH
MEANS
'GOD IS
WITH US.'



DAY ELEVEN



Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph is put into a pretty tough situation. When he hears that Mary is pregnant with a child that isn't his own, he must be devastated. Of course we can see from our vantage point what is really going on, but Joseph? He is living out what is probably a newlywed's worst nightmare. However, like Mary, Joseph is given a message by the angel of the Lord; and, like his bride, he responds with obedience and humility. We can learn so much from Joseph choosing to remain faithful even when things don't appear the way he thought they would.

Joseph will go on to raise the Child as his own and give Him the name Jesus, just as the angel commanded. The name Jesus actually means "Jehovah is Salvation." This is incredibly significant to understand because Jehovah is the proper name of God, meaning "The

Existing One." Here, salvation means "to be saved or delivered" particularly from moral struggles or failures. So even within this child's name, God is telling people that He is real, He exists, and He is giving Himself to save us from sin. How incredible that Joseph's obedience in the simple act of naming his child actually begins ushering in the good news of the gospel! Before Jesus is even old enough to speak, His name will declare His mission in the world.

Infinite power and hope are in the Name of Jesus. As the Church, we exist to lift up this Name above all other names! Today, invite Jesus into every moment of your day. Ask God what it looks like to honor Him in every task ahead of you. Remember that the Lord is for you and has come to you. He is your ever-present help for every need!

DAY TWELVE

Luke 1:5-25

How funny are we when, waiting and hoping beyond all reason for something, we disbelieve when it actually happens? Sometimes we even get frustrated or angry with the timing. Zechariah and Elizabeth had wanted a child for years. Yet it was still difficult for Zechariah to believe Gabriel's message of a son. Nevertheless, God faithfully fulfills His word to the couple.

Out of their single hope for a child, we see many people come into the Kingdom of God. Their son was John the Baptist, the man who prepares the way for Jesus to begin His ministry. In the same way, the things you hope for may seem simple or even too insignificant to ask the Lord about. But ask anyway. Know that you are heard (Psalm 145:18) and that He has far higher hopes for you than you could even imagine.

Today, ask the Lord to give you faith to believe in the good things you see or hear. Where can you surrender skepticism and choose to embrace what is good instead? Write down your thoughts and thank Him for these good things.

DAY THIRTEEN

Luke 1:35-45

Today we look at the stories of Elizabeth and Mary, two rather ordinary and quite unlikely women who are chosen to usher in the promised words of generations before. Mary bringing Jesus into the world had been prophesied since Adam and Eve, and Elizabeth's son, John, was the messenger Isaiah foretold would prepare the way for the Savior. "For the word of God will never fail," the angel told Mary in Luke 1:37, and how true this is in both of these women's lives!

The Word of God doesn't fail us. The Word of God is not just text, but a Person—and that Person is Jesus. "In the beginning the Word already existed, and the Word was with God." (John 1:1) Hold onto the promises of the Lord and believe that those words are embodied by the coming of Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us. Maybe, like Elizabeth, it seems your time has passed;

or, like Mary, you feel so unlikely and unworthy. But remember that there is a blessing we get to experience when, like these two women, we believe that the Lord will do what He has said He would. Have faith and take part in how He is working in the world around you!

Just like the encouragement Elizabeth and Mary gained from talking with each other, we can gain perspective when we share our needs with others. Take some time to write down things about your purpose in life that are difficult for you to believe.

Ask God to give you faith for those things and share them with trustworthy people in your life so they can be praying for you! If you don't have a life-giving community, we encourage you to begin looking for one today. New Life Church wouldn't be where it is today without the relationships that have been at the heart of our church since day one.

We believe we were created to be in relationship with God and humanity, so don't miss out on all that a good community of people can bring to your life!

DAY FOURTEEN

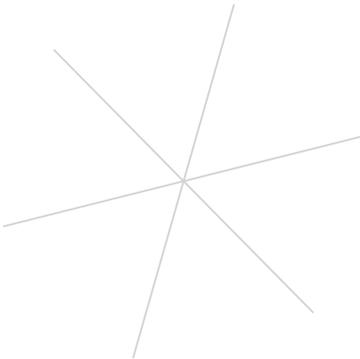
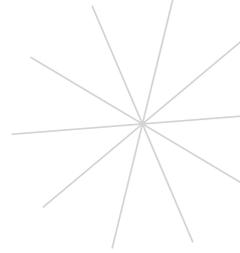
Luke 1:46-56

Worship speaks the eternal into the temporal. Worship declares who the Lord is; it puts the focus on God because we are choosing to look through the fog and noise of the world to what He is doing.

For Mary, there was a lot she could have been consumed with as she visited Elizabeth, but she chooses to engage her mind and speech in worship. She recognizes there is so much more at work in her life than a new marriage and pregnancy.

Generations of expectation and hope are about to be fulfilled and the future of humanity would shift into redemption through her Son's birth. Maybe your task list and calendar seem overwhelming during this holiday season, but ask the Lord to remind you what Christmas is really about. Remember, we're here to celebrate Jesus coming to us!

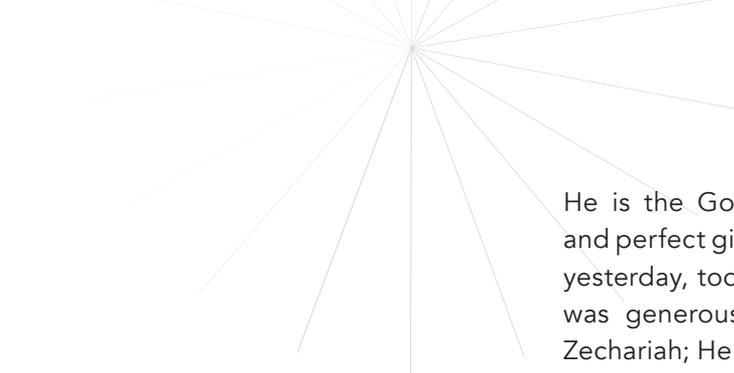
Today, spend ten minutes in worship, recalling and thanking God for specific ways that the Savior has given you an abundant, full life. Worship is vital to our relationship with the Lord and keeping our eyes focused on Him.





HE
SHOWS
MERCY
FROM
GENERATION
TO
GENERATION.





DAY FIFTEEN

Luke 1:57-66

For years Elizabeth and Zechariah desperately wanted to have a child, and in the first chapter of Luke, we get to see their dream finally come true. Friends and family gather around them at their son's birth to celebrate this miracle child born to them in old age. While visitors encourage them to name the baby after his father, Elizabeth and Zechariah remember the words of the angel to name the child John, which means "Jehovah is a Gracious Giver."

What a powerful and true name for this baby! Not only is John a precious gift to his parents, but he will become the messenger going out ahead of Jesus to prepare people for His ministry. Our hopes and desires are not lost on the Lord.

He is the God who gives good and perfect gifts. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He was generous to Elizabeth and Zechariah; He will be generous to us, too, and is ready to do more than we can ask or imagine!

Take time today to write down five things the Lord has given to you. Thank Him specifically for each of these gifts and tell Him why they are important to you. Then this weekend at church, ask the Lord to show you someone you can encourage with what God has given you. We believe that what God has done within you He will also be used by Him to bless others!

DAY SIXTEEN

Luke 1:67-80

Zechariah must have been anxious to say so many things after the birth of a son and restoration of his speaking ability. Yet he sets a powerful example for us when he chooses to quickly declare the goodness of God and His faithfulness to the promises made throughout Israel's history, inviting others to praise the Lord

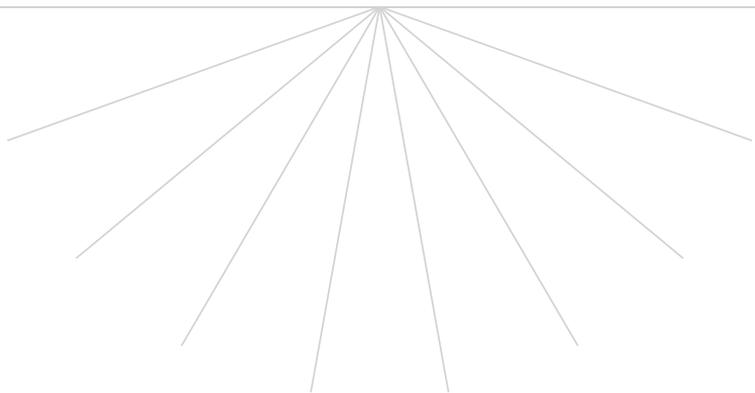
with him. Zechariah is among the first to declare that the Savior was arriving—the One the Lord promised would come to save and set captives free.

The last portion of Zechariah's prophecy is over his son. He speaks directly to the infant, telling him he will be a prophet of the Most High who will prepare the way for Christ to bring the message of salvation to all people. Some of the first words John would have heard were of the mercy of God, who brings light into the dark places. We have this same opportunity to speak heavenly life over the world around us! One of our core values at New Life has always been that we believe in life-giving relationships and communication. We encourage you to choose words that line up with who God has called you to be and to speak life over others.

Who are you declaring life and Kingdom-purpose over today? Take time to pray for three people and send them a message to encourage them in their faith.



SECTION
THREE:
JESUS' BIRTH
AND THE
WORLD'S
RESPONSE



DAY SEVENTEEN

Luke 2:1-7

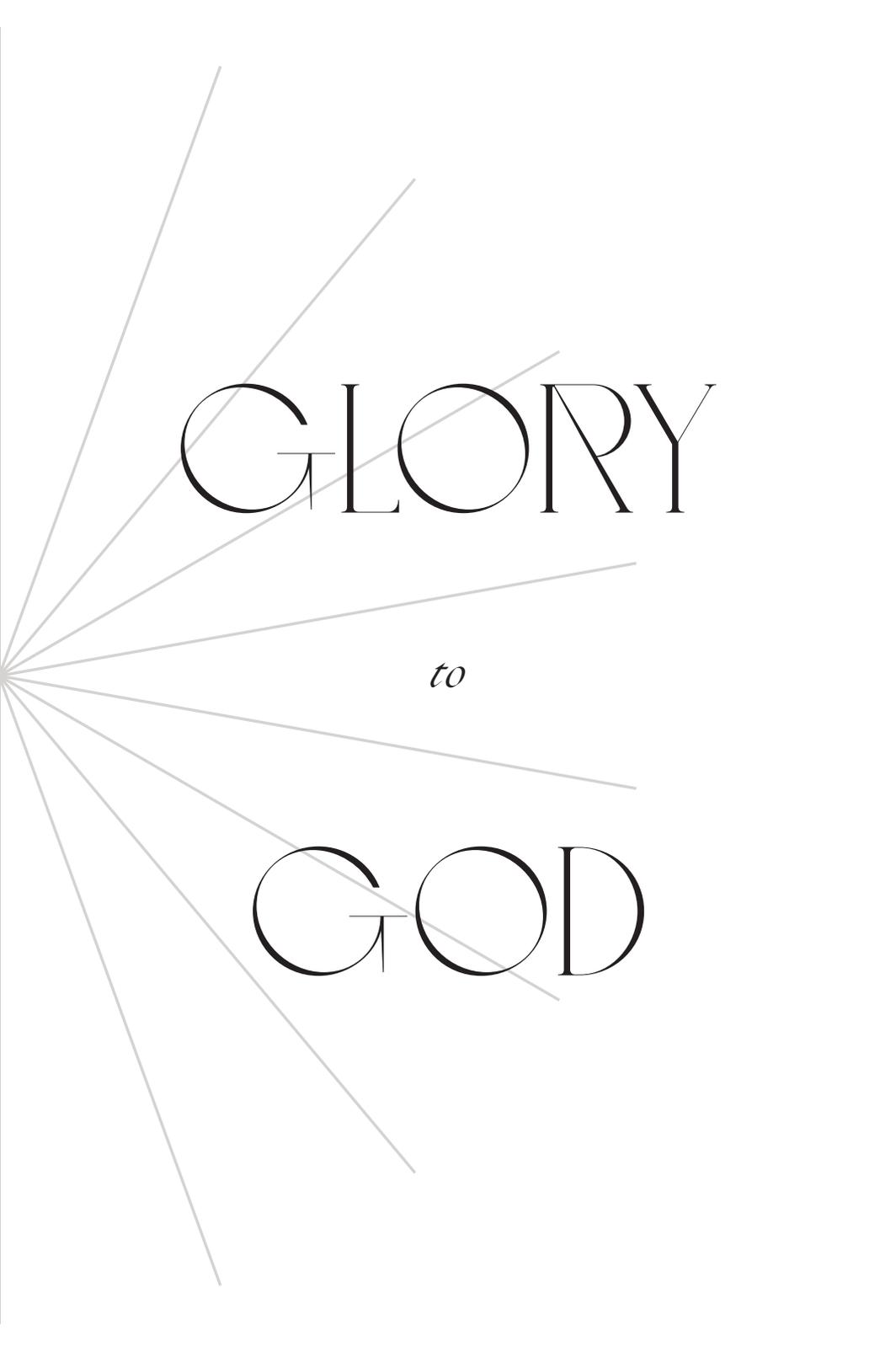
Jesus' birth had been prophesied for hundreds of years of Israelite history. It's something you would expect parades for. Have you seen how people react when a well-known leader or public figure has a child? Hashtags and videos are created, photos and articles document the occasion, crowds wave flags and hold up signs of congratulations. Yet the exalted Savior comes quietly, not just in a humble place but in a place that really isn't fit for people at all. Without a vacant space to be found in the inn, Joseph and Mary brought the Savior into the world within a stable.

So often we think that the promises of God come to us by ease and prosperity. But Joseph and Mary obeyed every part of the Lord's instruction about parenting Jesus and still faced a difficult journey to Bethlehem. They had to abide by the decrees of an oppressive government as

they registered for the census. Then the Savior was born in a stable and laid in a manger as His first bed.

Don't mistake difficult circumstances as a lack of God's purpose or presence in your life. His plans are not hindered by hardship—believe that His love is with you, even when it meets you in the stable because the inn is full. We are praying that you know that the Lord has powerful plans for your life, no matter what your season may look like!

PRAY THIS TODAY: JESUS, THANK YOU FOR COMING TO US, FOR BRINGING HEAVEN'S LOVE TO THE EARTH AND LIVING AMONG US. YOU ENTERED OUR VULNERABILITY AND HARDSHIP SO WE COULD LEARN HOW TO WALK IN OUR FATHER'S PURPOSE THROUGH ALL CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE. GIVE US GRACE AND FAITH TO FOLLOW YOU IN EVERY MOMENT OF OUR LIVES! IN YOUR NAME I PRAY, AMEN.



GLO RY

to

G O D

PEACE

on

EARTH



DAY EIGHTEEN

Luke 2:8-20

Can you imagine the serene, or possibly even mind-numbingly boring, act of sitting in a field with sheep all night? Any excitement that occurred for the shepherds was usually the danger of thieves or an attacking animal. Of course they are terrified when they first see the angels! However, they quickly change their attitudes as they begin to grasp that these heavenly messengers were sent to bring them the good news of the Messiah.

We should take note of how these humble shepherds receive the news of Jesus. They don't question why they are chosen to hear this message or if they are worthy of this news. Instead, they quite literally run with this news all the way to the presence of the newborn King, falling in adoration before Him. Their focus remains on Him.

Why might you question God's love and calling for you? Whose authority is higher than His, that

you could believe you don't have as much access to grace as anyone else? Jesus came for you! Rather than focusing on why you are or aren't worthy, find your identity in the selfless love of Jesus stepping down from the throne of heaven to become our Savior.

We often say "welcome home" when people come to New Life Church, and it's because we're convinced that they belong in the family of God because Jesus came just as much for them as anyone else. You, too, belong in the Church because of who Christ is and what He has done; there's nothing more or less you could do to make Him love you!

Find one verse that reminds you of the Lord's love for you and write it down somewhere you can see often throughout your day. Remember that you are chosen on heavenly authority to carry the good news of Jesus' arrival in your life!

DAY NINETEEN

Luke 2:21-24,

Matthew 5:17

These verses in Luke about Jesus' dedication at the temple may seem mundane compared to angels and shepherds visiting. But these details are crucial to understanding how Jesus came to fulfill the law. Moses set these requirements in place many generations before and Joseph and Mary obediently abided by them.

Jesus didn't come to undo the laws God put in place so long ago. Being God's Son didn't mean He was above the law—it actually meant He would abide within the commandments just as they were meant to be obeyed. The law was always meant to provide God's people with the ability to connect with Him, to be in right standing with Him. Jesus' sinless life within the bounds of God's

requirements made a way for us to be restored to the Father. He fulfilled what we could not so that the barrier between humanity and the presence of God could be removed! Pastor Rick always reminds us that we have to have both grace and truth. The grace that Jesus provides doesn't mean that we do whatever we want; it cleans the slate so that we have a free conscience to walk in truth.

Is there an area of your life you know God has asked something of you but you aren't yet obeying? Ask Him for forgiveness and write down your course of action to walk in obedience moving forward. Then share these steps with a trusted friend or leader as you start making this obedience a reality.



HE WILL
SHOW
YOU
WHICH
PATH
TO TAKE.



DAY TWENTY

Luke 2:25-35,

Proverbs 3:5-6

Remember the Old Testament prophecies spoken to people who longed for a Savior that would establish an eternal Kingdom? Today, we read about Simeon, a man who is believing for the fulfillment of those prophecies and is actually in the temple as infant Jesus is dedicated to the Lord. Simeon had been waiting for the Savior for so long he was basically on death's door, yet he refuses to give up hope to meet Him!

Like so many before him, Simeon is waiting for the One that the Lord promised. As he aged, there must have been moments when he didn't understand how he could see the Savior within his time. Year after year passed, but at just the right moment, God brought the Messiah directly to this incredibly faithful man. Though we may not always understand the timing of God's movement, we can trust that as

we seek His will, our Father will surely show us how to walk in His promises.

Write down three things that are difficult for you to trust God for because of a lack of understanding. Surrender them to the Lord as you pray and ask Him to give you the faith to trust Him for them. Our prayer for anyone reading this is that your faith will increase this Christmas, and that you will see the faithfulness of God like never before!



DAY TWENTY -ONE

Luke 2:36-40

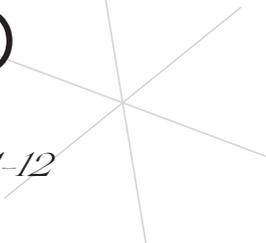
As we read about Anna in Scripture today, we quickly see that she doesn't have the most cheerful story. We see that the author of Luke has taken time to explain that she was a widow with a lonely life in many respects. Yet Anna is one of only a few people who recognizes the newborn King firsthand! The key to Anna's part in this story is her proximity. Anna chose to dwell in the house of the Lord, worshiping day and night. It is her devotion to the house of God that allows her to be among the first to know of the Savior's arrival. When we focus our lives around staying in the presence of God and glorifying Him, we can trust that He will draw near to us as well.

Anna doesn't keep her joy over the Savior's birth to herself.

She found those who were also waiting expectantly for Jesus and told them the good news. Our stories may not look how we thought it might, but we're all invited into the greater story of God's love and can rejoice in that! Let's remember that our hope is not only our own, but that Jesus came for all.

The heart of our church has always been to reach the one. You were once that "one" someone brought to church, the one who encountered the presence of Jesus for the first time. Who can you bring with you to church this week to celebrate Jesus? Write down the names of three people you want to come, pray over those names, and invite them to a service with you.

DAY TWENTY -TWO



Matthew 2:1-12

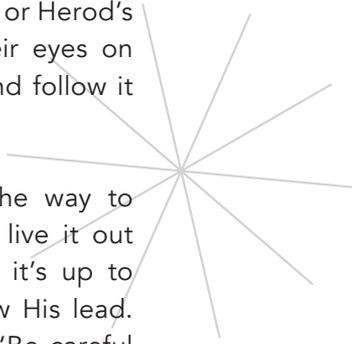
We live in a fast-paced world and our attention is fought for from every direction. The amount of information thrown at us can be overwhelming, and the temptation to disengage is all too real. The magi who search for Jesus are clearly wealthy

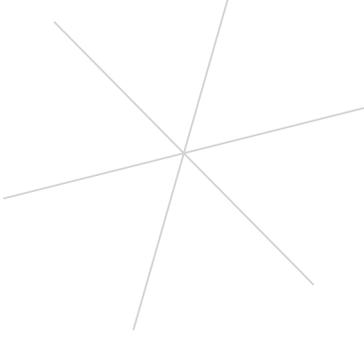
and well-educated people. But they don't use their knowledge or resources to avoid the world; rather, they choose to lean in, look up, and acknowledge the signs of the times.

When the magi reach the land of Israel, King Herod takes note of their presence and inquires as to why they are visiting his territory. It's here we see wisdom and humility on the magis' part. They don't give into flattery or Herod's deceit; they keep their eyes on the sign of the star and follow it to the Savior.

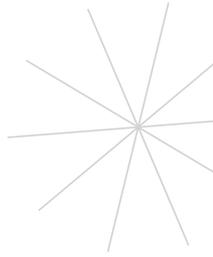
God has shown us the way to salvation and how to live it out through His Son. But it's up to us to choose to follow His lead. Paul says it this way: "Be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do." (Ephesians 5:15-17)

Practice pausing today before each thing you do or say. Be thoughtful in your actions and speech, always evaluating if you are living in a way that the Lord desires. Our mom of the house, Michelle, often reminds us that we must walk slowly through the room if we want to be able to see what's really going on around us. Don't blaze through this week; take the time to engage in what the Lord is doing around you.





THE LIGHT
SHINES IN THE
DARKNESS,
AND THE
DARKNESS
CAN NEVER
EXTINGUISH IT.





DAY TWENTY -THREE

Matthew 2:13-18

King Herod was appointed to his throne by the Roman empire, so we can reasonably guess that he didn't have Israel's best interests in mind from the start. As we see him act out in fear and rage at the news of Jesus' birth, we can begin to understand how unstable this king actually was. The orders Herod proclaimed once he realizes that the magi wouldn't be reporting the young Messiah's location to him are horrific. Herod was responsible for the murder of hundreds of innocent children—his own citizens—in his failed attempt to kill Jesus.

In the midst of so much tragedy and heartbreak, we can take heart knowing that Jesus has overcome all evil and terror. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it." (John 1:5) Jesus accomplished the will of our Father by submitting Himself to die on the cross on our behalf and by overcoming the grave once and for all! This child came to walk in our broken

world so He could bring comfort to all who mourn and win us freedom from the oppression of sin. As the Church, we are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus. We believe that we are all created with abilities to serve the local church and reach the world with the hope of Jesus. It's our prayer that you wouldn't be overwhelmed by the needs of the world around you, but that you would boldly carry the Name of Jesus into it!

PRAY THIS TODAY: JESUS, THANK YOU THAT THE LIGHT OF YOUR TRUTH AND GRACE STILL SHINES IN THE WORLD AND THAT IT CANNOT BE OVERCOME! AGE TO AGE, YOUR LOVE HAS BEEN THE LIGHT OF ALL, UNCHANGEABLE AND ETERNALLY SHINING ON US. I PRAY TODAY FOR PEACE IN AREAS OF CONFLICT AND TERROR. SHOW ME HOW TO CARRY THE LIGHT YOU'VE GIVEN ME TO THE PEOPLE IN MY WORLD. THANK YOU FOR THE PEACE THAT REIGNS IN MY LIFE THROUGH EVERY SEASON. I HONOR YOU. AMEN.



DAY TWENTY -FOUR



Matthew 2:19-23

Have you ever noticed that Jesus was a refugee? His family had to flee a terrifying king and take refuge in the land of Egypt. In fact, Christ experienced a lot of notable situations very early on in His life that mirror many different circumstances we as humanity face. He was humbly born in a stable under less than ideal conditions. Because of the visits from the shepherds and the magi, He was acquainted with both those on the social and economic fringes and the elite. As a child dependent on Mary and Joseph to care for Him, Jesus experienced vulnerability and the limitations of infancy.

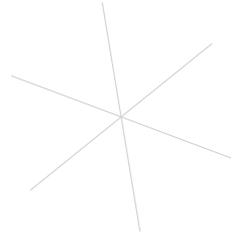
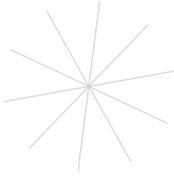
Savior came to rescue us. God's promise of salvation is fulfilled and we can rejoice in the precious gift of heaven that reconciled the earth to its Creator! We love you, Church, and we pray that this Christmas is full of joy and wonder for you. Celebrating this season with you will always be a glimpse into heaven and we're so thankful we get to live this life with you.

Jesus came to identify with humanity's struggles and trials—to bear our pain in holiness. He took on our sins and our struggles and conquered their power at the cross. He has come unto us. Here on this beautiful and broken earth, a Child was born and a



AND HIS NAME
WILL BE
CALLED
WONDERFUL,
COUNSELOR,
MIGHTY GOD,
EVERLASTING
FATHER, PRINCE
OF PEACE.

Isaiah 9:6



NEW LIFE
CHURCH

