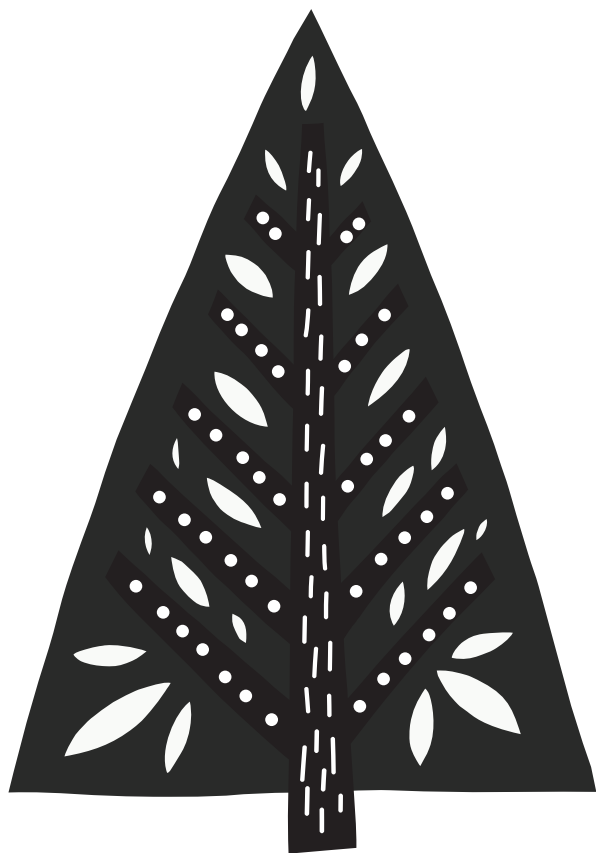




**Abraham & Isaac & Jacob &
Judah & Perez & Zerah &
Tamar & Hezron & Ram &
Amminadab & Nahshon &
Salmon & Boaz & Rahab &
Obed & Ruth & Jesse &
David & Bathsheba &
Solomon & Rehoboam &
Abijah & Asa & Jehoshaphat &
Jehoram & Uzziah &
Jotham & Ahaz & Hezekiah &
Manasseh & Amon &
Josiah & Jeconiah &
Shealtiel & Zerubbabel &
Abihud & Eliakim & Azor &
Zadok & Akim & Elihud &
Eleazar & Matthan & Jacob &
Joseph & Mary & **Jesus**
who is called the Messiah.**

Family Tree

An Advent Devotional from Eastbrook Church



Family Tree

**A Daily Devotional by
the People of Eastbrook Church**



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Introduction

One of my favorite memories from family gatherings is sitting around telling stories about “the old days.” Aunts and uncles, grandparents and cousins would regale us with stories about what life was like “back then,” eventually rolling into accounts of earlier generations, many of whom I never met. Those storytelling sessions would always leave me with a sense that I came from somewhere; that there were people who came before me who shaped who I was today. They gave me a sense of who I was and sometimes where I was going.

The Bible is full of stories like that. From Genesis to Revelation we hear accounts of earlier followers of God, gaining a sense of who we are with God and oftentimes where we are going. One of the most underrated parts of the Bible that work in this way are the genealogies. There are several places in the Old Testament recounting genealogies, such as the first few chapters of Numbers, and many times these are the texts that we prefer to jump over. When we skip them, though, we miss out on hidden jewels scattered throughout the genealogies that tell of God’s grace and truth in life after life.

This is nowhere so clear as in the first words of our New Testament, Matthew chapter 1, which recount Jesus’ family tree. This Advent we are going to linger in the genealogy of Jesus, walking our way through the stories of God’s grace and truth in the genealogy of Jesus. Advent is a season of preparation spread across the four weekends before Christmas intended to prepare us for our celebration of Jesus’ birth and anticipation of His return. It comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means ‘appearing,’ and calls us to prepare our hearts as we draw near to Christmas.

This year we will prepare by attending to the lives of the great men and women of faith, including Joseph and Mary, who we encounter in Jesus’ family tree. As we follow their stories it will give us an opportunity to regain a sense of who Jesus is and what He did, as well as who we are and where we are going as His disciples.

May God have His way in us, that we too may grow as trophies of His grace and truth, knowing Him more fully in the anticipation of Advent on our way to the celebration of Christmas.

Pastor Matt Erickson

How to use this Devotional

At Eastbrook, we have been publishing our own devotionals for several years now, but our Advent devotional is different from any of the others! Advent is a season of thoughtful reflection that prepares us for the celebration of Christ's birth. It is the "fast before the feast", and in this way, it sets apart God's people. Instead of following our culture in its rush from one celebration to another, we pause to reflect, pray, and meditate on the profound meaning of the incarnation—Christ with us.

At the same time, because of its lead-up to Christmas, Advent is also a season of childlike anticipation. Perhaps we light another candle on the Advent wreath every week? Or, maybe we add more figures to our nativity set each day until Christmas Eve, when we finally place Baby Jesus in the manger. This year, as we focus on the genealogy of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 1:1-17, we are creating our own version of the Jesse Tree—a tree dedicated to displaying ornaments that recall some of the key figures in Jesus' family tree. Whether you make a set of these ornaments using our Eastbrook kit, or design your own, this devotional will direct you to place these figures on your tree as we study them each week.

Monday – Fridays

These days will contain daily Scripture readings and a devotional essay from a fellow Eastbrooker. These are intended primarily for adult readers. The Scripture themselves, however, are largely narratives, and they can be read aloud with the entire family. We suggest choosing a kid-friendly version of a chapter-and-verse Bible, like the New International Readers' Version, or the International Children's Bible. The "Digging Deeper" questions can be discussed with the whole family as well.

Saturdays

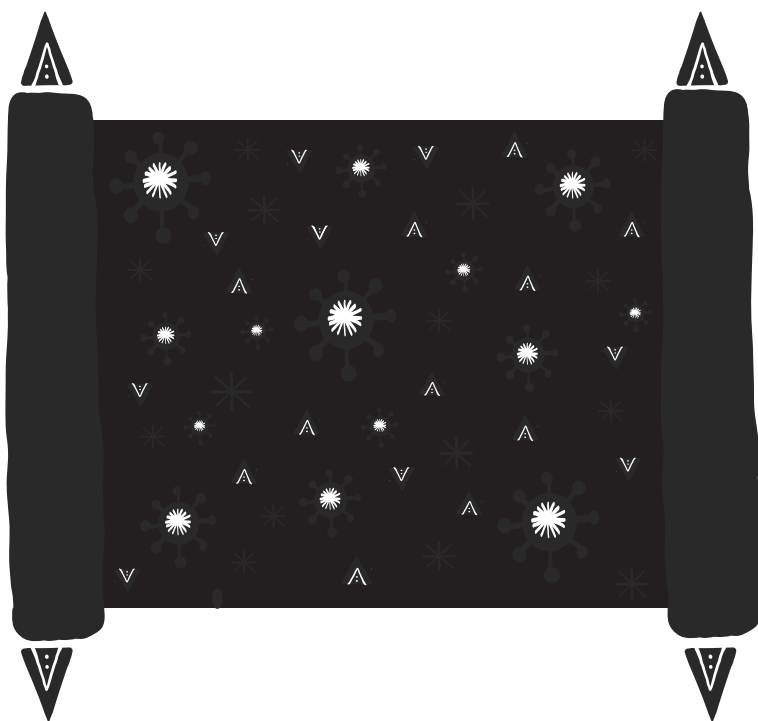
Aside from the daily Scripture and devotional readings, there are also weekly Family Talks—short devotional essays written for, and addressed to, elementary-age kids. This Saturday readings provide a time to gather the family, review some of the scriptures for the past week, and, if you've ordered an Advent Craft Kit, to hang that week's ornaments on your own Jesse Tree.

Sundays

There are no devotional readings for Sundays, when we focus on corporate worship as the body of Christ at Eastbrook. We invite you to participate in our worship services in person, or through Eastbrook At Home.



Find the online version of this devotional at eastbrook.org/familytreedevo



First Sunday of Advent:

MIEN OF FAITH

Worship Experience Response

As we begin our Advent journey, This Sunday's worship service focused our attention on three of the key men mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus: Abraham, David, and Josiah. Have you found any commonalities between the three? What role did each of them have in pointing to the coming Messiah, Jesus?

Use this page to reflect on this week's worship service. Where did you sense the Holy Spirit stirring your heart? Was it the message, the music, or some other aspect of the service? What was the "big idea" behind the message you heard? What did you learn about God, or about yourself and how you relate to God?

How can you respond to the message you've heard? Is there an action you will take this week to put in into practice?

Is there someone else that you think would be blessed by experiencing this week's worship service? You can share the link from our Eastbrook at Home webpage, eastbrook.org/athome.



Genealogy of Jesus. Genealogy of Us.

Read Matthew 1:1-17

The opening of Matthew is a striking list of names that was meant to resonate with the Jewish audience of Matthew's day. For modern readers, though, it can be overwhelming without more background.

First, we can spot heroes, kings, prophets and psalmists—an amazing collection of recognizable lives! Just as we list and retell stories of our family members and ancestors that make us proud, Matthew provides an important lineage that links Christ to the chosen people. However, Christ taught Matthew not to bask in prideful arrogance and ignore personal failings, temptations, and weaknesses. God is able to use everyone for His glory. Therefore, Matthew includes a shocking list of people: Manasseh, Abijah, Tamar, Rahab, among others. Why would Matthew include them?

We can be quick to hide family scandals and family members that might embarrass us: racist uncles, a parent with an addiction, a grandfather in prison, or a mother with severe mental health issues. As Americans, we struggle to confront some of our more sinful history, and instead, choose to celebrate our virtues. While it is important to recognize strengths within ourselves and our history, Christ teaches us to own all of our history. Unless we do so, we fool ourselves and allow the enemy a doorway to our souls.

Christ challenges every particle of our being. Yes, His family line includes kings, prophets, and Biblical heroes. At the same time, his bloodline is intertwined with other nations, and His birth is “scandalous” because it does not fit within human rationalization. Religious leaders of the time expected the Messiah to rule over all nations with great strength. Instead, Christ's strength is often displayed through His service, grace, inclusive nature, humility, and sacrifice.

Matthew 1:1-17 offers a lesson to us all. The importance of our history is not about placing our past on a pedestal; it is taking a hard look at everything and recognizing that God will use every aspect for His greater glory.

For Family Discussion: Who are some of the most memorable people in your own family tree? How did some of them live for Jesus?

For Personal Reflection: How is Christ asking us to reflect on how human beings have behaved within the church (good and/or bad)? How is Christ asking us to transform?



Abraham's Surrender

Read Matthew 1:2 & Genesis 12:1-9

I always remember skimming over the genealogy of Jesus, and thinking “I just want to read the parts where Jesus preaches and heals people and goes against everything that people expected of Him!” I never put much thought or value into His family tree, especially since Jesus is fully human and fully God. But, since then, I’ve gained a new appreciation for the list of people in Jesus’ line, because so many of them gave up so much, in order to play their part in making a way for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus.

In reading Matthew 1:2, we see that Abraham is the first member of Jesus’ family to be mentioned. In Genesis 12, God tells Abram “*Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.*” From the very beginning, we see that God is asking Abram to give up his country, a country that Abram’s family has loved for generations. Abram is asked to give up his people, a people that he has spent his life getting to know and love. He then is asked to go to a new, unfamiliar land, a place that is, quite possibly, not as good as his homeland. God promises Abram that He will bless those who bless him, and will curse those who curse him. He promises that all people will be blessed through Abram. God would transform this childless man, Abram, into Abraham, Father of all nations, the forefather of the people into which the Messiah would be born. He was the first to surrender so that King Jesus could be glorified.

When I look at Matthew 1:2, I cannot help but see that God knew exactly what He was doing through each person in this list. Each would bring us one generation closer to the Son, who is “*before all things, and in Him all things are held together.*” (Colossians 1:17) Take some time to be quiet before God and ask Him what he is inviting you to surrender today.

For Family Discussion: How would you feel if God asked you to give up everything and move to a new place where you didn’t know anyone?

For Personal Reflection: What are the blessings of surrendering to God? Do you feel the Holy Spirit’s urge for you to surrender something to Him now?



Abraham's Obedience

Read Genesis 22:1-19

What about this account so vividly captures the imagination? Is it because we know, up front, that God is testing Abraham and we wait with bated breath as we approach the climax, wondering what he will do? Is it sorrow for a son inquiring of his dad about a lamb, not knowing that he is the intended sacrifice? Or is it sympathy for a loving father who resolutely plods on to obey his master's will completely even though his heart is breaking?

Hebrews 11:19 gives us some insight into Abraham's thinking. It says, *"Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death."* Hebrews 11: 11-12 tells how Isaac was born to a mother who in reality was too old to have children and how from Abraham issued a multitude of descendants.

We know this account of Isaac's almost-sacrifice foreshadows Jesus' death even though imperfectly. In the divine account, we see a loving Father and a beloved Son who bows to His Father's will. In addition, this time the Son actually dies, and He is in reality raised to life.

The incarnation is about obedience. Just as Isaac obeyed Abraham and accompanied him on a journey to execute his will, so Jesus obeyed His father and embarked on a journey that led to a manger in a stable in Bethlehem. The Almighty, the Lord of the Universe stoops down to our level. This is the magnificent, joyous story of Christ's birth.

The incarnation is about gut-wrenching costly love. Just as Abraham resolved not to keep anything from his Lord, even the son he had waited decades for, so Jesus perfectly and resolutely did not grasp on to His divinity but emptied Himself and became a human (Philippians 2:6 & 7). Abraham prophetically says in Genesis 22:8, *"God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering."* Our God Himself is the One who provides (Genesis 22:14) the perfect Sacrifice. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! (2 Corinthians 9:15)

For Family Discussion: Why do you think Abraham obeyed God?

For Personal Reflection: Think of other stories of self-sacrifice like Esther's and Ruth's. How do these relate to what Jesus did when He consented to be born as a baby? Meditate on Jesus' incarnation through the lens of obedience. What new insights unfold? What does it mean to you?



Jesus is King

Read Matthew 1:6; 1 Samuel 16:1, 6-13, 18-23

King David was a man of faith. By faith, he received a promise from God that his kingdom will never end (1 Chronicles 17:7-14). Many kings would come after David, but the promise finds its total fulfillment in Jesus. Isaiah prophesied about the child who was born for us and who would reign over David's throne. In Isaiah 9:7, he states, *"Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom...from that time on and forever..."* As we celebrate Advent, we remember the Child born to save us. We eagerly anticipate his second coming as the exalted King.

Jesus comes from a family tree that includes kings. Jesus is King. His kingdom will usher in a new dawn. As King David vanquished his foes during his reign, so will Jesus defeat all of His enemies until he makes them his footstool (Psalm 110:1). Jesus' resurrection from the dead reveals his utter and complete victory over sin, death and hell.

While the final exaltation of Jesus, as King is still yet to come, Jesus is King right now. Creation bows to his will right now. All of the universe continues to function because of him. By his word, they exist, and by his magnificent power, they are sustained. That is why *"the heavens declare the glory of Jesus"* (Psalm 19:1, emphasis mine). So must we. We must hail King Jesus forever, who is both the Son of David and the Root of David (Revelation 22:16b). In this season of Advent, let us praise the Son of David who was born for us. King Jesus adopts everyone who believes in him into his family, so that we can be joint heirs with him in a kingdom that will never end, where Jesus rules as King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16).

For Family Discussion: How can you hail (worship) King Jesus today?

For Personal Reflection: What does it mean to you personally that Jesus is "God with us"? Take time to praise Jesus our Messiah, our Savior, our Immanuel.



The Word

Read Matthew 1:11; 2 Kings 22: 1-2, 8-13; 23:1-6

I remember finding the Bible when I was in college. Although I grew up hearing these words weekly in church, once I put my faith in Christ, they suddenly had new meaning as I read them for myself, and the Holy Spirit breathed life into them. Even more powerful was discussing them in a Bible study where a woman of mature faith led several of us new Christians to *“inquire of the Lord...about what is written in the Book”* (2 Kings 22:13).

When did you first find this Book? Have you ever set it aside, as the Israelites did in their temple, gathering dust or hidden beneath your idols? Most important is our response to finding God’s Word. When King Josiah, age 26, was presented with the neglected Book found in the temple, he tore his robes in mourning and repentance. Immediately he sought the meaning of the words and, as king, made it a priority that *“all the people from the least to the greatest”* heard those words. They responded in obedience and renewed their covenant relationship with God.

King Josiah stands out in Jesus’ family tree as one who restored God’s Word to centrality in the lives of the Israelites. The New Testament introduces Jesus as the Word: *“the Word was with God, and the Word was God”* (John 1:1). Jesus came for all people, from the least to the greatest, that they might hear, obey, and enter into the New Covenant.

Since those college days of soaking in God’s Word, there have been times that long work hours or demands of caring for young children have made it difficult to prioritize time in God’s Word. But whenever I began reading the Bible daily, praying through Scripture or memorizing verses, God’s presence grew near again.

During advent, celebrate Jesus, *“The Word [who] became flesh and made His dwelling among us”* (John 1:14).

For Family Discussion: Jesus wants to be your go-to person. How can you let Him do this?

For Personal Reflection: Recall a time when the words of Scripture came alive to you. When was this? How did it impact your life? What practices would help you to have similar encounters with God’s Word now?



Week 1 Family Talk:

Men of Faith

Have you ever heard stories about your parents when they were little? How about stories about your grandparents, or great grandparents? As a little girl, I loved hearing stories and seeing pictures of my family from ‘a long time ago.’ I loved hearing how my great-grandparents crossed the ocean on a big ship to come to America, or how my grandmother rode horses in the city of Chicago. It made them real to me even though I did not know them in person.



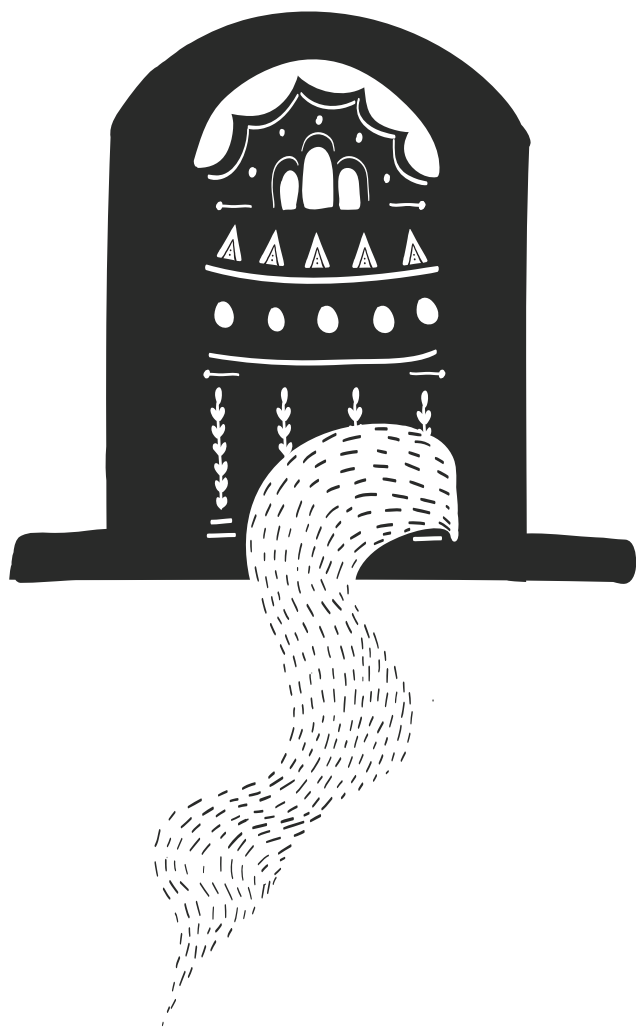
Think of Jesus growing up and hearing the stories of Abraham, David, and Josiah. His story was connected to their stories. That long list of people in Matthew 1 were real, living and breathing people, just like Jesus. Their histories pointed the way to Jesus. Sometimes, their lives showed an amazing thing they did with God. Sometimes, their lives showed that they messed up and that they, too, needed a Savior.

Abraham, David, and Josiah might not be your great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandfathers, but we are connected to them through Jesus! By believing in Jesus, we get to be part of His family. We become part of God’s story here on earth.

- What did you learn about Abraham, David, or Josiah this week that helped you to understand more about Jesus and why He came?
- What does it mean to you to be a part of God’s family?

At the end of your discussion and prayer time, hang the first three ornaments on your Jesse tree as you discuss each one: Stars to represent Abraham (Genesis 15:5), the Crown to represent King David (2 Samuel 5), and the Scroll to represent Josiah’s discovery of the Book of the Law (2 Kings 22:13-13).





Second Sunday of Advent:

WOMEN OF FAITH

Worship Experience Response

This week's worship service focused our attention on four women—four *unlikely* women—mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. What role did each of these women play in Jesus' family tree? What are some commonalities between the four women? What does their inclusion in Jesus' family tree tell us about the new kingdom that Messiah Jesus would build?

Use this page to reflect on this week's worship service. Where did you sense the Holy Spirit stirring your heart? Was it the message, the music, or some other aspect of the service? What was the “big idea” behind the message you heard? What did you learn about God, or about yourself and how you relate to God?

How can you respond to the message you've heard? Is there an action you will take this week to put in into practice?

Is there someone else that you think would be blessed by experiencing this week's worship service? You can share the link from our Eastbrook at Home webpage, eastbrook.org/athome.



He Called Them by Name

Read Matthew 1:1-17

You have just read the ancestry of Jesus from Abraham to his arrival for a second time today. Congrats! I'm sure you weren't thrilled with the idea of reading a long list of names...again, most of whom you might not be familiar with. But this week we will be taking a closer look at four Old Testament women in the genealogy of Jesus: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba.

These women represent real people with struggles, joys and pains. Two of these four, Rahab and Ruth, were not Jewish, but from other nations, yet they are listed in the family line of Jesus. We should note that these women are included in this long list of men, in a time when this is very counter-cultural. But God calls them by name and includes them in His family line.

I want you to keep an open mind about these women as you hear their stories. Put yourself in their position. Their stories are full of brokenness, seemingly impossible situations, abuse, and desperation. In a world where it's easy to pass judgment on these women's choices, occupations, and life circumstance, God uses them to bring His Son to us.

In recent years you may have heard of the movement #metoo. It's a movement of courageous women sharing their stories of sexual abuse. As I've been reflecting on these four women this week, I've been thinking about how many of them would likely have shared their stories using this hashtag if they lived today.

God used these unlikely women in the line of Jesus to share a powerful message that we need now: His Salvation is for everyone! God's salvation isn't gender-based. It doesn't discriminate against the color of your skin. It doesn't say "this person is in and this person is out" based on your circumstances, how others have treated you, or how you see yourself. Jesus is not ashamed of you. He wants to call you his family, just like these bold and brave women that are named in the family line of Christ.

For Family Discussion: Why do you think that God included ALL kinds of people in His family tree?

For Personal Reflection: Describe how God's capacity to love is different from our own. How would you like God to change your heart, so that you view all believers as fellow family members?



Family Drama

Read Matthew 1:3 & Genesis 38:25-30

One of the women who gets the honor of being listed in the family tree of Jesus is Tamar. She took matters into her own hands to better her life, even if it meant breaking a few rules.

Thrown into all of the family drama of Genesis 38 is Tamar, Er's wife, and daughter-in-law of Judah. Er was wicked and died. As was custom, Tamar was given to Judah's second son, Onan, as a wife. Onan knew that any children he had with Tamar would be credited to Er, so he didn't let that happen (Genesis 38:9). God found this wicked as well, so Onan died too, leaving Tamar double-widowed with no children. At this point, rather than honoring her as family and taking care of her until his third son was old enough to marry her, Judah passed Tamar back off to her own family.

Tamar had every right to be hurt and angry with Judah. She seemed to be powerless, but she cunningly took things into her own hands. She dressed up as a temple prostitute and tricked Judah into sleeping with her on his way up to worship Not-the-God-of-Israel. When it came out that she was pregnant and he nearly had her killed for prostitution, she showed him proof that he was the father; she presented him with his own staff, seal and cord. To avoid further scandal, he was forced to take care of his family.

Why was Tamar's behavior accepted, even honored, so much that she was named alongside men in the Bible? This isn't an easy story. But remember, while Judah, in a position of power, sought his own pleasure and shirked his duties to care for his family, Tamar risked her life to set his family right and stood up for her own worth. For the sacrifice she was willing to make, as messy and complicated as it was, Tamar was given an honorable place in Jesus' family line.

May Tamar's story encourage us to seek wisdom as we handle the moral and ethical dilemmas we face with the same determination, grace, and compassion she showed.

For Family Discussion: Judah didn't care for his family the way that God wanted him to. Tamar tricked him, and Judah finally realized his wrong. What can we do when others wrong us?

For Personal Reflection: How can we keep trusting God when we have been wronged? How can we know when to take action?



Rahab the Harlot

Read Matthew 1:5, Joshua 2:1-6, Hebrews 11:31, & James 2:25-26

“The LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”

Joshua sent two spies to check out the military power of Jericho. They came to Rahab’s house on the city wall and were welcomed in peace. Rahab encouraged these men, her natural enemies, reminding them of God’s work and victory, and told them that their enemies’ hearts had melted. She reminded them that God is the God of heaven and earth. She acted boldly and hid them on the roof under the drying harvest grain. She protected them from the kings’ men, lying about their whereabouts. She wisely counseled them to safety.

In darkness, she courageously lowered them outside of the city. In return, she requested rescue for her whole household. The spies agreed on the condition that she and her family stayed in her home marked by a scarlet cord. Everyone was destroyed except for Rahab and her family. She subsequently lived in Israel, married Salmon, and became the mother of Boaz, the great grandmother of King David.

Rahab became one of the four “bad girls” in the genealogy of Jesus. James marked her as one whose faith was shown to be alive by her works. The author of Hebrews exalted her as a model of faith. How could a lying prostitute be so uniquely honored?

Rahab shows us that God delights in faith found in the most unlikely and undeserving places. His love and mercy for Rahab shines brightly down the ages into all of our dark secrets and hidden crannies. Every one of us is able to grab the scarlet cord of God’s salvation in Christ. Every one of us is able to cry out in faith, believing in His unlikely love and rescue.

For Family Discussion: When God looks for leaders, he doesn’t just look for the strongest and the smartest. He looks for people who trust Him. What can we remember about God that helps us trust Him?

For Personal Reflection: What bothers you most about Rahab’s story? Do you resent her placement in God’s faith hall of fame? Take time to talk to the Lord about it. Do you identify with Rahab as one unworthy of God’s redemption? Bring all of your past and present into His presence as part of His story.



Courage & Obedience

Read Matthew 1:5, Ruth 1:6-18 & Ruth 2:8-12

Whether it is in my own life or the life of another, I am always in awe of the beautiful, intricate tapestry God weaves. He reveals His intentions for His creation through our obedience, allowing for moments of divine revelation. Some of those moments are small encouragements through a simple act of kindness. Other times, we realize that what seemed like an inconsequential act of faith, was actually a turning point.

As we live in response to the Spirit, God uses our obedience to further His kingdom. Bringing our walk to the notice of those whom He wills, God uses us as part of His redemption story. This truth is clearly seen in the life of Ruth. By choosing to serve Naomi despite the fears of an unknown land, Ruth brought about a multi-faceted redemption she could have never imagined. Even though Naomi's blessing over her, *"May the Lord show you kindness . . . May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband"* was meant for Ruth's new life back in Moab, the blessing was still honored by Yahweh; just not in the way it was intended.

Not only does Ruth find physical redemption by gleaning in the barley fields, she comes to experience spiritual redemption by committing herself to Naomi's God, social redemption through the favor of Boaz, and familial redemption in her marriage to Boaz.

The fruits of Ruth's faith came to benefit more than just herself. She became a thread in the greater redemptive story of all humanity with the birth of her son Obed, father of Jesse, father of David. Boaz offers another blessing, again, given with no idea of how it might turn out. *"May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."*

Ruth is an inspirational example of living out a courageous faith. Only God knows what can happen when a life is lived obediently. Only God can give us the courage to override fear through faith.

For Family Discussion: List some of your friends. In what ways can you put them first?

For Personal Reflection: When you placed your faith in Jesus was it an emotional choice or a lifelong commitment? How can you grow in faith that overrides fear?



Speak Up

Read Matthew 1:6 & 2 Samuel 11-12

Today's readings tell us more about the men in Bathsheba's life than about her directly. She is rarely even named, more often described in relationship to her father Eliam, her husband Uriah, and her son Solomon. And yet, this makes sense to me because Bathsheba is a woman at the mercy of the men in her life.

Bathsheba is often remembered as a sinful woman, but Scripture never condemns her as sinful. When she is summoned to the king's house, she had little choice but to obey him or risk death for defying him. When her relationship with David is mentioned in 2 Samuel 12:1-6, Nathan condemns David for his sin, and *he* is held accountable. Bathsheba is, for lack of a better term, collateral damage.

In this story of Bathsheba's life, I think there is a lot to learn. First, that secret sin will be found out and God will not allow it: David is exposed for abusing his power to bed a married woman and kill her husband. Second, we see that God will forgive anyone who is truly repentant: David repents and is forgiven, praise God! Third, this story serves as a reminder that sin's consequences remain even after the sin is forgiven: we still have to account for our actions. And fourth, we see that God is at work, even in difficult situations, working all things out for our good and for His sovereign purpose.

While Scripture doesn't share the details of the rest of Bathsheba's life, her son Solomon honors her by documenting her words in the beautiful poetry of Proverbs 31. Verses 8-9 carry so much more significance to me now, after I have spent some time with Bathsheba. In these verses, he writes, quoting his mother: *"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."* These words can only be the words of a woman who has been there; a woman with no power, at the mercy of those with power; a woman who realizes how important it is to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

For Family Discussion: If God already knows our sins, why is it still important to ask God for forgiveness?

For Personal Reflection: What do you think Bathsheba came to know about God that kept her from lifelong bitterness and resentment? What was she counting on God to do?



Week 2 Family Talk:

Women of Faith and Redemption

"May the LORD reward you for what you have done. May the LORD, the God of Israel, bless you richly. You have come to him to find safety under his care."

Ruth 2:12 (NirV)



When you think of safety, what comes to mind? Maybe your home, your school, or a friend's house? Maybe safety to you is a person, someone who loves you just as you are. In the family tree of Jesus, his great grandmother and his great-great grandmother and his great-great-great...well, you get the idea—they all needed a safe place. A place to land when life looked hopeless. When their actions or the actions of others or life's circumstances had all gone wrong.

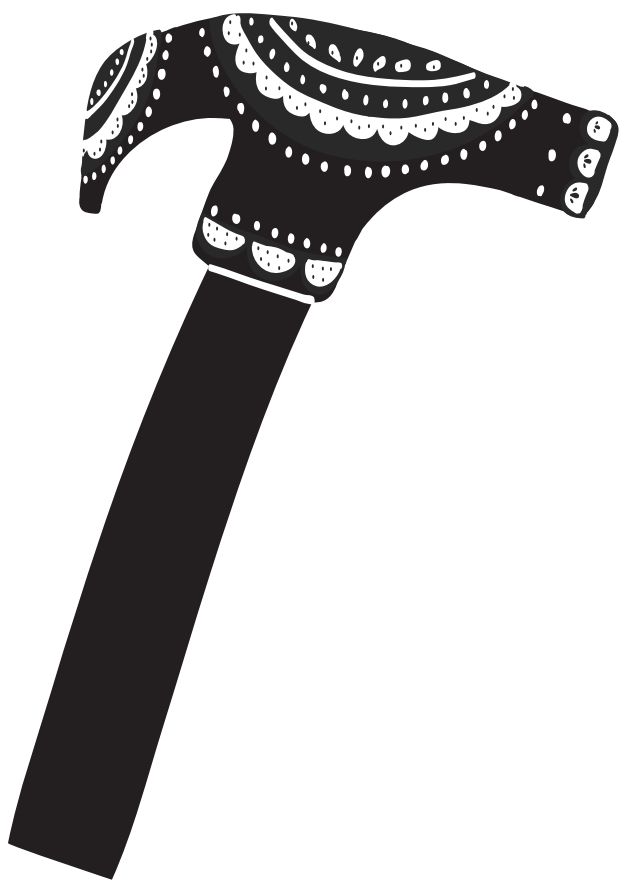
Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba, the few women who are named in the family tree of Jesus, are called the women of faith in the Bible. They are honored and remembered in Jesus's family line because of their faith in God. They had faith that even though their circumstances were scary, God was good and was going to take care of them. And He did! Even when their situations were hopeless, God was with them and they were safe in His care.

We worship and serve that same God. We are safe with the Lord and in His great love for us. No matter how uncertain or scary our situation is we can have faith, just like these women, that when we come to the Lord, He will keep us safe.

- Can you remember a time that you felt scared and someone helped you feel better?
- What can you remember about God that helps you feel safe?

At the end of your discussion and prayer time, hang the next four ornaments on your Jesse tree as you discuss each one: 1) the Staff to represent Tamar's confrontation with Judah (Genesis 38:25), 2) the Red Cord to represent Rahab (Joshua 6:25), 3) the Grain to represent Ruth (Ruth 2:1-2), and 4) the Teardrop to represent Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:19).





Third Sunday of Advent:



Worship Experience Response

Traditionally, this third Sunday of Advent is known as the Joy Sunday. The traditional purple candles of the Advent wreath are set aside for a pink one this week. The waiting is half over now, and the joy of the coming Savior is dawning!

This week's worship service focused our attention on the person of Joseph, the carpenter from Nazareth chosen to be Jesus' earthly father. Little is known of Joseph, yet this week's worship service and our daily readings will cause us to think deeply about his role in Jesus' young life. How did God prepare and equip Joseph for the staggering task of parenting the Messiah, sent from Yahweh? How do we see ourselves in Joseph's story?

Use this page to reflect on this week's worship service. Where did you sense the Holy Spirit stirring your heart? Was it the message, the music, or some other aspect of the service? What was the "big idea" behind the message you heard? What did you learn about God, or about yourself and how you relate to God?

How can you respond to the message you've heard? Is there an action you will take this week to put in into practice?

Is there someone else that you think would be blessed by experiencing this week's worship service? You can share the link from our Eastbrook at Home webpage, eastbrook.org/athome.



Joseph's Humble Obedience

Read Matthew 1:1-17

At first glance, Matthew 1:1-17 feels like an endless list of names. However, this passage is steeped in God's fulfilled promise woven throughout generations. In Matthew, we see a focus on Jesus as the anticipated Messiah. To the Jewish audience, these names would have held deep significance and reminded them of God's promised King. Joseph would have grown up learning these names from a young age.

Jesus' coming fulfilled the hope of generations. God told Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him, and David was promised that his offspring would bring forth One who would establish an everlasting kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12-14).

As we look closer at the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph, we find some unexpected characters. Abraham took matters into his own hands to fulfill God's promise; Jacob tricked his father into blessing him; Rahab was a prostitute; David took Uriah's wife (Bathsheba) and had Uriah murdered, and the list goes on. Yet, we see that God chose to have His Son born into this lineage full of imperfect people.

Then we get to Joseph.

While Scripture does not reveal much about Joseph, further in Matthew 1, we see that he is described as a righteous man. His honor must have been important to him as he planned to quietly divorce Mary after learning she was pregnant. When the angel speaks to Joseph, he calls him "*son of David*" (Matthew 1:20): reminding Joseph of the promised Messiah through his family line.

Interestingly, in Matthew 1:16, Joseph is not called Jesus's father, but rather referred to as the husband of Mary to whom (referring to Mary) Jesus was born. Joseph not only faced misplaced shame for Mary's surprise pregnancy, but also raised the Savior of the world knowing he already had a perfect Father. Even so, Joseph was obedient to accept this humbling role. Rather than protect his own honor, he chose to honor God.

For Family Discussion: How do you feel when you are not in control—when things happen unexpectedly? How can you pray during those times?

For Personal Reflection: Has God called you take on a task that you aren't likely to receive recognition or praise for doing? Where should our confidence and affirmation be during these times?



by Rachel Sanfelippo

Do Not Be Afraid

Read Matthew 1:18-25

Have you ever faced a daunting life decision that entirely consumes your waking and sleeping thoughts? When we can't seem to figure it out, we look toward heaven and say, "Why Lord?" or "What should I do now, Lord?" There are not many sermons preached about Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus. However, in Matthew 1:18-25, there is a notable lesson to be learned from the depth of faith displayed by Joseph, a lesson that may help you get through your next challenging circumstance.

Like us, Joseph was faced with an overwhelming decision when he discovered that the woman he was betrothed to, Mary, was now with child. Scripture says that Joseph *"did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly."* Joseph must have loved Mary very much because he wanted to save her from public humiliation, but after considerable contemplation, he decided to divorce her. Like us, I imagine Joseph looking toward heaven and asking, "Why, Lord? I thought Mary was the woman you planned for me to marry?"

Oftentimes the Lord brings his answer to us in mysterious ways. In Joseph's case, it came in his dream by an angel of the Lord. The first thing the angel said to Joseph was, *"Do not be afraid."* The angel also went on to tell Joseph what he should do, *"take Mary home as your wife... She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus."*

Let's be completely honest; most of us would wake from that dream and say, "Why me, Lord?" Instead, the Scripture says, *"When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him..."* We must admire the immediacy of his action.

I'm quite sure that following the resurrection of Jesus, Joseph thought about his dream and said, "Lord, I now see your plan." There is no way he could have understood the gravity of the situation in the moment. However, in hindsight, it all became obvious. Let's remember this lesson when we don't understand situations God is guiding us through.

For Family Discussion: What do you do when you are scared? How can we run to God when we're scared or confused?

For Personal Reflection: How can we be sure of God's guidance and direction through challenging circumstances?



A Faithful Father

Read Luke 2:1-7

Luke 2:1-7 is my favorite Christmas story. We used to read it to our kids each year on Christmas morning, before we went downstairs to open our gifts. The kids would climb into the “big bed” with my wife and me and it was a precious time. It was so great to be surrounded by my family and to share God’s story with them.

When I think of Joseph, I know he was a righteous man. There’s not a lot about him in the Bible, but everything about him is immediate obedience to the Lord and caring for Mary and Jesus. He’s the ultimate example of an earthly father, who obeys the Lord and puts his family ahead of his own needs. His story challenges me. Oh, that I would be as faithful a father and grandfather.

His life challenges me in other ways too. Even though Joseph and Mary were highly favored by God, they were poor. I’m reminded that God sees the heart and not the external things about us. Joseph set a godly example for his son, Jesus, and for their family in every aspect of life. There’s no indication that Joseph ever resisted earthly authorities, though I doubt that he agreed with every decree they made. It must have been hard for him and for Mary to go to Bethlehem but he didn’t do it reluctantly or with a grumble or complaint. No, Joseph was a man of complete and immediate obedience. While I’m not called to be the earthly father of the Messiah, the Son of God, I am called to love God and to love and care for others in my place in the world.

We would read this story every year because we wanted our children to know why we give gifts at Christmas and to train them to remember the Greatest Gift ever given, Jesus Christ. Now, we all gather at my son’s home with his family and our daughters and, while we don’t all climb into their “big bed,” he reads the Christmas story from Luke 2 to our granddaughter and to the rest of us. It’s still a precious time.

For Family Discussion: What do you think Joseph thought about as he searched for a place where he and Mary could stay?

For Personal Reflection: Joseph was a faithful man. What is it about the faithfulness of others in our lives that gives us comfort and makes us feel secure?



Joseph, Husband of Mary

Read Luke 2:21-33; 39-40

When I think of Joseph, I have to admit that, at first, he seems a small part of the BIG story. There aren't many songs sung about him during Advent, not much reflection on his character, no mention of his death. In Matthew he is noted as the husband of Mary.

As I reflected on him, I was drawn to his earnest, righteous, God-fearing life. His trust in God, from the moment the angel spoke to him in a dream, believing what was said would happen. His trust in God's provision and safety as they traveled (and travel they did!) to Jerusalem and beyond. Simeon spoke the *Nunc Dimittis*, a canticle of praise, over Jesus in the temple courts, and Luke tells us "*Joseph and Mary marveled at what was said about him.*"

There is no mention of the details of their flight to Egypt or their return to Nazareth. *But don't overlook them.* Lean in to the mystery as Joseph begins his life as provider, husband, father. Notice his earnest desire to bless the Lord, love his wife, and lead his children in a foreign land. Returning home after years away, did Mary and Joseph's own families welcome them back, or was there concern over their marriage and child?

There's a wonderful scene in *The Nativity Story* between Joseph and Mary as they journey to Jerusalem. Newly married, Mary asks Joseph, "Do you ever wonder when we'll know?"

"Know what?" Joseph asks.

Mary answers, "When he's more than just a child...Will it be something he says, or a look in his eye?"

And, the most compelling moment, Joseph's reply: "I wonder if I'll ever be able to teach him anything"

As Joseph's life comes more into focus, I wonder how long he lived to see Jesus grow and mature, becoming wiser each year...and how much he really did teach him as his earthly, God-fearing father.

For Family Discussion: What do you think it was like to care for Baby Jesus? If you had been Joseph, what would you be wondering about?

For Personal Reflection: In the Old Testament, God's people had been waiting generations for the Savior to arrive. What are you waiting for God to do in your life? Are you praying on it right now? Are you waiting in obedience?



Obedience in Action

Read Matthew 2:13-22

I love the perspective we get in Matthew's gospel on Jesus' extraordinary birth. Luke gives us Mary's point of view in his gospel, but Matthew gives us Joseph's. We have already seen how Joseph accepted Jesus as his own son even though he wasn't Jesus' biological father (Matthew 1:18-25) and now we see how Joseph took courageous action to protect his wife and young son. Can you imagine? Joseph heard the words from God in a dream and obeyed immediately. He packed up Mary and Jesus and swept them away during the night so as not to be seen, and traveled by foot and donkey all the way to Egypt with them, the equivalent of 90 miles. Joseph was a carpenter in Israel, but was he worried about finding more carpentry work when he got to Egypt to support his family? For that matter, how would he feed them on the journey and where would they live when they got there? Whatever misgivings he may have had, Joseph knew he had to obey God and he knew he had to act fast.

It strikes me that this is how godly husbands and fathers always are. They obey God, they take action, and they protect their families even at great risk to themselves. I am so blessed that I had a father like this and that I am married to a man who is like this. What a contrast Joseph is to the selfish, paranoid, prideful Herod! Herod was unspeakably cruel, and 2000 years later, it is still horrifying to think about his infanticidal decree. This is probably why people are more likely to read the Christmas story from Luke than from Matthew!

In His love for human beings, God the Father also had to take action in order to save them. Part of His divine action plan was choosing an earthly mother and father to raise and protect His Son while He was a baby and child. The stakes were high. Praise God that Joseph was obedient to God and trustworthy in fulfilling his unique task. I challenge us all, including myself, to obey God like Joseph did, in the specific tasks He has given us today.

For Family Discussion: Try to list some of the ways your parents, and other adults, care for you. How can you thank them and thank God for them?

For Personal Reflection: Think about a way your earthly father has protected you or is protecting you. Thank your father for his care or thank God for your earthly father.



Week 3 Family Talk:

Joseph

If you have ever seen a live play, you know that there's something magical that happens between acts. The stage curtains open, and suddenly, the audience is transported to another place and time. New scenery is in the background and new props are in place. How did everything change

so quickly and silently? It all happens because of the hardworking stage crew—the people who work behind the scenes of a play, putting everything into place so that the main action can happen just as it should. The stage crew is super-important to a good play, yet stage crew members aren't noticed. In fact, they often wear black clothes so that they fade into the background of the stage and won't be noticed!

In the story of Jesus' birth, Joseph was like a stage crew member. He was following God's directions, doing the important work of getting everything ready so that Jesus would be born in the right place at the right time. After Jesus was born, Joseph again listened carefully to the directions told to him in a dream. Like a good stage crew member, he silently transported Mary and Baby Jesus to safety in Egypt in the middle of the night!

The Bible does not tell us much about Joseph, but it does say that he was a righteous man. He loved God and followed Him closely. Because of this, God entrusted Joseph with the care of His most treasured Son, Jesus. Baby Jesus would grow up to take center stage for all of history!

- What was it about Joseph that made him a good earthly father for Baby Jesus?
- How has God rewarded Joseph for his obedience and care for Jesus?

At the end of your discussion and prayer time, hang the next two ornaments on your Jesse tree as you discuss each one: 1) a Carpenter's Tool (hammer) to represent Joseph's hard work (Matthew 13:55), and 2) Wedding Rings to represent Joseph's marriage to Mary (Matthew 1:20-21).





Fourth Sunday of Advent:



Worship Experience Response

Today is the final Sunday of Advent! Our season of waiting is just about over! Mary and Joseph draw close to Bethlehem, and in our readings, we focus our attention on the person of Mary, the young woman from Nazareth, chosen to be the mother of Jesus.

This week's worship service focused our attention on Mary, too. Mary may have been a simple girl from Nazareth, but her response to God and her beautiful poetry—the Magnificat, which we will read this week in Luke 1:46-55—show that she had unshakable faith and mature understanding of who God is. So, we put ourselves in Mary's position, and can only wonder how we might have responded to the remarkable events that preceded that first Christmas.

Use this page to reflect on this week's worship service. Where did you sense the Holy Spirit stirring your heart? Was it the message, the music, or some other aspect of the service? What was the "big idea" behind the message you heard? What did you learn about God, or about yourself and how you relate to God?

How can you respond to the message you've heard? Is there an action you will take this week to put in into practice?

Is there someone else that you think would be blessed by experiencing this week's worship service? You can share the link from our Eastbrook at Home webpage, eastbrook.org/athome.



Facing the Unknown

Read Matthew 1:1-17

My dad would have been 58 this year. I was reminded of this by my Swedish grandmother, Mor Mor. Not that I needed the reminder, but I did enjoy the dozen black and white photographs she passed along on November 1, what would have been his birthday. Pictures she carefully placed in a now-decades-old album capturing moments in time. Each photograph diligently labeled. One showing a bundled toddler sitting stoic on his father's lap; "January '64, Danny: 14 mo. Dallas' record snowfall: 71/2 inches." The list goes on: "Danny: 9 1/2 months," "Danny: 1 year."

As I looked through the vintage photos sent via iPhone, I couldn't help but envision my Mor Mor as a young mother, proudly watching her firstborn son. She would be bubbling with pride at his first steps, his first catch, and yes, his first glimpse of snow in Dallas. All the while, I'm sure she had hesitations, uncertainty, and even fears as a first-time mother doing her best to raise a little boy to love Jesus. Faithfully, she pushed on.

I picture Mary having similar motherly concerns and apprehensions. I'm sure she was worried about the well-being of Jesus. Perhaps she was the tired mother that so many of us can relate to. On top of that, what a great responsibility Mary must have felt lulling Jesus to sleep, knowing she held the Son of God. Mark Lowry's "Mary Did You Know" paints a beautiful picture: "When you kiss your little baby, you kiss the face of God." Wow. Given her circumstances, Mary could have easily given in to the fear and uncertainty of her situation. Yet, she embraced God's calling and faithfully surrendered as a servant of the Lord. She said "yes" even when "yes" meant facing the unknown.

This year has brought much uncertainty. So many things have been difficult to understand and have caused fear in the every day. How thankful we can be that we serve an almighty God who knows exactly what is happening. This Christmas season, may we think of Mary and as we continue to move forward in faith and say "yes" to God's calling.

For Family Discussion: If you could ask Mary just one question, what would it be?

For Personal Reflection: How can knowing the stories behind the people in Jesus' genealogy—all of their adventures, faith, and struggles—inspire you? Who were the significant spiritual people who influenced your faith and journey with Christ? What did they pass on to you?



Obedience, Acceptance, and Awe

Read Luke 1:26-38

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled" (Luke 1:38).

Ireneaus, one of the most significant theologians from the second century after Christ, writes in *Against Heresies*, "For as Eve was seduced by the word of a [fallen] angel to flee from God, having rebelled against his Word, so Mary by the word of an angel received the glad tidings that she would bear God by obeying his Word."

Mary received the news from the Yahweh-sent messenger with obedience, acceptance, and awe. She had made a space inside herself for obedience and surrender to the will of Yahweh. With her eyes fixed in wonder on the Eternal One from time before to time after who could alone do this new thing, Mary accepted in awe that the Holy One would be born within her womb.

All of history was changed by this simple act of obedience and trust in the Father. History, too, can be changed as each one of us, moment by moment, day by day, humbly become obedient to the Father, trusting his way over ours, his plan over our purposes, and his redemption over our own.

Jesus modeled this perfect obedience in "*being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*" (Philippians 2:8). Like Jesus, we need to die to our own ways, our own plans, our own reputations, so that we can live.

Mary's simple act of obedience paved the way for the mystery of the Word living among us in human flesh. Can we, like Mary, receive words from Yahweh? Would we recognize the messenger He sends? Have we made a space inside ourselves for humble and quick obedience and complete surrender to the will of the Father?

Do we spend time in wonder at the God of the Universe who became a baby? Do we marvel that he would be born in the fleshy womb of a woman, becoming like each one of us? Take time today to watch and wonder, marvel and listen, surrender and obey.

For Family Discussion: What are some of the good things that happen when we choose to obey God by obeying our parents, our teachers?

For Personal Reflection: What do you think gave Mary the confidence to obey this unique calling?



A Weighty Responsibility

Read Luke 1:45-56

Mary's song—also called the Magnificat—is one of three hymns recorded in Luke 1-2 that declare the covenant faithfulness of God. Zechariah prophesies about God's salvation after John the Baptist is born, then Simeon rejoices as he comes face to face with his Savior in the temple. Joining in praise with these 2 men, Mary beautifully proclaims through song how personal and communal God's redemptive work is.

The role God blessed her with held supernatural significance for all of humanity; the lives of both Jews and Gentiles would never be the same. But being the mother of Jesus was also deeply personal for Mary. No one else in the world would know what it felt like to carry the Son of God. The emotional weight, the awe and joy, the deep questions and ponderings of this young mother would only be fully grasped by God Himself. How beautiful is that!

The confident joy that Mary exhibits as she declares the wonder of God's individual and collective work brings encouragement and conviction to my heart. For the last few years, I was a caregiver for my father. I was in college for part of that time and returned on the weekends to help out at home. While the Lord provided dear friends to encourage and support me, I knew that my experience was one that few of my peers could relate to. Most of them weren't coming to class having fed, clothed, and cared for their father the night before. What I was living through was deeply personal; and yet, I saw God work in humbling, communal ways as He brought friends and strangers into our lives to walk with our family and experience His loving faithfulness with us.

God gave Mary a weighty responsibility, but He also granted her a willing, joyful spirit to trust in His faithfulness. Let Mary's song of praise be our response too! May we magnify the Lord both for the great things He does in the intimate spaces of our lives and for His glorious work that extends beyond us, throughout the generations.

For Family Discussion: Can you remember some of God's promises to us? What are they? What helps you to remember that God is a promise-keeper?

For Personal Reflection: How has your salvation impacted the people closest to you? How has your redemption benefited them?



Thwarted Plans

Read Matthew 1:18-25

Did you have specific plans that you found thwarted this past year? I think most of us found ourselves in that situation, specifically because of the pandemic. Like me, perhaps you also experienced confusion, frustration, and helplessness over those things that were beyond our control.

Mary had plans. She probably planned to marry, have children and raise a family and live a life similar to that of other women in her town. Joseph also had plans. But they both found their plans thwarted by another plan out of their control: God's plan.

We read that Mary accepted her circumstances without knowing the future. She did not know what would happen with Joseph. Rejection? Public humiliation? Private divorce? Would she be left all alone and rejected by society? Any of the above were possibilities, considering her condition.

An angel intervened, speaking to each of them separately, and in both cases, Mary and Joseph accepted this new change of plans. It is quite remarkable to consider how they dealt with such a unique circumstance, given their culture, tradition, and location. Yet, they embraced this unexpected plan and welcomed Jesus as his loving earthly parents.

Perhaps your plans in life have already been interrupted multiple times. The truth is we can expect disruptions to continue to occur in the future as well, because much is out of our control. So the question for us is not how to avoid these things or live in fear of them, but how will we respond when the unexpected occurs? It comes down to that inner place where we fight with the will and focus our eyes on the Master of the universe. Will we accept and learn, grow and give, worship and wonder? Will we trust that a greater, supreme purpose is at work beyond our understanding? It is a given that there will be unknowns and insurmountable circumstances; the question is how we will respond. What fruit is God is trying to bring to the world through us as a result of thwarted plans?

For Family Discussion: Name some of your plans that were thwarted this year. Can you see some ways that God may have been bringing about something greater, even just in the quiet of your heart?

For Personal Reflection: How do you respond when the unexpected occurs? What fruit might God be trying to bring to the world through us as a result of thwarted plans?



Loyal to Love

Read John 19:25-27

Our Lord, the Lamb of God who was born to die, bore our sin to free us to live in love, truth and obedience. This freedom contradicts all other definitions of love that omit God as its core foundation.

From the very first family, conflict, deception, sin, and chaos penetrated and severed relationships; most profoundly humanity's relationship to God. What exactly does it mean to be family? What did God intend?

"Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:50). One of the greatest joys in coming to faith is that we are a part of the family of Christ, loved and accepted, no longer rejected, hidden or ashamed; forever grafted into the fellowship.

Jesus modeled for us the significance of spiritual family when he spoke into the mother/son relationship between Mary and John. The barriers of blood relations that can separate, neglect, denounce, torment and abandon are no longer to define followers of Christ. The love of Christ in our hearts commands so much more of us than we could ever humanly manufacture.

When we welcome God's beloved expansively (2 Peter 1:3-8) into our 'heart-space' including the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the sick, the prisoner, the widow and the orphan; we're privileged to drink deeply and experience the immensity of the divine joy, immersing us in lavish fellowship with the Triune God.

God came, not as a deity who chose to save from afar. He enters into the cacophony of human messiness, and we are compelled to enter into the messy lives of those He loves. We are to invite them into our messy lives, that we all may be healed together, reflecting His unblemished glory. God's glory, the divine light of Truth shines in the darkness for those yet to believe, those who are looking for a reason to hope and trust in His love.

For Family Discussion: Name your family members, and then name people that are like family to you. How can you bring them closer to Jesus?

For Personal Reflection: What are some of the blessings you enjoy among your spiritual family members? Who do you most want to invite into God's family?



Week 4 Family Talk:

Mary

Hi! Hey! Hello! Hola! How's it going? What's up? There are a lot of different ways to greet someone when you first meet them, but most of the time we say something like, "Hi, my name is ____, what's your name?" We say our own name, and then ask the other person's name. Names

are important! Yet, when the angel came to Mary to tell her that she was going to have a baby, he didn't ask her what her name was, because he already knew!

"The angel greeted her and said, "The Lord has blessed you in a special way. He is with you." Luke 1:28 (NirV)

What a strange greeting! Can you imagine meeting someone new and calling them "Blessed"? Or how about "Special one?" You might get some funny looks! But the angel knew Mary's name and even more importantly, he knew what God called her, and THAT was how he greeted her! He called her special!

We can be called by many different names: sister, brother, daughter, son, friend, granddaughter, grandson, and the list goes on! But the most wonderful name of all is the name that God calls us. He calls us Loved, Special, and Chosen. When we put our trust in Him, we get to be called his Child! You are the Child of God! How awesome is that! Remember that no matter what else you are called, good names or even not-so-good names, the God of Heaven and Earth calls you His child!

- What are some of the names or titles you are called?
- What does it mean to be the Child of God?

At the end of your discussion and prayer time, hang the next two ornaments on your Jesse tree as you discuss each one: 1) the Swaddled Baby to represent Jesus (Luke 2:7), and 2) the Angel to represent the angel who visited Mary (Luke 1:30-31).





Sunday After Christmas:

MESSIAH, MAGI, AND THE NATIONS

Worship Experience Response

Just a few days ago we celebrated the coming of the promised Savior, Jesus! But the family tree continues to grow, and this week's focus on the Magi gives us clues about what this will look like. Coming from the east, the Magi represent the non-Jewish world—Gentiles who would faithfully seek Christ and worship Him. Jesus' ministry would start among His own people, but would expand to include the nations, "grafted in" to the family tree (See Romans 11:19-20).

In seeking the newborn King, however, the Magi also encounter King Herod. In this week's readings, the dichotomy is set before us—the conspiring, kingdoms of this world vs. the sovereign, eternal Kingdom of Jesus.

Use this page to reflect on this week's worship service. Where did you sense the Holy Spirit stirring your heart? Was it the message, the music, or some other aspect of the service? What was the "big idea" behind the message you heard? What did you learn about God, or about yourself and how you relate to God?

How can you respond to the message you've heard? Is there an action you will take this week to put in into practice?

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God of the Nations

Read Matthew 2:1-12

Growing up, I would hear lots of messages about how our God is a God of every nation, and it was an easy message to take for granted. God is big and universal and timeless, and there are people all over the world who follow the same Jesus that I know. I thought that everyone understood God in the same way. As I got older and met more people from different cultures, I saw more and more clearly how God shows up differently and uniquely to people of every ethnicity and culture.

In this passage, we see the Magi, who are people who study the stars and know so much more about the stars and astronomy than your average person, travel a great distance because of a very unique star. They recognize Jesus as King because even the stars in the sky point to His majesty. God shows up so clearly to the Magi in their specific context in such a way that they KNOW that someone very important was there; someone worthy of worship. The message from God to the Magi was so clear that they had no problem going straight to Herod and asking where the real King was.

This passage offers us yet another lens to see the authority and divinity of Jesus. The Magi offered the other people in this passage and they offer us a perspective we would not have seen otherwise. Our understanding of who God is and who God's people are is incomplete without one another. We need each other's stories to see God more fully than we'd be able to see God on our own.

This story from Matthew leads us to wonder which perspectives we're not paying attention to. How can you submit to the leadership of Christians who come from a different social location than you? We see that God uses even the stars to radically expand the family of God, and God still wants us to broaden our understanding of God's family today. May God give us all fresh and new eyes to see the majesty of Jesus.

For Family Discussion: Who are some people that God has put into your life to show you what God is like? What have you learned from them about who God is?

For Personal Reflection: How can you be open to learning from Christians of different backgrounds? Is there a way you can adopt a posture of humility and curiosity as you learn from the global church of Christ?



by Josh Green

Journey of Sorrow and Hope

Read Matthew 2:13-23

Years ago, on a night in early December, my first husband died in a car accident. Shock and grief cast a shadow over Christmas. Among the many cards and letters I received, one made the unusual suggestion that I look closely at Christmas carols.

When I did, I saw the lyrics in a new light. Jesus came to a “weary world”² where “sins and sorrows grow”³ and we are bent “beneath life’s crushing load.”⁴ He came “to save us all from Satan’s power when we were gone astray.”⁵

Herod’s massacre of baby boys in Bethlehem had seemed jarring and out-of-place in the Christmas narrative to me. Now I saw that story differently as well. I was reminded that Jesus was not born into a perfect Christmas-card scene. He became incarnate because we are broken! He came to a selfish world, where a paranoid Herod also killed one of his wives, three of his sons, and many others. To an unjust world, where Roman soldiers followed his orders and families were powerless to resist. To a world filled with centuries of weeping, from Jacob’s wife Rachel dying in childbirth (Genesis 35:16-18) to her figurative mourning for God’s people in exile (Jeremiah 31:15) to the parents wailing in Bethlehem.

In that dark winter I cherished 1 Corinthians 15:26: “*The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*” The carols concurred: Jesus understood grief, but was also “born that man no more may die.”⁶ He came to vanquish sin, “to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found.”⁷ In Matthew 2, the blessings flowed across borders. Why Egypt? Physically, little Jesus was safe there, and Egyptian Coptic Christians still celebrate his visit.

But for deeper significance, Matthew quoted Hosea 11: “*Out of Egypt I called my son.*” Hosea portrayed God’s tender love for Israel as a father’s for a small child. He rescued them from bondage in Egypt, yet they strayed into idolatry. In contrast, the little son Jesus would come out of Egypt in perfect obedience, carrying out his Father’s will for our salvation. During sorrow, these are “tidings of comfort and joy.”⁸

For Family Discussion: How would you feel to have to leave your school and friends to follow your parents to a new place? What might you pray for, as you traveled?

For Personal Reflection: What are some of the harsher aspects of the Christmas narrative? What do you they tell us about Christ?



One of Peace

Read Micah 5:2-5

“And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.”

Where does our security come from? For many of us, it comes from our identity as part of a group: our family, place of work, circle of friends. For others, it comes from our own abilities: our intelligence, ability to earn money, physical strength, artistic talent. We can be tempted to place our security in any of these things, especially when things are going well- when we are earning lots of money or our family life is flourishing. Yet today's reading turns our idea of security on its head.

We are secure because our King is great. And His greatness is connected with two specific things.

He shall be great to the ends of the earth. This is a promise, something the Lord assures us will happen. Why is this geographical caveat important? He is not great to me or for me, or for my nation or people group; but He is great to and for all people. This shows the incredible breadth of God's love. Even in this passage from Micah, where the author is writing about the people of Israel, God's heart for all the nations comes sneaking in. There's no escape! God's love is too wide, too beautiful to be confined to just one group of the people He created. His redemptive plan is for all people, even to the ends of the earth.

How will He be great among all the nations? Will He come in force and with a strong army, so that people are coerced into His orbit? Contrary to our human ways of striving to make our own names great, this King will be one of peace. Here we see the foreshadowing of the cross, of a great King Who lays down His life for His unworthy people; not because we deserve it, but because we are the work of His hands and He loves us. We can rest secure in the love of our great King Jesus.

For Family Discussion: Try to name all the ways that God is a GREAT God.

For Personal Reflection: Practically speaking, how do we root our identity in Christ and in His greatness, rather than our own?



Be Wise

Read Psalm 2

Few New Testament figures are shrouded in as much mystery as the Magi. They have been called kings, wise men and astrologers. They come, vaguely, from “the East” and they bring expensive and unusual gifts, strange gifts for a young family. Traditionally, we think there were three men, because of the three gifts, but their exact number is unknown. After this brief encounter, they do not appear again in the Bible.

But, from the account in Matthew 2, we understand that they were men of authority and prestige. Traveling from the non-Jewish world, they represent the nations, and in so doing, they are a narrative picture of the words of warning from Psalm 2:10-11:

*“Therefore, you kings, be wise;
Be warned, you rulers of the earth.
Serve the LORD with fear
And celebrate his rule with trembling.”*

The Magi understood: this King Jesus is sovereign over all, and submission to His authority is the wisest way to rule. But what about the rest of us non-rulers? What are we to take from this? Perhaps we need to zoom out to look at both Psalm 1 and 2, which are a perfectly balanced prologue to the entire book of Psalms. Psalm 2 ends with *“blessed are all,”* but Psalm 1 begins with *“blessed is the one.”* Psalm 2 is addressed to the nations and asks: Will you let God rule? Psalm 1 is addressed to us as individuals, and asks: Will you let God teach you? Taken together, the conclusion of both psalms is that by placing ourselves individually under God’s rule, we are best equipped to participate in His plan for blessing the nations. And the by-product is that we ourselves enjoy a blessed life, too.

As we stand on the edge of a brand-new year, we can only wonder what it will hold, personally, or for our nation. But, God Himself is unchanging, and His word is sure. He can be counted on to teach us, and to guide our steps according to His plan (Psalm 2:12).

For Family Discussion: Who is in charge of all the leaders, over all the world? How can we pray for them?

For Personal Reflection: How might God call you to participate in His mission in the coming year?



Nevertheless

Read Isaiah 9:1-7

"Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress..." (Isaiah 9:1)

Only three months remained until our daughter's wedding. The venue and the caterer were chosen. The wedding apparel, ready for alterations. The invitations, mailed. At the same time that we were finalizing details for the 02 May wedding, a statewide public health emergency was declared to contain the spread of COVID-19.

Uncertainty set in, followed by tears. The reception date was changed to October, but our daughter and her fiancé opted not to wait. On a brisk Saturday in March, they were married, in the company of a small group. The celebration and honeymoon would need to wait; the newlyweds forged ahead with their new life. So many plans had been turned upside-down. **Nevertheless**, the earlier days of distress soon turned to unbelievable joy. Our daughter and her husband found out that they are expecting a baby!

At the end of Isaiah 8, we read of the northern tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, suffering through the invasion of the Assyrians: *"Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom."* (Isaiah 8:22) Interestingly, Isaiah 9 poses a stark contrast: ***Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. . .*** (Isaiah 9:1) *"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) God planned to deliver redemption to Israel, as well as to people of all nations, by sending a baby, Immanuel, "God With Us."

We live in fluid and challenging times. We might, upon occasion, feel surrounded by gloom, distress and darkness. **Nevertheless**, Jesus, born a baby, bids all who are weary and burdened to come to Him, to find rest for our souls. (Matthew 11:28-30) Praise be to God for the indescribable hope of lasting justice, peace and righteous governance that we have in our Lord Jesus Christ!

For Family Discussion: God gives His people hope during very hard times. What does this tell us about God and His love for us?

For Personal Reflection: What does the "nevertheless" in Isaiah 9:1 tell us about God's character? Into what areas of life would you like to hear God proclaim a "nevertheless" statement?



Week 5 Family Talk:

Messiah, Magi & the Nations



Have you ever eaten a bad apple?

If you are starving,
it might look good.

It might be shiny,
but when you take a bite
It is rotten to the core.

Disgusting! It would make you sick.

A ripe apple is sweet, crisp, and refreshing.
It gives you energy and life.

King Herod was like that bad apple.

Sin-stained. Dangerous. Selfish and hungry for power.

We are all born hungry. Sometimes, like Herod, we try to feed ourselves
With things that make us feel good, but are not good for us.

Look instead at King Jesus,

The good King,

Holy and sinless,

Full of peace and life.

He is the bringer of justice and righteousness,

The True King,

The King that we all need to find.

- In your devotions this week, you read about the Magi who searched for the king of the Jews. They knew it was not King Herod. How did they know that Herod was not the king that they were looking for?
- Herod was full of jealousy and selfishness. He made evil choices because of those feelings. We can also make bad, selfish choices. What can we do to follow Jesus, the One True King, instead?



Special Thanks

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Works Cited

1. All Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted. *The Holy Bible*, New International Version. Grand Rapids: Zondervan House, 2011.
2. "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"
3. "Joy to the World"
4. "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"
5. "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen"
6. "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing"
7. "Joy to the World"
8. "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen"



This Advent we are going to linger in the genealogy of Jesus, walking our way through the stories of God's grace and truth in the genealogy of Jesus. Advent is a season of preparation spread across the four weekends before Christmas intended to prepare us for our celebration of Jesus' birth and anticipation of His return. It comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means 'appearing,' and calls us to prepare our hearts as we draw near to Christmas. This year we will prepare by attending to the lives of the great men and women of faith, including Joseph and Mary, who we encounter in Jesus' family tree. As we follow their stories it will give us an opportunity to regain a sense of who Jesus is and what He did, as well as who we are and where we are going as His disciples.

