

## 12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONS

DAY ONE of the Twelve Days of Christmas: Sunday Worship – December 25th

DAY TWO of the Twelve Days of Christmas: Monday December 26th

And now there is work to do. Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, in a new book about the Christmas story, write:

We who have seen the star and heard the angels sing are called to participate in the new birth and new world proclaimed by these stories. The birth stories are not a pipe dream, but a proclamation that what we see revealed in Jesus is the way—the way to a different kind of life and a different future...God will not change the world without our participation.

DAY THREE of the Twelve Days of Christmas: Tuesday December 27th

We are measured by love. Krista Tippett, host of public radio's popular *Speaking of Faith*, in her book of that title recounts how as a bright political journalist stationed in Berlin in the 1980s, she was thoroughly caught up in the drama and intrigue of international politics and assumed that all the problems of the world had geopolitical solutions. But she found herself intrigued with friends in East Germany who somehow found a way to live lives of joy and meaning and happiness even in a repressive society, and she changed her mind. There is more to changing the world than politics.

She quit her job, enrolled in Yale Divinity School, and has been thinking and pondering very creatively ever since.

Part of her divinity school experience was a stint as a chaplain in the Alzheimer's and dementia ward of a local hospital. The patients she visited, she said, "would ask me my name but never remember it. They were not interested in my background and education, the places I'd seen or the titles I'd held, the credentials. They would only know whether I was kind, gentle, patient, a good listener."

She realized there was nothing tangible she could do for them or give them. "I could come and love them as they were, and this was my greatest gift to them. But they gave me far more."

"When all is said and done," Krista Tippett wrote, "none of us will be measured by how much we accomplished, but on how well we love."

## DAY FOUR of the Twelve Days of Christmas: Wednesday December 28th

Last September 11, on the anniversary of the attack, NPR did a special on a retired New York City firefighter, John Vigiano, who lost two sons on 9/11: John Jr., also a firefighter, and his younger brother Joe, a police officer. Both died in the World Trade Center. John was close to both his sons, talked to each of them every day. He recalled how around 3:30 on September 10<sup>th</sup> he talked to John Jr. They ended the call by saying, “I love you.”

The next morning Joe called him and told him the earliest details of the attacks. That call also ended with “I love you.”

John Vigiano told NPR, “We had the boys, John for thirty-six years, Joe for thirty-four. I don’t have any could’ve, should’ve or would’ve. I wouldn’t change anything. It’s not many people that the last words they said to their son or daughter was ‘I love you.’” (*NPR StoryCorps 1 September 2009*)

That’s what happens at Christmas. God says, “I love you” to the world, to all the children, all the people, to you and me.

It is how God decided to save the world—by loving, by touching human hearts with the gift of love.

## DAY FIVE of the Twelve Days of Christmas: Thursday December 29th

*And the Word became a human being and lived among us...John 1:14*

Christmas celebrates what theologians like to call the “Incarnation,” the time when God’s love comes to earth in human form. But the Incarnation says as much about what we are to become as it does about what God has become. Christ becomes like us so that we might become like him. He comes to transform us, but not from life to something more than life, rather from something less than life to the possibility of full life itself. “I came that you might have life, and have it more abundantly,” says Jesus in the Gospel of John (10:10), words which the early Christian father, Irenaeus, translated into these words: “The glory of God is a human being full alive.” Not to enter into our part in the Incarnation is to settle for less than the life God gives us.

## DAY SIX OF THE Twelve Days of Christmas: Friday December 30th

### **The Grace of God has Appeared**

***For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.*** Titus 2:11-14

### **Theme**

Christmas, the celebration of God’s Incarnation in Christ, is a day of the church’s greatest joy. The God we could not reach up to has graciously reached down to us. God has appeared and we discovered, in the Incarnation, that God is gracious. God’s great gift evokes response. Now that God has come to us, how then shall we live?

### Prayer

Lord Jesus, you could have remained caught in your great, godly glory. But you decided to forsake your glory and come to our earth, dwelling among us as we are.

You could have been only Almighty and Powerful but you decided to also be All-Loving and Present. You stooped to our need and embraced our full humanity.

You could have righteously judged us and condemned us for our sin. You forgave us and blessed us instead.

You could have turned away from us, for in our sins we deserved it. Instead you turned toward us and came to us because we couldn't come to you. Amen.

### DAY SEVEN OF THE Twelve Days of Christmas: Saturday December 31st

#### The Fullness of Time

*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.* Galatians 4:4-7

### Theme

When is the time ever right? When is our expectation fulfilled? When is our hope vindicated? When is it legitimate to move from desire to full-throated joy? Christmas, the incarnation, is such a time. Is it possible for us to lay aside our reservations, our misgivings, our hesitancy and rejoice in the gift that God has given us in the Christ child?

### Prayer

Almighty and loving God, in this season, when our joy is full and your resourceful action on our behalf is self-evident, we give you thanks for your incarnation at Bethlehem. You did not stay aloof or uncaring in your creation. You came to us as Jesus.

Therefore, we rejoice.

Keep us full of wonder, not only during this season, but in all the days of the coming year. Preserve in us confidence in your life-giving care for us. Enable us, in good times and in bad, to rejoice.

We pray for those who suffer during this time of the year. We know that their suffering may be greater during a season when all the rest of the world seems to rejoice. May their mourning and sorrow be turned to gladness.

Move all your children to rejoice. Amen.

### DAY EIGHT OF THE Twelve Days of Christmas – Sunday Worship January 1<sup>st</sup>

### DAY NINE OF THE Twelve Days of Christmas – Monday January 2<sup>nd</sup>

#### CHRISTMAS PRAYER

Lord Jesus, You caused this holy day to shine with the brightness of Your great light. You have come to us, the world's true light. Grant that we might see Your light, that we might be drawn to Your love, that we show forth Your light into the world, that many might see Your love reflected in our lives.

Babe of Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph's son, the one for whom there was no room at the inn, speak to us during these 12 days of Christmas, be born again in our hearts, take form in our lives, redeem our humanity, making us your own.

Lord, we thank You that, having tried to speak to us in so many ways down through the ages, You at last speak to us through Your only Son, Jesus the Christ, who reigns this day and forever and ever. Amen.

### **DAY TEN OF THE Twelve Days of Christmas – Tuesday January 3<sup>rd</sup>**

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage."

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

‘And you, Bethlehem, , in the land of Judah,  
Are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
For from you shall come a ruler  
Who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

#### **Theme**

Even as the beloved story of the magi is a story full of both fear and joy, so our lives as believers, as followers of Christ, are also full of joy and fear. To be a Christian is to be someone who is on a journey toward Jesus. There is fear at the unknowns and the perils of the journey; there is joy at having reached our destination, our heart's desire. To be a Christian is to have lives that are characterized by fear and by joy, emotions that are based upon our comparative proximity to the One whose birth was presaged by a miraculous star.

#### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, light of the world, star rising in the east, dayspring, sun of righteousness shine upon us. Enlighten us, show us your way for us. Then, having seen your light, teach us to follow your star wherever it leads. Make us bold in venturing forth as your disciples, to walk with you, to serve you, and to rejoice in your light. Amen.

## **DAY ELEVEN OF THE Twelve Days of Christmas-Wednesday January 4th**

*And the Word became a human being and lived among us...John 1:14*

Christmas celebrates what theologians like to call the “Incarnation,” the time when God’s love comes to earth in human form. But the Incarnation says as much about what we are to become as it does about what God has become. Christ becomes like us so that we might become like him. He comes to transform us, but not from life to something more than life, rather from something less than life to the possibility of full life itself. “I came that you might have life, and have it more abundantly,” says Jesus in the Gospel of John (10:10), words which the early Christian father, Irenaeus, translated into these words: “The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” Not to enter into our part in the Incarnation is to settle for less than the life God gives us.

## **DAY TWELVE OF THE Twelve Days of Christmas: Thursday, January 5th**

### **THE ADVENTUROUS JOURNEY**

*“And the word became flesh and lived among us...” John 1:14*

Christmas invites us, calls us, inspires us, to join the journey and follow Jesus. For the Christian life is an adventurous journey.

“The Bible is fundamentally a story of a people’s journey with God. Scripture is an account of human existence as told by God. In Scripture we see God is taking the disconnected elements of our lives and pulling them together into a coherent story that means something. When we lack such a truthful, coherent account, life is likely to be perceived as disconnected.” –Stanley Hauerwas

“Jesus invited ordinary people to come out and be a part of an adventure, a journey that keeps surprising us at every turn in the road. Christianity is an adventurous journey, in which we attach ourselves to God’s story of salvation. The church today, if it is to make a difference, needs to see itself on the road again, on a journey with Jesus. You cannot know Jesus without following Jesus. Too often we have thought of the church as a colony unto itself, where people settle in, stake out a claim, build fences, and guard their turf. We need to move from this colony idea to that of an adventurous journey.” –William Willimon

## **THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD – Friday January 6<sup>th</sup>**

Epiphany—

The star appearing in the east,  
Wisemen seeking out the new King,  
God revealing Jesus to the whole world.

Epiphany—

God’s show and tell time.  
God’s turning on the light so we can see hope and love in the midst of darkness.

An Epiphany Thought:

“The Great Events of this world are not battles and elections and earthquakes and thunderbolts. The great events are BABIES, for each child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged with humanity, but is still expecting love and goodwill to be incarnate in each human life.” –Fred Craddock