

Christmas Family Devotions

Christmas is my favorite time of the year. I love the decorations that make our house come alive. I love the tree that brightens the room with a myriad of lights and ornaments. I love the smell of a candle burning filling our home with our favorite scent. I just love the Christmas season.

One of the mainstays of the décor at our home is the Nativity. This simple decoration tells the story of Christmas. The stable and figurines blend to depict the wonderful story of the Best Gift given over 2000 years ago. The young parents crouched around a little Baby that would die to redeem the world from sin. Angels announced the good news to shepherds who were transformed into worshippers because of a little Baby. In the Nativity, we see the glorious truth of Emmanuel—God with us.

The purpose of these devotions is to help you as a family be more intentional about sharing the good news of Christmas. Sometimes, parties and packages can get in the way of imparting the truth about Jesus and His Birth. Using these tools will help you communicate with even older children about the meaning and purpose of Christmas.

Each session has the following crucial parts:

- **Activity— (Crucial may be a strong word. But this will be fun).** This may need to be altered depending on your family and how “crafty” you are. Some of the activities will be difficult for small children. Others may require too much planning. I do suggest that you do an activity. If you do not like the one in the session, make up one. The goal is to spend productive time together as a family. Most stores have a good selection of craft stuff for the activities. Make sure that someone has purchased what you will need before hand.
- **Scripture Reading—**God’s Word is the basis for our understanding the Nativity. Without the truths of God’s Word, Christmas becomes meaningless and trivial. Use a translation of the Bible that everyone in your family can understand. We have a couple of picture Bibles that we have enjoyed. The passages are not long and they are familiar. You may have children read parts of the passages. Be creative as you read the Scriptures.
 - **The Read and Grow Picture Bible** - <http://www.amazon.com/Read-N-Grow-Picture-Bible-872-Picture-Revelation/dp/084991163X>
 - **The Big Picture Story Bible** - <http://www.amazon.com/Big-Picture-Story-Bible/dp/1581342772>
- **Devotional Passage—**Each session will have a couple of paragraphs that you can read or teach to your family. The passage will be short and to the point. The goal of this study is to give you a tool to share the message of Christmas with your family. If the passage is too cumbersome for you, paraphrase it. Express the core of the message in a way that your family can understand.
- **Singing—**One of my favorite parts of the Christmas season are the wonderful songs that fill every corner of my life. From the radio to the bustling shops, music expresses the meaning of Christmas. Your family might not enjoy singing. You may be musically challenged. If so, then get a good CD and listen to the songs. Talk about them with your children. Make sure they understand what words like “in sin and error pining” (O Holy Night) mean. Make it fun for your family.

Some suggestions. . .

Make sure that everyone is told about the plan in advance. The last thing you will want to do is start a devotion with a disgruntled teen who has just had to cancel her plans because of a surprise family devotional. Since the Advent is normally planned for five weeks, you will need to select times when other things are not scheduled and stick with them. Though you can tailor these devotions to your own family, the sessions are meant to be meaningful family experiences, not just a thought for the day. Make sure that you plan enough time together.

Begin the evening with a family meal. In my experience with parents, I have noticed that families have far too little time together around the table. Make this evening as enjoyable as possible for everyone involved. Depending on the size of your family, you may have someone select the menu or pick their favorite restaurant. The main goal is to spend time together as a family around a meal.

Put the Nativity in a prominent place in your home. Your family needs to be reminded by their vision that Christmas is about Jesus. Make sure that your Nativity is in a prominent place in your home.

Think FUN!!! The quickest way to make this a chore is for your children (especially teens) to not have a good time. Don't entertain, but make sure that they are enjoying themselves. You might take some time afterward to go and look at Christmas lights together. Just have a good time being together.

Dad, you are the point man for this. If your kids see that you are doing this between commercials, then they will follow your example. Make sure that you are focused and excited about spending quality family time together.

But we don't have kids...I realize that this guide is extremely family heavy. If you don't have kids, you still need to pursue Christ as a family. Perhaps you start a tradition now that you incorporate if and when you do have children. The main thing is that you determine how you will best pursue Christ as a family.

Devotion #1 The Frame

Goal: To show that the Old Testament promises about the Messiah provide a frame for the portrait of Jesus' birth.

The birth of Jesus didn't just happen. From the beginning of the Bible, God's Word reminds us that God would provide a Deliverer for his people. The Old Testament promises about Jesus encircle the beautiful story of Jesus' birth like a frame borders a portrait.

In your Nativity, the Stable provides the frame for the story. This is the place where Jesus came to earth—a stable. Using this tangible object as an illustration, discuss with your family the Old Testament promise pointing toward the birth of Jesus.

Activity—Family Christmas Frame

Needed:

- **A family picture**—A recent one would be best. Also, computers will provide a good help for this. The picture does need to be larger than a normal snap-shot.
- **Craft Items for the frame**—This will include glue, tape, scissors, colors, construction paper, etc. If you want to get really crazy, use glitter or fun foam.

Other Options

- www.elfyourself.com - just look it up... 😊
- Make a video collage of Christmas Pictures?

The point is to have fun as a family doing something together. There may be other activities that you would enjoy as a family. Do those...

Scripture

When you read the Scripture passages, do it in an animated way. Make it sound like the story it is. I have given you some questions that you could ask as you read to make sure that your family is following you. You may want to use rewards for answering questions correctly or some other teaching help. Think of ways to make this fun for your family.

Read Micah 5:2-5a

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah (Eff-ra-tha), though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace.

What famous town is mentioned in this passage?

What does the Bible say is going to happen there?

How is the child born in Bethlehem described in vv. 4-5? You will need to help your family understand what these qualities mean.

Devotional Passage

Can you imagine Mary and Joseph walking into a stable? This couple who has heard from angels that they will have a Baby who will impact the whole world gets to spend the night in a barn. I can hear the embarrassed young man apologizing to his young, pregnant wife, “Well, at least we will not get wet.” I can see Mary glance back to Joseph with a smile as she prepares a place to sleep in the hay.

Talk with your family about a barn. Ask your children to describe what they think the stable was like. Talk with them about the different kinds of animals that could have been present. Get your children to use their imagination as you tell the story.

Though not the best place to stay, The Stable holds the story of the first Christmas as a frame holds a picture. The Stable is not the story, but it provides a background—a window through which we can see the Story unfold. The greatest story ever told has a Stable for a backdrop.

Have one of your children place the stable from your nativity in the place you have chosen. Then, move on to talk with them about the Old Testament Frame.

There are over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the coming of the Messiah. Like the stable in your nativity, the promises of the Old Testament frame the birth of Jesus as the nation of Israel waited for the time to be right. As the Apostle Paul said in Galatians 4, “When the fullness of time had come...”

The Old Testament formed a frame for the birth of the Messiah. When the time was right, a little Baby was born. The greatest story ever told was not an accident, but the fulfillment of years of promises. The next time you look at the stable, think of it not as a barn, but as the frame of a beautiful portrait of God’s Gift to us.

Singing

O Little Town of Bethlehem
Away in a Manger
O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Devotion #2 Mary and Joseph

Goal: To talk as a family about the challenge of trusting God—even when you don't completely understand.

Activity

The following activities are suggestions from which to decide. Pick the one that is best for your family.

Trust Walk – Older kids

Needed: bandana, partners. This activity will require at least three people to work. One person will be blindfolded. Another will lead this person by the arm. The third will decide the path. This person will lead the team through the house or the yard. The challenge is to trust the person who is leading you even when you can not see. Parents need to be blindfolded too.

Donkey Ride – younger/smaller kids

In this activity, Dad gets to be a donkey for his kids. This is really just a lot of fun for everyone involved. Especially if Dad gets into it. After the activity talk about the journey for Joseph and Mary. The Bible does not say that they rode a donkey, but they did make a long journey. Talk with your family about long trips and how difficult they are.

Christmas Colors

Needed: Paper, Markers or Crayons. This activity is simple and fun for the whole family. Give each family member a piece of paper. The goal is to draw Mary and Joseph on their journey. This would be a good time to help your children understand different cultures. Talk with them about how difficult it would have been for Mary and Joseph to make the trip.

Scripture Passages

Read through the passages and discuss the following questions with your family.

Matthew 1:28-35

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

"BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US."

And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

Discussion—After you read the passage, ask one of your children to hold the Joseph figurine from your Nativity. Talk with your family about these questions.

- Do you think it was difficult for Joseph to hear the news from the Angel? Why?
- Talk about trust. Is it easy to trust someone? Have you ever lost trust in someone?
- After you have discussed Joseph and his crisis of trust, make a transition to talk about Mary.

Luke 1:26-38

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. "And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. "For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, the bonds slave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Discussion—After you read the passage, ask one of your children to hold the Mary figurine from your Nativity. Talk with your family about these questions.

- What do you think Mary thought when she heard the news from the Angel? *You will need to determine how far you want to go into Mary's situation with your children. With teens, you may be able to talk about how difficult it would have been to be an unwed mother in Mary's culture. With younger children, you may need to use more discretion.*
- What does it mean to be the "bonds slave of the Lord"? What did Mary mean when she said that?
- Talk about trusting God in difficult times.

Devotional Passage

The family drove home from church on a dark, Sunday night while a vicious storm raged around them. Rain pelted the windshield with blinding consistency. Lightning darted across the sky. Thunder rolled across the night as wind pounded against the sanctuary of their family car. Meanwhile, Cheryl sat calmly in the back seat as they journeyed home.

"Cheryl, aren't you scared of the storm?" Her mother asked as they drove down the wet streets.

With a childlike trust that is a picture of worship, Cheryl replied simply, “No, I’m not worried. Daddy’s driving. It will be ok.”

Sometimes, following God is difficult. We may not understand our situation or our circumstances. We may not know what His plan is for our lives. Our view of the events may not be good enough for us to know all the parts of His will in our lives. We are not always given the luxury of understanding the rhyme and reason of God’s plan.

However, God has called us like the Holy Family to follow Him. The childlike trust that follows the Father even when the world rages is the essence of worship. Mary and Joseph followed God with their whole heart and life. This Christmas season, Will that be said of your family?

Singing

Silent Night

O Come All Ye Faithful

Joy to the World

Devotion #3 The Angels

Goal: To show your family that the Angels had one purpose that Christmas night: To call people to worship at the feet of Jesus.

Activity

Angel Ornaments

Angel Cookies

Snow Angels? =)

Scripture Passage

Luke 2:8-14

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

Devotional Passage

A flock of sheep dots the landscape as the moon brings light to a dark night. Just another normal Bethlehem night for these shepherds. . .or so they think. Suddenly, an angel interrupts a normal night with an incredible message. The shepherds drop to their knees in awe and amazement as the glory of the Lord surrounds the angel. This night is anything but normal.

Talk with your family about what the shepherds might have seen. What do you think the sky looked like as the glory of the Lord surrounded the shepherds? What would you think if you had been there?

As the shepherds bow in worship at the sight of the Lord's glory, a multitude of heavenly messengers shout at the top of their lungs the two great realities of the gospel. First, glory to God in the highest. God deserves all glory, honor and worship. He is to be worshipped and adored. There is no one above Him. God is exalted above all. He is Supreme and glory is due Him. Glory to God in the Highest.

Secondly, the birth of a little Baby has brought peace to a planet that has been at war since the tragic sin of Adam long ago. By choosing not to follow God, Adam started a war that rages against the God who is Supreme. Men and women created in the image of God declared war on their Creator. The good news of that glorious night is that peace has been brought to earth.

The Apostle Paul said it this way,

“For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.” (Colossians 1:19-20)

Jesus' birth was the beginning of the end. His birth signaled the end of the war between God and man. Because of sin, all people were enemies of God. Everyone had chosen to do things their own way instead of following God. But, the Baby Jesus became a man who would obey God perfectly and one day sacrifice Himself on the Cross to bring peace. Now, through the death of Jesus, everyone who believes can be at peace with God. Finally, there is peace on earth.

As the sound of a million angels faded from the Bethlehem countryside, the shepherds left to find the one thing they longed for—peace. Their search took them to a feeding trough in Bethlehem. Your journey to peace will take you to the same place—the feet of Jesus.

Singing

Angels we have Heard on High
The First Noel

Session 4

The Shepherds

Goal: To show our family that Jesus' birth showed unwanted people that they are wanted by God.

Activity

Scripture

Luke 2:8, 15-20

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.

When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

Devotional Passage

There are always people around us who are unwanted—outcasts. Society has given up on them. No one wants them. We are embarrassed by their presence and look for ways to not be involved with unwanted people. In the Bible, Shepherds were outcasts. Shepherds were the low men on the totem pole of society. They were shunned and abandoned. Shepherds were unwanted and avoided.

How interesting that the first people who heard about the peace that Jesus brings were outcasts. What a wonderful reality that God's first evangelistic message was given to people who were unwanted by everyone else. The astounding thing about God is that He is madly in love with unwanted people. He loves them with a love that is radical—embracing the worst of sinners. The Father of Jesus seeks unworthy people to be His.

We have all experienced "unwanted-ness". Rejection. Isolation. Maybe we didn't make the football team. Maybe we were rejected by the "in crowd." Maybe we didn't have the right look or the right clothes. Whatever our circumstances, we were unwanted by those around us. We have all experienced "unwanted-ness."

For those who are unwanted, the story of that first Christmas night is a light in a dark place. Jesus comes into the world bringing peace to those who are unwanted. He comes bringing the reality that sinners are wanted by God. Jesus came to people who were unwanted to display the wonder of wantedness to the world.

The most amazing thing about the wantedness that Jesus brings is the effect it has on unwanted people. Notice what happens to the shepherds when they experience the grace of God. The

Bible tells us that the shepherds went away glorifying Him. These outcasts became worshippers because they understood that God wants people no one else does.

What about your family? You may not be an outcast in our society, but you were once unlovely to God because of your sin. How will the reality of your wantedness affect you this Christmas season?

Singing

O Come, All Ye Faithful

O Holy Night

Amazing Grace

Session 5 The Christ Child

Goal: To show that God sent His Son to us as Emmanuel—God in a way that we can understand.

Activity:

Hospital Visit—You will need to make arrangements for this activity with your family. Take candy canes or hand lotion to people in the hospital. The Oncology Floor is usually open to people doing this during the holidays. When you go to the room, sing a Christmas carol and ask the patient if you could pray with them.

Scripture

Luke 2:1-20 (Focus on vv. 10-12)

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, **"Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."**

And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

Devotional Passage

Have you ever noticed how words change meaning depending on how they are used? Words like “cool” or “hot” take on different meanings depending on the situation. The context in which a word is used is vital to its meaning.

In the time before the birth of Jesus, there were words given in the Old Testament prophecy pointing to the coming Messiah. The Christ would be Lord over Israel and a Savior of the people. However, many had taken these words from a context of political power, earthly royalty and conquest. Can you imagine how they felt when the context of the words changed to embrace a manger in a small Judean town?

*Talk with your family about these words: **Savior, Christ/Messiah, Lord.** What do they mean? How do we understand these words? Help them forget about Christmas for a moment and think about these words in a new way? What kinds of pictures come to mind?*

*Talk with your family about the following words: **Baby, manger, swaddling clothes.** What kind of thoughts flood your mind as you think about them? Talk about babies, feeding troughs, etc. What was God communicating to us through these words?*

In the birth of Jesus, God provided a new context for the Messiah. Jesus was not born to royalty in Rome, but to a teenage girl in a backwater province. The Christ-Child did not enter the world in finery, but in a feeding trough for barnyard animals. The Lord of glory was not arrayed in splendor, but in swaddling clothes. The Savior of the world became a Baby. Suddenly, words like Messiah, Lord and Savior had a whole new meaning.

One of the wonderful things about babies is that they almost call out to be held. The innocence of babies calls us close. They beckon us to approach and experience them. The Messiah did not come in regal splendor or appear as a mighty warrior. The Lord of glory became a baby so that we would approach Him. Jesus was born a little boy so that we would experience the goodness of God. He is Emmanuel—God in a way we can understand.

What about your family? Will you approach the Cradle of Christ this Christmas? Will you draw near to Him so that you might experience His goodness? The Lord of glory became a baby wrapped in cloth so that you and I would hear His call to come near. Will you hear the call to worship the Christ-Child?

Singing

What Child is This?

Away in a Manger

Silent Night

Jesus Name Above All Names