

A red ribbon is tied into a bow in the top right corner, with a long tail extending downwards. Another red ribbon tail is visible in the bottom left corner.

*By
Invitation
Only*

December 1 - 25



Christmas 2024

Introduction

Christmas is coming, but of course you did not need me to tell you this. It has been that way since midnight on Halloween. Suddenly, the pumpkins turned into Christmas decorations. The Christmas season was in full swing.

By now you are already planning the Christmas gatherings you will be hosting as well as looking ahead at the ones you will attend that are hosted by others. When you see the title of our Christmas devotions this year it may get your mind wandering to the list of people you plan to invite or thinking about whether or not you have received an invitation to the special gathering someone else is hosting. The invitation we are talking about this Christmas, however, is a little different. The invitation we are talking about this Christmas season, is to just one person, and that is Jesus Christ.

The Christmas season is also called the season of Advent. Advent refers to the coming of Jesus. It refers to his coming as a baby in a manger in Bethlehem, and it also speaks to the fact that He will be returning again one day. This Christmas, however, we want to invite Jesus to once again come and be with us in the midst of our Christmas celebration. We do not just want to spend Christmas talking about Jesus, we want to spend Christmas with Jesus.

Jesus is ready to come and be with you this Christmas. He, however, will not be like that relative or friend that just shows up unannounced. He is waiting for an invitation. He comes where He is wanted.

One of the things different about this year's devotions is that the prayer for each day will be the same except on Christmas day. This prayer is a prayer of invitation. It is not just a simple prayer inviting Jesus to be a part of Christmas, but it has 5 distinct parts to it. Each week we will unwrap one of these parts, until Christmas day, when we will unwrap the final piece of the invitation.

So, by now, I hope you are curious about what this prayer or invitation looks like, so let me reveal it to you.

Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my

life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

This prayer seems simple enough, but as we unwrap each part as we move through the four weeks of Advent, we will discover just how much is wrapped up in this simple invitation. Are you ready?

As you go through these devotions, you will discover that they are designed for a family setting. That does not mean that they cannot be just as meaningful for individual devotions, or as couples. If you are doing these alone, you may want to consider journaling your thoughts in place of the family discussion.

As these devotions were written, they were written from the perspective that those using them are Christians and that God is actively working in their lives. I know, however, that some of you are still at the point of being seekers after salvation. As you go through these devotions, you may discover that you want to be more than just a seeker. If so, I have provided a simple plan of salvation in the back of this book. If you pray the prayer there, let me encourage you to speak with me or another Christian about your decision, so that we can rejoice with you and be there to help you in your first days as a new Christian.

Are you ready for what God is going to do this Christmas season? Then join me as we invite Jesus to join us for Christmas.

Rev. Mark Eby

Calendar of Events

Advent Begins: The season of Advent begins on Dec. 1st this year. On this Sunday we will gather for the first message in our series “By Invitation Only” and begin this year’s devotional readings.

Children’s Christmas Party: On December 1st, the children are invited to stay after church for a Christmas party and a chance to run through their program for December 8. The teens are invited to stay with them for practice.

Prime Time Christmas Party: There is a Christmas party for those 50 and over at the home of Bob and Jean Altic on Dec. 7 from 4:00 to 7:00. Dress in festive Christmas attire. The menu is Italian. See Jean for what to bring. You are also encouraged to bring a white elephant gift that is new or gently used valued at \$10.00 or less.

Children’s Christmas Program: On Sun., Dec. 8th, the children and teens will be presenting their program “**By Invitation Only**” at 5:30 P.M. As part of the program, we will be dedicating several babies and having a time of blessing for children and teens. There will be a reception following.

Jingle and Mingle: Ladies are invited to a special Christmas party at the home of Jeanette Kentch on Mon., Dec. 9, at 6:00 pm. Bring a friend, bring a favorite Christmas dish to share, and bring a mystery gift – gently used.

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service: Join us on Dec. 24th, at 6:00 p.m. for a special Christmas Eve service. There will be refreshments following.

Young Adult New Year’s Eve Party: Alan and Kathy Edwards are putting together plans for a Young Adult New Year’s Eve Party on Dec. 31. More details are coming soon.

The Advent Wreath

Advent is a time of expectation. This is symbolized not only by the four-week period of preparation, but also by the lighting of a new Advent candle on each Sunday of the season. The flame of each new candle reminds the worshiper that something is happening, but something more is still to come. The Advent season will not be complete until all four candles are lighted, with the central Christ candle also burning brightly on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

There is symbolism in the color of the candles in the Advent wreath. The three purple candles symbolize the coming of Christ from the royal line of David. He is coming as King of Kings as well as Prince of Peace. The pink candle is lighted on the third Sunday of the Advent season. This candle symbolizes joy.

A progression is noted in the lighting of the Advent candles, beginning with the first, symbolizing expectation. The second reminds us that we are involved in a season of preparation for the celebration of the coming of Christ. Proclamation is the theme of the third candle as we proclaim that Christ brought joy to the world when He appeared. The revelation of God's love for all humankind is portrayed by the lighting of the fourth candle. The culmination of the season comes on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, as the Christ candle is lighted. We rejoice over the fact that the promise of long ago has now been fulfilled.

Is There Room?

(Light 1 purple candle each night this week)

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Come, Thou long expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free.
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our strength in Thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art-
Dear Desire of ev'ry nation,
Joy of ev'ry longing heart!

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a Child and yet a king,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit,
Rule in all our hearts alone.
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

Sun. December 1: Read Luke 2:1-7

As we begin this first week of the Advent or Christmas Season, I want us to think about the Inn Keeper there in Bethlehem. Perhaps the Inn was more like a bed and breakfast. It was a home in which a family lived that had an area of rooms that were rented to guests. If you had extra rooms to rent to guests, name some famous people you might like to stay in your rooms.

The Inn Keeper might have had rooms that he was saving for more important guests when he turned Mary and Joseph away. How do you think he felt later if he discovered just who it was that he had sent to be born in a stable?

This week, our focus is on the invitation of Christ to join us this Christmas. Will we have time for Him? Will you invite Him to join you right in the midst of your celebration? The better question is, what will you miss out on if you turn Him away this Christmas?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Mon. Dec. 2: Read Isaiah 9:6-7

Christmas is a time of anticipation. For children this is especially so as they wait for Christmas Day and the opening of presents. Have you ever waited for something, however, that did not come?

We have read today one of the prophecies concerning the birth of the Messiah. The people had been waiting for the Messiah for a long time. They had waited so long that many had begun to think that the Messiah would not be coming after all. How do you think that made them feel?

This Christmas we are inviting Jesus to come and be with us as we celebrate. Do you believe that He could come this Christmas? Do you believe that He will come? If you are having trouble believing He will come, ask God to increase your faith so that you do not miss Him as he comes this Christmas.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Tues. Dec. 3: Read Isaiah 7:14

If you had to describe how God looks, what do you think He would look like?

I know it is hard to describe God, for you have never really seen what He looks like, for when we see Him, it often is not in the way we would have imagined. That was the case as Jesus came as a baby. The name Emmanuel means God with us, but who would have guessed that He would take the form of a baby.

Jesus may come as Emmanuel this Christmas, and we might miss Him if we are not careful, for He may look so unlike what we imagined. The important thing is not what He looks like, but what He does in your life. He comes in that person who says the right word at the right moment. He is that person that is there at just the right time. Sometimes He is that inner presence that cannot be explained, but you know He is real.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

Wed. Dec. 4: Read Micah 5:2

When you think of the word “home” at Christmas, it may mean the place where you are living, or it may mean the place where your family is from. How important is being home for you at Christmas?

Mary and Joseph were not at home that Christmas as she was expecting to give birth to Jesus. How do you think she felt about being away from home?

Sometimes we think where we are determines whether or not Jesus will be there with us. We might say things like “I could never have a good Christmas if I can’t be in _____” (you can fill in the blank). But we cannot limit where God might be.

Read Acts 16:22-28. Here we find part of the account of Paul and Silas in jail. Isn’t it amazing that God could come and give them a reason to sing even in that setting? Now, if God could be in a 1st century prison cell, don’t you think he could be in whatever situation you find yourself in?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Thurs. Dec. 5: Read Isaiah 9:6

This prophecy shows us some of the names that Jesus will be known by. Notice that He will be called the Prince of Peace. When you hear the word “peace” at Christmas, what comes to your mind?

For many people, peaceful would not describe the way they are feeling at Christmas. What might rob people of peace at Christmas?

One thing that might rob us of peace at Christmas is our busy schedules. Maybe the reason we often fail to see Christ at Christmas is we are way too busy doing Christmas stuff, to be with the one Christmas is all about. Maybe it is time we looked again at our Christmas schedule so that we can find time to actually spend time with the One whose birth we are celebrating.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Fri. Dec. 6: Read John 3:16

I remember the song, “**I'm Gettin' Nuttin' For Christmas.**” It is the song of a boy that has been so bad, that he does not believe that Santa will visit and bring him gifts. Have you ever felt like you did not deserve any presents?

It may be that as you prepare for Christmas, that you may not feel worthy of Jesus visiting with you this Christmas. It may be that you feel that your sins are too great, or maybe this is for super Christians, and you are just beginning your walk with Christ. Our passage today reminds us that it is not about

how good we are. Our passage says God's love is for all, and His salvation is for anyone.

Read Rev. 3:20. This passage says that Jesus is knocking on the door of everyone's life. All he asks is that we let Him in. Notice that it says He wants to eat with us, or fellowship with us. What do you think this means? Do you trust Him enough to open the door?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Sat. Dec. 7: Take time today to catch up if you are behind, reflect on what God has been saying, and act on God's word to you.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Who Me?

(Light 2 purple candles each night this week)

Away in a Manger

Away in a manger no crib for a bed;
The little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay;
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing the baby awakes;
But little Lord Jesus no crying He makes.
I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky;
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

Be near me Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay;
Close by me forever and love me I pray.
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care;
And take us to Heaven to live with Thee there.

Sun. Dec. 8: Read Luke 19:1-10

So, we have begun this week with a story that is not a Christmas story, but it does make me think of a Christmas parade. Do you like going to Christmas parades? Have you ever had to climb up on something so you could see, or maybe you always make sure to get down front?

In our passage, we do not find a Christmas parade, but we do find something similar as Jesus was coming to town. The people have gathered all around, and so Zacchaeus, being a man that is vertically challenged, climbs up in a tree so that he can see Jesus. Do you think that Zacchaeus was thinking that Jesus would come to his house?

This week as we go through our devotions, we are going to look at how Zacchaeus might have felt when Jesus said He was going to his house, and also what happened to Zacchaeus because of Jesus' visit to his house. As we prepare for what

we shall discover this week, how would you feel if Jesus said He was coming to your house, and what do you think would happen if He did?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Mon. Dec. 9: Read Luke 19:7

If all of a sudden you received a phone call, and someone said they were coming to your house, how would you feel? You can tell that Zacchaeus was a man, for he welcomed Jesus gladly. If he had been a woman, he probably would have hesitated. He would have thought, “but my house is not as clean as I would like for it to be” or, “I do not have any refreshments to serve.” How about, “but I haven’t fixed my hair and I have nothing to wear.” Ok, so yes, some men would be just as concerned.

Now if it was Jesus coming, we might have other concerns. What if He saw those things I would not want Him to see? On page 27 I have printed a poem by Lois Eades. It is called, “If Jesus Came To Your House”. What is your reaction to this poem?

But Zacchaeus did not say, “wait, let me go home and get ready”, instead He said, “come on over”, even though he knew himself that he was a sinner. That is what I want us to do this Christmas. Jesus wants to come on over. There is no need to get things ready, he already knows all about our lives. Instead, it is time to just let Him come. Like Zacchaeus, you will be glad you did.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Tues. Dec. 10: Read Luke 19:5-6

I saw a cartoon the other day in which the Wisemen were traveling to see Jesus and one looked at the other who had brought Gold as a gift and said, "I thought there was a \$10.00 limit." Now you may or may not get the joke, but it points out that we often think about how much things cost us.

For Zacchaeus, this had to be a concern. When Jesus said He wanted to go to his house, he had to wonder what this would cost him in the long run. Now I am thinking about more than just the cost of feeding Jesus. You see, Zacchaeus was a dishonest tax collector. What if Jesus wanted him to become honest? What would this cost him?

If you seriously invited Jesus to be with you this Christmas, what might it cost you? Would you be willing to pay that cost if it meant Jesus being in your life? Zacchaeus did not hesitate. May we each be like him.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Wed. Dec. 11: Read Matthew 9:10-11

I switched today to the story of another tax collector, for it tells us what we assumed happened there in the home of Zacchaeus, and that was that they ate together. Christmas is often a time of people gathering together to eat. Why is this a special part of Christmas? Who do you look forward to being with the most?

When you think of Jesus eating with people, especially those who were known to be sinners, why is this important? To me, it shows how much Jesus desires to enter into a relationship with us. He does not just come to us to tell us how bad we are. He wants us to know that He wants to share life with us.

As you prepare to celebrate Christmas, how important is it to you to know that Jesus loves you, and that He longs to sit and spend time with you? If you took some time to just

spend with Jesus, what would you tell Him? What do you think He would say to you? I can tell you that He will tell you how much He loves you and how special you are to Him. Why not invite Him to spend some quiet time with you?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Thurs. Dec. 12: Read Luke 19:8

When you celebrate Christmas, do you find more pleasure in what you get, or more pleasure in what you give? It appears that we are trained young to focus on the getting. How often do you hear of children making lists of what they want to give at Christmas, instead of lists of what they want to receive?

The more time we spend in the presence of Jesus, the more our hearts are changed. In many ways we become like the Grinch whose heart began to warm, and then to grow. We find ourselves being transformed from those who selfishly take to those who selflessly give.

Giving to others is not always monetary things, but it can also be the giving of our time. As we invite Jesus to join us this Christmas, is there some way that He might be encouraging you to give this Christmas? Like Zacchaeus, and the Grinch, I believe giving will be good for your heart, and bring joy to others this Christmas.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Fri. Dec. 13: Read Luke 19:9-10

At Christmas you do not want to be on the naughty list. Through the years, this threat has been used to make some unruly children toe the line. Did this idea that Santa was watching

ever have an effect on your behavior? Now it may work for a little while, but the problem is that soon Christmas will be over, and then we will revert back to our old unruly selves. When we look at this story of Zacchaeus, we find a change in his heart as salvation comes to him. If we are cynical, we may say this is a good story, but like the unruly child, once Jesus has left, he will go back to being the same old self-centered man. Do you find yourself ever thinking this way? But the gift of salvation is not like those Christmas presents we have received that were quickly broken. The new life in Christ can mean a transformation that will last forever. The key is continuing to spend as much time in Jesus' presence as you can. Read John 15:5. What a wonderful promise!

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Sat. Dec. 14: Take time today to catch up if you are behind, reflect on what God has been saying, and act on God's word to you.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

If Only!

(Light 2 purple candles and the pink candle each night this week)

Joy To The World

Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King.
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the world! the Savior reigns;
Let men their songs employ.
While fields and floods,
Rocks, hills and plains,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, Repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sin and sorrow grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground.
He comes to make
His blessings flow,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world, with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, and wonders of His love.

Sun. Dec 15: Read Luke 19:41-44

This may seem like a strange passage of scripture for Christmas, but this week we are going to focus on inviting Jesus into our communities. What we recognize is that our communities are in desperate need for Jesus. What difference do you think Jesus could make in your community?

One of the things that may make us weep like Jesus did was the fact that many who celebrate Christmas will not even realize the true meaning of this holiday. They will decorate, have parties, and sing with Joy, but Jesus will never be invited into their celebration.

It is not just the fact that they do not recognize Jesus, however, that should make us weep. Like Jesus, it is the reality that in failing to recognize Jesus, they will not receive the wonderful gift of salvation for their lives, as well as all the blessings He will bring to them. What a difference He could bring.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Mon. Dec. 16: Read Philipians 2:5-11

In the story, “The Gift of the Magi”, we read of a husband and wife who each sold something they loved to buy a Christmas gift for the other. What a wonderful story. If you have not read it, take time to check it out. It will touch your heart by their sacrificial love for each other, and of course the story has an interesting twist to it that I will leave for you to discover for yourself. Have you ever given up something you loved in order to give somebody what they desired?

This “Gift of the Magi” is very much like the story of Jesus coming to earth. He looked down upon the misery of the people on Earth, and He gave up His throne in Heaven to come to Earth in order to give hope to the people in your community. The people you see around you also have something to give up. Unlike in “The Gift of the Magi”, it

is not something they highly treasure. He asks them to give Him their sin, their shame, and their pain. Do you think He has the capacity to accept all of what those in your community can give Him? What do you think those in your community can receive from Him?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

Tues. Dec. 17: Read Matthew 1:23

Do you know where your name came from or what it means? The name Emmanuel for Jesus was very special. It points to the fact that God loves us so much that he chooses to come right in the midst of people in all of their problems. He took on flesh so He could be with the people in your community. What does this tell you about Jesus' concern for the people in your community?

Today Jesus still comes in the flesh to people who are lost in their sin and are hurting because of the effects of sin in this world. The difference is that today, the flesh He takes on is ours. He calls us to be His presence right in the middle of the people in our community who are lost without Him.

Do you love others enough to go to where they are and be the presence of God, or are you willing to stand back and look at how people are hurting and say I wish someone would do something? May God so work in our hearts that we are willing to be Christ for them.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

Wed. Dec. 18: Read Luke 2:8-12

When we used to open presents at my parents' home, there were times when some of the grandkids thought they had been left

out of the presents. With so many people, and the gifts scattered in no order under the tree, sometimes it seemed others were getting gifts, but they had been left out. Now the reality is, no one was ever left out, it just felt that way for a while.

The shepherds were some that might have been left out in the community around Bethlehem. If you had invited the community to come to a special gathering, they would probably have been overlooked. Besides, who would have expected the shepherds to have come? Yet, when Jesus was born, those who were the most overlooked were the first invited to celebrate the birth of Jesus. God truly cares for the least of these.

In your community there are probably some people who feel like they have been forgotten, especially during the holidays. Yesterday we saw that God often uses us to be His living presence with them. Can you think of some people in your community that might need to be reminded they are not forgotten? What could you do to show them you care?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Thurs. Dec. 19: Read Matthew 2:1-12

In our text this morning we find a Christmas road trip. These Wisemen had to travel quite a way to get to celebrate the birth of Jesus. What is the farthest you have ever traveled for Christmas? Have you ever traveled to another country to celebrate Christmas?

Yesterday we saw how the shepherds were invited to celebrate the birth of Jesus even though they were the least in the community. In our passage today we find the Wisemen celebrating the birth of Jesus even though they are not Jewish. This would have seemed strange, for prejudice was a big problem in Jewish society at this time. Do you think prejudice is still a problem today?

Prejudice can really be a problem for people from another country or culture. They may be overlooked, or even treated badly because they are foreigners. Scripture repeatedly tells us that God has a special place in His heart for those who are far from home.

Are there people from other countries living in your community? Is there a way you can help them to know that Christmas is for them as well? How can you show them the love of Christ?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Fri. Dec. 20: Read Luke 2:15-20

What is one the best Christmas gifts you ever received? I remember getting a bike for Christmas. I was so proud of this bike. I wanted everyone to see it, and perhaps even be a little jealous of me.

I do not believe that the shepherds were looking for people to be jealous of them. I think, instead, that after they had seen Jesus, they just could not stop talking about Him. They had met the Son of God, and best of all, they knew through the angels that He was God's gift of love to them. How do you think people responded to the good news they shared with them?

I would like to believe that a revival of sorts broke out in that community. As they saw the love of God at work in the lives of these shepherds, I can just imagine that suddenly the whole community began to be hopeful of what God could do in each of their lives.

Think of what could happen in your community. If through you, people began to experience the power of God's love in their lives, and they began to share with others what God had done for them, what do you think could happen? And to think, it all began because you were willing to let God become flesh in you for your community.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Sat. Dec. 21: Take time today to catch up if you are behind, reflect on what God has been saying, and act on God's word to you.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Our Family Gathering

(This week we will light all four candles on the outside.)

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild-
God and sinners reconciled.”
Joyful, all ye nations rise;
Join the triumph of the skies.
With th’angelic host proclaim,
“Christ is born in Bethlehem.”
Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!”

Christ, by highest heav’n adored!
Christ, the everlasting Lord!
Long desired, behold Him come-
Offspring of the Virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail th’incarnate deity,
Pleased as man with men to dwell,
Jesus our Immanuel!
Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!”

Hail, the heav’n born Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness
Light and Life to all He brings,
Ris’n with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays his glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!”

Sun. Dec. 22: Read Luke 2:1-4

Will you get to spend time with your family this Christmas?
How important is this family time to you?

It is interesting to note that when Jesus was born, He was born right in the middle of a family gathering. Mary and Joseph had gone to Bethlehem for the census because this was their ancestral home. That means that all male members of Joseph's family had to go to Bethlehem to be counted.

This would have been one very hectic gathering. Like many large family gatherings, they had to try and figure out where everyone would sleep. Will this be an issue for your family this Christmas?

Mary and Joseph drew the short straw and got the barn. What a place to be during this family gathering, and especially since Mary was expecting a child. The amazing thing is we do not find Joseph or Mary blessing everyone out, or even sulking because they felt like they had been wronged. Instead, right there in a stable, they brought Jesus into the midst of their family gathering.

This Christmas we may not always be treated like we think we deserve. We may not like where we have to sleep or even what table we have to eat at but let us not let that affect us. Instead, let's focus on bringing Jesus into our family gathering by the love we share, no matter what.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Mon. Dec. 23: Read Matthew 12:46-50

Speaking of family at Christmas can be painful. There are many who will not be able to travel to be with their family, and there are others whose loved ones have passed away. I choose this verse today, not to deny the special place your family has in your life, but to celebrate the new family God has blessed you with in the church. Name some ways that you have been blessed through the people you attend church

with. How has your life been a blessing to others in your church?

As you reflect on the value of the church family, perhaps someone has come to mind in your church that will be spending Christmas without family this year. Our tendency might be to be a little selfish at Christmas, and not include those outside our biological family, but maybe this year God has a special blessing for you through someone else. I know that you will be a blessing to them.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Christmas Eve

(You may choose to light all four outside candles and the center Christ candle today or save this for Christmas Day)

Tues. Dec. 24: Read Luke 2:19

Mary had a lot to think about that first Christmas. What do you think might have been the most amazing thing she had seen? Whose visit in the stable might have surprised her the most? What had the greatest impact on her life that first Christmas?

There are many ways you might answer the questions above, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized that the answer to each question was Jesus. She saw Jesus, He came to a stable, and wow what an impact on her life.

Now I ask you to look at this Christmas. What was the most amazing thing you saw? Who was a part of your life in the most surprising way? What had the greatest impact on your life? I hope the answer to each of these questions was Jesus, even as He became flesh through others in your life. That has been our prayer. Praise God for His faithfulness.

If you have not seen Him yet, I urge you to pray that God will show Himself to you. He is just waiting for you to recognize His presence.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Christmas Day

(Light all 5 candles today)

Wed. Dec. 25: Read Luke 2:1-20

By now you have probably exchanged presents with your family and friends. Why did you take the time to pick out that perfect gift to give? I know that some gifts we give are actually given out of a sense of obligation, but then there are those special gifts. These are the ones we really give a lot of thought to. These are the gifts we give because of love. Who did you give a gift like that to this Christmas?

There is one final part of our prayer. That is where we invite God to accept our gift to Him. What is the best gift we can offer Jesus? The answer is found in Romans 12:1. The greatest gift we can offer to Him is ourselves. This includes allowing Him to cleanse our lives of all that is not pleasing to Him. It also means giving ourselves in service to Him.

Are you ready to offer Him this gift this Christmas? Don't worry about the package your gift is in, or even how good the gift is. In this case, it really is the giving of the gift that is important. He is the one who will take our gift and truly make something beautiful out of it.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for coming as Emmanuel this Christmas. Thank you for being in my life, thank you for being in my community, and in my family. I invite now you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

The God Who Cares

When God created the world, it was good, but it did not stay that way. Because of the sin of Adam and Eve, all of creation has been affected. That includes you and me, we have all sinned. But God has not turned His back on the world. Instead, Christmas is a reminder that God sent His Son so that he could save people from their sins and restore what sin has destroyed.

You may wonder how to be a part of what God has made possible through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. To begin with, you must recognize that you are a sinner. As we read in Romans 3:23 “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Already you know that this means you. Through His Holy Spirit, God has already been convicting you of this. You are a sinner, but you do not have to remain one.

In 1 John 1:9 we read, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” That simply means that He is just waiting for us to ask. If we ask, He will forgive us.

You may be thinking “that sounds great but let me get my life together first.” The problem with that is that we cannot. Until He breaks into our lives with His power, we cannot be free from the sin that holds us in bondage. However, when we invite him into our lives, He will set us free. John 8:36 tells us that “if the Son (Jesus) sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

If you want this freedom, all you need to do is ask. Your prayer can go like this. “Father, I know that I am a sinner. Please forgive me for my sin. I need your power to break free from sin. Please come into my life with this power that I might discover the new life you have for me. Thank you for hearing my prayer. Amen.”

If you have prayed this prayer in faith, God has forgiven your sins and come into your life. You are now a child of God. He is ready to give you a brand-new life. Your responsibility now is to put your life into His hands and under His control and discover the great things God has in store for your life as you partner with Him for the sake of others.

If you have prayed and asked Jesus to come into your life, please let your pastor know so that he can be praying for you and offer you support in the new life that is ahead of you.

If Jesus Came to Your House

If Jesus came to your house
To spend some time with you,
If He came unexpected,
I wonder what you'd do.

Oh, I know you'd give your nicest room
To such an honored guest
And all the food you'd give to Him
Would be the very best.

And you would keep assuring Him
You're glad to have Him there—
That serving Him in your home
Is joy beyond compare.

But when you saw Him coming,
Would you meet Him at the door
With arms outstretched in welcome
To your heavenly visitor?

Or would you have to change your clothes
Before you let Him in
Or hide some magazines
And put the Bible where they'd been

Would you hide your worldly music
and put some hymn books out?
Could you let Jesus walk right
in, or would you rush about?

And I wonder – if the Saviour
spent a day or two with you,
Would you go right on doing, the
things you always do?

Would you go right on saying, the
things you always say?
Or would life for you continue
as it does from day to day?

Would you take Jesus with you
everywhere you go?
Or would you maybe change your
plans for just a day or so?

Would you be glad to have Him
meet your closest friends?
Or would you hope they stay away,
until His visit ends?

Would you be glad to have Him
stay forever on and on?
Or would you sigh with great
relief when He at last was gone?

It might be interesting to know,
the things that you would do,
If Jesus came in person, to spend
some time with you.

-Lois Eades

We have spent this Christmas sending an invitation to God to join us in a special way. It is my desire that each of us have experienced His coming to our lives, have seen Him move in our communities, and brought His presence into our families. I also pray that we have each responded by giving ourselves to Him.

Merry Christmas,
Pastor Mark

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*By
Invitation
Only*

December 1 - 25



Christmas 2024



Introduction

Christmas is coming, but of course you did not need me to tell you this. It has been that way since midnight on Halloween. Suddenly, the pumpkins turned into Christmas decorations. The Christmas season was in full swing.

By now you are already planning the Christmas gatherings you will be hosting as well as looking ahead at the ones you will attend that are hosted by others. When you see the title of our Christmas devotions this year it may get your mind wandering to the list of people you plan to invite or thinking about whether or not you have received an invitation to the special gathering someone else is hosting. The invitation we are talking about this Christmas, however, is a little different. The invitation we are talking about this Christmas season, is to just one person, and that is Jesus Christ.

The Christmas season is also called the season of Advent. Advent refers to the coming of Jesus. It refers to his coming as a baby in a manger in Bethlehem, and it also speaks to the fact that He will be returning again one day. This Christmas, however, we want to invite Jesus to once again come and be with us in the midst of our Christmas celebration. We do not just want to spend Christmas talking about Jesus, we want to spend Christmas with Jesus.

Jesus is ready to come and be with you this Christmas. He, however, will not be like that relative or friend that just shows up unannounced. He is waiting for an invitation. He comes where He is wanted.

One of the things different about this year's devotions is that the prayer for each day will be the same except on Christmas day. This prayer is a prayer of invitation. It is not just a simple prayer inviting Jesus to be a part of Christmas, but it has 5 distinct parts to it. Each week we will unwrap one of these parts, until Christmas day, when we will unwrap the final piece of the invitation.

So, by now, I hope you are curious about what this prayer or invitation looks like, so let me reveal it to you.

Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my

life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

This prayer seems simple enough, but as we unwrap each part as we move through the four weeks of Advent, we will discover just how much is wrapped up in this simple invitation. Are you ready?

As you go through these devotions, you will discover that they are designed for a family setting. That does not mean that they cannot be just as meaningful for individual devotions, or as couples. If you are doing these alone, you may want to consider journaling your thoughts in place of the family discussion.

As these devotions were written, they were written from the perspective that those using them are Christians and that God is actively working in their lives. I know, however, that some of you are still at the point of being seekers after salvation. As you go through these devotions, you may discover that you want to be more than just a seeker. If so, I have provided a simple plan of salvation in the back of this book. If you pray the prayer there, let me encourage you to speak with me or another Christian about your decision, so that we can rejoice with you and be there to help you in your first days as a new Christian.

Are you ready for what God is going to do this Christmas season? Then join me as we invite Jesus to join us for Christmas.

Rev. Mark Eby

Calendar of Events

Advent Begins: The season of Advent begins on Dec. 1st this year. On this Sunday we will gather for the first message in our series “By Invitation Only” and begin this year’s devotional readings.

Children’s Christmas Party: On December 1st, the children are invited to stay after church for a Christmas party and a chance to run through their program for December 8. The teens are invited to stay with them for practice.

Prime Time Christmas Party: There is a Christmas party for those 50 and over at the home of Bob and Jean Altic on Dec. 7 from 4:00 to 7:00. Dress in festive Christmas attire. The menu is Italian. See Jean for what to bring. You are also encouraged to bring a white elephant gift that is new or gently used valued at \$10.00 or less.

Children’s Christmas Program: On Sun., Dec. 8th, the children and teens will be presenting their program “**By Invitation Only**” at 5:30 P.M. As part of the program, we will be dedicating several babies and having a time of blessing for children and teens. There will be a reception following.

Jingle and Mingle: Ladies are invited to a special Christmas party at the home of Jeanette Kentch on Mon., Dec. 9, at 6:00 pm. Bring a friend, bring a favorite Christmas dish to share, and bring a mystery gift – gently used.

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service: Join us on Dec. 24th, at 6:00 p.m. for a special Christmas Eve service. There will be refreshments following.

Young Adult New Year’s Eve Party: Alan and Kathy Edwards are putting together plans for a Young Adult New Year’s Eve Party on Dec. 31. More details are coming soon.

The Advent Wreath

Advent is a time of expectation. This is symbolized not only by the four-week period of preparation, but also by the lighting of a new Advent candle on each Sunday of the season. The flame of each new candle reminds the worshiper that something is happening, but something more is still to come. The Advent season will not be complete until all four candles are lighted, with the central Christ candle also burning brightly on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

There is symbolism in the color of the candles in the Advent wreath. The three purple candles symbolize the coming of Christ from the royal line of David. He is coming as King of Kings as well as Prince of Peace. The pink candle is lighted on the third Sunday of the Advent season. This candle symbolizes joy.

A progression is noted in the lighting of the Advent candles, beginning with the first, symbolizing expectation. The second reminds us that we are involved in a season of preparation for the celebration of the coming of Christ. Proclamation is the theme of the third candle as we proclaim that Christ brought joy to the world when He appeared. The revelation of God's love for all humankind is portrayed by the lighting of the fourth candle. The culmination of the season comes on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, as the Christ candle is lighted. We rejoice over the fact that the promise of long ago has now been fulfilled.

Is There Room?

(Light 1 purple candle each night this week)

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Come, Thou long expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free.
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our strength in Thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art-
Dear Desire of ev'ry nation,
Joy of ev'ry longing heart!

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a Child and yet a king,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit,
Rule in all our hearts alone.
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

Sun. December 1: Read Luke 2:1-7

As we begin this first week of the Advent or Christmas Season, I want us to think about the Inn Keeper there in Bethlehem. Perhaps the Inn was more like a bed and breakfast. It was a home in which a family lived that had an area of rooms that were rented to guests. If you had extra rooms to rent to guests, name some famous people you might like to stay in your rooms.

The Inn Keeper might have had rooms that he was saving for more important guests when he turned Mary and Joseph away. How do you think he felt later if he discovered just who it was that he had sent to be born in a stable?

This week, our focus is on the invitation of Christ to join us this Christmas. Will we have time for Him? Will you invite Him to join you right in the midst of your celebration? The better question is, what will you miss out on if you turn Him away this Christmas?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Mon. Dec. 2: Read Isaiah 9:6-7

Christmas is a time of anticipation. For children this is especially so as they wait for Christmas Day and the opening of presents. Have you ever waited for something, however, that did not come?

We have read today one of the prophecies concerning the birth of the Messiah. The people had been waiting for the Messiah for a long time. They had waited so long that many had begun to think that the Messiah would not be coming after all. How do you think that made them feel?

This Christmas we are inviting Jesus to come and be with us as we celebrate. Do you believe that He could come this Christmas? Do you believe that He will come? If you are having trouble believing He will come, ask God to increase your faith so that you do not miss Him as he comes this Christmas.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Tues. Dec. 3: Read Isaiah 7:14

If you had to describe how God looks, what do you think He would look like?

I know it is hard to describe God, for you have never really seen what He looks like, for when we see Him, it often is not in the way we would have imagined. That was the case as Jesus came as a baby. The name Emmanuel means God with us, but who would have guessed that He would take the form of a baby.

Jesus may come as Emmanuel this Christmas, and we might miss Him if we are not careful, for He may look so unlike what we imagined. The important thing is not what He looks like, but what He does in your life. He comes in that person who says the right word at the right moment. He is that person that is there at just the right time. Sometimes He is that inner presence that cannot be explained, but you know He is real.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

Wed. Dec. 4: Read Micah 5:2

When you think of the word “home” at Christmas, it may mean the place where you are living, or it may mean the place where your family is from. How important is being home for you at Christmas?

Mary and Joseph were not at home that Christmas as she was expecting to give birth to Jesus. How do you think she felt about being away from home?

Sometimes we think where we are determines whether or not Jesus will be there with us. We might say things like “I could never have a good Christmas if I can’t be in _____” (you can fill in the blank). But we cannot limit where God might be.

Read Acts 16:22-28. Here we find part of the account of Paul and Silas in jail. Isn’t it amazing that God could come and give them a reason to sing even in that setting? Now, if God could be in a 1st century prison cell, don’t you think he could be in whatever situation you find yourself in?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Thurs. Dec. 5: Read Isaiah 9:6

This prophecy shows us some of the names that Jesus will be known by. Notice that He will be called the Prince of Peace. When you hear the word “peace” at Christmas, what comes to your mind?

For many people, peaceful would not describe the way they are feeling at Christmas. What might rob people of peace at Christmas?

One thing that might rob us of peace at Christmas is our busy schedules. Maybe the reason we often fail to see Christ at Christmas is we are way too busy doing Christmas stuff, to be with the one Christmas is all about. Maybe it is time we looked again at our Christmas schedule so that we can find time to actually spend time with the One whose birth we are celebrating.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Fri. Dec. 6: Read John 3:16

I remember the song, “**I'm Gettin' Nuttin' For Christmas.**” It is the song of a boy that has been so bad, that he does not believe that Santa will visit and bring him gifts. Have you ever felt like you did not deserve any presents?

It may be that as you prepare for Christmas, that you may not feel worthy of Jesus visiting with you this Christmas. It may be that you feel that your sins are too great, or maybe this is for super Christians, and you are just beginning your walk with Christ. Our passage today reminds us that it is not about

how good we are. Our passage says God's love is for all, and His salvation is for anyone.

Read Rev. 3:20. This passage says that Jesus is knocking on the door of everyone's life. All he asks is that we let Him in. Notice that it says He wants to eat with us, or fellowship with us. What do you think this means? Do you trust Him enough to open the door?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Sat. Dec. 7: Take time today to catch up if you are behind, reflect on what God has been saying, and act on God's word to you.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Who Me?

(Light 2 purple candles each night this week)

Away in a Manger

Away in a manger no crib for a bed;
The little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay;
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing the baby awakes;
But little Lord Jesus no crying He makes.
I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky;
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

Be near me Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay;
Close by me forever and love me I pray.
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care;
And take us to Heaven to live with Thee there.

Sun. Dec. 8: Read Luke 19:1-10

So, we have begun this week with a story that is not a Christmas story, but it does make me think of a Christmas parade. Do you like going to Christmas parades? Have you ever had to climb up on something so you could see, or maybe you always make sure to get down front?

In our passage, we do not find a Christmas parade, but we do find something similar as Jesus was coming to town. The people have gathered all around, and so Zacchaeus, being a man that is vertically challenged, climbs up in a tree so that he can see Jesus. Do you think that Zacchaeus was thinking that Jesus would come to his house?

This week as we go through our devotions, we are going to look at how Zacchaeus might have felt when Jesus said He was going to his house, and also what happened to Zacchaeus because of Jesus' visit to his house. As we prepare for what

we shall discover this week, how would you feel if Jesus said He was coming to your house, and what do you think would happen if He did?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Mon. Dec. 9: Read Luke 19:7

If all of a sudden you received a phone call, and someone said they were coming to your house, how would you feel? You can tell that Zacchaeus was a man, for he welcomed Jesus gladly. If he had been a woman, he probably would have hesitated. He would have thought, “but my house is not as clean as I would like for it to be” or, “I do not have any refreshments to serve.” How about, “but I haven’t fixed my hair and I have nothing to wear.” Ok, so yes, some men would be just as concerned.

Now if it was Jesus coming, we might have other concerns. What if He saw those things I would not want Him to see? On page 27 I have printed a poem by Lois Eades. It is called, “If Jesus Came To Your House”. What is your reaction to this poem?

But Zacchaeus did not say, “wait, let me go home and get ready”, instead He said, “come on over”, even though he knew himself that he was a sinner. That is what I want us to do this Christmas. Jesus wants to come on over. There is no need to get things ready, he already knows all about our lives. Instead, it is time to just let Him come. Like Zacchaeus, you will be glad you did.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Tues. Dec. 10: Read Luke 19:5-6

I saw a cartoon the other day in which the Wisemen were traveling to see Jesus and one looked at the other who had brought Gold as a gift and said, "I thought there was a \$10.00 limit." Now you may or may not get the joke, but it points out that we often think about how much things cost us.

For Zacchaeus, this had to be a concern. When Jesus said He wanted to go to his house, he had to wonder what this would cost him in the long run. Now I am thinking about more than just the cost of feeding Jesus. You see, Zacchaeus was a dishonest tax collector. What if Jesus wanted him to become honest? What would this cost him?

If you seriously invited Jesus to be with you this Christmas, what might it cost you? Would you be willing to pay that cost if it meant Jesus being in your life? Zacchaeus did not hesitate. May we each be like him.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Wed. Dec. 11: Read Matthew 9:10-11

I switched today to the story of another tax collector, for it tells us what we assumed happened there in the home of Zacchaeus, and that was that they ate together. Christmas is often a time of people gathering together to eat. Why is this a special part of Christmas? Who do you look forward to being with the most?

When you think of Jesus eating with people, especially those who were known to be sinners, why is this important? To me, it shows how much Jesus desires to enter into a relationship with us. He does not just come to us to tell us how bad we are. He wants us to know that He wants to share life with us.

As you prepare to celebrate Christmas, how important is it to you to know that Jesus loves you, and that He longs to sit and spend time with you? If you took some time to just

spend with Jesus, what would you tell Him? What do you think He would say to you? I can tell you that He will tell you how much He loves you and how special you are to Him. Why not invite Him to spend some quiet time with you?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Thurs. Dec. 12: Read Luke 19:8

When you celebrate Christmas, do you find more pleasure in what you get, or more pleasure in what you give? It appears that we are trained young to focus on the getting. How often do you hear of children making lists of what they want to give at Christmas, instead of lists of what they want to receive?

The more time we spend in the presence of Jesus, the more our hearts are changed. In many ways we become like the Grinch whose heart began to warm, and then to grow. We find ourselves being transformed from those who selfishly take to those who selflessly give.

Giving to others is not always monetary things, but it can also be the giving of our time. As we invite Jesus to join us this Christmas, is there some way that He might be encouraging you to give this Christmas? Like Zacchaeus, and the Grinch, I believe giving will be good for your heart, and bring joy to others this Christmas.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Fri. Dec. 13: Read Luke 19:9-10

At Christmas you do not want to be on the naughty list. Through the years, this threat has been used to make some unruly children toe the line. Did this idea that Santa was watching

ever have an effect on your behavior? Now it may work for a little while, but the problem is that soon Christmas will be over, and then we will revert back to our old unruly selves. When we look at this story of Zacchaeus, we find a change in his heart as salvation comes to him. If we are cynical, we may say this is a good story, but like the unruly child, once Jesus has left, he will go back to being the same old self-centered man. Do you find yourself ever thinking this way? But the gift of salvation is not like those Christmas presents we have received that were quickly broken. The new life in Christ can mean a transformation that will last forever. The key is continuing to spend as much time in Jesus' presence as you can. Read John 15:5. What a wonderful promise!

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Sat. Dec. 14: Take time today to catch up if you are behind, reflect on what God has been saying, and act on God's word to you.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

If Only!

(Light 2 purple candles and the pink candle each night this week)

Joy To The World

Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King.
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the world! the Savior reigns;
Let men their songs employ.
While fields and floods,
Rocks, hills and plains,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, Repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sin and sorrow grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground.
He comes to make
His blessings flow,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world, with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, and wonders of His love.

Sun. Dec 15: Read Luke 19:41-44

This may seem like a strange passage of scripture for Christmas, but this week we are going to focus on inviting Jesus into our communities. What we recognize is that our communities are in desperate need for Jesus. What difference do you think Jesus could make in your community?

One of the things that may make us weep like Jesus did was the fact that many who celebrate Christmas will not even realize the true meaning of this holiday. They will decorate, have parties, and sing with Joy, but Jesus will never be invited into their celebration.

It is not just the fact that they do not recognize Jesus, however, that should make us weep. Like Jesus, it is the reality that in failing to recognize Jesus, they will not receive the wonderful gift of salvation for their lives, as well as all the blessings He will bring to them. What a difference He could bring.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Mon. Dec. 16: Read Philipians 2:5-11

In the story, “The Gift of the Magi”, we read of a husband and wife who each sold something they loved to buy a Christmas gift for the other. What a wonderful story. If you have not read it, take time to check it out. It will touch your heart by their sacrificial love for each other, and of course the story has an interesting twist to it that I will leave for you to discover for yourself. Have you ever given up something you loved in order to give somebody what they desired?

This “Gift of the Magi” is very much like the story of Jesus coming to earth. He looked down upon the misery of the people on Earth, and He gave up His throne in Heaven to come to Earth in order to give hope to the people in your community. The people you see around you also have something to give up. Unlike in “The Gift of the Magi”, it

is not something they highly treasure. He asks them to give Him their sin, their shame, and their pain. Do you think He has the capacity to accept all of what those in your community can give Him? What do you think those in your community can receive from Him?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

Tues. Dec. 17: Read Matthew 1:23

Do you know where your name came from or what it means? The name Emmanuel for Jesus was very special. It points to the fact that God loves us so much that he chooses to come right in the midst of people in all of their problems. He took on flesh so He could be with the people in your community. What does this tell you about Jesus' concern for the people in your community?

Today Jesus still comes in the flesh to people who are lost in their sin and are hurting because of the effects of sin in this world. The difference is that today, the flesh He takes on is ours. He calls us to be His presence right in the middle of the people in our community who are lost without Him.

Do you love others enough to go to where they are and be the presence of God, or are you willing to stand back and look at how people are hurting and say I wish someone would do something? May God so work in our hearts that we are willing to be Christ for them.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

Wed. Dec. 18: Read Luke 2:8-12

When we used to open presents at my parents' home, there were times when some of the grandkids thought they had been left

out of the presents. With so many people, and the gifts scattered in no order under the tree, sometimes it seemed others were getting gifts, but they had been left out. Now the reality is, no one was ever left out, it just felt that way for a while.

The shepherds were some that might have been left out in the community around Bethlehem. If you had invited the community to come to a special gathering, they would probably have been overlooked. Besides, who would have expected the shepherds to have come? Yet, when Jesus was born, those who were the most overlooked were the first invited to celebrate the birth of Jesus. God truly cares for the least of these.

In your community there are probably some people who feel like they have been forgotten, especially during the holidays. Yesterday we saw that God often uses us to be His living presence with them. Can you think of some people in your community that might need to be reminded they are not forgotten? What could you do to show them you care?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Thurs. Dec. 19: Read Matthew 2:1-12

In our text this morning we find a Christmas road trip. These Wisemen had to travel quite a way to get to celebrate the birth of Jesus. What is the farthest you have ever traveled for Christmas? Have you ever traveled to another country to celebrate Christmas?

Yesterday we saw how the shepherds were invited to celebrate the birth of Jesus even though they were the least in the community. In our passage today we find the Wisemen celebrating the birth of Jesus even though they are not Jewish. This would have seemed strange, for prejudice was a big problem in Jewish society at this time. Do you think prejudice is still a problem today?

Prejudice can really be a problem for people from another country or culture. They may be overlooked, or even treated badly because they are foreigners. Scripture repeatedly tells us that God has a special place in His heart for those who are far from home.

Are there people from other countries living in your community? Is there a way you can help them to know that Christmas is for them as well? How can you show them the love of Christ?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Fri. Dec. 20: Read Luke 2:15-20

What is one the best Christmas gifts you ever received? I remember getting a bike for Christmas. I was so proud of this bike. I wanted everyone to see it, and perhaps even be a little jealous of me.

I do not believe that the shepherds were looking for people to be jealous of them. I think, instead, that after they had seen Jesus, they just could not stop talking about Him. They had met the Son of God, and best of all, they knew through the angels that He was God's gift of love to them. How do you think people responded to the good news they shared with them?

I would like to believe that a revival of sorts broke out in that community. As they saw the love of God at work in the lives of these shepherds, I can just imagine that suddenly the whole community began to be hopeful of what God could do in each of their lives.

Think of what could happen in your community. If through you, people began to experience the power of God's love in their lives, and they began to share with others what God had done for them, what do you think could happen? And to think, it all began because you were willing to let God become flesh in you for your community.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Sat. Dec. 21: Take time today to catch up if you are behind, reflect on what God has been saying, and act on God's word to you.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Our Family Gathering

(This week we will light all four candles on the outside.)

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild-
God and sinners reconciled.”
Joyful, all ye nations rise;
Join the triumph of the skies.
With th’angelic host proclaim,
“Christ is born in Bethlehem.”
Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!”

Christ, by highest heav’n adored!
Christ, the everlasting Lord!
Long desired, behold Him come-
Offspring of the Virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail th’incarnate deity,
Pleased as man with men to dwell,
Jesus our Immanuel!
Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!”

Hail, the heav’n born Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness
Light and Life to all He brings,
Ris’n with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays his glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!”

Sun. Dec. 22: Read Luke 2:1-4

Will you get to spend time with your family this Christmas?
How important is this family time to you?

It is interesting to note that when Jesus was born, He was born right in the middle of a family gathering. Mary and Joseph had gone to Bethlehem for the census because this was their ancestral home. That means that all male members of Joseph's family had to go to Bethlehem to be counted.

This would have been one very hectic gathering. Like many large family gatherings, they had to try and figure out where everyone would sleep. Will this be an issue for your family this Christmas?

Mary and Joseph drew the short straw and got the barn. What a place to be during this family gathering, and especially since Mary was expecting a child. The amazing thing is we do not find Joseph or Mary blessing everyone out, or even sulking because they felt like they had been wronged. Instead, right there in a stable, they brought Jesus into the midst of their family gathering.

This Christmas we may not always be treated like we think we deserve. We may not like where we have to sleep or even what table we have to eat at but let us not let that affect us. Instead, let's focus on bringing Jesus into our family gathering by the love we share, no matter what.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Mon. Dec. 23: Read Matthew 12:46-50

Speaking of family at Christmas can be painful. There are many who will not be able to travel to be with their family, and there are others whose loved ones have passed away. I choose this verse today, not to deny the special place your family has in your life, but to celebrate the new family God has blessed you with in the church. Name some ways that you have been blessed through the people you attend church

with. How has your life been a blessing to others in your church?

As you reflect on the value of the church family, perhaps someone has come to mind in your church that will be spending Christmas without family this year. Our tendency might be to be a little selfish at Christmas, and not include those outside our biological family, but maybe this year God has a special blessing for you through someone else. I know that you will be a blessing to them.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Christmas Eve

(You may choose to light all four outside candles and the center Christ candle today or save this for Christmas Day)

Tues. Dec. 24: Read Luke 2:19

Mary had a lot to think about that first Christmas. What do you think might have been the most amazing thing she had seen? Whose visit in the stable might have surprised her the most? What had the greatest impact on her life that first Christmas?

There are many ways you might answer the questions above, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized that the answer to each question was Jesus. She saw Jesus, He came to a stable, and wow what an impact on her life.

Now I ask you to look at this Christmas. What was the most amazing thing you saw? Who was a part of your life in the most surprising way? What had the greatest impact on your life? I hope the answer to each of these questions was Jesus, even as He became flesh through others in your life. That has been our prayer. Praise God for His faithfulness.

If you have not seen Him yet, I urge you to pray that God will show Himself to you. He is just waiting for you to recognize His presence.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Christmas Day

(Light all 5 candles today)

Wed. Dec. 25: Read Luke 2:1-20

By now you have probably exchanged presents with your family and friends. Why did you take the time to pick out that perfect gift to give? I know that some gifts we give are actually given out of a sense of obligation, but then there are those special gifts. These are the ones we really give a lot of thought to. These are the gifts we give because of love. Who did you give a gift like that to this Christmas?

There is one final part of our prayer. That is where we invite God to accept our gift to Him. What is the best gift we can offer Jesus? The answer is found in Romans 12:1. The greatest gift we can offer to Him is ourselves. This includes allowing Him to cleanse our lives of all that is not pleasing to Him. It also means giving ourselves in service to Him.

Are you ready to offer Him this gift this Christmas? Don't worry about the package your gift is in, or even how good the gift is. In this case, it really is the giving of the gift that is important. He is the one who will take our gift and truly make something beautiful out of it.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for coming as Emmanuel this Christmas. Thank you for being in my life, thank you for being in my community, and in my family. I invite now you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

The God Who Cares

When God created the world, it was good, but it did not stay that way. Because of the sin of Adam and Eve, all of creation has been affected. That includes you and me, we have all sinned. But God has not turned His back on the world. Instead, Christmas is a reminder that God sent His Son so that he could save people from their sins and restore what sin has destroyed.

You may wonder how to be a part of what God has made possible through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. To begin with, you must recognize that you are a sinner. As we read in Romans 3:23 “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Already you know that this means you. Through His Holy Spirit, God has already been convicting you of this. You are a sinner, but you do not have to remain one.

In 1 John 1:9 we read, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” That simply means that He is just waiting for us to ask. If we ask, He will forgive us.

You may be thinking “that sounds great but let me get my life together first.” The problem with that is that we cannot. Until He breaks into our lives with His power, we cannot be free from the sin that holds us in bondage. However, when we invite him into our lives, He will set us free. John 8:36 tells us that “if the Son (Jesus) sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

If you want this freedom, all you need to do is ask. Your prayer can go like this. “Father, I know that I am a sinner. Please forgive me for my sin. I need your power to break free from sin. Please come into my life with this power that I might discover the new life you have for me. Thank you for hearing my prayer. Amen.”

If you have prayed this prayer in faith, God has forgiven your sins and come into your life. You are now a child of God. He is ready to give you a brand-new life. Your responsibility now is to put your life into His hands and under His control and discover the great things God has in store for your life as you partner with Him for the sake of others.

If you have prayed and asked Jesus to come into your life, please let your pastor know so that he can be praying for you and offer you support in the new life that is ahead of you.

If Jesus Came to Your House

If Jesus came to your house
To spend some time with you,
If He came unexpected,
I wonder what you'd do.

Oh, I know you'd give your nicest room
To such an honored guest
And all the food you'd give to Him
Would be the very best.

And you would keep assuring Him
You're glad to have Him there—
That serving Him in your home
Is joy beyond compare.

But when you saw Him coming,
Would you meet Him at the door
With arms outstretched in welcome
To your heavenly visitor?

Or would you have to change your clothes
Before you let Him in
Or hide some magazines
And put the Bible where they'd been

Would you hide your worldly music
and put some hymn books out?
Could you let Jesus walk right
in, or would you rush about?

And I wonder – if the Saviour
spent a day or two with you,
Would you go right on doing, the
things you always do?

Would you go right on saying, the
things you always say?
Or would life for you continue
as it does from day to day?

Would you take Jesus with you
everywhere you go?
Or would you maybe change your
plans for just a day or so?

Would you be glad to have Him
meet your closest friends?
Or would you hope they stay away,
until His visit ends?

Would you be glad to have Him
stay forever on and on?
Or would you sigh with great
relief when He at last was gone?

It might be interesting to know,
the things that you would do,
If Jesus came in person, to spend
some time with you.

-Lois Eades

We have spent this Christmas sending an invitation to God to join us in a special way. It is my desire that each of us have experienced His coming to our lives, have seen Him move in our communities, and brought His presence into our families. I also pray that we have each responded by giving ourselves to Him.

Merry Christmas,
Pastor Mark

**Written by Rev. Mark Eby
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*By
Invitation
Only*

December 1 - 25



Christmas 2024



Introduction

Christmas is coming, but of course you did not need me to tell you this. It has been that way since midnight on Halloween. Suddenly, the pumpkins turned into Christmas decorations. The Christmas season was in full swing.

By now you are already planning the Christmas gatherings you will be hosting as well as looking ahead at the ones you will attend that are hosted by others. When you see the title of our Christmas devotions this year it may get your mind wandering to the list of people you plan to invite or thinking about whether or not you have received an invitation to the special gathering someone else is hosting. The invitation we are talking about this Christmas, however, is a little different. The invitation we are talking about this Christmas season, is to just one person, and that is Jesus Christ.

The Christmas season is also called the season of Advent. Advent refers to the coming of Jesus. It refers to his coming as a baby in a manger in Bethlehem, and it also speaks to the fact that He will be returning again one day. This Christmas, however, we want to invite Jesus to once again come and be with us in the midst of our Christmas celebration. We do not just want to spend Christmas talking about Jesus, we want to spend Christmas with Jesus.

Jesus is ready to come and be with you this Christmas. He, however, will not be like that relative or friend that just shows up unannounced. He is waiting for an invitation. He comes where He is wanted.

One of the things different about this year's devotions is that the prayer for each day will be the same except on Christmas day. This prayer is a prayer of invitation. It is not just a simple prayer inviting Jesus to be a part of Christmas, but it has 5 distinct parts to it. Each week we will unwrap one of these parts, until Christmas day, when we will unwrap the final piece of the invitation.

So, by now, I hope you are curious about what this prayer or invitation looks like, so let me reveal it to you.

Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my

life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

This prayer seems simple enough, but as we unwrap each part as we move through the four weeks of Advent, we will discover just how much is wrapped up in this simple invitation. Are you ready?

As you go through these devotions, you will discover that they are designed for a family setting. That does not mean that they cannot be just as meaningful for individual devotions, or as couples. If you are doing these alone, you may want to consider journaling your thoughts in place of the family discussion.

As these devotions were written, they were written from the perspective that those using them are Christians and that God is actively working in their lives. I know, however, that some of you are still at the point of being seekers after salvation. As you go through these devotions, you may discover that you want to be more than just a seeker. If so, I have provided a simple plan of salvation in the back of this book. If you pray the prayer there, let me encourage you to speak with me or another Christian about your decision, so that we can rejoice with you and be there to help you in your first days as a new Christian.

Are you ready for what God is going to do this Christmas season? Then join me as we invite Jesus to join us for Christmas.

Rev. Mark Eby

Calendar of Events

Advent Begins: The season of Advent begins on Dec. 1st this year. On this Sunday we will gather for the first message in our series “By Invitation Only” and begin this year’s devotional readings.

Children’s Christmas Party: On December 1st, the children are invited to stay after church for a Christmas party and a chance to run through their program for December 8. The teens are invited to stay with them for practice.

Prime Time Christmas Party: There is a Christmas party for those 50 and over at the home of Bob and Jean Altic on Dec. 7 from 4:00 to 7:00. Dress in festive Christmas attire. The menu is Italian. See Jean for what to bring. You are also encouraged to bring a white elephant gift that is new or gently used valued at \$10.00 or less.

Children’s Christmas Program: On Sun., Dec. 8th, the children and teens will be presenting their program “**By Invitation Only**” at 5:30 P.M. As part of the program, we will be dedicating several babies and having a time of blessing for children and teens. There will be a reception following.

Jingle and Mingle: Ladies are invited to a special Christmas party at the home of Jeanette Kentch on Mon., Dec. 9, at 6:00 pm. Bring a friend, bring a favorite Christmas dish to share, and bring a mystery gift – gently used.

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service: Join us on Dec. 24th, at 6:00 p.m. for a special Christmas Eve service. There will be refreshments following.

Young Adult New Year’s Eve Party: Alan and Kathy Edwards are putting together plans for a Young Adult New Year’s Eve Party on Dec. 31. More details are coming soon.

The Advent Wreath

Advent is a time of expectation. This is symbolized not only by the four-week period of preparation, but also by the lighting of a new Advent candle on each Sunday of the season. The flame of each new candle reminds the worshiper that something is happening, but something more is still to come. The Advent season will not be complete until all four candles are lighted, with the central Christ candle also burning brightly on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

There is symbolism in the color of the candles in the Advent wreath. The three purple candles symbolize the coming of Christ from the royal line of David. He is coming as King of Kings as well as Prince of Peace. The pink candle is lighted on the third Sunday of the Advent season. This candle symbolizes joy.

A progression is noted in the lighting of the Advent candles, beginning with the first, symbolizing expectation. The second reminds us that we are involved in a season of preparation for the celebration of the coming of Christ. Proclamation is the theme of the third candle as we proclaim that Christ brought joy to the world when He appeared. The revelation of God's love for all humankind is portrayed by the lighting of the fourth candle. The culmination of the season comes on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, as the Christ candle is lighted. We rejoice over the fact that the promise of long ago has now been fulfilled.

Is There Room?

(Light 1 purple candle each night this week)

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Come, Thou long expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free.
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our strength in Thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art-
Dear Desire of ev'ry nation,
Joy of ev'ry longing heart!

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a Child and yet a king,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit,
Rule in all our hearts alone.
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

Sun. December 1: Read Luke 2:1-7

As we begin this first week of the Advent or Christmas Season, I want us to think about the Inn Keeper there in Bethlehem. Perhaps the Inn was more like a bed and breakfast. It was a home in which a family lived that had an area of rooms that were rented to guests. If you had extra rooms to rent to guests, name some famous people you might like to stay in your rooms.

The Inn Keeper might have had rooms that he was saving for more important guests when he turned Mary and Joseph away. How do you think he felt later if he discovered just who it was that he had sent to be born in a stable?

This week, our focus is on the invitation of Christ to join us this Christmas. Will we have time for Him? Will you invite Him to join you right in the midst of your celebration? The better question is, what will you miss out on if you turn Him away this Christmas?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Mon. Dec. 2: Read Isaiah 9:6-7

Christmas is a time of anticipation. For children this is especially so as they wait for Christmas Day and the opening of presents. Have you ever waited for something, however, that did not come?

We have read today one of the prophecies concerning the birth of the Messiah. The people had been waiting for the Messiah for a long time. They had waited so long that many had begun to think that the Messiah would not be coming after all. How do you think that made them feel?

This Christmas we are inviting Jesus to come and be with us as we celebrate. Do you believe that He could come this Christmas? Do you believe that He will come? If you are having trouble believing He will come, ask God to increase your faith so that you do not miss Him as he comes this Christmas.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Tues. Dec. 3: Read Isaiah 7:14

If you had to describe how God looks, what do you think He would look like?

I know it is hard to describe God, for you have never really seen what He looks like, for when we see Him, it often is not in the way we would have imagined. That was the case as Jesus came as a baby. The name Emmanuel means God with us, but who would have guessed that He would take the form of a baby.

Jesus may come as Emmanuel this Christmas, and we might miss Him if we are not careful, for He may look so unlike what we imagined. The important thing is not what He looks like, but what He does in your life. He comes in that person who says the right word at the right moment. He is that person that is there at just the right time. Sometimes He is that inner presence that cannot be explained, but you know He is real.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

Wed. Dec. 4: Read Micah 5:2

When you think of the word “home” at Christmas, it may mean the place where you are living, or it may mean the place where your family is from. How important is being home for you at Christmas?

Mary and Joseph were not at home that Christmas as she was expecting to give birth to Jesus. How do you think she felt about being away from home?

Sometimes we think where we are determines whether or not Jesus will be there with us. We might say things like “I could never have a good Christmas if I can’t be in _____” (you can fill in the blank). But we cannot limit where God might be.

Read Acts 16:22-28. Here we find part of the account of Paul and Silas in jail. Isn’t it amazing that God could come and give them a reason to sing even in that setting? Now, if God could be in a 1st century prison cell, don’t you think he could be in whatever situation you find yourself in?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Thurs. Dec. 5: Read Isaiah 9:6

This prophecy shows us some of the names that Jesus will be known by. Notice that He will be called the Prince of Peace. When you hear the word “peace” at Christmas, what comes to your mind?

For many people, peaceful would not describe the way they are feeling at Christmas. What might rob people of peace at Christmas?

One thing that might rob us of peace at Christmas is our busy schedules. Maybe the reason we often fail to see Christ at Christmas is we are way too busy doing Christmas stuff, to be with the one Christmas is all about. Maybe it is time we looked again at our Christmas schedule so that we can find time to actually spend time with the One whose birth we are celebrating.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Fri. Dec. 6: Read John 3:16

I remember the song, “**I'm Gettin' Nuttin' For Christmas.**” It is the song of a boy that has been so bad, that he does not believe that Santa will visit and bring him gifts. Have you ever felt like you did not deserve any presents?

It may be that as you prepare for Christmas, that you may not feel worthy of Jesus visiting with you this Christmas. It may be that you feel that your sins are too great, or maybe this is for super Christians, and you are just beginning your walk with Christ. Our passage today reminds us that it is not about

how good we are. Our passage says God's love is for all, and His salvation is for anyone.

Read Rev. 3:20. This passage says that Jesus is knocking on the door of everyone's life. All he asks is that we let Him in. Notice that it says He wants to eat with us, or fellowship with us. What do you think this means? Do you trust Him enough to open the door?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Sat. Dec. 7: Take time today to catch up if you are behind, reflect on what God has been saying, and act on God's word to you.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Who Me?

(Light 2 purple candles each night this week)

Away in a Manger

Away in a manger no crib for a bed;
The little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay;
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing the baby awakes;
But little Lord Jesus no crying He makes.
I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky;
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

Be near me Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay;
Close by me forever and love me I pray.
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care;
And take us to Heaven to live with Thee there.

Sun. Dec. 8: Read Luke 19:1-10

So, we have begun this week with a story that is not a Christmas story, but it does make me think of a Christmas parade. Do you like going to Christmas parades? Have you ever had to climb up on something so you could see, or maybe you always make sure to get down front?

In our passage, we do not find a Christmas parade, but we do find something similar as Jesus was coming to town. The people have gathered all around, and so Zacchaeus, being a man that is vertically challenged, climbs up in a tree so that he can see Jesus. Do you think that Zacchaeus was thinking that Jesus would come to his house?

This week as we go through our devotions, we are going to look at how Zacchaeus might have felt when Jesus said He was going to his house, and also what happened to Zacchaeus because of Jesus' visit to his house. As we prepare for what

we shall discover this week, how would you feel if Jesus said He was coming to your house, and what do you think would happen if He did?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Mon. Dec. 9: Read Luke 19:7

If all of a sudden you received a phone call, and someone said they were coming to your house, how would you feel? You can tell that Zacchaeus was a man, for he welcomed Jesus gladly. If he had been a woman, he probably would have hesitated. He would have thought, “but my house is not as clean as I would like for it to be” or, “I do not have any refreshments to serve.” How about, “but I haven’t fixed my hair and I have nothing to wear.” Ok, so yes, some men would be just as concerned.

Now if it was Jesus coming, we might have other concerns. What if He saw those things I would not want Him to see? On page 27 I have printed a poem by Lois Eades. It is called, “If Jesus Came To Your House”. What is your reaction to this poem?

But Zacchaeus did not say, “wait, let me go home and get ready”, instead He said, “come on over”, even though he knew himself that he was a sinner. That is what I want us to do this Christmas. Jesus wants to come on over. There is no need to get things ready, he already knows all about our lives. Instead, it is time to just let Him come. Like Zacchaeus, you will be glad you did.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Tues. Dec. 10: Read Luke 19:5-6

I saw a cartoon the other day in which the Wisemen were traveling to see Jesus and one looked at the other who had brought Gold as a gift and said, "I thought there was a \$10.00 limit." Now you may or may not get the joke, but it points out that we often think about how much things cost us.

For Zacchaeus, this had to be a concern. When Jesus said He wanted to go to his house, he had to wonder what this would cost him in the long run. Now I am thinking about more than just the cost of feeding Jesus. You see, Zacchaeus was a dishonest tax collector. What if Jesus wanted him to become honest? What would this cost him?

If you seriously invited Jesus to be with you this Christmas, what might it cost you? Would you be willing to pay that cost if it meant Jesus being in your life? Zacchaeus did not hesitate. May we each be like him.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Wed. Dec. 11: Read Matthew 9:10-11

I switched today to the story of another tax collector, for it tells us what we assumed happened there in the home of Zacchaeus, and that was that they ate together. Christmas is often a time of people gathering together to eat. Why is this a special part of Christmas? Who do you look forward to being with the most?

When you think of Jesus eating with people, especially those who were known to be sinners, why is this important? To me, it shows how much Jesus desires to enter into a relationship with us. He does not just come to us to tell us how bad we are. He wants us to know that He wants to share life with us.

As you prepare to celebrate Christmas, how important is it to you to know that Jesus loves you, and that He longs to sit and spend time with you? If you took some time to just

spend with Jesus, what would you tell Him? What do you think He would say to you? I can tell you that He will tell you how much He loves you and how special you are to Him. Why not invite Him to spend some quiet time with you?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Thurs. Dec. 12: Read Luke 19:8

When you celebrate Christmas, do you find more pleasure in what you get, or more pleasure in what you give? It appears that we are trained young to focus on the getting. How often do you hear of children making lists of what they want to give at Christmas, instead of lists of what they want to receive?

The more time we spend in the presence of Jesus, the more our hearts are changed. In many ways we become like the Grinch whose heart began to warm, and then to grow. We find ourselves being transformed from those who selfishly take to those who selflessly give.

Giving to others is not always monetary things, but it can also be the giving of our time. As we invite Jesus to join us this Christmas, is there some way that He might be encouraging you to give this Christmas? Like Zacchaeus, and the Grinch, I believe giving will be good for your heart, and bring joy to others this Christmas.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Fri. Dec. 13: Read Luke 19:9-10

At Christmas you do not want to be on the naughty list. Through the years, this threat has been used to make some unruly children toe the line. Did this idea that Santa was watching

ever have an effect on your behavior? Now it may work for a little while, but the problem is that soon Christmas will be over, and then we will revert back to our old unruly selves. When we look at this story of Zacchaeus, we find a change in his heart as salvation comes to him. If we are cynical, we may say this is a good story, but like the unruly child, once Jesus has left, he will go back to being the same old self-centered man. Do you find yourself ever thinking this way? But the gift of salvation is not like those Christmas presents we have received that were quickly broken. The new life in Christ can mean a transformation that will last forever. The key is continuing to spend as much time in Jesus' presence as you can. Read John 15:5. What a wonderful promise!

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Sat. Dec. 14: Take time today to catch up if you are behind, reflect on what God has been saying, and act on God's word to you.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

If Only!

(Light 2 purple candles and the pink candle each night this week)

Joy To The World

Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King.
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the world! the Savior reigns;
Let men their songs employ.
While fields and floods,
Rocks, hills and plains,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, Repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sin and sorrow grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground.
He comes to make
His blessings flow,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world, with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, and wonders of His love.

Sun. Dec 15: Read Luke 19:41-44

This may seem like a strange passage of scripture for Christmas, but this week we are going to focus on inviting Jesus into our communities. What we recognize is that our communities are in desperate need for Jesus. What difference do you think Jesus could make in your community?

One of the things that may make us weep like Jesus did was the fact that many who celebrate Christmas will not even realize the true meaning of this holiday. They will decorate, have parties, and sing with Joy, but Jesus will never be invited into their celebration.

It is not just the fact that they do not recognize Jesus, however, that should make us weep. Like Jesus, it is the reality that in failing to recognize Jesus, they will not receive the wonderful gift of salvation for their lives, as well as all the blessings He will bring to them. What a difference He could bring.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Mon. Dec. 16: Read Philipians 2:5-11

In the story, “The Gift of the Magi”, we read of a husband and wife who each sold something they loved to buy a Christmas gift for the other. What a wonderful story. If you have not read it, take time to check it out. It will touch your heart by their sacrificial love for each other, and of course the story has an interesting twist to it that I will leave for you to discover for yourself. Have you ever given up something you loved in order to give somebody what they desired?

This “Gift of the Magi” is very much like the story of Jesus coming to earth. He looked down upon the misery of the people on Earth, and He gave up His throne in Heaven to come to Earth in order to give hope to the people in your community. The people you see around you also have something to give up. Unlike in “The Gift of the Magi”, it

is not something they highly treasure. He asks them to give Him their sin, their shame, and their pain. Do you think He has the capacity to accept all of what those in your community can give Him? What do you think those in your community can receive from Him?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

Tues. Dec. 17: Read Matthew 1:23

Do you know where your name came from or what it means? The name Emmanuel for Jesus was very special. It points to the fact that God loves us so much that he chooses to come right in the midst of people in all of their problems. He took on flesh so He could be with the people in your community. What does this tell you about Jesus' concern for the people in your community?

Today Jesus still comes in the flesh to people who are lost in their sin and are hurting because of the effects of sin in this world. The difference is that today, the flesh He takes on is ours. He calls us to be His presence right in the middle of the people in our community who are lost without Him.

Do you love others enough to go to where they are and be the presence of God, or are you willing to stand back and look at how people are hurting and say I wish someone would do something? May God so work in our hearts that we are willing to be Christ for them.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

Wed. Dec. 18: Read Luke 2:8-12

When we used to open presents at my parents' home, there were times when some of the grandkids thought they had been left

out of the presents. With so many people, and the gifts scattered in no order under the tree, sometimes it seemed others were getting gifts, but they had been left out. Now the reality is, no one was ever left out, it just felt that way for a while.

The shepherds were some that might have been left out in the community around Bethlehem. If you had invited the community to come to a special gathering, they would probably have been overlooked. Besides, who would have expected the shepherds to have come? Yet, when Jesus was born, those who were the most overlooked were the first invited to celebrate the birth of Jesus. God truly cares for the least of these.

In your community there are probably some people who feel like they have been forgotten, especially during the holidays. Yesterday we saw that God often uses us to be His living presence with them. Can you think of some people in your community that might need to be reminded they are not forgotten? What could you do to show them you care?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Thurs. Dec. 19: Read Matthew 2:1-12

In our text this morning we find a Christmas road trip. These Wisemen had to travel quite a way to get to celebrate the birth of Jesus. What is the farthest you have ever traveled for Christmas? Have you ever traveled to another country to celebrate Christmas?

Yesterday we saw how the shepherds were invited to celebrate the birth of Jesus even though they were the least in the community. In our passage today we find the Wisemen celebrating the birth of Jesus even though they are not Jewish. This would have seemed strange, for prejudice was a big problem in Jewish society at this time. Do you think prejudice is still a problem today?

Prejudice can really be a problem for people from another country or culture. They may be overlooked, or even treated badly because they are foreigners. Scripture repeatedly tells us that God has a special place in His heart for those who are far from home.

Are there people from other countries living in your community? Is there a way you can help them to know that Christmas is for them as well? How can you show them the love of Christ?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Fri. Dec. 20: Read Luke 2:15-20

What is one the best Christmas gifts you ever received? I remember getting a bike for Christmas. I was so proud of this bike. I wanted everyone to see it, and perhaps even be a little jealous of me.

I do not believe that the shepherds were looking for people to be jealous of them. I think, instead, that after they had seen Jesus, they just could not stop talking about Him. They had met the Son of God, and best of all, they knew through the angels that He was God's gift of love to them. How do you think people responded to the good news they shared with them?

I would like to believe that a revival of sorts broke out in that community. As they saw the love of God at work in the lives of these shepherds, I can just imagine that suddenly the whole community began to be hopeful of what God could do in each of their lives.

Think of what could happen in your community. If through you, people began to experience the power of God's love in their lives, and they began to share with others what God had done for them, what do you think could happen? And to think, it all began because you were willing to let God become flesh in you for your community.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Sat. Dec. 21: Take time today to catch up if you are behind, reflect on what God has been saying, and act on God's word to you.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Our Family Gathering

(This week we will light all four candles on the outside.)

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild-
God and sinners reconciled.”
Joyful, all ye nations rise;
Join the triumph of the skies.
With th’angelic host proclaim,
“Christ is born in Bethlehem.”
Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!”

Christ, by highest heav’n adored!
Christ, the everlasting Lord!
Long desired, behold Him come-
Offspring of the Virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail th’incarnate deity,
Pleased as man with men to dwell,
Jesus our Immanuel!
Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!”

Hail, the heav’n born Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness
Light and Life to all He brings,
Ris’n with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays his glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!”

Sun. Dec. 22: Read Luke 2:1-4

Will you get to spend time with your family this Christmas?
How important is this family time to you?

It is interesting to note that when Jesus was born, He was born right in the middle of a family gathering. Mary and Joseph had gone to Bethlehem for the census because this was their ancestral home. That means that all male members of Joseph's family had to go to Bethlehem to be counted.

This would have been one very hectic gathering. Like many large family gatherings, they had to try and figure out where everyone would sleep. Will this be an issue for your family this Christmas?

Mary and Joseph drew the short straw and got the barn. What a place to be during this family gathering, and especially since Mary was expecting a child. The amazing thing is we do not find Joseph or Mary blessing everyone out, or even sulking because they felt like they had been wronged. Instead, right there in a stable, they brought Jesus into the midst of their family gathering.

This Christmas we may not always be treated like we think we deserve. We may not like where we have to sleep or even what table we have to eat at but let us not let that affect us. Instead, let's focus on bringing Jesus into our family gathering by the love we share, no matter what.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Mon. Dec. 23: Read Matthew 12:46-50

Speaking of family at Christmas can be painful. There are many who will not be able to travel to be with their family, and there are others whose loved ones have passed away. I choose this verse today, not to deny the special place your family has in your life, but to celebrate the new family God has blessed you with in the church. Name some ways that you have been blessed through the people you attend church

with. How has your life been a blessing to others in your church?

As you reflect on the value of the church family, perhaps someone has come to mind in your church that will be spending Christmas without family this year. Our tendency might be to be a little selfish at Christmas, and not include those outside our biological family, but maybe this year God has a special blessing for you through someone else. I know that you will be a blessing to them.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Christmas Eve

(You may choose to light all four outside candles and the center Christ candle today or save this for Christmas Day)

Tues. Dec. 24: Read Luke 2:19

Mary had a lot to think about that first Christmas. What do you think might have been the most amazing thing she had seen? Whose visit in the stable might have surprised her the most? What had the greatest impact on her life that first Christmas?

There are many ways you might answer the questions above, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized that the answer to each question was Jesus. She saw Jesus, He came to a stable, and wow what an impact on her life.

Now I ask you to look at this Christmas. What was the most amazing thing you saw? Who was a part of your life in the most surprising way? What had the greatest impact on your life? I hope the answer to each of these questions was Jesus, even as He became flesh through others in your life. That has been our prayer. Praise God for His faithfulness.

If you have not seen Him yet, I urge you to pray that God will show Himself to you. He is just waiting for you to recognize His presence.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Christmas Day

(Light all 5 candles today)

Wed. Dec. 25: Read Luke 2:1-20

By now you have probably exchanged presents with your family and friends. Why did you take the time to pick out that perfect gift to give? I know that some gifts we give are actually given out of a sense of obligation, but then there are those special gifts. These are the ones we really give a lot of thought to. These are the gifts we give because of love. Who did you give a gift like that to this Christmas?

There is one final part of our prayer. That is where we invite God to accept our gift to Him. What is the best gift we can offer Jesus? The answer is found in Romans 12:1. The greatest gift we can offer to Him is ourselves. This includes allowing Him to cleanse our lives of all that is not pleasing to Him. It also means giving ourselves in service to Him.

Are you ready to offer Him this gift this Christmas? Don't worry about the package your gift is in, or even how good the gift is. In this case, it really is the giving of the gift that is important. He is the one who will take our gift and truly make something beautiful out of it.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for coming as Emmanuel this Christmas. Thank you for being in my life, thank you for being in my community, and in my family. I invite now you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

The God Who Cares

When God created the world, it was good, but it did not stay that way. Because of the sin of Adam and Eve, all of creation has been affected. That includes you and me, we have all sinned. But God has not turned His back on the world. Instead, Christmas is a reminder that God sent His Son so that he could save people from their sins and restore what sin has destroyed.

You may wonder how to be a part of what God has made possible through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. To begin with, you must recognize that you are a sinner. As we read in Romans 3:23 “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Already you know that this means you. Through His Holy Spirit, God has already been convicting you of this. You are a sinner, but you do not have to remain one.

In 1 John 1:9 we read, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” That simply means that He is just waiting for us to ask. If we ask, He will forgive us.

You may be thinking “that sounds great but let me get my life together first.” The problem with that is that we cannot. Until He breaks into our lives with His power, we cannot be free from the sin that holds us in bondage. However, when we invite him into our lives, He will set us free. John 8:36 tells us that “if the Son (Jesus) sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

If you want this freedom, all you need to do is ask. Your prayer can go like this. “Father, I know that I am a sinner. Please forgive me for my sin. I need your power to break free from sin. Please come into my life with this power that I might discover the new life you have for me. Thank you for hearing my prayer. Amen.”

If you have prayed this prayer in faith, God has forgiven your sins and come into your life. You are now a child of God. He is ready to give you a brand-new life. Your responsibility now is to put your life into His hands and under His control and discover the great things God has in store for your life as you partner with Him for the sake of others.

If you have prayed and asked Jesus to come into your life, please let your pastor know so that he can be praying for you and offer you support in the new life that is ahead of you.

If Jesus Came to Your House

If Jesus came to your house
To spend some time with you,
If He came unexpected,
I wonder what you'd do.

Oh, I know you'd give your nicest room
To such an honored guest
And all the food you'd give to Him
Would be the very best.

And you would keep assuring Him
You're glad to have Him there—
That serving Him in your home
Is joy beyond compare.

But when you saw Him coming,
Would you meet Him at the door
With arms outstretched in welcome
To your heavenly visitor?

Or would you have to change your clothes
Before you let Him in
Or hide some magazines
And put the Bible where they'd been

Would you hide your worldly music
and put some hymn books out?
Could you let Jesus walk right
in, or would you rush about?

And I wonder – if the Saviour
spent a day or two with you,
Would you go right on doing, the
things you always do?

Would you go right on saying, the
things you always say?
Or would life for you continue
as it does from day to day?

Would you take Jesus with you
everywhere you go?
Or would you maybe change your
plans for just a day or so?

Would you be glad to have Him
meet your closest friends?
Or would you hope they stay away,
until His visit ends?

Would you be glad to have Him
stay forever on and on?
Or would you sigh with great
relief when He at last was gone?

It might be interesting to know,
the things that you would do,
If Jesus came in person, to spend
some time with you.

-Lois Eades

We have spent this Christmas sending an invitation to God to join us in a special way. It is my desire that each of us have experienced His coming to our lives, have seen Him move in our communities, and brought His presence into our families. I also pray that we have each responded by giving ourselves to Him.

Merry Christmas,
Pastor Mark

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*By
Invitation
Only*

December 1 - 25



Christmas 2024

Introduction

Christmas is coming, but of course you did not need me to tell you this. It has been that way since midnight on Halloween. Suddenly, the pumpkins turned into Christmas decorations. The Christmas season was in full swing.

By now you are already planning the Christmas gatherings you will be hosting as well as looking ahead at the ones you will attend that are hosted by others. When you see the title of our Christmas devotions this year it may get your mind wandering to the list of people you plan to invite or thinking about whether or not you have received an invitation to the special gathering someone else is hosting. The invitation we are talking about this Christmas, however, is a little different. The invitation we are talking about this Christmas season, is to just one person, and that is Jesus Christ.

The Christmas season is also called the season of Advent. Advent refers to the coming of Jesus. It refers to his coming as a baby in a manger in Bethlehem, and it also speaks to the fact that He will be returning again one day. This Christmas, however, we want to invite Jesus to once again come and be with us in the midst of our Christmas celebration. We do not just want to spend Christmas talking about Jesus, we want to spend Christmas with Jesus.

Jesus is ready to come and be with you this Christmas. He, however, will not be like that relative or friend that just shows up unannounced. He is waiting for an invitation. He comes where He is wanted.

One of the things different about this year's devotions is that the prayer for each day will be the same except on Christmas day. This prayer is a prayer of invitation. It is not just a simple prayer inviting Jesus to be a part of Christmas, but it has 5 distinct parts to it. Each week we will unwrap one of these parts, until Christmas day, when we will unwrap the final piece of the invitation.

So, by now, I hope you are curious about what this prayer or invitation looks like, so let me reveal it to you.

Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my

life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

This prayer seems simple enough, but as we unwrap each part as we move through the four weeks of Advent, we will discover just how much is wrapped up in this simple invitation. Are you ready?

As you go through these devotions, you will discover that they are designed for a family setting. That does not mean that they cannot be just as meaningful for individual devotions, or as couples. If you are doing these alone, you may want to consider journaling your thoughts in place of the family discussion.

As these devotions were written, they were written from the perspective that those using them are Christians and that God is actively working in their lives. I know, however, that some of you are still at the point of being seekers after salvation. As you go through these devotions, you may discover that you want to be more than just a seeker. If so, I have provided a simple plan of salvation in the back of this book. If you pray the prayer there, let me encourage you to speak with me or another Christian about your decision, so that we can rejoice with you and be there to help you in your first days as a new Christian.

Are you ready for what God is going to do this Christmas season? Then join me as we invite Jesus to join us for Christmas.

Rev. Mark Eby

Calendar of Events

Advent Begins: The season of Advent begins on Dec. 1st this year. On this Sunday we will gather for the first message in our series “By Invitation Only” and begin this year’s devotional readings.

Children’s Christmas Party: On December 1st, the children are invited to stay after church for a Christmas party and a chance to run through their program for December 8. The teens are invited to stay with them for practice.

Prime Time Christmas Party: There is a Christmas party for those 50 and over at the home of Bob and Jean Altic on Dec. 7 from 4:00 to 7:00. Dress in festive Christmas attire. The menu is Italian. See Jean for what to bring. You are also encouraged to bring a white elephant gift that is new or gently used valued at \$10.00 or less.

Children’s Christmas Program: On Sun., Dec. 8th, the children and teens will be presenting their program “**By Invitation Only**” at 5:30 P.M. As part of the program, we will be dedicating several babies and having a time of blessing for children and teens. There will be a reception following.

Jingle and Mingle: Ladies are invited to a special Christmas party at the home of Jeanette Kentch on Mon., Dec. 9, at 6:00 pm. Bring a friend, bring a favorite Christmas dish to share, and bring a mystery gift – gently used.

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service: Join us on Dec. 24th, at 6:00 p.m. for a special Christmas Eve service. There will be refreshments following.

Young Adult New Year’s Eve Party: Alan and Kathy Edwards are putting together plans for a Young Adult New Year’s Eve Party on Dec. 31. More details are coming soon.

The Advent Wreath

Advent is a time of expectation. This is symbolized not only by the four-week period of preparation, but also by the lighting of a new Advent candle on each Sunday of the season. The flame of each new candle reminds the worshiper that something is happening, but something more is still to come. The Advent season will not be complete until all four candles are lighted, with the central Christ candle also burning brightly on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

There is symbolism in the color of the candles in the Advent wreath. The three purple candles symbolize the coming of Christ from the royal line of David. He is coming as King of Kings as well as Prince of Peace. The pink candle is lighted on the third Sunday of the Advent season. This candle symbolizes joy.

A progression is noted in the lighting of the Advent candles, beginning with the first, symbolizing expectation. The second reminds us that we are involved in a season of preparation for the celebration of the coming of Christ. Proclamation is the theme of the third candle as we proclaim that Christ brought joy to the world when He appeared. The revelation of God's love for all humankind is portrayed by the lighting of the fourth candle. The culmination of the season comes on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, as the Christ candle is lighted. We rejoice over the fact that the promise of long ago has now been fulfilled.

Is There Room?

(Light 1 purple candle each night this week)

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Come, Thou long expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free.
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our strength in Thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art-
Dear Desire of ev'ry nation,
Joy of ev'ry longing heart!

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a Child and yet a king,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit,
Rule in all our hearts alone.
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

Sun. December 1: Read Luke 2:1-7

As we begin this first week of the Advent or Christmas Season, I want us to think about the Inn Keeper there in Bethlehem. Perhaps the Inn was more like a bed and breakfast. It was a home in which a family lived that had an area of rooms that were rented to guests. If you had extra rooms to rent to guests, name some famous people you might like to stay in your rooms.

The Inn Keeper might have had rooms that he was saving for more important guests when he turned Mary and Joseph away. How do you think he felt later if he discovered just who it was that he had sent to be born in a stable?

This week, our focus is on the invitation of Christ to join us this Christmas. Will we have time for Him? Will you invite Him to join you right in the midst of your celebration? The better question is, what will you miss out on if you turn Him away this Christmas?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

Mon. Dec. 2: Read Isaiah 9:6-7

Christmas is a time of anticipation. For children this is especially so as they wait for Christmas Day and the opening of presents. Have you ever waited for something, however, that did not come?

We have read today one of the prophecies concerning the birth of the Messiah. The people had been waiting for the Messiah for a long time. They had waited so long that many had begun to think that the Messiah would not be coming after all. How do you think that made them feel?

This Christmas we are inviting Jesus to come and be with us as we celebrate. Do you believe that He could come this Christmas? Do you believe that He will come? If you are having trouble believing He will come, ask God to increase your faith so that you do not miss Him as he comes this Christmas.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

Tues. Dec. 3: Read Isaiah 7:14

If you had to describe how God looks, what do you think He would look like?

I know it is hard to describe God, for you have never really seen what He looks like, for when we see Him, it often is not in the way we would have imagined. That was the case as Jesus came as a baby. The name Emmanuel means God with us, but who would have guessed that He would take the form of a baby.

Jesus may come as Emmanuel this Christmas, and we might miss Him if we are not careful, for He may look so unlike what we imagined. The important thing is not what He looks like, but what He does in your life. He comes in that person who says the right word at the right moment. He is that person that is there at just the right time. Sometimes He is that inner presence that cannot be explained, but you know He is real.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

Wed. Dec. 4: Read Micah 5:2

When you think of the word “home” at Christmas, it may mean the place where you are living, or it may mean the place where your family is from. How important is being home for you at Christmas?

Mary and Joseph were not at home that Christmas as she was expecting to give birth to Jesus. How do you think she felt about being away from home?

Sometimes we think where we are determines whether or not Jesus will be there with us. We might say things like “I could never have a good Christmas if I can’t be in _____” (you can fill in the blank). But we cannot limit where God might be.

Read Acts 16:22-28. Here we find part of the account of Paul and Silas in jail. Isn’t it amazing that God could come and give them a reason to sing even in that setting? Now, if God could be in a 1st century prison cell, don’t you think he could be in whatever situation you find yourself in?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Thurs. Dec. 5: Read Isaiah 9:6

This prophecy shows us some of the names that Jesus will be known by. Notice that He will be called the Prince of Peace. When you hear the word “peace” at Christmas, what comes to your mind?

For many people, peaceful would not describe the way they are feeling at Christmas. What might rob people of peace at Christmas?

One thing that might rob us of peace at Christmas is our busy schedules. Maybe the reason we often fail to see Christ at Christmas is we are way too busy doing Christmas stuff, to be with the one Christmas is all about. Maybe it is time we looked again at our Christmas schedule so that we can find time to actually spend time with the One whose birth we are celebrating.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Fri. Dec. 6: Read John 3:16

I remember the song, “**I'm Gettin' Nuttin' For Christmas.**” It is the song of a boy that has been so bad, that he does not believe that Santa will visit and bring him gifts. Have you ever felt like you did not deserve any presents?

It may be that as you prepare for Christmas, that you may not feel worthy of Jesus visiting with you this Christmas. It may be that you feel that your sins are too great, or maybe this is for super Christians, and you are just beginning your walk with Christ. Our passage today reminds us that it is not about

how good we are. Our passage says God's love is for all, and His salvation is for anyone.

Read Rev. 3:20. This passage says that Jesus is knocking on the door of everyone's life. All he asks is that we let Him in. Notice that it says He wants to eat with us, or fellowship with us. What do you think this means? Do you trust Him enough to open the door?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Sat. Dec. 7: Take time today to catch up if you are behind, reflect on what God has been saying, and act on God's word to you.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Who Me?

(Light 2 purple candles each night this week)

Away in a Manger

Away in a manger no crib for a bed;
The little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay;
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing the baby awakes;
But little Lord Jesus no crying He makes.
I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky;
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

Be near me Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay;
Close by me forever and love me I pray.
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care;
And take us to Heaven to live with Thee there.

Sun. Dec. 8: Read Luke 19:1-10

So, we have begun this week with a story that is not a Christmas story, but it does make me think of a Christmas parade. Do you like going to Christmas parades? Have you ever had to climb up on something so you could see, or maybe you always make sure to get down front?

In our passage, we do not find a Christmas parade, but we do find something similar as Jesus was coming to town. The people have gathered all around, and so Zacchaeus, being a man that is vertically challenged, climbs up in a tree so that he can see Jesus. Do you think that Zacchaeus was thinking that Jesus would come to his house?

This week as we go through our devotions, we are going to look at how Zacchaeus might have felt when Jesus said He was going to his house, and also what happened to Zacchaeus because of Jesus' visit to his house. As we prepare for what

we shall discover this week, how would you feel if Jesus said He was coming to your house, and what do you think would happen if He did?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Mon. Dec. 9: Read Luke 19:7

If all of a sudden you received a phone call, and someone said they were coming to your house, how would you feel? You can tell that Zacchaeus was a man, for he welcomed Jesus gladly. If he had been a woman, he probably would have hesitated. He would have thought, “but my house is not as clean as I would like for it to be” or, “I do not have any refreshments to serve.” How about, “but I haven’t fixed my hair and I have nothing to wear.” Ok, so yes, some men would be just as concerned.

Now if it was Jesus coming, we might have other concerns. What if He saw those things I would not want Him to see? On page 27 I have printed a poem by Lois Eades. It is called, “If Jesus Came To Your House”. What is your reaction to this poem?

But Zacchaeus did not say, “wait, let me go home and get ready”, instead He said, “come on over”, even though he knew himself that he was a sinner. That is what I want us to do this Christmas. Jesus wants to come on over. There is no need to get things ready, he already knows all about our lives. Instead, it is time to just let Him come. Like Zacchaeus, you will be glad you did.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Tues. Dec. 10: Read Luke 19:5-6

I saw a cartoon the other day in which the Wisemen were traveling to see Jesus and one looked at the other who had brought Gold as a gift and said, "I thought there was a \$10.00 limit." Now you may or may not get the joke, but it points out that we often think about how much things cost us.

For Zacchaeus, this had to be a concern. When Jesus said He wanted to go to his house, he had to wonder what this would cost him in the long run. Now I am thinking about more than just the cost of feeding Jesus. You see, Zacchaeus was a dishonest tax collector. What if Jesus wanted him to become honest? What would this cost him?

If you seriously invited Jesus to be with you this Christmas, what might it cost you? Would you be willing to pay that cost if it meant Jesus being in your life? Zacchaeus did not hesitate. May we each be like him.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Wed. Dec. 11: Read Matthew 9:10-11

I switched today to the story of another tax collector, for it tells us what we assumed happened there in the home of Zacchaeus, and that was that they ate together. Christmas is often a time of people gathering together to eat. Why is this a special part of Christmas? Who do you look forward to being with the most?

When you think of Jesus eating with people, especially those who were known to be sinners, why is this important? To me, it shows how much Jesus desires to enter into a relationship with us. He does not just come to us to tell us how bad we are. He wants us to know that He wants to share life with us.

As you prepare to celebrate Christmas, how important is it to you to know that Jesus loves you, and that He longs to sit and spend time with you? If you took some time to just

spend with Jesus, what would you tell Him? What do you think He would say to you? I can tell you that He will tell you how much He loves you and how special you are to Him. Why not invite Him to spend some quiet time with you?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Thurs. Dec. 12: Read Luke 19:8

When you celebrate Christmas, do you find more pleasure in what you get, or more pleasure in what you give? It appears that we are trained young to focus on the getting. How often do you hear of children making lists of what they want to give at Christmas, instead of lists of what they want to receive?

The more time we spend in the presence of Jesus, the more our hearts are changed. In many ways we become like the Grinch whose heart began to warm, and then to grow. We find ourselves being transformed from those who selfishly take to those who selflessly give.

Giving to others is not always monetary things, but it can also be the giving of our time. As we invite Jesus to join us this Christmas, is there some way that He might be encouraging you to give this Christmas? Like Zacchaeus, and the Grinch, I believe giving will be good for your heart, and bring joy to others this Christmas.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Fri. Dec. 13: Read Luke 19:9-10

At Christmas you do not want to be on the naughty list. Through the years, this threat has been used to make some unruly children toe the line. Did this idea that Santa was watching

ever have an effect on your behavior? Now it may work for a little while, but the problem is that soon Christmas will be over, and then we will revert back to our old unruly selves. When we look at this story of Zacchaeus, we find a change in his heart as salvation comes to him. If we are cynical, we may say this is a good story, but like the unruly child, once Jesus has left, he will go back to being the same old self-centered man. Do you find yourself ever thinking this way? But the gift of salvation is not like those Christmas presents we have received that were quickly broken. The new life in Christ can mean a transformation that will last forever. The key is continuing to spend as much time in Jesus' presence as you can. Read John 15:5. What a wonderful promise!

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Sat. Dec. 14: Take time today to catch up if you are behind, reflect on what God has been saying, and act on God's word to you.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

If Only!

(Light 2 purple candles and the pink candle each night this week)

Joy To The World

Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King.
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the world! the Savior reigns;
Let men their songs employ.
While fields and floods,
Rocks, hills and plains,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, Repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sin and sorrow grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground.
He comes to make
His blessings flow,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world, with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, and wonders of His love.

Sun. Dec 15: Read Luke 19:41-44

This may seem like a strange passage of scripture for Christmas, but this week we are going to focus on inviting Jesus into our communities. What we recognize is that our communities are in desperate need for Jesus. What difference do you think Jesus could make in your community?

One of the things that may make us weep like Jesus did was the fact that many who celebrate Christmas will not even realize the true meaning of this holiday. They will decorate, have parties, and sing with Joy, but Jesus will never be invited into their celebration.

It is not just the fact that they do not recognize Jesus, however, that should make us weep. Like Jesus, it is the reality that in failing to recognize Jesus, they will not receive the wonderful gift of salvation for their lives, as well as all the blessings He will bring to them. What a difference He could bring.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Mon. Dec. 16: Read Philippians 2:5-11

In the story, “The Gift of the Magi”, we read of a husband and wife who each sold something they loved to buy a Christmas gift for the other. What a wonderful story. If you have not read it, take time to check it out. It will touch your heart by their sacrificial love for each other, and of course the story has an interesting twist to it that I will leave for you to discover for yourself. Have you ever given up something you loved in order to give somebody what they desired?

This “Gift of the Magi” is very much like the story of Jesus coming to earth. He looked down upon the misery of the people on Earth, and He gave up His throne in Heaven to come to Earth in order to give hope to the people in your community. The people you see around you also have something to give up. Unlike in “The Gift of the Magi”, it

is not something they highly treasure. He asks them to give Him their sin, their shame, and their pain. Do you think He has the capacity to accept all of what those in your community can give Him? What do you think those in your community can receive from Him?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

Tues. Dec. 17: Read Matthew 1:23

Do you know where your name came from or what it means? The name Emmanuel for Jesus was very special. It points to the fact that God loves us so much that he chooses to come right in the midst of people in all of their problems. He took on flesh so He could be with the people in your community. What does this tell you about Jesus' concern for the people in your community?

Today Jesus still comes in the flesh to people who are lost in their sin and are hurting because of the effects of sin in this world. The difference is that today, the flesh He takes on is ours. He calls us to be His presence right in the middle of the people in our community who are lost without Him.

Do you love others enough to go to where they are and be the presence of God, or are you willing to stand back and look at how people are hurting and say I wish someone would do something? May God so work in our hearts that we are willing to be Christ for them.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

Wed. Dec. 18: Read Luke 2:8-12

When we used to open presents at my parents' home, there were times when some of the grandkids thought they had been left

out of the presents. With so many people, and the gifts scattered in no order under the tree, sometimes it seemed others were getting gifts, but they had been left out. Now the reality is, no one was ever left out, it just felt that way for a while.

The shepherds were some that might have been left out in the community around Bethlehem. If you had invited the community to come to a special gathering, they would probably have been overlooked. Besides, who would have expected the shepherds to have come? Yet, when Jesus was born, those who were the most overlooked were the first invited to celebrate the birth of Jesus. God truly cares for the least of these.

In your community there are probably some people who feel like they have been forgotten, especially during the holidays. Yesterday we saw that God often uses us to be His living presence with them. Can you think of some people in your community that might need to be reminded they are not forgotten? What could you do to show them you care?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Thurs. Dec. 19: Read Matthew 2:1-12

In our text this morning we find a Christmas road trip. These Wisemen had to travel quite a way to get to celebrate the birth of Jesus. What is the farthest you have ever traveled for Christmas? Have you ever traveled to another country to celebrate Christmas?

Yesterday we saw how the shepherds were invited to celebrate the birth of Jesus even though they were the least in the community. In our passage today we find the Wisemen celebrating the birth of Jesus even though they are not Jewish. This would have seemed strange, for prejudice was a big problem in Jewish society at this time. Do you think prejudice is still a problem today?

Prejudice can really be a problem for people from another country or culture. They may be overlooked, or even treated badly because they are foreigners. Scripture repeatedly tells us that God has a special place in His heart for those who are far from home.

Are there people from other countries living in your community? Is there a way you can help them to know that Christmas is for them as well? How can you show them the love of Christ?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Fri. Dec. 20: Read Luke 2:15-20

What is one the best Christmas gifts you ever received? I remember getting a bike for Christmas. I was so proud of this bike. I wanted everyone to see it, and perhaps even be a little jealous of me.

I do not believe that the shepherds were looking for people to be jealous of them. I think, instead, that after they had seen Jesus, they just could not stop talking about Him. They had met the Son of God, and best of all, they knew through the angels that He was God's gift of love to them. How do you think people responded to the good news they shared with them?

I would like to believe that a revival of sorts broke out in that community. As they saw the love of God at work in the lives of these shepherds, I can just imagine that suddenly the whole community began to be hopeful of what God could do in each of their lives.

Think of what could happen in your community. If through you, people began to experience the power of God's love in their lives, and they began to share with others what God had done for them, what do you think could happen? And to think, it all began because you were willing to let God become flesh in you for your community.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Sat. Dec. 21: Take time today to catch up if you are behind, reflect on what God has been saying, and act on God's word to you.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Our Family Gathering

(This week we will light all four candles on the outside.)

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild-
God and sinners reconciled.”
Joyful, all ye nations rise;
Join the triumph of the skies.
With th’angelic host proclaim,
“Christ is born in Bethlehem.”
Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!”

Christ, by highest heav’n adored!
Christ, the everlasting Lord!
Long desired, behold Him come-
Offspring of the Virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail th’incarnate deity,
Pleased as man with men to dwell,
Jesus our Immanuel!
Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!”

Hail, the heav’n born Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness
Light and Life to all He brings,
Ris’n with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays his glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!”

Sun. Dec. 22: Read Luke 2:1-4

Will you get to spend time with your family this Christmas?
How important is this family time to you?

It is interesting to note that when Jesus was born, He was born right in the middle of a family gathering. Mary and Joseph had gone to Bethlehem for the census because this was their ancestral home. That means that all male members of Joseph's family had to go to Bethlehem to be counted.

This would have been one very hectic gathering. Like many large family gatherings, they had to try and figure out where everyone would sleep. Will this be an issue for your family this Christmas?

Mary and Joseph drew the short straw and got the barn. What a place to be during this family gathering, and especially since Mary was expecting a child. The amazing thing is we do not find Joseph or Mary blessing everyone out, or even sulking because they felt like they had been wronged. Instead, right there in a stable, they brought Jesus into the midst of their family gathering.

This Christmas we may not always be treated like we think we deserve. We may not like where we have to sleep or even what table we have to eat at but let us not let that affect us. Instead, let's focus on bringing Jesus into our family gathering by the love we share, no matter what.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Mon. Dec. 23: Read Matthew 12:46-50

Speaking of family at Christmas can be painful. There are many who will not be able to travel to be with their family, and there are others whose loved ones have passed away. I choose this verse today, not to deny the special place your family has in your life, but to celebrate the new family God has blessed you with in the church. Name some ways that you have been blessed through the people you attend church

with. How has your life been a blessing to others in your church?

As you reflect on the value of the church family, perhaps someone has come to mind in your church that will be spending Christmas without family this year. Our tendency might be to be a little selfish at Christmas, and not include those outside our biological family, but maybe this year God has a special blessing for you through someone else. I know that you will be a blessing to them.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Christmas Eve

(You may choose to light all four outside candles and the center Christ candle today or save this for Christmas Day)

Tues. Dec. 24: Read Luke 2:19

Mary had a lot to think about that first Christmas. What do you think might have been the most amazing thing she had seen? Whose visit in the stable might have surprised her the most? What had the greatest impact on her life that first Christmas?

There are many ways you might answer the questions above, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized that the answer to each question was Jesus. She saw Jesus, He came to a stable, and wow what an impact on her life.

Now I ask you to look at this Christmas. What was the most amazing thing you saw? Who was a part of your life in the most surprising way? What had the greatest impact on your life? I hope the answer to each of these questions was Jesus, even as He became flesh through others in your life. That has been our prayer. Praise God for His faithfulness.

If you have not seen Him yet, I urge you to pray that God will show Himself to you. He is just waiting for you to recognize His presence.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Christmas Day

(Light all 5 candles today)

Wed. Dec. 25: Read Luke 2:1-20

By now you have probably exchanged presents with your family and friends. Why did you take the time to pick out that perfect gift to give? I know that some gifts we give are actually given out of a sense of obligation, but then there are those special gifts. These are the ones we really give a lot of thought to. These are the gifts we give because of love. Who did you give a gift like that to this Christmas?

There is one final part of our prayer. That is where we invite God to accept our gift to Him. What is the best gift we can offer Jesus? The answer is found in Romans 12:1. The greatest gift we can offer to Him is ourselves. This includes allowing Him to cleanse our lives of all that is not pleasing to Him. It also means giving ourselves in service to Him.

Are you ready to offer Him this gift this Christmas? Don't worry about the package your gift is in, or even how good the gift is. In this case, it really is the giving of the gift that is important. He is the one who will take our gift and truly make something beautiful out of it.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for coming as Emmanuel this Christmas. Thank you for being in my life, thank you for being in my community, and in my family. I invite now you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

The God Who Cares

When God created the world, it was good, but it did not stay that way. Because of the sin of Adam and Eve, all of creation has been affected. That includes you and me, we have all sinned. But God has not turned His back on the world. Instead, Christmas is a reminder that God sent His Son so that he could save people from their sins and restore what sin has destroyed.

You may wonder how to be a part of what God has made possible through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. To begin with, you must recognize that you are a sinner. As we read in Romans 3:23 “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Already you know that this means you. Through His Holy Spirit, God has already been convicting you of this. You are a sinner, but you do not have to remain one.

In 1 John 1:9 we read, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” That simply means that He is just waiting for us to ask. If we ask, He will forgive us.

You may be thinking “that sounds great but let me get my life together first.” The problem with that is that we cannot. Until He breaks into our lives with His power, we cannot be free from the sin that holds us in bondage. However, when we invite him into our lives, He will set us free. John 8:36 tells us that “if the Son (Jesus) sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

If you want this freedom, all you need to do is ask. Your prayer can go like this. “Father, I know that I am a sinner. Please forgive me for my sin. I need your power to break free from sin. Please come into my life with this power that I might discover the new life you have for me. Thank you for hearing my prayer. Amen.”

If you have prayed this prayer in faith, God has forgiven your sins and come into your life. You are now a child of God. He is ready to give you a brand-new life. Your responsibility now is to put your life into His hands and under His control and discover the great things God has in store for your life as you partner with Him for the sake of others.

If you have prayed and asked Jesus to come into your life, please let your pastor know so that he can be praying for you and offer you support in the new life that is ahead of you.

If Jesus Came to Your House

If Jesus came to your house
To spend some time with you,
If He came unexpected,
I wonder what you'd do.

Oh, I know you'd give your nicest room
To such an honored guest
And all the food you'd give to Him
Would be the very best.

And you would keep assuring Him
You're glad to have Him there—
That serving Him in your home
Is joy beyond compare.

But when you saw Him coming,
Would you meet Him at the door
With arms outstretched in welcome
To your heavenly visitor?

Or would you have to change your clothes
Before you let Him in
Or hide some magazines
And put the Bible where they'd been

Would you hide your worldly music
and put some hymn books out?
Could you let Jesus walk right
in, or would you rush about?

And I wonder – if the Saviour
spent a day or two with you,
Would you go right on doing, the
things you always do?

Would you go right on saying, the
things you always say?
Or would life for you continue
as it does from day to day?

Would you take Jesus with you
everywhere you go?
Or would you maybe change your
plans for just a day or so?

Would you be glad to have Him
meet your closest friends?
Or would you hope they stay away,
until His visit ends?

Would you be glad to have Him
stay forever on and on?
Or would you sigh with great
relief when He at last was gone?

It might be interesting to know,
the things that you would do,
If Jesus came in person, to spend
some time with you.

-Lois Eades

We have spent this Christmas sending an invitation to God to join us in a special way. It is my desire that each of us have experienced His coming to our lives, have seen Him move in our communities, and brought His presence into our families. I also pray that we have each responded by giving ourselves to Him.

Merry Christmas,
Pastor Mark

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*By
Invitation
Only*

December 1 - 25



Christmas 2024



Introduction

Christmas is coming, but of course you did not need me to tell you this. It has been that way since midnight on Halloween. Suddenly, the pumpkins turned into Christmas decorations. The Christmas season was in full swing.

By now you are already planning the Christmas gatherings you will be hosting as well as looking ahead at the ones you will attend that are hosted by others. When you see the title of our Christmas devotions this year it may get your mind wandering to the list of people you plan to invite or thinking about whether or not you have received an invitation to the special gathering someone else is hosting. The invitation we are talking about this Christmas, however, is a little different. The invitation we are talking about this Christmas season, is to just one person, and that is Jesus Christ.

The Christmas season is also called the season of Advent. Advent refers to the coming of Jesus. It refers to his coming as a baby in a manger in Bethlehem, and it also speaks to the fact that He will be returning again one day. This Christmas, however, we want to invite Jesus to once again come and be with us in the midst of our Christmas celebration. We do not just want to spend Christmas talking about Jesus, we want to spend Christmas with Jesus.

Jesus is ready to come and be with you this Christmas. He, however, will not be like that relative or friend that just shows up unannounced. He is waiting for an invitation. He comes where He is wanted.

One of the things different about this year's devotions is that the prayer for each day will be the same except on Christmas day. This prayer is a prayer of invitation. It is not just a simple prayer inviting Jesus to be a part of Christmas, but it has 5 distinct parts to it. Each week we will unwrap one of these parts, until Christmas day, when we will unwrap the final piece of the invitation.

So, by now, I hope you are curious about what this prayer or invitation looks like, so let me reveal it to you.

Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my

life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

This prayer seems simple enough, but as we unwrap each part as we move through the four weeks of Advent, we will discover just how much is wrapped up in this simple invitation. Are you ready?

As you go through these devotions, you will discover that they are designed for a family setting. That does not mean that they cannot be just as meaningful for individual devotions, or as couples. If you are doing these alone, you may want to consider journaling your thoughts in place of the family discussion.

As these devotions were written, they were written from the perspective that those using them are Christians and that God is actively working in their lives. I know, however, that some of you are still at the point of being seekers after salvation. As you go through these devotions, you may discover that you want to be more than just a seeker. If so, I have provided a simple plan of salvation in the back of this book. If you pray the prayer there, let me encourage you to speak with me or another Christian about your decision, so that we can rejoice with you and be there to help you in your first days as a new Christian.

Are you ready for what God is going to do this Christmas season? Then join me as we invite Jesus to join us for Christmas.

Rev. Mark Eby

Calendar of Events

Advent Begins: The season of Advent begins on Dec. 1st this year. On this Sunday we will gather for the first message in our series “By Invitation Only” and begin this year’s devotional readings.

Children’s Christmas Party: On December 1st, the children are invited to stay after church for a Christmas party and a chance to run through their program for December 8. The teens are invited to stay with them for practice.

Prime Time Christmas Party: There is a Christmas party for those 50 and over at the home of Bob and Jean Altic on Dec. 7 from 4:00 to 7:00. Dress in festive Christmas attire. The menu is Italian. See Jean for what to bring. You are also encouraged to bring a white elephant gift that is new or gently used valued at \$10.00 or less.

Children’s Christmas Program: On Sun., Dec. 8th, the children and teens will be presenting their program “**By Invitation Only**” at 5:30 P.M. As part of the program, we will be dedicating several babies and having a time of blessing for children and teens. There will be a reception following.

Jingle and Mingle: Ladies are invited to a special Christmas party at the home of Jeanette Kentch on Mon., Dec. 9, at 6:00 pm. Bring a friend, bring a favorite Christmas dish to share, and bring a mystery gift – gently used.

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service: Join us on Dec. 24th, at 6:00 p.m. for a special Christmas Eve service. There will be refreshments following.

Young Adult New Year’s Eve Party: Alan and Kathy Edwards are putting together plans for a Young Adult New Year’s Eve Party on Dec. 31. More details are coming soon.

The Advent Wreath

Advent is a time of expectation. This is symbolized not only by the four-week period of preparation, but also by the lighting of a new Advent candle on each Sunday of the season. The flame of each new candle reminds the worshiper that something is happening, but something more is still to come. The Advent season will not be complete until all four candles are lighted, with the central Christ candle also burning brightly on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

There is symbolism in the color of the candles in the Advent wreath. The three purple candles symbolize the coming of Christ from the royal line of David. He is coming as King of Kings as well as Prince of Peace. The pink candle is lighted on the third Sunday of the Advent season. This candle symbolizes joy.

A progression is noted in the lighting of the Advent candles, beginning with the first, symbolizing expectation. The second reminds us that we are involved in a season of preparation for the celebration of the coming of Christ. Proclamation is the theme of the third candle as we proclaim that Christ brought joy to the world when He appeared. The revelation of God's love for all humankind is portrayed by the lighting of the fourth candle. The culmination of the season comes on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, as the Christ candle is lighted. We rejoice over the fact that the promise of long ago has now been fulfilled.

Is There Room?

(Light 1 purple candle each night this week)

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Come, Thou long expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free.
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our strength in Thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art-
Dear Desire of ev'ry nation,
Joy of ev'ry longing heart!

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a Child and yet a king,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit,
Rule in all our hearts alone.
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

Sun. December 1: Read Luke 2:1-7

As we begin this first week of the Advent or Christmas Season, I want us to think about the Inn Keeper there in Bethlehem. Perhaps the Inn was more like a bed and breakfast. It was a home in which a family lived that had an area of rooms that were rented to guests. If you had extra rooms to rent to guests, name some famous people you might like to stay in your rooms.

The Inn Keeper might have had rooms that he was saving for more important guests when he turned Mary and Joseph away. How do you think he felt later if he discovered just who it was that he had sent to be born in a stable?

This week, our focus is on the invitation of Christ to join us this Christmas. Will we have time for Him? Will you invite Him to join you right in the midst of your celebration? The better question is, what will you miss out on if you turn Him away this Christmas?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Mon. Dec. 2: Read Isaiah 9:6-7

Christmas is a time of anticipation. For children this is especially so as they wait for Christmas Day and the opening of presents. Have you ever waited for something, however, that did not come?

We have read today one of the prophecies concerning the birth of the Messiah. The people had been waiting for the Messiah for a long time. They had waited so long that many had begun to think that the Messiah would not be coming after all. How do you think that made them feel?

This Christmas we are inviting Jesus to come and be with us as we celebrate. Do you believe that He could come this Christmas? Do you believe that He will come? If you are having trouble believing He will come, ask God to increase your faith so that you do not miss Him as he comes this Christmas.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Tues. Dec. 3: Read Isaiah 7:14

If you had to describe how God looks, what do you think He would look like?

I know it is hard to describe God, for you have never really seen what He looks like, for when we see Him, it often is not in the way we would have imagined. That was the case as Jesus came as a baby. The name Emmanuel means God with us, but who would have guessed that He would take the form of a baby.

Jesus may come as Emmanuel this Christmas, and we might miss Him if we are not careful, for He may look so unlike what we imagined. The important thing is not what He looks like, but what He does in your life. He comes in that person who says the right word at the right moment. He is that person that is there at just the right time. Sometimes He is that inner presence that cannot be explained, but you know He is real.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

Wed. Dec. 4: Read Micah 5:2

When you think of the word “home” at Christmas, it may mean the place where you are living, or it may mean the place where your family is from. How important is being home for you at Christmas?

Mary and Joseph were not at home that Christmas as she was expecting to give birth to Jesus. How do you think she felt about being away from home?

Sometimes we think where we are determines whether or not Jesus will be there with us. We might say things like “I could never have a good Christmas if I can’t be in _____” (you can fill in the blank). But we cannot limit where God might be.

Read Acts 16:22-28. Here we find part of the account of Paul and Silas in jail. Isn’t it amazing that God could come and give them a reason to sing even in that setting? Now, if God could be in a 1st century prison cell, don’t you think he could be in whatever situation you find yourself in?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Thurs. Dec. 5: Read Isaiah 9:6

This prophecy shows us some of the names that Jesus will be known by. Notice that He will be called the Prince of Peace. When you hear the word “peace” at Christmas, what comes to your mind?

For many people, peaceful would not describe the way they are feeling at Christmas. What might rob people of peace at Christmas?

One thing that might rob us of peace at Christmas is our busy schedules. Maybe the reason we often fail to see Christ at Christmas is we are way too busy doing Christmas stuff, to be with the one Christmas is all about. Maybe it is time we looked again at our Christmas schedule so that we can find time to actually spend time with the One whose birth we are celebrating.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Fri. Dec. 6: Read John 3:16

I remember the song, “**I'm Gettin' Nuttin' For Christmas.**” It is the song of a boy that has been so bad, that he does not believe that Santa will visit and bring him gifts. Have you ever felt like you did not deserve any presents?

It may be that as you prepare for Christmas, that you may not feel worthy of Jesus visiting with you this Christmas. It may be that you feel that your sins are too great, or maybe this is for super Christians, and you are just beginning your walk with Christ. Our passage today reminds us that it is not about

how good we are. Our passage says God's love is for all, and His salvation is for anyone.

Read Rev. 3:20. This passage says that Jesus is knocking on the door of everyone's life. All he asks is that we let Him in. Notice that it says He wants to eat with us, or fellowship with us. What do you think this means? Do you trust Him enough to open the door?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Sat. Dec. 7: Take time today to catch up if you are behind, reflect on what God has been saying, and act on God's word to you.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Who Me?

(Light 2 purple candles each night this week)

Away in a Manger

Away in a manger no crib for a bed;
The little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay;
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing the baby awakes;
But little Lord Jesus no crying He makes.
I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky;
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

Be near me Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay;
Close by me forever and love me I pray.
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care;
And take us to Heaven to live with Thee there.

Sun. Dec. 8: Read Luke 19:1-10

So, we have begun this week with a story that is not a Christmas story, but it does make me think of a Christmas parade. Do you like going to Christmas parades? Have you ever had to climb up on something so you could see, or maybe you always make sure to get down front?

In our passage, we do not find a Christmas parade, but we do find something similar as Jesus was coming to town. The people have gathered all around, and so Zacchaeus, being a man that is vertically challenged, climbs up in a tree so that he can see Jesus. Do you think that Zacchaeus was thinking that Jesus would come to his house?

This week as we go through our devotions, we are going to look at how Zacchaeus might have felt when Jesus said He was going to his house, and also what happened to Zacchaeus because of Jesus' visit to his house. As we prepare for what

we shall discover this week, how would you feel if Jesus said He was coming to your house, and what do you think would happen if He did?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Mon. Dec. 9: Read Luke 19:7

If all of a sudden you received a phone call, and someone said they were coming to your house, how would you feel? You can tell that Zacchaeus was a man, for he welcomed Jesus gladly. If he had been a woman, he probably would have hesitated. He would have thought, “but my house is not as clean as I would like for it to be” or, “I do not have any refreshments to serve.” How about, “but I haven’t fixed my hair and I have nothing to wear.” Ok, so yes, some men would be just as concerned.

Now if it was Jesus coming, we might have other concerns. What if He saw those things I would not want Him to see? On page 27 I have printed a poem by Lois Eades. It is called, “If Jesus Came To Your House”. What is your reaction to this poem?

But Zacchaeus did not say, “wait, let me go home and get ready”, instead He said, “come on over”, even though he knew himself that he was a sinner. That is what I want us to do this Christmas. Jesus wants to come on over. There is no need to get things ready, he already knows all about our lives. Instead, it is time to just let Him come. Like Zacchaeus, you will be glad you did.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Tues. Dec. 10: Read Luke 19:5-6

I saw a cartoon the other day in which the Wisemen were traveling to see Jesus and one looked at the other who had brought Gold as a gift and said, "I thought there was a \$10.00 limit." Now you may or may not get the joke, but it points out that we often think about how much things cost us.

For Zacchaeus, this had to be a concern. When Jesus said He wanted to go to his house, he had to wonder what this would cost him in the long run. Now I am thinking about more than just the cost of feeding Jesus. You see, Zacchaeus was a dishonest tax collector. What if Jesus wanted him to become honest? What would this cost him?

If you seriously invited Jesus to be with you this Christmas, what might it cost you? Would you be willing to pay that cost if it meant Jesus being in your life? Zacchaeus did not hesitate. May we each be like him.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Wed. Dec. 11: Read Matthew 9:10-11

I switched today to the story of another tax collector, for it tells us what we assumed happened there in the home of Zacchaeus, and that was that they ate together. Christmas is often a time of people gathering together to eat. Why is this a special part of Christmas? Who do you look forward to being with the most?

When you think of Jesus eating with people, especially those who were known to be sinners, why is this important? To me, it shows how much Jesus desires to enter into a relationship with us. He does not just come to us to tell us how bad we are. He wants us to know that He wants to share life with us.

As you prepare to celebrate Christmas, how important is it to you to know that Jesus loves you, and that He longs to sit and spend time with you? If you took some time to just

spend with Jesus, what would you tell Him? What do you think He would say to you? I can tell you that He will tell you how much He loves you and how special you are to Him. Why not invite Him to spend some quiet time with you?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Thurs. Dec. 12: Read Luke 19:8

When you celebrate Christmas, do you find more pleasure in what you get, or more pleasure in what you give? It appears that we are trained young to focus on the getting. How often do you hear of children making lists of what they want to give at Christmas, instead of lists of what they want to receive?

The more time we spend in the presence of Jesus, the more our hearts are changed. In many ways we become like the Grinch whose heart began to warm, and then to grow. We find ourselves being transformed from those who selfishly take to those who selflessly give.

Giving to others is not always monetary things, but it can also be the giving of our time. As we invite Jesus to join us this Christmas, is there some way that He might be encouraging you to give this Christmas? Like Zacchaeus, and the Grinch, I believe giving will be good for your heart, and bring joy to others this Christmas.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Fri. Dec. 13: Read Luke 19:9-10

At Christmas you do not want to be on the naughty list. Through the years, this threat has been used to make some unruly children toe the line. Did this idea that Santa was watching

ever have an effect on your behavior? Now it may work for a little while, but the problem is that soon Christmas will be over, and then we will revert back to our old unruly selves. When we look at this story of Zacchaeus, we find a change in his heart as salvation comes to him. If we are cynical, we may say this is a good story, but like the unruly child, once Jesus has left, he will go back to being the same old self-centered man. Do you find yourself ever thinking this way? But the gift of salvation is not like those Christmas presents we have received that were quickly broken. The new life in Christ can mean a transformation that will last forever. The key is continuing to spend as much time in Jesus' presence as you can. Read John 15:5. What a wonderful promise!

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Sat. Dec. 14: Take time today to catch up if you are behind, reflect on what God has been saying, and act on God's word to you.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

If Only!

(Light 2 purple candles and the pink candle each night this week)

Joy To The World

Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King.
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the world! the Savior reigns;
Let men their songs employ.
While fields and floods,
Rocks, hills and plains,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, Repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sin and sorrow grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground.
He comes to make
His blessings flow,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world, with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, and wonders of His love.

Sun. Dec 15: Read Luke 19:41-44

This may seem like a strange passage of scripture for Christmas, but this week we are going to focus on inviting Jesus into our communities. What we recognize is that our communities are in desperate need for Jesus. What difference do you think Jesus could make in your community?

One of the things that may make us weep like Jesus did was the fact that many who celebrate Christmas will not even realize the true meaning of this holiday. They will decorate, have parties, and sing with Joy, but Jesus will never be invited into their celebration.

It is not just the fact that they do not recognize Jesus, however, that should make us weep. Like Jesus, it is the reality that in failing to recognize Jesus, they will not receive the wonderful gift of salvation for their lives, as well as all the blessings He will bring to them. What a difference He could bring.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Mon. Dec. 16: Read Philippians 2:5-11

In the story, “The Gift of the Magi”, we read of a husband and wife who each sold something they loved to buy a Christmas gift for the other. What a wonderful story. If you have not read it, take time to check it out. It will touch your heart by their sacrificial love for each other, and of course the story has an interesting twist to it that I will leave for you to discover for yourself. Have you ever given up something you loved in order to give somebody what they desired?

This “Gift of the Magi” is very much like the story of Jesus coming to earth. He looked down upon the misery of the people on Earth, and He gave up His throne in Heaven to come to Earth in order to give hope to the people in your community. The people you see around you also have something to give up. Unlike in “The Gift of the Magi”, it

is not something they highly treasure. He asks them to give Him their sin, their shame, and their pain. Do you think He has the capacity to accept all of what those in your community can give Him? What do you think those in your community can receive from Him?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

Tues. Dec. 17: Read Matthew 1:23

Do you know where your name came from or what it means? The name Emmanuel for Jesus was very special. It points to the fact that God loves us so much that he chooses to come right in the midst of people in all of their problems. He took on flesh so He could be with the people in your community. What does this tell you about Jesus' concern for the people in your community?

Today Jesus still comes in the flesh to people who are lost in their sin and are hurting because of the effects of sin in this world. The difference is that today, the flesh He takes on is ours. He calls us to be His presence right in the middle of the people in our community who are lost without Him.

Do you love others enough to go to where they are and be the presence of God, or are you willing to stand back and look at how people are hurting and say I wish someone would do something? May God so work in our hearts that we are willing to be Christ for them.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.

Wed. Dec. 18: Read Luke 2:8-12

When we used to open presents at my parents' home, there were times when some of the grandkids thought they had been left

out of the presents. With so many people, and the gifts scattered in no order under the tree, sometimes it seemed others were getting gifts, but they had been left out. Now the reality is, no one was ever left out, it just felt that way for a while.

The shepherds were some that might have been left out in the community around Bethlehem. If you had invited the community to come to a special gathering, they would probably have been overlooked. Besides, who would have expected the shepherds to have come? Yet, when Jesus was born, those who were the most overlooked were the first invited to celebrate the birth of Jesus. God truly cares for the least of these.

In your community there are probably some people who feel like they have been forgotten, especially during the holidays. Yesterday we saw that God often uses us to be His living presence with them. Can you think of some people in your community that might need to be reminded they are not forgotten? What could you do to show them you care?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Thurs. Dec. 19: Read Matthew 2:1-12

In our text this morning we find a Christmas road trip. These Wisemen had to travel quite a way to get to celebrate the birth of Jesus. What is the farthest you have ever traveled for Christmas? Have you ever traveled to another country to celebrate Christmas?

Yesterday we saw how the shepherds were invited to celebrate the birth of Jesus even though they were the least in the community. In our passage today we find the Wisemen celebrating the birth of Jesus even though they are not Jewish. This would have seemed strange, for prejudice was a big problem in Jewish society at this time. Do you think prejudice is still a problem today?

Prejudice can really be a problem for people from another country or culture. They may be overlooked, or even treated badly because they are foreigners. Scripture repeatedly tells us that God has a special place in His heart for those who are far from home.

Are there people from other countries living in your community? Is there a way you can help them to know that Christmas is for them as well? How can you show them the love of Christ?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Fri. Dec. 20: Read Luke 2:15-20

What is one the best Christmas gifts you ever received? I remember getting a bike for Christmas. I was so proud of this bike. I wanted everyone to see it, and perhaps even be a little jealous of me.

I do not believe that the shepherds were looking for people to be jealous of them. I think, instead, that after they had seen Jesus, they just could not stop talking about Him. They had met the Son of God, and best of all, they knew through the angels that He was God's gift of love to them. How do you think people responded to the good news they shared with them?

I would like to believe that a revival of sorts broke out in that community. As they saw the love of God at work in the lives of these shepherds, I can just imagine that suddenly the whole community began to be hopeful of what God could do in each of their lives.

Think of what could happen in your community. If through you, people began to experience the power of God's love in their lives, and they began to share with others what God had done for them, what do you think could happen? And to think, it all began because you were willing to let God become flesh in you for your community.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Sat. Dec. 21: Take time today to catch up if you are behind, reflect on what God has been saying, and act on God's word to you.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Our Family Gathering

(This week we will light all four candles on the outside.)

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild-
God and sinners reconciled.”
Joyful, all ye nations rise;
Join the triumph of the skies.
With th’angelic host proclaim,
“Christ is born in Bethlehem.”
Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!”

Christ, by highest heav’n adored!
Christ, the everlasting Lord!
Long desired, behold Him come-
Offspring of the Virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail th’incarnate deity,
Pleased as man with men to dwell,
Jesus our Immanuel!
Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!”

Hail, the heav’n born Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness
Light and Life to all He brings,
Ris’n with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays his glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark, the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the new-born King!”

Sun. Dec. 22: Read Luke 2:1-4

Will you get to spend time with your family this Christmas?
How important is this family time to you?

It is interesting to note that when Jesus was born, He was born right in the middle of a family gathering. Mary and Joseph had gone to Bethlehem for the census because this was their ancestral home. That means that all male members of Joseph's family had to go to Bethlehem to be counted.

This would have been one very hectic gathering. Like many large family gatherings, they had to try and figure out where everyone would sleep. Will this be an issue for your family this Christmas?

Mary and Joseph drew the short straw and got the barn. What a place to be during this family gathering, and especially since Mary was expecting a child. The amazing thing is we do not find Joseph or Mary blessing everyone out, or even sulking because they felt like they had been wronged. Instead, right there in a stable, they brought Jesus into the midst of their family gathering.

This Christmas we may not always be treated like we think we deserve. We may not like where we have to sleep or even what table we have to eat at but let us not let that affect us. Instead, let's focus on bringing Jesus into our family gathering by the love we share, no matter what.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Mon. Dec. 23: Read Matthew 12:46-50

Speaking of family at Christmas can be painful. There are many who will not be able to travel to be with their family, and there are others whose loved ones have passed away. I choose this verse today, not to deny the special place your family has in your life, but to celebrate the new family God has blessed you with in the church. Name some ways that you have been blessed through the people you attend church

with. How has your life been a blessing to others in your church?

As you reflect on the value of the church family, perhaps someone has come to mind in your church that will be spending Christmas without family this year. Our tendency might be to be a little selfish at Christmas, and not include those outside our biological family, but maybe this year God has a special blessing for you through someone else. I know that you will be a blessing to them.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Christmas Eve

(You may choose to light all four outside candles and the center Christ candle today or save this for Christmas Day)

Tues. Dec. 24: Read Luke 2:19

Mary had a lot to think about that first Christmas. What do you think might have been the most amazing thing she had seen? Whose visit in the stable might have surprised her the most? What had the greatest impact on her life that first Christmas?

There are many ways you might answer the questions above, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized that the answer to each question was Jesus. She saw Jesus, He came to a stable, and wow what an impact on her life.

Now I ask you to look at this Christmas. What was the most amazing thing you saw? Who was a part of your life in the most surprising way? What had the greatest impact on your life? I hope the answer to each of these questions was Jesus, even as He became flesh through others in your life. That has been our prayer. Praise God for His faithfulness.

If you have not seen Him yet, I urge you to pray that God will show Himself to you. He is just waiting for you to recognize His presence.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I invite you to come as Emmanuel this Christmas. I invite you to be in my life, I invite you to be in my community, and I invite you to be in my family. I also invite you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

Christmas Day

(Light all 5 candles today)

Wed. Dec. 25: Read Luke 2:1-20

By now you have probably exchanged presents with your family and friends. Why did you take the time to pick out that perfect gift to give? I know that some gifts we give are actually given out of a sense of obligation, but then there are those special gifts. These are the ones we really give a lot of thought to. These are the gifts we give because of love. Who did you give a gift like that to this Christmas?

There is one final part of our prayer. That is where we invite God to accept our gift to Him. What is the best gift we can offer Jesus? The answer is found in Romans 12:1. The greatest gift we can offer to Him is ourselves. This includes allowing Him to cleanse our lives of all that is not pleasing to Him. It also means giving ourselves in service to Him.

Are you ready to offer Him this gift this Christmas? Don't worry about the package your gift is in, or even how good the gift is. In this case, it really is the giving of the gift that is important. He is the one who will take our gift and truly make something beautiful out of it.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for coming as Emmanuel this Christmas. Thank you for being in my life, thank you for being in my community, and in my family. I invite now you to accept my life as a gift offered to you in love this Christmas. Amen.*

The God Who Cares

When God created the world, it was good, but it did not stay that way. Because of the sin of Adam and Eve, all of creation has been affected. That includes you and me, we have all sinned. But God has not turned His back on the world. Instead, Christmas is a reminder that God sent His Son so that he could save people from their sins and restore what sin has destroyed.

You may wonder how to be a part of what God has made possible through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. To begin with, you must recognize that you are a sinner. As we read in Romans 3:23 “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Already you know that this means you. Through His Holy Spirit, God has already been convicting you of this. You are a sinner, but you do not have to remain one.

In 1 John 1:9 we read, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” That simply means that He is just waiting for us to ask. If we ask, He will forgive us.

You may be thinking “that sounds great but let me get my life together first.” The problem with that is that we cannot. Until He breaks into our lives with His power, we cannot be free from the sin that holds us in bondage. However, when we invite him into our lives, He will set us free. John 8:36 tells us that “if the Son (Jesus) sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

If you want this freedom, all you need to do is ask. Your prayer can go like this. “Father, I know that I am a sinner. Please forgive me for my sin. I need your power to break free from sin. Please come into my life with this power that I might discover the new life you have for me. Thank you for hearing my prayer. Amen.”

If you have prayed this prayer in faith, God has forgiven your sins and come into your life. You are now a child of God. He is ready to give you a brand-new life. Your responsibility now is to put your life into His hands and under His control and discover the great things God has in store for your life as you partner with Him for the sake of others.

If you have prayed and asked Jesus to come into your life, please let your pastor know so that he can be praying for you and offer you support in the new life that is ahead of you.

If Jesus Came to Your House

If Jesus came to your house
To spend some time with you,
If He came unexpected,
I wonder what you'd do.

Oh, I know you'd give your nicest room
To such an honored guest
And all the food you'd give to Him
Would be the very best.

And you would keep assuring Him
You're glad to have Him there—
That serving Him in your home
Is joy beyond compare.

But when you saw Him coming,
Would you meet Him at the door
With arms outstretched in welcome
To your heavenly visitor?

Or would you have to change your clothes
Before you let Him in
Or hide some magazines
And put the Bible where they'd been

Would you hide your worldly music
and put some hymn books out?
Could you let Jesus walk right
in, or would you rush about?

And I wonder – if the Saviour
spent a day or two with you,
Would you go right on doing, the
things you always do?

Would you go right on saying, the
things you always say?
Or would life for you continue
as it does from day to day?

Would you take Jesus with you
everywhere you go?
Or would you maybe change your
plans for just a day or so?

Would you be glad to have Him
meet your closest friends?
Or would you hope they stay away,
until His visit ends?

Would you be glad to have Him
stay forever on and on?
Or would you sigh with great
relief when He at last was gone?

It might be interesting to know,
the things that you would do,
If Jesus came in person, to spend
some time with you.

-Lois Eades

We have spent this Christmas sending an invitation to God to join us in a special way. It is my desire that each of us have experienced His coming to our lives, have seen Him move in our communities, and brought His presence into our families. I also pray that we have each responded by giving ourselves to Him.

Merry Christmas,
Pastor Mark

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