

AN ADVENT DEVOTION
FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY



Great Joy



Jonathan Williams

Great Joy

AN ADVENT DEVOTION

As we celebrate the Biblical story of God demonstrating His love by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to seek and save the lost, we invite you to spend time celebrating these 25 stories of 25 different characters and the truth they still speak today. We encourage you to read the story, read the passages in the Bible, and pray the prayer with those in your home. You can enjoy one devotion a day from December 1-25.

- This is a story of Good News of Great Joy for All the People (Luke 2:10).





¹ ZECHARIAH AND THOSE WHO NEED THEIR HEARTS TO BE READY

One of the first characters of the Advent story is Zechariah, a priest. The angel, Gabriel, appeared to him and told him he would have a son, John the Baptist, who would prepare the people for the coming Savior. But Zechariah's heart was not ready to receive this news and he did not believe. However, after the birth and naming of his son, Zechariah was filled with the Spirit and rejoiced at the coming redemption, salvation, and forgiveness of sins. (**read Luke 1:5-24; 57-80**)

Lord, we pray that you would make our hearts ready to receive you and the news of your redemption. Replace doubt with faith and lead us to enjoy the freedom of your forgiveness.



2 ELIZABETH AND THOSE WHO NEED A COVERING FOR THEIR SHAME

Elizabeth was barren and everyone knew it. This brought her shame and reproach until the Lord brought her a miracle. She would give birth to John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ. She immediately praised the Lord for taking away her reproach, highlighting the very ministry of the coming Savior. For through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we may have our sins forgiven and our shame covered so that there is “now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1; **read Luke 1:24-25; 39-45; 57-66**).

We praise you Lord for coming to take away our sins and cover our shame with your righteousness.



3 GABRIEL AND THOSE WITH A MESSAGE TO SHARE

Another character throughout the Advent story is the angel, Gabriel. He is God's messenger, sent by God, with Good News from God. He tells Zechariah about John's birth and he tells Mary that she would give birth to Jesus, the Son of the Most High. Gabriel is one of the first in a long line of Gospel proclaimers as the church today continues to tell this story so that the world may know Jesus and the life he gives. What a beautiful ministry, for "as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" (Rom. 10:15; **read Luke 1:26-38**)

Open our hearts, Lord, to believe in you, and open our mouths to boldly share this story with others this Advent season, so that they may know you too.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a white Christmas ornament. The ornament is intricately decorated with silver and gold beads, sequins, and small lights. The background is dark and out of focus, showing the person's face and hands. The lighting is soft, highlighting the details of the ornament.

4 MARY AND THOSE WHO CLING TO GOD'S PROMISES

Mary is, of course, one of the main characters of this miraculous story. She was the chosen one to give birth to the Son of God. And she, though a virgin, was the one who believed the promise of God. She believed Gabriel's announcement, she believed in the power of the Holy Spirit, and she believed that all of this would be fulfilled (see Luke 1:45). She magnified the Lord and rejoiced in her Savior (v. 46-47). Those who follow her example today are those who believe that God is able; that God works miracles; that God keeps his promises; and that nothing is impossible for God (v. 37; **read Luke 1:26-38; 46-56**).

We cling to your promises today, Lord, for you are always faithful and you are always able. Nothing is impossible for you.



JOSEPH AND THOSE WITH 5 BOLD FAITH

Joseph is a character in the story who demonstrates bold faith and bold obedience. Although no one would understand his situation and although he could not explain it himself, Joseph boldly put his faith in the word of the Lord and married pregnant Mary, for he trusted “that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:20). His faith led to obedience and he received the blessing of seeing the Son of God enter the world. Faithful obedience today continues to bring the blessing of the Lord’s presence and the joy of living within his perfect will.
(read Matthew 1:18-25)

We pray you will strengthen our faith, forgive our disobedience, and move us into a new season of bold faith and bold obedience so that we might enjoy your will for our lives.



6 JOHN THE BAPTIST AND THOSE WHOSE LIVES ARE OVERSHADOWED BY JESUS

Throughout the Advent story, there is one main character, Jesus Christ, and many supporting characters, including John the Baptist. While John's birth was miraculous in nature, his mother's pregnancy and his birth were secondary to Mary's pregnancy and Jesus' birth. From the moment John leapt in the womb because he was in the presence of the unborn Messiah to the time he told his own disciples, "He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30), John's entire life was overshadowed by the life and ministry of Jesus. And this gave John great joy, just as Christ followers today find great joy in denying themselves in order to live for the glory of Christ. (**John 1:6-34**)

Lord, let our lives be for your will & your glory and not our own.



7 THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THOSE WHO NEED NEW LIFE

Far too often, the Holy Spirit is one of the unsung characters of the first Advent. When you read the Scriptures, though, the Holy Spirit is active throughout the story. Mary was found to be with child “from the Holy Spirit,” (Matt. 1:18), for the Holy Spirit came upon her (Luke 1:35); Joseph is told that the baby Mary is carrying is “from the Holy Spirit,” (Matt. 1:20), John the Baptist is filled with the Holy Spirit in the womb (Luke 1:15), Elizabeth is filled with the Spirit when Mary enters her home (Luke 1:41), & Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit after John’s birth as he rejoices at the coming redemption (Luke 1:67). The Spirit gives life & continues to give life today to those who put their faith in Jesus (John 6:63; 2 Cor. 3:6; Titus 3:5; **read Matthew 1:18-25**)

Lord, give us renewed, revived, life in you and fill us with your Spirit so we may produce the fruit of the Spirit for your glory.



GOD THE FATHER AND 8 THOSE IN NEED OF PERFECT LOVE

Jesus was not just born; He was sent as the greatest gift ever. The Bible teaches that Jesus was sent with a purpose (see Luke 19:10). Jesus, the Son of God, was sent by His Father. God the Father is the initiating character in the Advent story, and in sending His Son, the Father demonstrates perfect love. Scripture declares, "In this **the love of God** was made manifest among us, that **God sent his only Son** into the world, so that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9). Those in need of perfect, faithful, unconditional, unwavering, forgiving love today, can find all they need in God who proved His love by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, in the flesh. (**read John 3:16-21**)

We praise You for Your Son, oh God, & for your perfect love.



9 CAESAR AUGUSTUS AND THOSE WHO REJOICE IN THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Doctors today encourage women not to travel late in their pregnancies, & yet, we find Mary taking a week-long, arduous journey from Galilee to Bethlehem in the 8th month of her pregnancy. It seems that all of this was because of a decree from Caesar Augustus that “all the world should be registered” (Luke 2:1). However, it is clear throughout Scripture that the Messiah was always meant to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) and here, Caesar Augustus is unknowingly used by God to fulfill this important prophecy. God’s sovereignty is still evident in our lives today as the Author of Life fulfills His plans for His glory, and each day moves us closer to Jesus’ return (**read Luke 2:1-7**).

We worship you, God, our King, the sovereign Author of Life.

An hourglass with blue sand is positioned on a beach of smooth, grey and tan pebbles. The background is a soft-focus sunset or sunrise over the ocean, with warm light reflecting on the water. The hourglass is made of dark wood and has a clear glass bulb containing blue sand. The sand is in the process of falling from the top bulb to the bottom bulb.

10 OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS & THOSE WAITING ON THE LORD

The Holy Spirit spoke through Old Testament prophets about the coming Messiah for centuries before the birth of Jesus Christ. These prophets searched carefully for the timing of it all (1 Peter 1:10-12), and they desired to see these promises fulfilled (Matthew 13:17; Luke 10:24). Men like Isaiah (7:14), Jeremiah (31:15), Hosea (11:1), & Micah (5:2) all spoke of that first Advent. And yet, they died before the Messiah came. However, their faith remained strong as they trusted in the promises of the Lord, knowing that “the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise” (2 Peter 3:9). This faith continues today in the church as believers wait on the Lord (Psalm 27:14), trusting in His timing, His will, His promises, & His Word that one day He will come again (**read Hebrews 1:1-4**).

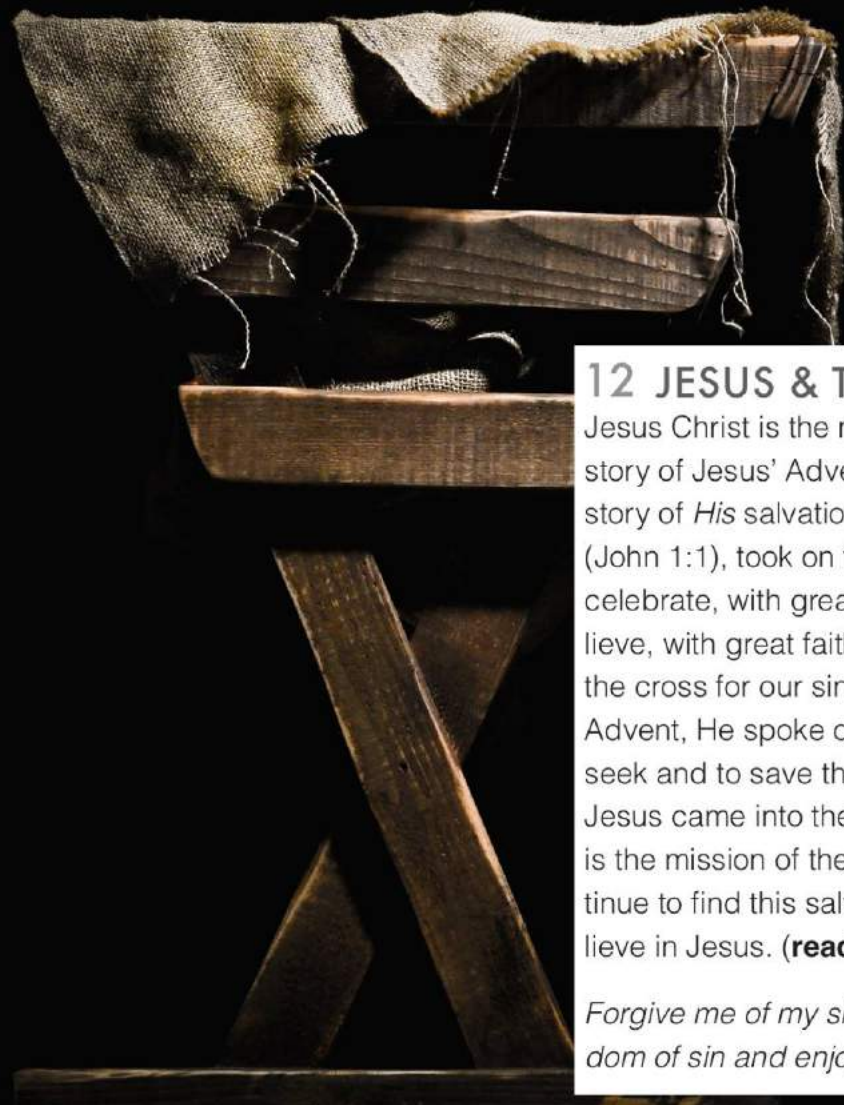
We trust in Your perfect timing & faithfulness to keep your promises, Oh Lord! Give us grace today as we wait on You.



11 THE ENEMY AND THOSE FINDING VICTORY IN CHRIST

Believe it or not, one of the characters in the narrative of Jesus' birth is the Devil. This is the case because one of the primary reasons that Jesus took on flesh and came into this world was to destroy the Devil. The first promise of a coming Redeemer was in the context of victory over the enemy (Genesis 3:15). John writes, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). The birth of Jesus, then, is a story of victory; a story of our Savior coming to rescue us. It is a story for the world today, for those in need of victory over temptation, over sin, over the enemy, and for those who find this victory in Jesus Christ. **(read Romans 8:1-11 & 1 Corinthians 15:50-57)**

We pray you will deliver us from temptation and give us victory.



12 JESUS & THOSE IN NEED OF A SAVIOR

Jesus Christ is the main character of the Advent story, for it is the story of Jesus' Advent, *His* coming, *His* incarnation. And it is the story of *His* salvation of the nations. Jesus, the eternal Son of God (John 1:1), took on flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). We celebrate, with great joy, that day He lay in the manger, for we believe, with great faith, that He grew up, lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. When Jesus spoke of His Advent, He spoke of salvation, saying, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). Paul also writes, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). This is the mission of the first Advent, & sinners everywhere today continue to find this salvation when they repent of their sin and believe in Jesus. (**read John 1:1-18; 1 John 1:9**)

Forgive me of my sins, Jesus, and save me so I might live in freedom of sin and enjoy new life in You.



13 THE SHEPHERDS AND THOSE WHO FIND JOY IN THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST

On the night that Jesus was born, “in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock” (Luke 2:8). An angel and then a multitude of angels appeared to them and they were the first ones told about the birth of a Savior. They immediately ran to Bethlehem and soon found themselves in the presence of a baby lying in a manger: Jesus Christ. Scriptures tell us that these shepherds “returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen” (Luke 2:20). This sort of worship continues in the lives of those today who find great joy in the presence of the Lord (Psalm 16:11), the Good Shepherd (John 10:14) and, therefore, seek Him and rest in Him daily. **(read Luke 2:8-21)**

Help me to rest in You and let me find my joy in Your presence.



14 A MULTITUDE OF THE HEAVENLY HOST & THOSE SEARCHING FOR PEACE

An angel proclaimed the birth of Jesus to the shepherds and then, suddenly, there was “a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!’” (Luke 2:13-14) They brought a message of peace, for the baby who had just been born is the Prince of Peace. Jesus makes peace between sinful man and a holy God (Romans 5:1), and His peace, which surpasses all understanding, guards our hearts and minds today (Philippians 4:7). This message of peace is still proclaimed today to all who are searching for peace and for those who find it in Jesus Christ. (**read Isaiah 9:2-7**)

Glory to God who has sent Jesus to bring us peace!



15 THE WISE MEN AND THOSE SEEKING THE KING

Isaiah had prophesied, "nations shall come to your light, & kings to the brightness of your rising...They shall bring gold & frankincense..." (Is. 60:3,6). In Matthew 2, we read about the wise men from the east who saw Jesus' star & were seeking the King. Perhaps they were familiar with Balaam's prophecy: "A star shall come out of Jacob..." (Num. 24:17). They saw the star & spent about 40 days traveling nearly 800 miles in order to find the new King who had been born. Once in the presence of young Jesus, these wise men rejoiced, worshipped, and gave gifts: gold, for Jesus is King; frankincense, for Jesus is our High Priest; and myrrh, for Jesus would die for our sins. Following their example, believers today rejoice in Jesus, worship Jesus, and seek (Is. 55:6), search (Jer. 29:13), & draw near to Him (James 4:8). **(read Matthew 2:1-12).** *Draw near to us today, Jesus, as we seek You.*



16 HEROD AND THOSE THREATENED BY ANOTHER KING

As the Wise Men sought the newborn King, another king felt threatened by an unknown rival. King Herod the First, or Herod the Great, ruler of Israel and Judah, was appointed king of the Jews, and yet, remained under the authority of Rome. It is said that he ruled firmly & ruthlessly, and that Herod even murdered several of his own sons. He would remove anyone who threatened his kingdom or power. And then one day, the Wise Men show up and say they are there to worship a King; but not Herod; but Jesus Christ. Herod developed a plot and immediately began to hunt Jesus, committing genocide against all the male children in Bethlehem who were two years old and younger. This defiance is still seen today in the hearts of those who aim to be king and ruler of their own lives, refusing to submit to Jesus, for they feel threatened by the presence of another King. (**read Matthew 2:1-23**)

Oh Lord, forgive us for our pride and rebellion, and help us to submit to you so you may be the Lord of our lives.



17 RACHEL AND THOSE WEEPING THIS CHRISTMAS

Christmas is not “Merry” for everyone. Some are weeping, mourning & struggling this Christmas. Some will spend this Advent season clinging to Jesus Christ just to keep from falling into deep despair. These are the ones who, perhaps, can relate to an often overlooked character in the Christmas story: Rachel and those who wept for their children who fell victim to Herod’s raging genocide. Scripture tells us that as Herod ordered the murder of every male child in Bethlehem, two years old and younger, prophecy was fulfilled (Jer. 31:15), as Rachel was weeping for her children. Heartbreak still exists during every Christmas season, highlighting our desperate need for the light of the world to come into this darkness so that we may be delivered, healed, restored, and comforted. **(read Matthew 11:25-30)**

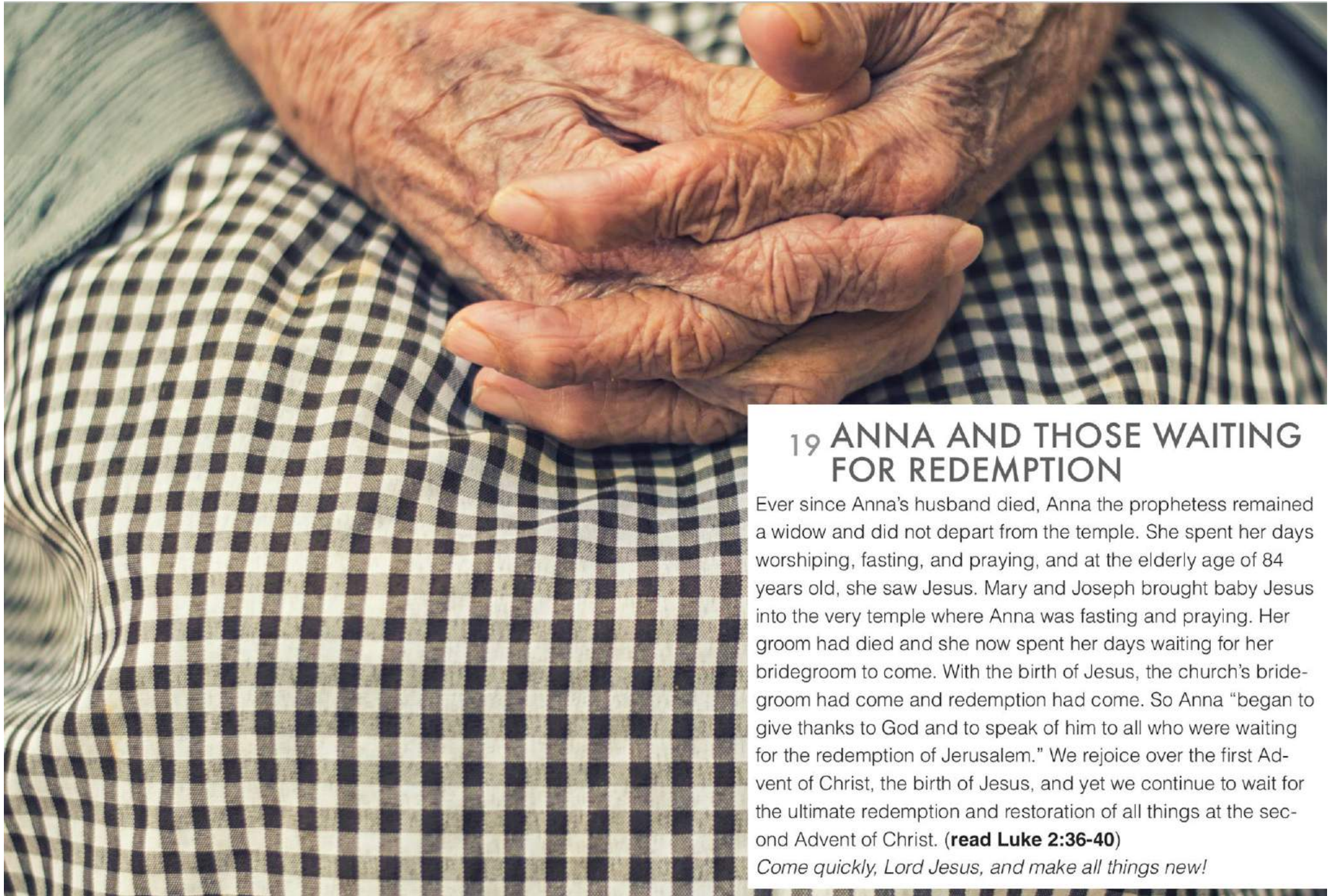
Heal our hearts, Jesus, and comfort us in the midst of suffering.



18 SIMEON AND THOSE SEEKING SALVATION

When Mary and Joseph brought baby Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord in the temple, they met a man named Simeon. We do not know much about Simeon, but Scripture tells us that he “was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.” The Spirit led Simeon into the temple and when he saw Jesus, he knew he had seen the promised Messiah. Simeon then took baby Jesus in his arms and blessed God saying, “My eyes have seen your salvation.” This is the same praise sung by those today who seek salvation from their sin and find it in Jesus Christ. **(read Luke 2:22-35)**

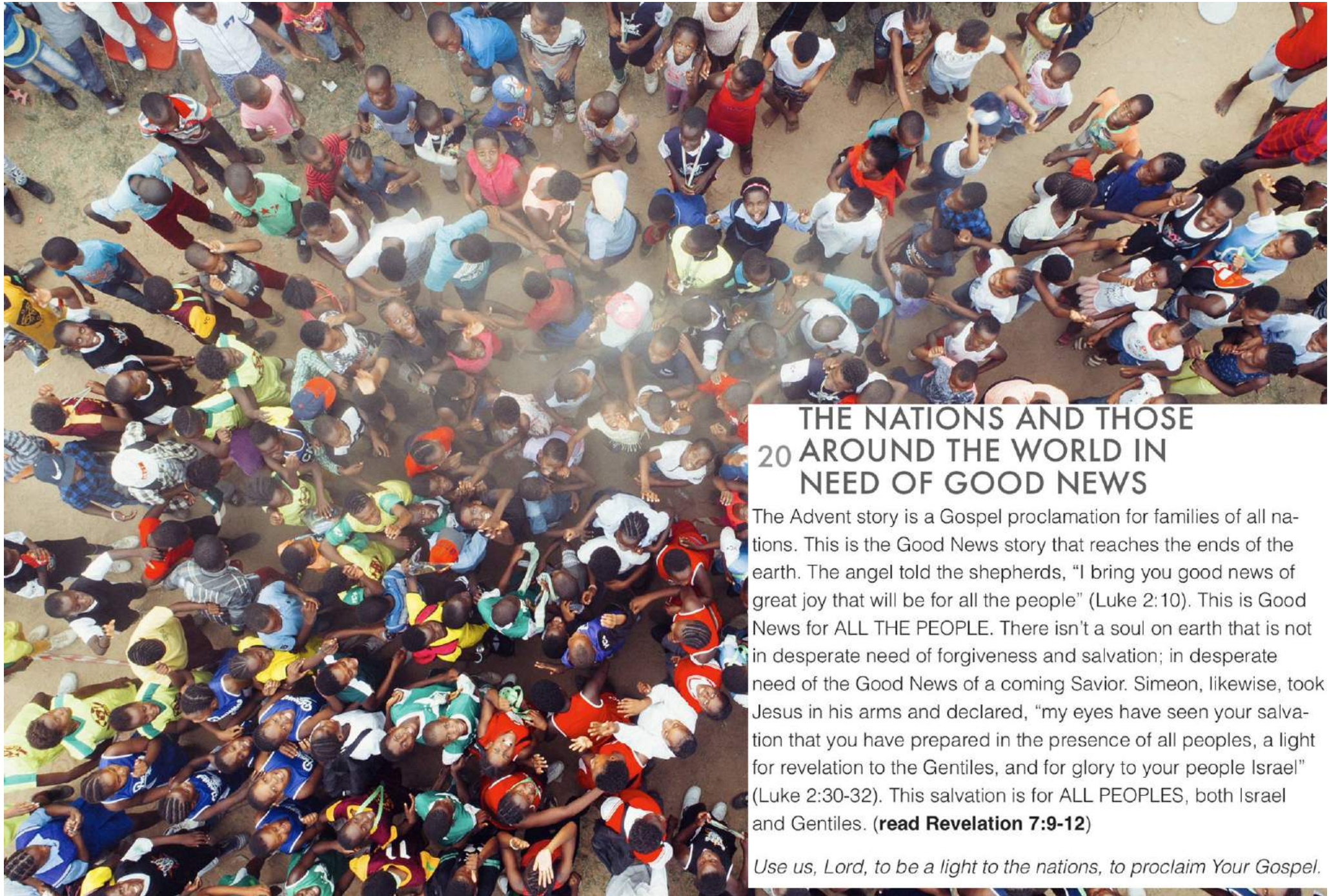
Save us, Lord Jesus, and free us from the bondage of sin.



19 ANNA AND THOSE WAITING FOR REDEMPTION

Ever since Anna's husband died, Anna the prophetess remained a widow and did not depart from the temple. She spent her days worshiping, fasting, and praying, and at the elderly age of 84 years old, she saw Jesus. Mary and Joseph brought baby Jesus into the very temple where Anna was fasting and praying. Her groom had died and she now spent her days waiting for her bridegroom to come. With the birth of Jesus, the church's bridegroom had come and redemption had come. So Anna "began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem." We rejoice over the first Advent of Christ, the birth of Jesus, and yet we continue to wait for the ultimate redemption and restoration of all things at the second Advent of Christ. **(read Luke 2:36-40)**

Come quickly, Lord Jesus, and make all things new!



THE NATIONS AND THOSE 20 AROUND THE WORLD IN NEED OF GOOD NEWS

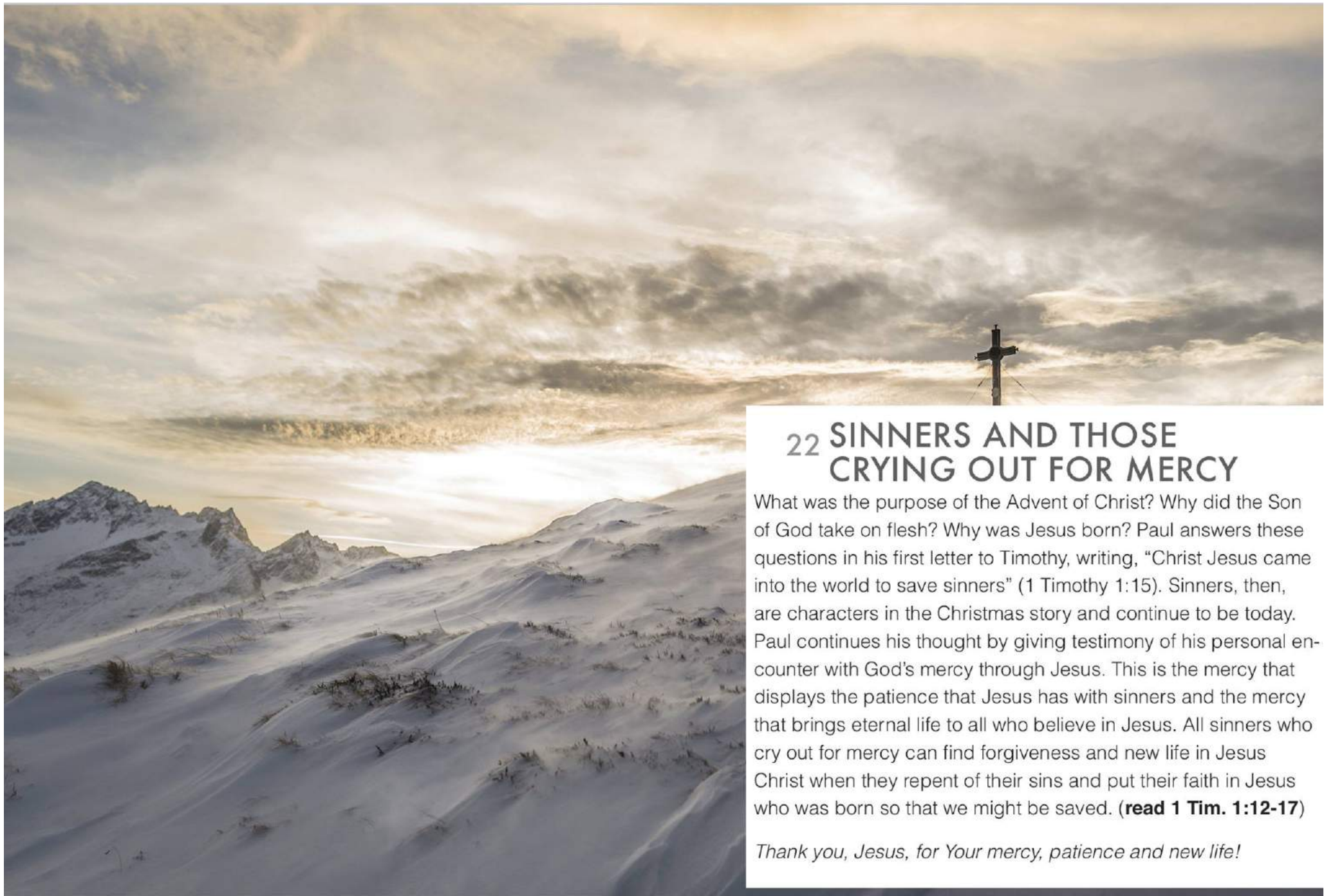
The Advent story is a Gospel proclamation for families of all nations. This is the Good News story that reaches the ends of the earth. The angel told the shepherds, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10). This is Good News for ALL THE PEOPLE. There isn't a soul on earth that is not in desperate need of forgiveness and salvation; in desperate need of the Good News of a coming Savior. Simeon, likewise, took Jesus in his arms and declared, "my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:30-32). This salvation is for ALL PEOPLES, both Israel and Gentiles. **(read Revelation 7:9-12)**

Use us, Lord, to be a light to the nations, to proclaim Your Gospel.



21 TRUTH COMING DOWN AND THOSE SET FREE

Scripture proclaims the purposes of Jesus' birth throughout the Bible. Just before His death, Jesus is questioned by Pilate and Jesus Himself teaches us one of the reasons that He came. Jesus said, "For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (John 18:37). This echoes the words throughout the book of John: "Grace and *truth* came through Jesus Christ;" (John 1:17); Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the *truth*, and the life" (John 14:6); and, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the *truth*, and the *truth* will set you free" (John 8:31-32). The first Advent is about Truth coming down through Jesus in order to set us free from the lies of the enemy; an invitation extended to us today (**read John 8:31-59**). *Set us free, Jesus, so we may walk in truth.*



22 SINNERS AND THOSE CRYING OUT FOR MERCY

What was the purpose of the Advent of Christ? Why did the Son of God take on flesh? Why was Jesus born? Paul answers these questions in his first letter to Timothy, writing, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). Sinners, then, are characters in the Christmas story and continue to be today. Paul continues his thought by giving testimony of his personal encounter with God's mercy through Jesus. This is the mercy that displays the patience that Jesus has with sinners and the mercy that brings eternal life to all who believe in Jesus. All sinners who cry out for mercy can find forgiveness and new life in Jesus Christ when they repent of their sins and put their faith in Jesus who was born so that we might be saved. (**read 1 Tim. 1:12-17**)

Thank you, Jesus, for Your mercy, patience and new life!

A photograph of a person reading a Bible in a dark room. The person's face is in profile, illuminated by a soft light from a lamp. The Bible is open, and the text is visible on the pages. The overall mood is contemplative and focused.

23 YOU AND THOSE WHO RECEIVE JESUS AS SAVIOR

Everyone responds to the Good News of the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. They either reject Jesus (John 1:11) or they receive Him, believing in His name (John 1:12). Everyone who hears the Advent story today will either reject or receive Jesus as their Savior. And so this story is for you and you are invited to turn from your sin and put your faith in Jesus so that you may have eternal life (John 3:16). Just as Rembrandt would occasionally paint himself into his masterpieces, like when he painted himself at the foot of the cross in *The Raising of the Cross*, the Gospel calls you to be in the Advent story, clinging to the cross of Christ where Jesus died for your sin. (**read Ephesians 2:1-10**)

I confess my sins to you, Jesus, and pray that you will forgive me of my sins and give me a new heart and a new life in You.



24 THE SPIRITUALLY SICK AND THOSE IN NEED OF A HEALER

In Mark chapter 2, Jesus once again teaches on why He was born, and why He came. He had just called Levi to follow Him and immediately goes to his house. The story tells us that “many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus.” The self-righteous religious leaders see this and criticize Jesus for eating in the home of a sinner. Jesus said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” Sinners, those who are spiritually sick and unhealthy, are the ones in need of a Healer. And the Advent story is that of a Healer who has come and comes into the homes of sinners. (**read Mark 2:13-17**)

Jesus, You alone can heal and forgive. We praise You today!



25 JOY AND THOSE WHO CELEBRATE AND ANTICIPATE THE COMING OF JESUS

The Advent of Jesus not only celebrates the coming of Jesus, but also anticipates, with great excitement, the future coming of Jesus when He returns. Paul tells Titus that just as grace has already appeared, bringing salvation, we are waiting for the appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11-14). Those who wait on the Lord should find these days filled with great joy, for Jesus came that we might enjoy abundant life (John 10:10). His heart is for His disciples to be filled with His joy (John 15:11). Our most difficult days are still filled with reasons to praise Jesus for His birth, His daily presence, and His promise to come again. (**read 1 John 1:1-4**)

We rejoice in your promise, Jesus, to one day come again!