

# Jesus Came for Us

*A Christmastide Devotional from Romans*



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## Introduction

DURING ADVENT, we all excitedly look towards celebrating Jesus's birth. However, suddenly it is December 26<sup>th</sup> and the world resets to its ordinary preoccupations. A few years ago, my friend Patrick Weston and I put together a devotional booklet to help us keep the excited focus on God taking on flesh during the days *after* Christmas. The opportunity to take the time to do that is why I have always loved the Twelve Days of Christmas, a tradition that has seemingly been forgotten in our current age.

The Twelve Days of Christmas are more than just the familiar old carol of unusual gifts from one's true love. The Twelve Days of Christmas are the days between December 25<sup>th</sup> and the traditional celebration of the arrival of the wise men at Epiphany (January 6). This year, please join me in another devotional journey as we look at some gifts far more incredible than a partridge in a pear tree. These are the gifts from our God as Paul describes them in the Letter to the Romans. This devotional has twelve readings exploring the ways Jesus coming into the world is for us. I cannot wait to go on this adventure with you!

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## Day 1: Christmas is for Everyone

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." – Romans 1:16-17*

It does not usually strike us just how odd the selection of people who surround the story of Christmas really is. *Of course* a lowly, newly married couple expecting a baby, an aged cousin with a new baby, shepherds, angels, wise men from afar and murderous kings fit together! If you stop and think, though, it is a pretty eclectic selection and, apart from the wise men, not whom we would pick to hail the birth of a king.

In that bizarreness, we get a preview of what is to come: a gift for the entire world. Way back in Genesis 12, God promised to Abraham that the whole world would be blessed by his family (v. 3). In the verse quoted from Romans, above, Paul reflects on the impact of Jesus coming into the World: the salvation He offers is for both the Jews (those descended from Abraham) and the Greeks (referring to everyone else).

That's good news for us. Most of us live thousands of miles away from where the earthly life of Jesus took place and all of us live thousands of years later. Yet, the gift of salvation that comes from the One born in Bethlehem is still for us. We may feel unworthy or disconnected from the promises of God, but in truth we are not. Anyone who believes in Jesus has this hope, including you and me.

*PRAYER: Father, thank you for not only sending your Son for us as we remember on Christmas, but truly sending him for all who would believe – that we, no matter how distant we may feel, can rejoice in the salvation that comes from you. Please help us not only to be reminded of that, but to remind others too: the hope of Christmas is for everyone. In Jesus's name we pray and give you thanks for this wonderful truth. Amen.*

## Day 2: Jesus Came for All of Us Who Don't Get It

*For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. – Romans 1:19-20*

The day after Christmas usually feels a bit calmer – a chance for a breath. The presents are wrapped and, likely, opened. The Christmas dinner has been served. Much of the running we do from house to house has passed. In the midst of all of those things, we often miss things right in front of us: maybe it is a gift we picked out months ago that we just cannot locate even though a day or two from now we will spot it and it will seem impossible that just days before it might as well have been invisible.

We human beings, lost in our own thoughts and worries of the moment miss an even more important thing: the testimony of who God is that is all around us. As we are told in the first chapter of the Gospel of John, the story of Jesus does not begin with Christmas day. It begins with the Son making the very world He would come into. The very world who would reject Him as if He were unknown to them, even though His fingerprints are on all of creation (John 1:9-11).

This is part of the incredible mystery of Christmas: God was not surprised by this lack of recognition. He knew before the creation of the World, yet he still chose to love us. The miracle of Christmas shouts that love. Who goes intentionally somewhere he knows he will be rejected and ultimately killed? The Creator of the World, Jesus, did. He did so that He might restore us into fellowship with Him and enjoy that relationship with him forever.

*PRAYER: Father, so often we miss how you are working and how the world shouts out the wonder of who you are. Thank you for loving us even when we are too preoccupied to see what you are doing. Help us to see the miracle of your love not just Christmas day, but every day. And let us show your love to the world so that others can see you, too. We pray in the name of the one who came into the world for us, Jesus. Amen.*

## Day 3: Jesus Came for Those Who Value the Wrong Things

Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. – Romans 1:22-23

Have you ever given someone a gift and then realized a week or two later they returned it? If it does not fit or the person already has the same thing, we might be glad our recipient was able to get something else that will be more useful. But, sometimes we realize the gift we picked out, something we thought was of great value, was traded in for something that seems comparatively worthless. The person we gave it to did not understand the value of our gift and does not want to spend the time to learn. In the moment, the person we gave the gift to may be happier, but we cannot help but wonder if they realized what they have lost.

What do we really value in this season? We have a way of valuing everything, but the “reason for the Season.” The gifts, the get together preparations, the family dramas, the decorations and food all call for our focus. Ironically, sometimes we become so focused on defending what Christmastime is about to a world that has forgotten, even *that* defense which takes our attention away from the meaning of Christmas.

We are good at missing what God is doing. However, God is persistent and the story of Scripture shows how He works to call us back to Him. We find in the Christmas story the most stunning example of that as the Lord of the Universe came into the world to dwell with those who quickly turn from His glory to lesser things. What an incredibly loving God we serve!

*PRAYER: Father, please help us to use this Christmas season to focus on you and not on lesser things. Help us to remember not just the words “Jesus was born this day in Bethlehem,” but the fullness of what they mean: that our God will pursue us and restore us even when we are constantly losing focus. Thank you for the good news of Christmas and how it affects every day since. In Jesus’s Name we pray. Amen.*

## Day 4: Jesus Came to Give Us God's Grace

*But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it — the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...*

– Romans 3:21-24

We do not always like to think of sin a lot at Christmas time. Why would we want to think of the imperfections of those around us or – even worse – ourselves at a time when we are supposed to be joyful and enjoying “peace”? Sin *is not* enjoyable to think about, but the story of the loving God who would set up the history of the world to bring forth the Messiah who would save us is the truest joy of Christmas.

The Christmas story was not one that began when Mary had a visit from an angel two thousand years ago, but rather began as soon as the Fall happened, when God first hinted at his plan (Gen. 3:15). As Paul notes the law too pointed to the Messiah and the prophets proclaimed the coming Messiah who would bring salvation (Zech. 9:9). Though we can never succeed in fully keeping God's law, the Story of Christmas reminds us that God rescued us just as he promised. For many of us, this truth that Jesus offers salvation even for us imperfect, sinful people is so familiar we are almost immune to its effect.

On this fourth day of Christmas, let us stop and truly reflect on the wonder of what God has done. We should never allow ourselves to forget that the first Christmas present was the gift of the most amazing of things: that through God's grace, we would be redeemed by the one whose birth we celebrate.

PRAYER: *Father, thank you for offering us your salvation through your Son, our savior Jesus. May we be refreshed in the wonder of that good news each day and never take it for granted. How amazing it is that as we sing the carols telling the story of so long ago, we are singing of the events that changed our lives. We love you, O God. Amen.*

## Day 5: Jesus Came to Give Us Peace

*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. – Romans 5:1*

Driving around a city at Christmas makes the idea of “peace” and “good will” seem distant. People are often crabby as they are trying to get to their destinations. In a way, that’s just an intensified picture of our lives, where we yearn for peace and good will, yet we so often find those very things elusive.

Whether it be at work or home or school or anywhere else, it seems like there is always something going wrong and someone who is upset.

If we cannot have peace even for a few days with other human beings, how can we ever have peace with the Holy One? The Prophet Isaiah tells us that Jesus would be known as the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6), and in this verse from Romans, we see just how that peace comes. While we might not always experience peace in our day to day lives, as we trust in Jesus, we experience true peace with our God.

One of the many things I appreciate about celebrating the Twelve Days of Christmas is that we have this time after the hustle and bustle around December 25 that we can reflect on God’s peace. As we do, we have the opportunity to think of how we can take that peace into the New Year and be agents of God’s peace everywhere we go. Do people know by our lives that we have the Prince of Peace as our King?

*PRAYER: Lord Jesus, you are the Prince of Peace and our true and eternal King. Though so much in our lives may crumble and fail, your kingdom never will. As we go back to normal routines in a new year, help us to be reminded that we serve the King who ushers in peace. As citizens of your kingdom, let us share that peace with all of those around us. We pray these things in your matchless name. Amen.*

## Day 6: Jesus Came to Re-Create

*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned — for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. — Romans 5:12*

While it is rare here to have the “white Christmas” so many of us dream of, there does seem to be an uncanny tendency for there to be some ice on Christmas Eve. I can remember numerous times going back to when I was growing up when it felt more than a little perilous getting to a Christmas Eve service because of the ice. And, as anyone who has driven on ice knows, it does not take much to mess up a drive.

That’s the way sin is for us. It only took one sin to mess up the world God created. Throughout our lives it is that one sin here and there that causes us to skid off the road we are called to follow by God. We see how one little sin of jealousy threw Herod dramatically off course when he could have had the joy of meeting his Messiah (Matthew 2:16-18).

When we sing “O Come, O Come Emmanuel,” that cry should remind us of the yearning inside of us for rescue from our sin which keeps us captive all the time. Christmastime is a good time to ask which sorts of sins are serving as our “ice” and asking the God who is with us – Immanuel – to steer us back on safer roads where we can be the men and women God made us to be.

PRAYER: *Immanuel, our God with us, we pray that you would free us each day more and more from our old selves and make us new in your grace. Whether we come to you for the first time asking this or have asked it for decades, please help steer us onto the paths laid out for us in your word, for it is a lamp unto our feet. We pray these things in Jesus’s name. Amen.*

## Day 7: Jesus Gives Us Righteousness

*For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. – Romans 5:17*

Have you ever opened a Christmas gift bag and, not realizing that there were multiple gifts in it, nearly missed something really important? As we reflect on the miracle of Christmas, we often miss that Jesus did more than bring forgiveness for our sins by coming into the world.

Imagine for a moment that “all” Jesus did was forgive us of our sins. That would be incredible! We could not possibly deserve even that, and, yet, how could we possibly come before God even with our sins wiped away? We will still be – at best – neutral before a holy God and rapidly falling back into sin.

It is always so disappointing when we give a gift and then it gets broken right away. Imagine God watching us take His forgiveness and fall right back into sin.

*But, Jesus gave us his righteousness. We receive that first gift of forgiveness, but as we reach into the “bag,” we find a second gift just as amazing as the first. Then, the gifts continue as the Spirit brings forth the Fruit of the Spirit in our lives so that we can share the goodness of God with others (Gal. 5:22-24).*

PRAYER: *Our Savior and Redeemer, thank you for not only coming into the world to take on our sin, but to give us your righteousness when we are so undeserving. Help us to show your righteousness to those around us through the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control you bring forth in our lives. We pray in your precious name. Amen.*

## Day 8: Jesus Came to Give Us a Restored Life Forever

*For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. [...] We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. – Romans 6:5, 9-11*

We cannot go through very much of life without reflecting on the frailty of our physical existence. We are often reminded of that at Christmastime as we miss those who have died – recently or even long ago. We remember where our loved ones sat at the Christmas table or the sorts of stories they shared each year as we gathered to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The remembrance may warm our hearts in one way, but also leave us feeling a cold winter breeze.

As acutely as we feel those losses at Christmas, it is important to remember what comes with the gift we receive at Christmas: a gift of hope for the future. Hope that our own bodies that repeatedly get injured and ultimately fail us will be restored to the fullness of what God intended. Even more amazingly: hope that our loved ones we have missed who have trusted in Jesus will experience that same promise. We have hope we will see them again (1 Thess 4:13).

The hope of resurrection does not mean we will not still ache for those whom we miss. Paul says to the Thessalonians simply that he wants them to know that promise so they do not “grieve as others do who have no hope.” We will still ache. The Christmas parties may still feel empty for the lack of those who have died. But we ache with hope made possible by our Messiah whose birth we celebrate at Christmas.

*PRAYER: God we praise you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for the miraculous hope of resurrection. We pray for your comfort as we and those we care about ache over the loss of friends and family, perhaps even over this last year. We pray that you would turn our hearts towards you as we grieve and you would give us comfort in the fact that death is not the final word. We love you, Lord, and pray these things in our risen Savior Jesus's name. Amen.*

## Day 9: Jesus Came to Give Us the Spirit

*You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*

– Romans 8:9-10

So often we can feel alone during the holiday season. Whether it is because a job or schooling has taken us far away from our families or because of the losses of those loved ones we reflected on yesterday. Sometimes it is just because we look back on a year and think of all the things that have gone wrong or the broken relationships with people who were once very present in our lives.

Whatever might make us feel alone, though, the One who was Born on Christmas gives us another gift: the gift of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. No matter where we are, how far away we are from everything familiar or how desperate we feel, God is with us.

How appropriate that Jesus is the one known to the prophet Isaiah as Immanuel: God with us! That is what Christmas is about: that God, the creator of time and space, came into a particular time in a particular place – neither of which seem particularly majestic by human standards – and humbled Himself for us (Phil. 2:5-8).

We frequently struggle to do things that would take away what is “rightfully” ours, but Jesus gave up what He deserved to dwell with us. On this day, we have the best company we could ever have over for the holiday season: the Spirit who still dwells in you if you trust in Jesus as your Lord.

*PRAYER: Holy Spirit, thank you for being with us and transforming us each a little more as the days go by to be more like the Son. In this new year, please help us to be more and more in accordance with your will. Guide us, we pray in Jesus's name. Amen.*

## Day 10: Jesus Came to Give Us a Family

*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. – Romans 8:16-17*

How many Christmas movies have the theme of trying to get home to family? Whether it is *Home Alone*'s frantic rush of Kevin's parents to get back to their very much alone son or the perilous travels of a young reindeer and his friends fleeing the Abominable Snow Monster to return to the North Pole in *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, we often think of Christmas as a time to return home.

In Romans, we are reminded that the birth of Jesus offers us the ultimate homecoming. Here, Paul reminds us that the Spirit does not just travel with us alone: He testifies to our adoption as sons and daughters of God.

What does that mean? *We get to be called part of God's family!* The Heavenly Father calls us His own. And, he has also given us the opportunity to be with an extended family that spans the globe: the Church. Even if we are not very involved in church, most of us will come at Christmas, but as we think about the new year, it is a great time to think about being part of that family all year long.

The Christian life is not one free of suffering – Paul acknowledges that even in this verse – but as we remember who we are to God and we support and encourage each other within the family of the Church, we are much better equipped to face the challenges of life.

PRAYER: *Father, thank you for calling us your sons and daughters. Thank you for making us heirs of the promises you have given. When we feel alone, please remind us of these promises. And help us to encourage each other as the Church, holding each other up and helping each other when we stumble, that we might glorify you in everything we do. We pray in Jesus's name. Amen.*

## Day 11: Jesus Came for Our Good

*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. – Romans 8:28*

As we come towards the end of the time traditionally known as Christmastide and look into the “bleak midwinter” of January, sometimes it feels like a harsh reminder of everything that does not make sense in our lives. Christmas reminds us that even when our lives do not make sense yet, that God is taking the good and even the bad to work *all things* together for good.

Our worst moments are undeniably bad, but they are not meaningless. And God takes our experiences and weaves them together to begin the process of conforming us to be more like Jesus (Romans 8:29). That does not always make those experiences easier in the moment, nor does it lessen how genuinely hard those times can be. Yet we serve One who has experienced the same things we do, yet He did so perfectly (Heb. 4:15).

That is why the miracle of Christmas is so amazing: Jesus understands. He does not *just* understand, though. He has power over all things and so we can trust that even in those hard moments He will not let go of us or abandon us. He did not overlook some challenge, only to realize that we no longer can be part of His plan. *All things work together for good* by God’s grace, because He loves us.

PRAYER: *Lord Jesus, thank you for working all things together for our good. We do not deserve anything good from you, and yet you watch over us and take note of even the little details of our lives. We know you understand the things we face, but better yet, you also use those things for good in the end. Whether or not we understand, please give us peace in you. We pray in your precious name. Amen.*

## Day 12: Jesus Came that We Could Know God is For Us

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. – Romans 8:31-34*

Traditionally, tomorrow marks Epiphany, the day we remember the story of the Wise Men coming to worship Jesus. That story shows God's provision for the Wise Men in so many ways: he guided them to Jesus, He allowed them the special privilege of worshipping God in His very presence and then protected them from the mad king Herod.

As we go into this New Year and think of all the ways that Jesus's coming is the most amazing Christmas gift ever, we know that Jesus did not just live, suffer and die for us, but incredibly continues to speak "our case" for us to the Father. Even if all the forces of evil were to speak against us and accuse us of the most vile of things, they will not succeed in taking away that love which God has given to us. *God is for us.*

If you are looking at challenging circumstances in this coming year, remember that you go with God with you and for you. If you are looking at exciting, pleasant circumstances, remember the same, for in those times it is often even more important not to lose sight of the One who gives us those blessings. The wise men had many earthly blessings, but they knew what was far more wonderful than anything they could attain: the Messiah, the King of kings, came down to earth for us. For everyone. All of us are called to seek him this day, this month, this year and for all of our lives.

As we conclude this Christmas season, may you go with the hope, the promise and the knowledge that this same king is always there for you, too. That is the good news for you and for me.

*PRAYER: Father, thank you for the good news of your Son. Thank you for never letting go of us and never letting any opposition, earthly or spiritual, be so great as to be able to overcome your love for us. Turn us more towards you this day and help us to go about this next year focused on following our King. We pray in Jesus's name. Amen.*

## Next Steps

*Thank you for joining me on this devotional adventure over the Christmas season. If you are looking to explore the Scriptures further and experience some of that adopted family of God we discussed above, I would like to invite you to take advantage of the following opportunity to do just that.*

### FaithTree Christian Fellowship

FaithTree aims to connect believers from different churches for worship, prayer and thought-provoking conversations about faith, while making a welcoming space for people who are not yet sure what they believe. We are a ministry led by and rooted in local churches; you can learn more about our story at [www.faithtreecf.org](http://www.faithtreecf.org) or on social media @FaithTreeCF. Please check out our calendar of events and join us in the near future!

### Questions? Comments?

Are you wanting to know more who Jesus is? Do you have a question about the Bible? Would you simply like to provide feedback on this devotional booklet? Please feel free to e-mail me at [timothy.butler@faithtree.com](mailto:timothy.butler@faithtree.com). I am always happy to hear from you!