

25 CHRISTMAS
DEVOTIONS IN LUKE

Salvation
Has Come

GREGG MATTE

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Dedication

I am Texan born and raised but spent Christmases growing up with family in Louisiana. To those who made Christmas special I dedicate this devotional guide.

To my Mom, Aunt Cheryl, Uncle Taylor, and my cousins Beth and Bryan—fun, fireworks, and running down the stairs on Brentwood Blvd. still makes me smile.

To my Dad, Uncle Dirk, my cousin Amanda, Granny and Pop (both now in heaven)—countless football games, Granny's gumbo, and LSU Tiger talk around the table, are great memories.

Thank you all for the wonderful Christmases growing up!

Acknowledgments

So grateful to my wife Kelly and our kids, Greyson and Valerie . . . affectionately known as Team Matte. Our advent devotionals around the Christmas tree through the years gave inspiration to this work. Our family is my biggest earthly blessing. Love you all!

I'm appreciative to my sister-in-law, Debbie Juern, whose Instagram post sparked the idea for this devotional. Thanks Debbie, Team Matte loves you and the Juern crew.

I'm thankful for my continued partnership with Lifeway, particularly Ben Mandrell, Mary Wiley, and Matt Hawkins. You guys make ideas into a reality!

The people and staff of Houston's First Baptist Church—our Christmas Eve candlelight services are one the highlights of my year. I'm grateful, humbled, and honored to be your shepherd. Don't tell anyone, but I think we have the best church on earth!

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Introduction

Merry Christmas!

It's interesting where ideas can come from. While mindlessly scrolling Instagram one late November afternoon, I ran across my sister-in-law's post:

New Christmas Tradition
Beginning December 1
read one chapter of
the book of Luke in the Bible
each day.

There are 24 chapters.
On Christmas Eve you will have read
an entire account of Jesus's life
and wake up Christmas morning
knowing WHO and WHY
we celebrate!¹

I thought, *What a great idea!*

Like using the thirty-one chapters of Proverbs for thirty-one days of the month, I set off in my December "quiet-time sled" with a chapter from the Gospel of Luke to match the date and write a devotional for each of Luke's twenty-four chapters and one more for Christmas day. The fruit of my daily reading of Luke now rests in your hands.

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Our goal is to prepare our hearts for Christmas by delving into the life of Christ. My invitation to you is simple: read the chapter of Luke and the devotional entry that corresponds to the December date (chapter 1 on December 1, chapter 2 on December 2, and so on).

Over the next twenty-four days, we will read and reflect on the entire book of Luke. Then, on that most glorious of birthdays, December 25, we will know the *who* and the *why* of our Christmas worship.

As Chuck Swindoll wrote, “Luke had the mind of a scientist, the pen of a poet, and the heart of an artist. When you read his writing, it is as if you are there.”²

With Luke’s leadership, it is my hope we will celebrate on Christmas Day with a greater depth of understanding and joy! Let’s go!

Your December guide,

Pastor Gregg

LUKE 1

The Lord Is with Us

We are beginning a wonderful twenty-five-day journey together today. It's not a marathon but a bit more than a sprint. Our goal is to push back the heightened stress or "bah humbug" of walking into another Christmas season and instead to prepare our hearts to truly celebrate His birth. The first chapter of Luke is a powerful platform for the Christmas story.

And the angel came to [Mary] and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you." Luke 1:28

The birth of Jesus was of such significance it required an *angelic* announcement. This baby announcement required far more than a social media post or card in the mail. The Messiah's birth meant *a word from heaven*: a star for the wise men, the heavenly hosts for the shepherds, and the angel Gabriel for Mary. Heaven declared to earth, in numerous ways, "The Son of God is coming to earth to save souls. And Mary, you are going to play a central part."

Obviously, to carry God's Son in your womb is a heavy calling. Could anything be more overwhelming when you are promised in marriage to another and in a culture where pregnancy out of wedlock could be punishable by death? Mary is deeply troubled and afraid. So

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the angel brings greetings and lets her know God is on this journey with her. She is favored by God, filled with grace, no fear needed. This Greek word for “favored” is used only one other time in the New Testament in Ephesians 1:6 “to the praise of His glorious grace that He favored us with in the Beloved” (HCSB). In a way, God is saying to Mary, “You are secure. I’ve got you.” Ponder, yes, of course. Please ponder but don’t panic. God is with you in the womb and in the world. God is going to lead the entire journey.

We soon see God will be with Mary and Joseph while riding the donkey, knocking on the door of the inn, in the stable, through the birth, in and out of Egypt, at the cross, and at the empty tomb.

Don’t panic, but trust the Lord is with you, Mary.

Now none of us are going to carry such a responsibility this December, but we need the Lord’s presence and guidance nonetheless. This month we will interact with family both distant and close, which is stress inducing on its own aside from the monthlong constant feeling of having too much to do with too little time to do it. As we speak, the calendar is filling with school, church, and personal activities, school is wrapping up the semester, and work is frantic. All these things and more are purposeful parts of lives, but they can be crushing if we believe we are walking through them alone. We need to know the Lord is with us. He is our power and strength. He is our guide and hope. He is the order in the chaos. The tasks are not too much for Him. He is with you.

Mary found God faithful and so will we in this season. Let’s trust Him more deeply than the first eleven months of the year. His favor is upon His people through Jesus. Let’s follow Luke through

the plan of God—from the dark night of His birth to the empty tomb of His resurrection, realizing both were for us.

Merry Christmas!



Prayer: Lord, remind me and show me that You are with me. I want to walk with You as I anticipate and celebrate your birth! May Christmas come alive like never before in my heart.

LUKE 2

No Room in the Inn

Early in the season years ago, we brought all the Christmas decorations down from the attic—that annual tradition and necessary chore—to get ready for the blessed celebration of Christmas. Each box was full, but one of the most special to us was the one that contained our nativity scene, gifted to us by family many years ago.

I opened the box and carefully unpacked each character, placing them in their positions, but I couldn't find the baby Jesus. It's not much of a nativity with only Mary and Joseph and a few farm animals but no Savior of the world. The symbolism of the empty cradle struck me: without Jesus nothing else makes sense—both in the Christmas season and in life. He's the centerpiece of the nativity and the center point of our faith. You and I know this, but the innkeeper of Luke 2 was completely unaware of who he was turning away.

Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Luke 2:7

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We don't read that the innkeeper was a terrible guy; we just read that his rooms were filled. He wasn't recorded for all eternity as slamming the door in Mary's face or telling Joseph to scam. He was just out of room and probably too busy to mess with a young couple while tending to a full inn.

The Feast of Tabernacles was happening so it was the inn's "busy season." In the midst of his equivalent to our presents to wrap, errands to run, and food in the oven, I imagine the innkeeper just motioning to the stable around back. Inns of this time period typically had a section for people and another for livestock. Since the human section was filled, the innkeeper resorted to saying, "You can be on the property just not in the heart of my home."

This is often where we end up in the season of Christmas—with fast-paced, busy calendars filled with endless to-do lists and too many credit card swipes to count. Jesus is on the property, somewhere, but not in the *center* of our Christmas.

The nativity is considered and likely on display, but a focus on the central member is missing. He's not central because we are already filled up. We've eaten too many chips before the enchiladas arrived. We've Cyber Monday-ed or Black Friday-ed so much the core of Christmas is misplaced, behind the house with the animals rather than in the center of it all.

There is no room in the inn of our hearts, even though much of what fills our time is *good*, like kids' activities, church presentations, parties to attend, travel plans to secure, and presents to buy. And that's true of me as a pastor, ironically, with Christmas messages to prepare. This flurry from Thanksgiving to Christmas leaves us filled to the brim but empty to the bone. There's just not enough room left in our hearts to ponder and praise.

Psalms 10:4 haunts: “In all his thoughts there is no room for God” (NIV).

But be encouraged! It’s only December 2, and you can set out to have a Christmas season that looks different from years past. You can slow down, savoring the truth of what God has done through Jesus. You can prepare room for Him in your heart and life. It’s fine to keep a busy schedule, but don’t let the busy schedule keep you from the Hero of the nativity. A smile on our face and a word of praise on our lips creates room for the Savior in this season and any other.

Thankfully, with more searching in the box from the attic that stored our nativity, I found baby Jesus, and the manger was complete. He took His rightful place in the middle of the scene, the center of attention. May we rightly order our lives in the same way.

Joy to the world, the Lord is come

Let Earth receive her King

Let every heart prepare Him room.³



Prayer: Jesus, I want You to dwell in the “inn” of my heart and life. Show me anything that is pushing You outside to the stable, and give me courage to do something about it so You can have Your rightful place in my life.