

A silhouette illustration of a nativity scene set against a dark blue night sky with a bright star shining down. The scene includes two camels on the left, two palm trees, a manger with baby Jesus, and several figures in the foreground. The background shows rolling hills and a warm glow from the star.

# Hidden in Plain Sight

Advent Devotional 2022

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## Welcome!

The biblical accounts of Jesus' birth are foundational for the world's most widely observed holiday. Christmas is celebrated by believers and nonbelievers alike. Advent is a season of preparation and can focus on decorating our homes, making plans to visit family, or buying the perfect gift for someone we love.

This year our Advent Devotional includes insights into the Jewish roots of the birth of the Messiah and first century environment into which He arrived. Hebrew traditions, words, and meanings will be introduced as we discover deeper meaning in the texts and discover many of the Christmas traditions we celebrate have ancient roots.

John, the Beloved Disciple, introduced his eyewitness account with content from a well-known hymn of his day that incorporated a hidden message that needs to be decoded through the lens of the Messiah:

*The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, **the world did not recognize him**. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:9-14 NIV*

Why *wouldn't* God want the Messiah to be recognized immediately by His own people? Why hide the Messiah? Wouldn't the Jewish People want to publicly welcome the Messiah and serve Him as the true King and usher in the Kingdom of Heaven?

Jesus, the Messiah, arrived and lived within the Mediterranean culture, traditions, and worldview of the people of Israel. It is through the Jewish lens that we will investigate the biblical accounts and identify some of the prophecy connected with the coming of the Messiah.

It has been said that the best place to hide something is in plain sight. Things that are hidden out in the open are often the most difficult to see. May the Messiah be revealed to you in a new and incredible way this year.

Shalom.

# Hidden in Plain Sight

Advent Devotional 2022

**November 27**

**First Sunday of Advent**



**Yeshua (yeh-shoo'-ah) Hebrew word for Salvation**

**Scripture:** She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. Matthew 1:21, Read Matt 1:18-24

**Family Time:** Talk with your children about their names. Tell them about the name you chose and why. You may want to include your last name and talk about your family tree.

In his world-famous play *Romeo and Juliet*, British playwright William Shakespeare is credited with asking, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." Perhaps his point is that our character is more important than what we are called. When it comes to the Messiah of the world, His character matters as much as what He is called.

The name Jesus, in Hebrew, is *Yeshua*. There are a number of different pronunciations and meanings: the LORD is my salvation, salvation, to rescue, to deliver, and even "Yahweh will deliver."

The translation of Yeshua gives added significance to Bible texts such as "*The LORD is my strength and my defense; He has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt Him.*" (Exodus 15:2) or, "*Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD Himself, is my strength and my defense; He has become my salvation.*" (Isaiah 12:2) or "*Today salvation has come to this house,*" (Luke 19:9)

What's your name? Names are powerful. They identify us and can define our credibility as well as our reputation. But scripture reveals there is a name above all other names, and it says there is only one name that can shine a light in the darkness, bring hope to the hopeless, and heal the brokenhearted. This name is our salvation...Yeshua.

**Prayer:** God of Salvation, I pray that everyone can learn what Christmas is all about. Sometimes people think this time of year is about food, being out of school, getting presents, and having fun, but we all need to know why we needed Christmas. Thank You, Yeshua, for letting me know Your name and for letting me share mine with you. Thank You for revealing to me the real account of Christmas. Help me tell my family and friends who don't understand it all. I pray in the name of Yeshua, Amen.

## **November 28**

### **Talmid (tal-meed) Disciple**

**Scripture:** By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. John 13:35

**Family Time:** Talk about and make a plan to buy and deliver a gift for a stranger.

When you first become a follower of Yeshua, someone is bound to tell you that you need to become a *disciple*. Most of us think of being a disciple as being a student. We know we need to study the life of Yeshua and learn as much as we can about His family, culture, and the way He lived His life. So, you can read books, watch YouTube, listen to podcasts, and take a class on discipleship! While all of this activity is academic, and learning is essential, you might discover that something is missing.

However, being a disciple during Yeshua's day meant that someone would make the move to become more of an *apprentice*. A student learns and gains knowledge to know what the teacher knows. This is a good start and it is valuable to *know* certain things. But, becoming an apprentice means something more. An apprentice takes action to become more like the teacher—an apprentice *does* what the teacher *does*.

Talmidim (plural for talmid) didn't just read a book, watch YouTube videos, listen to podcasts, or attend a class. Talmidim left everything to follow their rabbi or teacher. A talmid watched everything the teacher did and strived to do it exactly like him. Essentially, a talmid watched how the rabbi lived and tried every moment of every day to live like the rabbi.

Consider whether you are a student or a talmid. Maybe you're a combination of both. If so, which do you think Yeshua would want you to become? How? How would you become a talmid? Practice forgiveness with everyone. Forgive those who hurt you or disappoint you. Pray for those who have wronged you—pray especially for those who *continue* to wrong you. Welcome and work on behalf of those the world rejects and condemns. Work to repair brokenness wherever you find it. Decide what is most pleasing to the rabbi Yeshua.

**Prayer:** Abba, I want to be someone You can count on this Christmas to help others. Help me to stop being so self-centered. Give me time to cook for someone, write a card, or maybe share a special gift to show someone how I changed to become your talmid. Maybe the person I help will want to become a talmid too. I am serious, I want to become more like you. I pray, knowing it's up to me to take action. Amen.

## **November 29**

### **Nephesh (neh'-fesh) Soul**

**Scripture:** Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature (a *nephesh*). Genesis 2:7, Read Genesis 1 and 2

**Family Time:** Visit a live Nativity or act one out at home. Identify the animals in the Creation narrative and talk about why God included them in Jesus' birth story.

Sometimes we experience the ethereal beauty of a frost-laden winter sunrise or encounter the star-gazing wonder of the Milky Way in deep winter and somehow we know there has to be a purpose for it all. King David wrote, *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. (Psalm 19:1)* Have you ever considered that our lives are supposed to reveal the same message—to reveal the glory of God?

Several times in the Bible, we are told to love God with “all our soul,” a phrase that employs the Hebrew word *nephesh* which means soul. *Nephesh* can also mean *inner person* or *inner being* or, more profoundly, it means to love God with our *whole being*. It would take intentional practice to love God that way—we would have to change our inclination or our disposition. We would change our focus for life. We would set up special times, like holy days, and manage our time differently. Let's agree to show God our real intent by taking one day in seven to let Him know how serious we really are. Hmm, sounds familiar! This is the way God loves us. Not only us, but all of Creation, too.

We are called to love God with all we are. This does not mean loving God only when it is convenient. It matters most to God when loving Him is not convenient. Our life needs to be lived in a way, even if there is no speech or sound, that reveals His glory. Each day we have countless opportunities. We need only to pay attention and follow through on the prompting. Share your love for God through Creation with someone today—make the call, write the note, begin the conversation. Their soul, their *nephesh*, cries out too.

**Prayer:** Dear Adonai, You are special to us all. You created everything with a purpose for Your plan. You created the cosmos and gave it a soul. We have a whole season of Advent to celebrate the birth of Your Son. Give me courage to share with those who don't know about You. Show me how I can be a helper and tell someone about You. Keep me brave as I talk and help me to know what words to say. Christmas is a good time to tell others what I know about You. Your works reveal Your glory—it is shining all around. Amen.

## **November 30**

### **Shema (shah-mah or shay-ma) To Hear**

**Scripture:** Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. Deuteronomy 6:4, Read Deuteronomy 6

**Family Time:** Practice listening skills with the entire family. Discover how long family members can remember what they hear. Does the ability to hear what someone said coincide with how we value what he or she said? Why?

Do you ever wake up in a fog of stress and anxiety, unable to focus because you are being pulled in multiple directions? The stress of work, unresolved issues at home, unanswered emails, sickness, tiredness, financial pressures and so many other things too numerous to mention leave many of us feeling flat and unable to enjoy the Advent season. Stress seems to be a modern issue. But what if the ancient people of Israel experienced stress too, and discovered an ancient solution!

God's People have spoken a prayer for thousands of years. It is spoken the moment they awaken to the new day, and it helps focus their attention on God rather than the situation or circumstances they face. This prayer is known as the *Shema*, which means *to listen* or *to hear*.

The word shema also implies action. Jesus said it like this: "Whoever has ears, let them hear." (Matthew 11:15) This was one way he told his talmidim (disciples and followers) to listen to His words and to follow through. Obedience is key. Consider this: when God says shema, it is an invitation for us to listen, respond, appreciate, understand, and act.

Yeshua would have prayed the shema each morning as a way of committing Himself to our loving God and listening to His word. Imagine what your attitude might be like if the first thing you did in the morning was to commit to loving God and listening for His Word. Be sure to adjust expectations as you pray—prayer is not meant for immediate gratification. May you discover the extraordinary truth the ancient People of Israel knew as you pray.

**Prayer:** El Shama—the God who hears me, I set my heart on You. You are trustworthy, faithful, and the Giver of the gift of shalom. Wholeness belongs to you. My life can get chaotic, and I forget You. Please fill me with your peace this Christmas season. Help me silence the outside voices that seem to get louder as Christmas approaches. As I kindle shalom in me, let others see how Your shalom changes me. Give me the opportunity to share my solution. Let my family and friends recognize You as Savior of us all, Amen.

## December 1

### **Torah (to-raw')** The first five books of the Bible, also known as the Pentateuch

**Scripture:** Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. Micah 4:2

**Family Time:** Find some instruction manuals or watch some DIY or "how to" videos on YouTube. Select several and compare them. Talk about why we need instruction manuals, DIY or "how to" videos.

The Torah contains the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—the first five books of the Bible. It includes some of the most beloved narratives in the Bible and provides a solid footing for the entire Bible.

The Torah is the foundation of faith in Jesus as Messiah. All of the concepts associated with the Gospel—such as God, holiness, righteousness, sin, sacrifice, repentance, faith, forgiveness, covenant, grace, and the kingdom of heaven on earth—are introduced in the Torah. Basic sacraments and rituals like baptism, communion, prayer, and blessing all come from the Torah. Faith in Jesus is meaningful because of the Torah. Without the first five books of the Bible, the Gospel has no foundation on which to stand.

The Hebrew word Torah is often translated "law" in most of our English Bibles. But it is so much more! The Torah is called the Law of Moses because Moses wrote it, but the Torah is more than just a legal code. The word *Torah* is from the Hebrew root, *yara* which means "to instruct," or "to teach." Although it does contain laws, Torah itself is not only a "law," but it is God's "teaching" and "instruction." That explains why the word Torah is often used to refer to the whole Bible. Consider from our perspective, that the Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Revelation fall under the broad definition of Torah. It's all God's Word, God's instruction, and all rooted in the Torah of Moses.

The Torah is the revelation of God's love for all people—Jew and Gentile—and how they became the People of God. The Torah is something all believers have in common. We all have this common ground. The Torah is our shared origin. It is God's book.

**Prayer:** Awesome God, You revealed Yourself in many ways. You are Creator, Confidant, Disciplinarian, Provider, Rescuer, Redeemer, Friend and so much more! Why? Why did You work so hard to create a relationship with people who would consistently fail you? Your love and mercy would show the world that You are the true God and different from all the other gods and non-gods of the world. Love. Eternal love that surrounds and surpasses any love we have ever known. Love. Amen.

## December 2      **Sabbath or Shabbat** *(Meal Liturgy included in Appendix, pg 36)*

### **Shabbat (shah-baht') He Rested**

**Scripture:** So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all His work that He had done in Creation. Genesis 2:3, Read Exodus 34

**Family Time:** Follow the Sabbath instructions beginning on page 36. Talk with your kids about how the People of Israel have been fulfilling Shabbat for 3,300 years.

Did you know Jesus celebrated Shabbat every week?

When Gentile believers discover the Jewish roots of their faith, the first questions that arise usually surround the Sabbath. Once they realize that Shabbat was never abolished, questions arise as to practical application. So, if Gentiles are not obligated to honor the Sabbath in the same manner as Jews but wish to partake in the blessings of the sacred day, what should their Sabbath observance look like? How should a Gentile believer's Sabbath differ from that of a Jewish believer?

Gentiles who believe in Jesus as the Messiah should feel free to honor the Shabbat and join in with the rest of Israel, even observing some of the customs of the Jewish people. After all, Shabbat was originally meant to be a universal expression for all people. (Genesis 2:1-3)

1) Individuals will have to decide for themselves on what level they want to take on some of the traditional prohibitions of Shabbat. If you can, cook your Sabbath food ahead of time and plan it with your family or friends. Try simply having a nice family dinner Friday night or something similar. Light two candles, say a few prayers and focus on God because a little Sabbath is better than no Sabbath at all.

2) The three meals of the Sabbath (Friday evening, Saturday morning, and Saturday afternoon) can be very helpful in setting up a structure and consistency. The table prayers, blessings, and some favorite Christmas songs can greatly increase the joy and spirituality of your Advent Sabbath observance. Other aspects of Jewish liturgy such as the evening and morning prayers can enhance the day and provide structure as well.

3) The Sabbath can be a time of rest but also a time to connect with God and study the Scriptures. Reading this (or another) Advent Devotional is a great way to dig into God's Word. Read a favorite Christmas book aloud, or read a book that you've been wanting to read!

4) Take a break from the internet, TV, and your cell phone on Friday night. Of course emergencies will arise and there will be other special circumstances, but in general these activities tend to keep us from fully resting with God, family, and community.

5) If the weather is nice, get out into nature. Take a walk in the snow or count the stars during a night walk. Enjoy God's creation and remember the Genesis origin of the Sabbath. Allow God to provide a place of peace and tranquility for meditation and prayer.

6) Honor the spirit of the Sabbath as best you can by abstaining from travel on the Sabbath day.

7) If at all possible, a person desiring to honor the Sabbath should abstain from financial transactions. Sabbath is not a day for going shopping, making purchases, conducting business, eating out. Sabbath is about making God the priority and preparing to make room in your life for Him.

**Prayer:** Dear Yahweh—M'Kaddesh, *The Lord Who Sanctifies, Who Makes Holy*: Jew and Gentile both need to set aside a holy day for rest and sanctification. We need a time to reconnect, both with our family and with You. Sabbath is the day we prepare for ahead of time, so that all we have left to do is enjoy and delight in this precious gift. As the world becomes more and more hectic and our lives become more and more busy, the practice of Shabbat becomes more and more important. We don't want to turn You away because there is no room in our lives when You knock at the door. We want to be ready to welcome You in. Amen.

## **December 3**

### **Teshuva or shuv (shoov) To Turn Back; Repent, Return**

**Scripture:** I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you. Isaiah 44:22

**Family Time:** Fly a kite. Float a balloon. What does it mean to “drift?” Why is it important to stay connected?

The cry of God’s heart is a cry for us to repent, to turn back to Him. It is so easy to drift. “Repent! The kingdom of God is near!” This is not merely an ominous warning filled with doom and foreboding, rather it is a passionately loving call to a most treasured people. The LORD delights in repentance and is willing to forgive when we seek Him with all of our hearts. Consider some major moments of repentance as He pardoned the transgression of Israel after the golden calf, (Exodus 32) not annihilating the nation to start over with Moses. He pardoned David for his murder and adultery. (2 Samuel 11) He pardoned Jonah when he cried out to Him from the belly of the whale. He pardoned all the people of Nineveh from their atrocities when, with humble hearts, they repented and changed their ways. (Jonah)

Repentance became the Gospel message that He sent His Messiah to proclaim: “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” (Matthew 3:2). The gospel that Jesus adamantly proclaimed was this Gospel of Repentance as the Kingdom of Heaven coming to earth—“the King was coming out into the field.”

The Messiah holds not only the promise of salvation—He is also the voice of repentance. Repentance is the most opulent gift given to us by God. Repentance allows for a clean slate and the remission of severe, justly deserved punishment. We can actively live a life fulfilling the gospel message proclaimed by our Messiah. We are offered a chance to join with our Sovereign LORD in causing the kingdom to break through by repenting, returning to Him, and meeting our Beloved King in the field. We run toward Him and can see Him running toward us as we partake of His lavish gift of repentance.

**Prayer:** Sovereign LORD, you are the King of kings. But You didn’t remain in the throne room, You came looking for me in the field. I need to repent. These are gifts not only to me—but for the entire world. Amen.

## December 4      **Second Sunday of Advent**



### **Messiah (mi-sahy-uh) Advent of Messiah; God's Anointed.**

**Scripture:** Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your God. Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy. Leviticus 20:8-9

**Family Time:** Set up your Nativity or buy one for your household. Talk about each character and develop a description about them. Name each character in your Nativity.

The English word "Messiah" comes from the Hebrew word, *Mashiach*, which means "anointed" or "anointed one." We see examples of both people and objects which are anointed in the Scriptures. Jacob anointed a stone with oil at Bethel, marking the place where the LORD appeared to him in a dream (Gen. 28:18). Priests (Lev. 4:3) and kings (1 Samuel 10:1) were anointed to fulfill their specific roles on behalf of the nation of Israel. The Scriptures even speak of a foreign king, Cyrus, who is called "*His anointed*" (the anointed one of the LORD), to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem on behalf of the nation of Israel (Isaiah 45:1).

The act and the status of being anointed was used in the Bible to set someone or something apart as holy and separate to the LORD for a specific purpose. There were three times Jesus was anointed: his head at the home of a Pharisee by a sinful woman (Luke 7:36-48); his feet at the home of Lazarus and his sisters (John 12:1-8); and while Jesus was at the home of Simon the Leper, a woman poured an expensive vial of perfume over His head and body to prepare Him for burial two days before He was crucified. (Mark 14:1-9 and Matthew 26:6-13)

There was another anointing Jesus received from the Holy Spirit. (Isaiah 11:2, Isaiah 42:1, Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3, John 1) This spiritual anointing by the Holy Spirit in Jesus' life was used to display the glory of God to those to whom He taught and ministered.

The Holy Spirit's work is not limited to the ancient people—the power of the Holy Spirit is also available to work within you. Surrender to Him and invite Him in—exactly the way you invited Jesus into your life. God is interested in your holiness not your happiness. Peter, one of Jesus' chosen disciples declares, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9)

**Prayer:** I ask you now Father, will you give me yet another Helper? I want to live a life that is holy and set apart. I can see where I have allowed the outside world into my life in ways that are detrimental to my spiritual life. Create within me a longing for your holiness and a desire to fill my mind and heart with Your Word. Amen.

## December 5

### **Tikkun Olam (Tik-kuhn oh-lam) Repairing the World**

**Scripture:** All this is from God, Who reconciled us to Himself through Messiah and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Messiah, not counting people's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:18–19

**Family Time:** Serve at the Food Pantry, make an offering for our missionaries, talk about how we can practice acts of kindness for friends, neighbors, and strangers. Talk about our role as followers of Jesus to help heal what is broken.

Tikkun olam means “doing acts to repair our world.” This work reminds us that we are not only responsible for our own interests (moral, spiritual, and material), but also for the interests of the rest of the world. Paul states it this way to the followers in Philippi: “not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” (Philippians 2:4) The idea of tikkun olam has been the practice for the people of God for more than 2,000 years. It is generally believed by many people that tikkun olam will help usher in the coming of the Messiah and the Messianic Age. This word expresses the heart and soul of our responsibility as believers. It is not simply a strategy, but a lifestyle.

In fact, reconciliation is a profound tradition within Judaism and is arguably the key pillar of many Jewish values. Paul even points to the Hebrew Scriptures as a guidebook for reconciliation, “Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us. And the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled.” (Romans 15:4)

At the beginning of chapter 15 of Paul's letter to the Roman believers, he compels the readers to work in accordance with others, as to please one another (not ourselves), building up others for their good. He uses a Greek word, *areskó*, that means to win favor or willingly serve. This word carries a connotation of going the extra mile to make peace or reconcile.

Nowhere is tikkun olam more clearly described than in John 3:16-17. Through His redemptive plan God sought to reconcile all creation to Himself. He did not send Jesus to punish, but to redeem His creation. Perpetual condemnation is the result against those who refuse salvation as a logical outworking of the consequences of sin. God does not send people to everlasting torment, to the contrary, through the hardness of their hearts people choose to go there, away from God's presence. Jesus himself is the ultimate form of tikkun olam.

**Prayer:** Redeeming God, begin in me. I need to be repaired before I do the work of repair in the world. Restore and reconcile me to you first and then show me where to do your work in the broken world. Amen.

## **December 6**

### **Derek (deh'-rek) The Way or the Path**

**Scripture:** A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." Isaiah 40:3-5

**Family Time:** Find a map. A road map is best. Identify all the roads, highways, and other markings. Note there are MANY ways to get from one point to another. The Bible is a guide to the ONE way God wants us to live. Discuss what that means as a family.

Do you ever wonder what Jesus meant when he said He was 'the Way?' The Hebrew word for the way is derek, which means the path you are on or the way you are going. It can also mean the road you are currently on. This word is often used as a spiritual metaphor for how you live your life because every choice you make contributes to the direction you take in life.

When we make good, God-honoring decisions, generally, our outcomes are good. When we make bad decisions, our outcomes can take us to dangerous places. The good news is that God meets us on the way and will redirect us when we ask.

The first time the word derek is used in the Bible is in the Garden of Eden when God says He will guard 'the way' back to the Tree of Life. (Genesis 3:24) When Jesus said that He was the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6), He was saying that He was the way back to God. Jesus is the only way to enter into the fellowship and life God provides for everyone who believes in Him. How can Jesus be the only way? Because He is the only one who knows the way to Eden and what we were designed for from the beginning.

When Jesus said He was 'the Way,' he was announcing that He revealed a way to live that would require us to deny ourselves, pick up our cross, and follow him. (Matthew 16:24) Self-denial would be a foundational value for being Jesus' disciple. Self-denial and controlling your fleshly appetites will set you apart from a world where we are often encouraged to indulge our desires and feed our appetites.

**Prayer:** I can hear the voice of John the Baptist summoning me and speaking to me: "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD, make His paths straight.'" (Mark 1:2). Jesus, lead me to Eden, the place where I belong. Amen.

## December 7

**Kadima (kah-DEE-mah) Forward, Let's Go! Go Now! The Time is now!**

**Scripture:** The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you." Genesis 12:1

**Family Time:** Make plans for relocation for your entire family. What would you have to do to make arrangements to live in another country?

Abraham is the quintessential example of what it means to walk with God. At seventy-five years of age, God summoned Abraham to travel to a distant land and he accepted. Abraham had to leave his country, his relatives, and all that was familiar. He was not given a map, he didn't receive a Bible atlas, and he didn't have a navigation system. Abraham went forward in obedience to God!

There is a moment like this for every disciple of Jesus. It means following in the footsteps of Jesus like never before. No more waiting. No more waffling. You received the summons from your Savior and LORD. This decision isn't a decision you make lightly. It isn't a decision you can make conveniently. It isn't a decision you can put off for another time.

When you are summoned to follow Jesus, you need to comply. Too many of us waver and make excuses as to why we cannot follow. We waste valuable time and become like those in Jesus' parable in Luke 14. God's summons has gone out. We are all urged to come and to convince those close to us to be in attendance at the great feast that has been prepared. But, also heed the warning: Do not make excuses—the time is near.

There are sacred and holy reasons why Abraham has been revered by godly believers for generations. These reasons are known as to why God made a wondrous, blessed covenant with Abraham, promising him a land and a people and an enduring legacy leading all the way to the Messiah. Abraham is cited as an example of faith in Romans 4 and again in Hebrews 11.

Is it time for you to move forward? Is the Messiah summoning you? Let's GO!!

**Prayer:** LORD, I am tempted to put off making this life changing decision. I am sorry for the sin of procrastination that I have committed. I know my sins put distance between us and I know I cannot save myself. Your only Son, Jesus, can save me and eliminate the distance between us. But, now I must comply. It is my obedience You are requiring. I believe Jesus is Your Son, who died for my sins and rose from the dead. I receive Him as my Savior and accept Your summons. It is time. Let's go! Forward in Christ's name! Amen.

## December 8

### **Hasidut (hah-si-doot) To Walk Intimately with God**

**Scripture:** Read the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew Chapters 5-7

**Family Time:** What does it mean to establish good boundaries? Why are there ratings on movies? Talk about healthy boundaries with your children and establish expectations as they mature and get older.

As Jesus looked into the crowd of his followers, He had an idea in mind that was part of the first century culture. The content of Jesus' sermon seems to be focused on the idea of hasidut – (hah-see-DOOT), a term which is often translated loyal, reverent, or totally committed. It means to walk closely with God and be utterly obedient to Him. A hasid (ha-SEED), a passionate person, eagerly asks the question, "What more can I do for you, LORD?"

The idea is not to focus on the minimum requirements, but going beyond the minimum to serve God in a maximum way. Those who practice hasidut go beyond the letter of the law in service to God. They are not limited to do only what they are told, but they look for ways to fulfill God's will in a greater, more expanded, way.

This requires intelligence, planning and anticipating what God wants in any given situation. Ultimately it is service to our Creator. Hasidut is in direct contrast to self-indulgence – bragging, pontificating, doing a service so that others can see. God has no interest in senseless service – that we do things just because we get noticed.

Some define hasidut as sanctified living. It is not doing things which hurt. It is careful, thoughtful, planned and responsible service to God. Hasidut helps us see the overall message of the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus points out various minimums set in scripture, and then says to go beyond that. Scripture says "don't kill" but you should not even stay angry. (Matthew 5:21-26) Scripture says, "don't commit adultery" but you should not even lust. (Matthew 5:27)

This fits completely with Jesus' statement that all the commands can be summarized by "Love the LORD your God." There is always a danger of becoming legalistic and hasidut becomes burdensome. Consider how when you are following God purely out of love for him, you are eager to go beyond the minimum. When love for God motivates us to establish healthy boundaries, we become more aware of the temptation to sin, and we make a plan *not* to fall into sin. It becomes an honor to set up boundaries without becoming arrogant or legalistic about them.

**Prayer:** Jesus, a disciple is more than a convert. I have to admit that I am tempted to do the minimum for You. Now I see You did the maximum for me. Jesus, ignite my passion for more of you. Amen.

## December 9      Sabbath or Shabbat Meal

### Chazaq (khaw-zawk') To be Strong

**Scripture:** But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD. Joshua 24:15

**Family Time:** Go on a family adventure. Do something really hard—together. Dangerous is good—balance dangerous with safety. Debrief as a family.

During seasons of darkness or struggles, we tend to look through the scriptures for help. Jesus reminds His disciples that “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) When Jesus said these words, He was giving them His peace (shalom). Jesus wasn’t encouraging His disciples to roll over or be submissive. Jesus was challenging them to stand firm and believe in His Way—*especially* when they were being challenged and their faith was on the line.

God had already set the precedent with Joshua. God said, “Be strong and courageous... for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go!” (Joshua 1:9) This is known as *chazaq—to behave with strong courage and urgency*. It also means to confidently walk into the challenges set before you.

We build confidence by doing difficult or hard things together. Challenges can make us come alive! They can help us develop skills, create new bonds of friendship, and lead us in new directions. In Jesus’ development strategy for disciples, faith is not limited to what we believe, it is something we do even in the midst of adversity.

Chazaq is a call for courage and boldness. Transformation of our hearts and the world won’t happen easily or overnight. Long-suffering and perseverance are virtues for a reason! Courageous hearts step out with faith knowing the battle can be long and arduous—but that doesn’t stop us from going forth!

The people had been living in darkness for a long time. Jesus was the True Light. But His disciples were the ones whom Jesus challenged with the responsibility of leadership. It is time to make the choice—step up and lead, knowing the Messiah is with you.

**Prayer:** LORD, you are the Strong Tower. You desire even greater things from me. I confess that I have been secure in my comfort zone for far too long. I fell into the trap of choosing myself—today I choose You. I will serve the LORD—even in the midst of adversity. Amen.

## December 10

### **Berakah (ber-aw-kah') Blessing, or Expanding Godly Influence**

**Scripture:** When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! Luke 1:41-42, Read Jeremiah 17:7-8, Numbers 6, Matthew 5

**Family Time:** Create a "Blessing Bowl." Cut a piece of paper into small strips and write blessings or ideas for whom to bless. Fold them. Put them into a bowl. Select one each day through Advent. Talk about what you learned about blessing others.

According to the Bible, if you are a follower of the Messiah, you pray—everyday, without ceasing, from sunrise to sunset. Few of us ever come close to that description without some kind of strategy and plan. Paul wrote to the believers in Thessalonica that we should always be joyful and never stop praying. (1 Thessalonians 6:16-17) Never stop praying—how did anyone get any work done? Someone will be sure to ask, "What's the point of trying?"

Sometimes we know how to pray. Other times, we struggle to find the words. Paul and other leaders like him developed a list of prayers called the *berakah*—also known as the blessings. Jesus' culture blessed every thing and every action a person may come into contact with during the day! A blessing is a way to give thanks to God. To bless means to ask for increase or to expand God's influence a person's life.

Bless God! Bless you! You are blessed when... Bless your coming and going. Bless your meals and give God thanks for providing the food. Fathers, bless your sons. Mothers, bless your daughters. Bless. Bless. Bless some more. Increase! Increase! Increase! Jesus Himself commands us to "bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." (Luke 6:28) Paul says to bless those who persecute you! (Romans 12:14) Bless! And bless some more, all day long!

These commands and citations seem ludicrous in the world we currently live in! Jesus doesn't mince words—because the great temptation we face as Christians is to act like the world instead of acting like Jesus. In the midst of all that is coming at us, our families and against us as the Church...we bless.

**Prayer:** Practice the berakah blessing by saying: Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the universe who...saved me, bestowed goodness to me and my family, brought me a little spice for my life, created the fruit of earth, granted us life—sustained us and enabled us to reach this day, restored my soul, and gave rest to my eyes. Amen!

## December 11    Third Sunday of Advent



### Tefillah (te-feel-ah) Prayer

**Scripture:** But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard.” Luke 1:13a, Read Exodus 3, Psalm 34 & 66, Proverbs 15:29

**Family Time:** Create a family prayer journal. Write down what your family is praying for and check it daily. Notice when prayers are answered. Talk about what answered prayer means and why it is important to never give up hope that God will answer prayers.

Life had become unpredictable preceding the birth of the Messiah. Roman occupation made travel throughout the empire safe, so streams of pilgrims journeyed from all over the world to Jerusalem for the holy days or festivals and for worship. Herod the Great had ordered upgrades to the temple. Daily sacrifice, worship and rituals required twenty-four divisions of priests who rotated in and out of the temple on a timetable like gears in an ancient clock. The priests worked in shifts day and night.

One day while Zechariah was doing his priestly routine, an unexpected event disrupted their well-ordered world. This one unexpected event would eventually disrupt our world too. Zechariah and Elizabeth suffered from unfulfilled longings. As faithful servants of God, they both endured the disappointment and pain of childlessness.

Unfulfilled yearnings, unmet expectations and memories of the past can sideline anyone’s faith. It is not hard to imagine that Zechariah and Elizabeth had given up hope of ever having a child of their own. An angel appeared to Zechariah while he was not expecting to hear from God. There was no way to prepare and there was no way to know the time or the hour—the angel just showed up with an important message: *Your prayer has been heard.*

Advent is a season for hearing supernatural news. Sometimes all we need is acknowledgment that God really does hear and listen to our prayers. Have you been waiting a long time with unfulfilled longings and unmet needs? How have those waiting years changed and shaped you for the better? How has waiting affected your life positively?

**Prayer:** I confess, Lord, that I am often impatient. My resources, wisdom and power are limited. I often feel like I have little control in my life. I grow frustrated with the challenges and unexpected troubles that crop up. Help me realize that setbacks and circumstances can shape my character. May I learn to wait on You, to hope in You, to trust in You, to delight myself in You, and to unreservedly commit my ways to You for I, too, long to hear the words: Your prayer has been heard. Amen

## **December 12**

### **Or (or) Light**

**Scripture:** The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned. Isaiah 9:2, Read John 1

**Family Time:** Go exploring or go for a walk at night lighting your way with a flashlight. Light a candle in a dark room and discover how long it takes for your eyes to adjust to the light. Children are often excited about searching for things in the dark—remind them that Jesus came searching for them to give them the gift of eternity.

Both Advent and Hanukkah use candlelight imagery to express the important themes of each celebration. Advent is a season of preparation before Christmas and marks the beginning of the Christian liturgical year. The term 'Advent' originated from the Latin '*adventus*,' which means 'coming' or 'arrival.' Therefore, the Advent season is observed for Christians as the celebration of the Messiah's coming at his birth and the return of the Messiah at the second coming.

Hanukkah celebrates the military victory of the Maccabees over the Syrian Greek army and the rededication of the holy temple in Jerusalem. The miracle of Hanukkah is that only one vial of oil was found with just enough oil to illuminate the temple lamp for one day and yet it lasted for eight full days. Hanukkah is celebrated for eight days to commemorate this miracle.

The lighting of candles is an important part of the celebration of both Advent and Hanukkah. An Advent wreath uses three purple candles and one pink candle to mark each of the Sundays leading up to Christmas. As an additional candle is lit each week, Christians remember and look forward to the light of the world, Jesus, entering into human history as the light that dispels the darkness. On each night of Hanukkah, an additional candle is lit on the menorah in remembrance of the miracle of God's provision and victory over the darkness.

We celebrate these two feasts during the darkest part of the winter season and draw on the humble light of candles as lights to shatter the winter darkness. Consider how you can share God's light around you and dispel the darkness of fear, sin, and despair in the lives of others this Christmas.

**Prayer:** Miracle-working God, You choose to work through Your people and to set a path for us in the midst of the darkness. Rather than remove us from the situation, You promise to lead us through. Lead us this year. We surrender to Your leadership. Amen.

## **December 13**

### **Evus (ay-booce') Feeding Trough or Manger**

**Scripture:** This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Luke 2:12

**Family Time:** Visit a local farm, pet shop or animal shelter and help feed animals.

At his birth, Jesus was laid in the *evus* (Lk 2:7,12,16). Traditionally, this Hebrew word has been translated as "manger." The true definition is an animal's feeding trough. What does it mean that Jesus was *put into a feeding trough*?

There is a lot of eating in the Bible, done by Jesus, people and animals. Here is some food for thought. God provided good food in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:1-25), manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16:1-36), grain in Egypt during Joseph's leadership throughout a famine that could have destroyed both human beings and livestock (Genesis 41), bread for David while he was on the run from King Saul (1 Samuel 21), fish and bread for 4000 on the east side of the Sea of Galilee (John 6) and fish and bread for the disciples after the resurrection. (John 21)

Bread would become incredibly important for Christians. As Jesus was tempted, He affirmed that we do not live by bread alone. (Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4) Jesus said, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger." (John 6:35) Jesus taught His disciples to pray for daily bread. (Matthew 6:11) Jesus broke bread, blessed it, and gave it to His disciples which became a means of grace through Holy Communion. (Matthew 26:26) Bread was for sustenance but there is also the promise of gathering for feasts and celebrations.

Holy days and festivals are built into the year as a sign of God's provision and community sharing. Passover keeps the account of Israel's freedom alive for all generations. Shavuot is Pentecost and the celebration of God's holy word revealed at Mount Sinai. Sukkot is the festival of tabernacles and provides the experience of camp-style living in temporary dwelling places. Jesus celebrated the feasts and attended wedding banquets (John 20), fancy meals at Pharisees' homes (Luke 7), and a grand meal with tax collectors and sinners. (Luke 19) Eventually, Jesus would feed everyone.

**Prayer:** Jehovah-Jireh, You are my provider. The evidence is clear throughout the Bible that you provide more than bread or food and that I am not meant to live by food alone but by every word of God. Jesus, what I hunger for only You provide. I confess that I often look elsewhere and worry too much about things of this world. Forgive me for even thinking I could fend for myself. I long for Your fullness in my life. Amen.

## December 14

### **Etz Chayim (etz chai-YEEM) Tree of Life**

**Scripture:** Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Revelation 22:14, Read Genesis 1-3, Revelation 2, Proverbs 13:12, Ezekiel 47:12

**Family Time:** Identify different trees in your neighborhood. Try to identify the trees of the Bible. How can your Christmas tree connect you with Jesus?

Trees play a major role in the Bible. They are a familiar sight in the Biblical landscape from Genesis to Revelation. Trees and all their variations are lifesavers. The fruit from the tree of life in the Garden, located in the eastern part of Eden, provided food for Adam and Eve. Consider how other trees provided life saving capabilities: the cyprus wood for the ark (Genesis 6:14), and the leaf from the olive tree was a sign of shalom and the end of the flood. (Genesis 8:11) Acacia wood was used for the Ark of the Covenant. (Exodus 25:10)

Other than people and God, trees are the most mentioned living thing in the Bible. There are trees in the first chapter of Genesis, in the first psalm (Psalm 1:3), and on the last page of Revelation (22:2). As if to underscore all these trees, the Bible refers to wisdom as a tree. (Proverbs 3:18) The only physical description of Jesus in the Bible occurs in Isaiah. "Want to recognize the Messiah when he arrives?" Isaiah asks. "Look for the man who is like a tender shoot growing out of dry ground." (Isaiah 53:2)

Tradition tells us carpentry was the chosen vocation of Joseph and Jesus. Nazareth was home to many families where the men were skilled craftsmen. The irony that astounds us even today is how harmful a tree would become for the carpenter from Nazareth. Why? Because "cursed is he who is hanged on a tree." (Deuteronomy 21:23, Gal. 3:13)

And yet, without that special tree on Calvary, there is no atonement, forgiveness, resurrection, nor Good News. The cross became a lifesaver in the most unexpected and profound way—the tree of eternal life. Since trees are a unifying theme and act as signs of hope on the redemptive path throughout scripture, it is no surprise to find that Jesus brought life and forgiveness and reopened the door to paradise by dying on a tree (Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; Gal.3:13; 1 Peter 2:24-25).

**Prayer:** Jehovah Jireh, You will always provide! Above all, let me never forget your greatest provision of Jesus—Your Son, Your only Son whom You love—who went up the hill of Calvary carrying a wooden cross on his back, to be the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Thank You for Jesus! Thank You for the gift of faith in him! Thank You for forgiveness! Thank You for eternal life! Let my mouth confidently declare that You are Jehovah Jireh, the LORD, my provider. Amen.

## December 15

### **Emunah (em-oo-naw') Faith**

**Scripture:** For nothing will be impossible with God. Luke 1:37, Read Proverbs 3:5-6, Romans 10:17, Galatians 2, Ephesians 2:8-9, Hebrews 11, James 2

**Family Time:** Take time to listen to one another's fears. Talk about the positive and negative aspects of fear. Faith isn't the absence of fear—it is the willingness to feel fear and still do what God says. Managing our impulses is key.

Life is all about growth and improvement. Day by day, month by month, year by year, it is important to take an assessment of our spiritual life. So, if we're still angry or still lacking in an abundance of faith, we have work to do. Consider faith like a construction zone. We need to focus on our Christian maturity and develop our own faith. Our kids, extended family, and friends should be able to see concrete signs of improvement: fewer angry outbursts, greater patience, more self-control, less wringing of hands, fewer words of fear and worry, greater equanimity in the face of challenge, more verbal expressions of sincere trust in God and in His timing and ways.

Imperfect as we are, we have the authority and the obligation to help children develop their *emunah!* Parents and leaders must do our part to help our children learn to trust Jesus and put their confidence in Him.

Some people think of faith as purely an intellectual decision. Perhaps we know inwardly there is a God and we may even believe in Him. But, that doesn't mean we have an *intimate relationship* or *trust* Him. Emunah literally means "to act with firmness" according to God's will. It means taking control of your life, emotions and decisions. Emunah is more about action and why the people with the most robust faith are not likely those with advanced theological degrees, but people who are daily, actively living out God's will with determination.

Faith is measured by how well we love—not how much we know. Faith is transformational in the way we act and respond to others. So, try a faith exercise and put to memory the verse for today: "For nothing will be impossible with God." Luke 1:37

**Prayer:** Sovereign and unchanging God, I stand firm today on Your Word. You are the Most High God and the deliverer of nations from captivity. I commit to trust You and believe that You have my best interest in mind. I need to trust in You and that all Your ways are just and righteous. Help me make today my day of transformation. Amen.

## December 16 Prepare a Shabbat Meal for your family!

**Tzaddik (tsa-dik ) A Person who follows the correct path; A Righteous and saintly woman or man according to Jewish standards**

**Scripture:** Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. Matthew 1:19, Read Genesis 6 & 7, Job 1, Mark 6:20, Luke 1, Luke 23:50

**Family Time:** Host a cleaning class. Talk about why, how, and what we use to clean. Discuss what it means to be really clean inside our hearts.

Joseph played a crucial role in the life of Jesus. He is the man who stepped up to be the father of the household where Jesus grew up. Joseph is introduced in Matthew's gospel as tzaddik or righteous. (Matthew 1:19) Joseph was likely raised to become a righteous and holy man. By remaining as Mary's husband, Joseph made a choice that was not religiously correct according to the Law of Moses, but fulfilled the direct intervention by an angel who revealed God's plan.

Joseph is not the only tzaddik in the Christmas story. Luke also describes Elizabeth and Zechariah as righteous. (Luke 1:6) Luke, being a Gentile, would have used the Greek term dikaios for the idea of righteousness.

The Bible portrays a tzaddik as a person who is calibrated to God's original concept of being human. Imagine being so intertwined with God—soul, spirit and body— that you live into the reality God intended for you. This is different from modern definitions of the word righteous, and it challenges us to do some internal checking. Am I living into the potential God desires for me?

Holiness is what God requires. There are people who show us the way to follow God throughout the Bible: Noah, Job, Daniel, Esther, and Ruth come to mind as we think about those whom God chose as righteous not on their own accord but because of their unblemished hearts that were totally surrendered to God. God can and does act with those who will be obedient. Joseph had an obligation, according to the letter of the law, to either divorce Mary or make a public spectacle of her, much like the woman caught in adultery in John 8. But an angel visited Joseph to give him clear directions on not only how to care for Mary but also how to provide a righteous home for Jesus.

**Prayer:** Jehovah T'sidkenu', The God of My Righteousness, You are perfect in all of Your ways. You gave us the perfect example and powerful intercessor in Your only Son, Jesus. His perfection must reign in me, for You require perfection. I confess that I have tried to live through my own definition of righteousness. Cleanse me of my unrighteousness and empower me to provide a holy place for Jesus to live in me. Amen.

## **December 17**

### **Naba (nah-bah') Prophecy**

**Scripture:** Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. Isaiah 11:1-2, Also Genesis 3, 12, 15 & 22, Exodus 12, Numbers 24, Deuteronomy 18:15-19, 2 Samuel 7:12-16, Ruth 4, Psalm 118:22-24, Isaiah 7, 9, 53 & 61:1-2, Daniel 7-12, Hosea 11, Micah 5, Malachi 3

**Family Time:** Get a green plant or visit a greenhouse. Discover how some types of plants have shoots while other plants have seeds. What is the difference?

The prophet Isaiah promised that, one day, a new branch would grow up from the old stump of the Davidic dynasty. A new king from the house of David would arise. The prophets called the new shoot the Mashiach, which means, "anointed one." The prophets anointed the kings of Israel with oil to symbolize the LORD's Spirit resting upon them to rule. The word Mashiach has the same meaning as our English words Messiah and Christ: "anointed one." The title referred to the king of Israel. Therefore, the name Jesus Christ could fairly be translated into English as "Jesus the King." The name "Christ Jesus" means "King Jesus."

In 515 BC, the Jewish people who returned and rebuilt Jerusalem after the captivity in Babylon hoped that their governor Zerubbabel, a descendant of David who had returned with them from Babylon, might be the promised king, the shoot from the stump of David's house. He was not. Nevertheless, the prophets promised the Messiah would yet come forth from the line of Zerubbabel—the Davidic heir.

Generations passed. The heirs to the throne of David continued to wait. Empires rose and fell. Still no Davidic king emerged. No branch grew from the stump.

The descendants of David held onto the promises. They kept careful records of their genealogies because they knew that the coming Messiah must be born from their family. Their genealogical records were like legal deeds to the throne of Israel. Before anyone could claim to be a candidate for Messiah, he must first prove his ancestry from the house of David. Scripture uses the title "Son of David" as a name for the Messiah. This also explains why Matthew calls Jesus "the Messiah, the son of David." To say that Jesus is a "son of David" means He is an heir to the royal dynasty, and a legitimate contender for the throne of David. The early believers, His first followers, and His family members all recognized Him as a Davidic heir.

**Prayer:** Covenant-Making-God, You entered into an eternal covenant with King David, promising him that his family and his throne will endure forever, and the throne of Israel will belong to his seed. Jesus is the King of kings, He is the true and rightful leader who needs total access to my heart. I long to serve at the command of my King. Amen.

**December 18**    **Hanukkah Begins**  
**Fourth Sunday of Advent**



**Zakar (zaw-kar') To Remember**

**Scripture:** Then came the Festival of Dedication (Hanukkah) at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. John 10:22-23



**Family Time:** Discover the story about the Maccabees—a brave family who stood up against the cruel bullies of their time. Talk about bullying. We need to support one another and there are times to stand up for what you believe.

Did you know that Hanukkah is in the Gospels?

Hanukkah is not mentioned in the Old Testament because the story of Hanukkah happened after the last book, Malachi, had been written. However, Hanukkah is mentioned in the New Testament. Jesus went to the Temple for the Feast of Hanukkah.

John states that Jesus was in Solomon's Colonnade for the "Feast of Dedication," which is another name for Hanukkah. "At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon" (John 10:22-23). Jesus likely celebrated this feast.

Hanukkah is the Festival of Light. The menorah was sometimes called the "light of the world." Jesus said, "I am the light of the world," (John 8:10) and at another time he told his disciples, "You are the light of the world." (Matthew 5:14-16) Being the light in the world takes on new meaning as we consider the Hanukkah candles.

During part of the time between the Old Testament and the New, a tyrant king named Antiochus Epiphanies IV from Damascus ruled over the Jews and forced them to worship Greek gods. Jewish rebels, the Maccabees, fought for their freedom for three years and victoriously reclaimed the holy temple in Jerusalem. In order to rededicate the temple, they needed oil to light the menorah but they could only find enough to keep the flames burning for one night. And here's the miracle: The oil lasted for eight days. In that time, they were able to make more oil and keep the eternal flame lit.

There are many lessons to be learned through the example of the people of God in the story of Hanukkah. They rededicated their lives and fought for what was right. God blessed them and God provided for them as their faith increased.

**Prayer:** Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, You performed wondrous deeds for our ancestors. May it be so in our day and in our season. Amen.

## December 19

### **Chen or Chesed (khen or khess' ed) Unmerited Favor, Grace**

**Scripture:** I will tell of the LORD's unfailing grace [chesed]. I will praise the LORD for all He has done. I will rejoice in His great goodness to Israel, which He has granted according to His mercy [racham] and grace [chesed]. Isaiah 63:7

**Family Time:** Make cookies, soup, or bread and deliver it to a neighbor or shut-in. Attach a note with 'grace' written on it.

Did you know grace is part of the whole Bible? Many believers think that the Old Testament is all about the Law and the New Testament is all about grace. Some believers even consider grace the opposite of the Law. While it is true that grace is evident in the New Testament, grace did not just appear with the arrival of Jesus.

Grace can be found within and throughout the books of Genesis to Malachi. Grace is not the antithesis nor the opposite of the Law. Both the Law and grace endure together. Not only is grace active in the Old Testament, but so is faith in the LORD. "Abram *believed* the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness." (Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:3, 22; Galatians 3:6) In fact, Habakkuk 2:4 states that the just will live by faith!

God's grace is evident in the entire word of God and did not begin in the New Testament. The idea that the Old Testament and Judaism is a religion of laws while the New Testament and Christianity is a religion of grace is simply incorrect. Grace originates in the character of God who does not change. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. (Hebrews 13:8)

The two Hebrew words that essentially express grace are chen and chesed. In the Greek language, these words have been translated as charis and eleos. In the New Testament, *charis* is often translated as grace and *eleos* as mercy. In both instances, charis and eleos are used to translate chesed.

God's grace for His people is miraculously explored through His redeeming work of freeing the Israelites from slavery, and freeing all of humanity through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Even though the Israelites and the Gentiles are a rebellious people and God knew this—He redeemed us and called us His beloved.

**Prayer:** LORD, thank you for Your abundant, lavish grace. Thank You for the unexpected, unmerited favor You've showered on my life. Help me put myself in the path of Your grace and truth. Help me not neglect the disciplines I need to meet with You regularly and to drink deeply from the water of life. Your forgiveness and grace are not lost on me. Amen.

## **December 20**

### **Michshol (mik-shuhl) A Stumbling Block—Protecting Someone from Sin**

**Scripture:** Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against. Luke 2:34

**Family Time:** Play the Trust Game by leading a blindfolded player. Discuss what you learned. Take turns and use noise-cancelling headphones for added difficulty.

“Do not place a stumbling block before the blind.” There is an obvious and plain meaning in these words. We are not to live only concerning ourselves or live as though our personal lives have no meaning to anyone but God. Living a God-honoring life means we are concerned for others. There is a collective responsibility for those who want to live in a God-honoring way within marriage, family, community, and world. We are held accountable by God throughout the Bible as to how we treat one another and how we love our neighbor as ourself. (Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:37-40, Mark 12:30-31, Luke 10:25-37; Romans 13:9)

Christians must think about the obligation we have to one another. God summoned us to be different, so that we may collectively create a society worthy of being God’s covenant partner and we may be fit to be an example to other nations. There is also another Biblical meaning. We may not do anything to cause another person to sin. It is considered a greater sin to make it easier for someone else to sin.

We are not to become nit-picky. (Matthew 7:1-5) There are obvious and plain ways we all sin and recognizing it within ourselves is imperative. Dealing with sin within Christian community must be done as Jesus would expect it in Matthew 18.

Simeon recognized that Jesus would become a stumbling block. Many would fall and others would rise. Blindness would keep people from seeing the truth of Jesus. We are witnesses to His work, and to this day, Jesus is spoken against. There may be a reminder for us this Christmas season to not intentionally put a stumbling block in the way of someone discovering Jesus. Measure your words wisely, accept someone who’s been far away, be gentle in your correction, forgive as you have been forgiven.

**Prayer:** Eloah selikot, God of forgiveness: Help me remember the wondrous deeds You performed among your people. I can become stubborn and hard-hearted. Please, forgive me. You are gracious, compassionate, and slow to anger. Your lovingkindness is a banner over us forever. You have not forsaken your people and neither shall I. Amen.

## December 21

### **Kol am Berit (Kohl-am-Beer'it) All the People of the Covenant**

**Scripture:** I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles. Isaiah 42:6

**Family Idea:** Develop your own family covenant. Establish an agreement for accepted behaviors, and expectations for making your family a priority. Plan for how as a family you will develop and learn to apply new rules as you age and grow.

People have always been the apple of God's eye. God chose Israel by His sovereign love and by this same sovereign love He includes us. Likewise, by this sovereign love, He chooses and keeps choosing us. It seems so simple yet profound: God loves us. His love is possibly the most profound reality of the Bible. The God of the universe is not indifferent to us. He infinitely wills to fulfill our good. He has a personal concern for you as He does for each and every person in this world.

This is the entire significance of the Good News of the New Covenant, and the only explanation for the sacrificial death of Messiah Yeshua, Jesus Christ. God did not send out some messenger boy to tell us of His love; rather, He came in the flesh to sacrificially demonstrate it Himself (John 3:16, Romans 5:6-8). He understands our suffering, not as a doctor, but as a fellow sufferer, for on this earth He was "*a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*" (Isaiah 53:3). He endured these sorrows because He loves us.

To God, love is a personal matter. The Hebrew word for love is *ahavah*: a deep desire which reflects God's heart. Since He demonstrated this love personally, we need to respond personally to Him by trusting in Yeshua and personally receiving His love. This is also why we share Him with others. We personally share the Good News with Jewish people because God's love is a personal matter.

**Prayer:** Covenant-making God, help me accept Your love. I must admit that I don't always understand it. I don't always understand Your ways. I want Your love even though it is difficult for me to accept. Give me eyes that see and I will be satisfied. Amen.

## **December 22**

### **Kavod Adonai (ka-vohd Ah-duh-nigh) Respect, Dignity, Glory of the LORD**

**Scripture:** An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. Luke 2:9

**Family Time:** Talk about angels in the Bible. Identify angels on a Christmas tree or card. Purchase one or display an angel as a reminder that they are always with us.

When Christians witness an amazing sunset, relish the colors of autumn, or see a shooting star streak across the night sky we might think of Psalm 19:1 *the heavens declare the glory of the LORD!* Glory is beautiful. The Hebrew definition of glory will expand our understanding of this word.

Kavod is the Hebrew word for glory. It is also the root word for 'rich.' This is also where we get the idea that someone who is wealthy is 'loaded.' The biblical sense of the word means once we are in contact with God's glory, we experience the weight of His attributes, such as honor, compassion, mercy, grace, long-suffering, goodness, truth, forgiveness, justice, kindness. The thirteen attributes of God are found in Numbers 14:18, Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2, Micah 7:18, Nahum 1:3, Psalms 86:15, 103:8, 145:8, and Nehemiah 9:17.

Glory is a word that turns out not to be so simple after all. It's not so easy to translate. We can compare the root kavod in other biblical contexts:

In Genesis 45:13, kavod is held up as an attribute to attain, as exemplified by the case of Joseph, who attains kavod while in Egypt.

The prophet Isaiah famously uses kavod in his description of the whole earth being filled with God's kavod (glory). (Isaiah 6:3)

Exodus 24:16 uses Kavod Adonai to refer to the Presence that dwelled on Mount Sinai. The Kavod Adonai was present the night Jesus was born.

Kavod or glory bridges the gap between what is holy or eternal and what is created and temporal. Great holy revelations were experienced with the miracle of the Exodus, the creation of the people of God, the giving of God's holy word at Mount Sinai, and the annunciation to the shepherds that the Messiah was born. God's glory is more than some shiny explosion in the night sky—it is the weighty presence of a holy God.

**Prayer:** It is easy to underestimate you, LORD Most High! I see your majesty displayed throughout the galaxy and marvel at your work in Creation. But I often fail to see your glory displayed right next to me. Help me. Help me see your glory in the eyes of the elderly, the college students, the children, my family, and especially my Savior. Amen.

## December 23    Shabbat Meal

### **B'rit Chadashah (ba-reet kha-dash-ah) The New Covenant to Renew, Redeem, Restore**

**Scripture:** Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Jeremiah 31:31

**Family Time:** Goal setting exercise. Set a goal, make a plan, achieve it. Why is goal setting important? God set a goal and achieved it—why is that important?

The biblical covenants form the unifying link of God's salvation through the Bible. Initiated through Noah, each covenant pointed toward the goal of the new covenant ratified through the blood of Jesus Christ. Each covenant revealed with clarity how God writes His own job description with all His expectations, and signs it. God is to be trusted.

The first clearcut covenant in the Bible is between God and Noah after the flood. (Genesis 9) The Abrahamic covenant follows soon after in Genesis 13, laying the groundwork for the nation of Israel and the coming Messiah, through whom God would bless all the nations of the world. The Mosaic covenant (Exodus 19 and 24) continued God's relationship with the nation of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, calling them to reflect the glory of their Lord to the nations around them. The covenant made with King David (2 Samuel 7) prophesied of the coming Messiah, the Anointed One who would rule perfectly on David's throne forever. Jesus, the Messiah, established the New Covenant Himself.

God, Himself, is the builder, restorer, redeemer of souls and of nations. He makes all things new. At Christmas, we celebrate Jesus as God-made-flesh and the family member who redeems us. He is the cornerstone. He is the Master, King of kings, Righteous One, the Lamb of God, the Bread of Life, the Living Water, and so much more.

Jesus took the Cup of Redemption, the third cup of the Passover Seder, and instructed the disciples to partake of it as a sign of the covenant. (Matthew 26:27; Luke 22:19) Through the righteous action of Jesus' atonement, Jew and Gentile are renewed, redeemed, and restored into right relationship with God. We repent of our sins, ask for and receive forgiveness, and take the cup and drink it.

**Prayer:** Abba, I have seen the damage firsthand that sin can produce. I know the destruction, ache, and devastation sin causes. At times it seems impossible that anything beautiful or good can come from such deep loss and destruction. I know this is not the end of the story. You have something far greater to come. Abba, I ask for Your restoration. I know the process may not be what I think or plan, but I know You have my best interest in mind, and can bring full restoration in all our lives. I surrender my desire to control over to Your ever-loving will and kindness. Amen.

## December 24

### **Besuras HaGeulah (beh-sur-ahs ha-ge-oo-lah) Good News/Tidings of Redemption**

**Scripture:** Luke 2 and Zechariah 2:10-13

**Family Time:** Read the scriptures aloud. Discuss the passages and share insights about what God was doing.

If you received a message with the best news you have ever heard, what would that message say? How would you prefer to receive the good news?

Christmas Eve has its own traditions. Every once in a while we are tempted to 'spice things up a bit.' It seems like those experiences are the ones that stand out in our memory. Traditionally, we read the incredible story of the birth of Jesus. We read about the angel of the Lord and the heavenly host appearing to the shepherds who were terrified! The angel came with *Besuras HaGeulah*, good news, or tidings of redemption.

"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."

Luke 2:10-11

Part of the reason the shepherds were so terrified was that throughout the Bible angels were sent by God to interact with humans in several different ways—and one of those ways was as agents of justice and judgement. (Genesis 19, Isaiah 6) There were times when angels were sent by God to direct humans who were acting in accordance with God's will. (Genesis 32:1, Judges 6:22, 1 Chronicles 21:30, Matthew 28:5) Other times in the Bible, angels were sent to offer comfort, guidance, and compassion. (Psalm 91, Matthew 1) Angels serve God and work in perfect union and harmony with His will.

On the night of the angels' visitation, their message would 'spice things up a bit' and cause a great disturbance—not the typical tradition, and definitely memorable. The announcement included the notification of a birth, and the good news of redemption that was for all people. This is the point in history where everything changes. Redemption didn't come in a neat box or as a declaration on paper. Redemption was *born*.

**Prayer:** El Olam—Everlasting God, Your Word remains true. You kept Your promise as You worked through Your covenants and through Your unfailing love. We put You in a tough position, but You remained steadfast and unmovable. You are to be trusted. On this night, we recommit ourselves to You and Your will in our personal lives and in Your world. Glory to God in the highest! The Messiah has come! Praise Adonai! Amen.

## **Appendix:**

### **Guide and Example for A Messianic Evening Shabbat Service at Home**

#### **Order of Worship for Erev Shabbat (Evening of the Sabbath)**

Shabbat, or the Sabbath, is celebrated because the Lord commanded us to keep this holy day. Just as He created for six days and then rested on the seventh, we too are to cease from our work on the seventh day of the week. This, first, gives us time to focus on the Lord and on our relationship with Him. It also reminds us that all of our time belongs to God, and that all that we have comes from His hand. He alone is our provider and He cares for us.

#### **Preparation for Shabbat celebration you will need: \*(see additional items below)**

two candlesticks with candles,  
 wine and/or juice,  
 2 loaves of Challah or other bread  
 your meal/dinner for the evening—often matzo ball soup!

#### **Prayer for the Lighting of the Shabbat Candles** (Said by mother or any woman)

The mother lights the candles, and then covers her eyes with her hands and offers the following blessing:

“Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to be a light to the nations, and Who gave to us Jesus our Messiah, the light of the world.”

(Barukh atta Adonai eloheinu meleck ha-olam, asher kideshanu bmitzvotav ve-tsivanu lehiyot or le-goyim v’natan-lanu et Yeshua Meshicheinu ha or ha-olam.)

#### **A scripture reading: Deut. 5:1-32**

## **Blessing over the Children—Birkat Habanim**

**For the Sons:** (Parents say the following blessings over their sons and daughters.)

Father: May the Lord bless you and keep you. May he cause His face to shine upon you. May He lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.

(Yevarechecha Adonai veyeeshmerecha! Yaer Adonai panav eleycha veechoonecha!  
Yeesa Adonai panev eleycha vayasem lecha ahalom!) (Yesimcah Elohim le Ephrayim  
vechi Menashe.)

May the Lord always be with you. May He bring you home unto the land prepared for you. May God bless you and grant you long life.

Mother: May the Lord fulfill our Sabbath prayer for you. May God make you good husbands and fathers.

Father: May He prepare and send holy wives for you. May the Lord protect and defend you. May His Spirit fill you with grace. May our family grow in happiness. Please hear our Shabbat prayer, Amen.

### **For the Daughters:**

Father: May the Lord bless you and keep you. May he cause His face to shine upon you. May He lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. May God make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah.

(Yevarechecha Adona veyeeshmerecha! Yaer Adonai panav eleycha veechoonecha!  
Yeesa Adonai panev eleycha vayasem lecha shalom! Yesimech Elohim ke Sarah Rivka  
Rachel ve Leah.)

May the Lord always be with you. May He bring you home unto the land prepared for you. May God bless you and grant you long life.

Mother: May the Lord fulfill our Sabbath prayer for you. May God make you good mothers and wives.

Father: May He bring you a husband who will love, cherish, and care for you. May the Lord protect and defend you. May His Spirit fill you with grace. May our family grow in happiness. Please hear our Shabbat prayer, Amen.

## A Woman of Valor—Eshet Chayil

Husband/men: Lord, I thank You for giving me a wife.

<sup>10</sup> Who can find a virtuous wife?

For her worth is far above rubies.

<sup>11</sup> The heart of her husband safely trusts her; So he will have no lack of gain.

<sup>12</sup> She does him good and not evil All the days of her life.

<sup>17</sup> She girds herself with strength, And strengthens her arms. . .

<sup>20</sup> She extends her hand to the poor,

Yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy.

<sup>21</sup> She is not afraid of snow for her household,

For all her household is clothed with scarlet.

<sup>22</sup> She makes tapestry for herself;

Her clothing is fine linen and purple.

<sup>23</sup> Her husband is known in the gates,

When he sits among the elders of the land.

<sup>25</sup> Strength and honor are her clothing; She shall rejoice in time to come.

<sup>26</sup> She opens her mouth with wisdom,

And on her tongue is the law of kindness.

<sup>27</sup> She watches over the ways of her household,

And does not eat the bread of idleness. <sup>28</sup> Her children rise up and call her blessed;

Her husband also, and he praises her: <sup>29</sup> "Many daughters have done well,

But you excel them all."

<sup>30</sup> Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing,

But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. <sup>31</sup> Give her of the fruit of her hands,

And let her own works praise her in the gates." (Proverbs 31:10-31)

May your heart meditate on the power and the glory of the Lord and may your hands perform good deeds, as you do the work of Yeshua. Amen.

May you **(insert wife's name)** be blessed as you rise while it is yet night to see about the ways of our household and may you be blessed as you see about the daily care and education of our children. May your mouth be filled with wisdom and kindness.

## The Blessed Man

Wife/women: Lord, thank you for giving me a husband.

<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners,

Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;

<sup>2</sup> But his delight is in the law of the Lord,

And in His law he meditates day and night.

<sup>3</sup> He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water,

That brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.

<sup>4</sup> The ungodly are not so,

But are like the chaff which the wind drives away.

<sup>5</sup> Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

<sup>6</sup> For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish." (Psalm 1:1-6)

May you (**insert husband's name**) be blessed as you rise and as you labor for the good of our household. And may you be blessed as you lead our family in the ways of the Lord. May your mouth be filled with wisdom and kindness.

## Blessing before the Meal—Evening Shabbat Kiddush

(Before any meal the father is to say a blessing over the wine and the bread.)

Blessing over the wine: Blessed are you O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who created the fruit of the vine.

(Baruch ata Adonai Eloheynu Melech HaOlam, boreh pri hagafen. Ah-mein.)

Blessing over the bread: Blessed are you O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who brings forth bread from the earth.

(Baruch ata Adonai Eloheynu Melech HaOlam, hamotzi lechem meen haaretz.  
Ah- mein.)

## Dinner

### Grace After Meals

We are commanded to eat and be satisfied and to bless the Lord our God for the good land which he gave us. (Deut. 8:10)

(The entire passage below is said by all, except when the “Father” is designated.)

Psalm 126: A song of ascents. (You may substitute any Psalm of Ascent 120-134)

- <sup>1</sup> When the Lord will returns our captivity to Zion, we will be like dreamers.
- <sup>2</sup> Then our mouths will be filled with laughter and our tongues with glad song.
- <sup>3</sup> Then they will declare among the nations, “the Lord has done greatly with these.”
- <sup>4</sup> The Lord has done greatly with us, we were gladdened,
- <sup>5</sup> O Lord—return our captivity like springs in the desert.
- <sup>6</sup> Those who tearfully sow will reap in glad song.
- <sup>7</sup> He who bears the measure of seeds walks along weeping, but will return in exultation, a bearer of sheaves.”

Blessed are you, O Lord God, King of the universe. He gives nourishment to all flesh, for His kindness is eternal. And through His great goodness, we have never lacked, and may we never lack, nourishment for all eternity. For the sake of His Great Name, because He is God Who nourishes and sustains all, and benefits all, and He prepares food for all His creatures which He has created. And it is said: “You open Your hand, and satisfy the desire of every living thing.”

Father: Blessed are You, O Lord, Who nourishes all. Amen. Come my Beloved

Father: The Shabbat is often thought of in tradition as a bride approaching her wedding day. We greet her with great joy as we prepare for the “wedding” celebration. The coming of Shabbat is a foreshadowing of the coming of the Messiah, when we will enter His eternal rest.

A time of teaching or sharing may be added here. Traditionally it is the Torah selection for the Shabbat morning service.

**Closing Aaronic Benediction**

Father: May the Lord bless you and keep you. May he cause His face to shine upon you. May He lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. In the Name of Yeshua, our Messiah, Amen.

(Yevarechecha Adonai veyeeshmerecha! Yaer Adonai panav eleycha veechoonecha!  
Yeesa Adonai panev eleycha vayasem lecha shalom! B'Shem Yeshua Mishikanu,  
Ah- mein.

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## **What's Next?**

There can be a disconnect for Christians between the Jesus of scripture and the Jesus of theology. For many of us in the Church, we have focused on the long-held beliefs taught to us from denominational resources or popular Christian authorities. We have read books and participated in Bible studies which included Christian topics such as scriptural integrity, theology, doctrine, and Christian living from Christian leaders or pastors.

What if we discovered something new?

Consider the fact that Jesus grew up in a Jewish household with Jewish parents living within a devout Jewish culture. Imagine Jesus living within an extended family who were all Jewish. Most of the early apostles or disciples of Jesus were Jewish. Jesus even remarked that he came to save the lost sheep of Israel. (Matthew 15:24) Very Jewish! So how did the primitive or early church understand their role of disciple making and worship? In addition, how do we discern today what Jesus commanded his followers to fulfill as his great commission years ago: to make disciples of all nations? (Matthew 28:16-20)

Let's investigate and learn more about the context of the first century. Perhaps we will discover something new as we delve into the Jewishness of Jesus for the next series. We begin January 8, 2023.

