



Have Yourself a
Meaningful Little
Christmas

The message fell into my heart weeks ago and stayed with me, *“Have yourself a Meaningful Little Christmas.”* I didn’t know what I was meant to do with it, but I determined to listen. I’ve learned if I’ll value God’s inside voice, He’ll elaborate.

Granted, I recognized the gentle spin of the lyrics from the old Christmas classic. I’m not that dense. But any meaning beyond that was fuzzy. I figured it was either a personal invitation from the Lord, or something I was called to offer others. I remember thinking time will tell.

Time will tell...My attention was captured with that idiom, so I looked up the definition. *“Time will tell means the results of a situation will be known only after a certain amount of time has passed.”* Indeed. There is truth in those words. *Time always tells.* How you and I spend the time given to us always tells the story of our lives.

Around that same time, I had my first brush with the part of the holiday season that can feel meaningless or meaningful to me, depending on how I engage. I call it retail Christmas and here it was, coming at me weeks before Thanksgiving so I challenged myself to “pause before the purchase.” The pause is something Jesus has taught me to do in recent years in response to my desire to walk through the season looking and listening for Him. And just like other seasons, the moments I brought Jesus into were meaningful. The rest were potentially overwhelming. By nightfall I knew I’d be writing to you again. I really do want to have a meaningful little Christmas, but if I can help you have one, too, my own enjoyment will be multiplied.

Here's what I'm thinking. Instead of writing a daily advent journey for us to walk together, as I've done in the past, I'm going to choose four passages, one for each week of advent. I'll post our Scripture passage, a focus, and a prayer at the first of each week. The early birds and the night owls among us can decide how to weave it into the fabric of the next seven days. And then we'll take week's two passage, and so on, until we arrive at Christmas Day. My hope is we'll show up with full hearts and a delicious realization that the season was merry, but it was also so very meaningful, for He is so very worthy. Come, Lord Jesus.

Hugs, Shellie

Week One

Week One's Passage – Luke 1: 26-35

Read with me...²⁶ And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, ²⁷ To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. ²⁹ And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. ³⁰ And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. ³¹ And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. ³² He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: ³³ And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. ³⁴ Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? ³⁵ And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore, also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

Week One's Focus

We couldn't find a better grounding point in our quest for a meaningful Christmas than to consider the grace announced to Mary in this opening scene of the Christmas story. We often hear the angel's greeting and imagine Mary to have been an exceptional young girl to merit God choosing her to birth the Messiah. Exceptional she may have been, but her choosing was not one of merit. Mary was graced for her place in God's family, just as all of us who are in Christ Jesus have been graced with ours. The wording "highly favored" is used only one other time in the entire New Testament. We'll find it in Eph 1: 3-6.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

“Made us accepted” is the same wording as highly favored. Like Mary, you and I stagger at being accepted into God’s gracious favor because we know us, and we know He knows us. But our faith grows every time we feast our eyes on Jesus and let Him confirm His love to us. Let’s do it. Let’s savor His grace and have a meaningful week.

Week One’s Prayer:

Dear Jesus, I don’t want the materialism of Christmas to swallow me up. Apart from You all the sentiment and all the excesses are temporal and earthly. You are Christmas’ miracle and lasting joy is in knowing my place in the family of God is eternal, forever secured, wholly your gift, and mine apart from merit. Thank you for making me favored and accepted with God through faith in You. Remind me often of this grace and keep me closer still. Amen.

Week Two

Week Two's Passage – Luke 1: 46-55

Read with me...⁴⁶ And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, ⁴⁷ And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior. ⁴⁸ For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. ⁴⁹ For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. ⁵⁰ And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. ⁵² He hath put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree. ⁵³ He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. ⁵⁴ He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; ⁵⁵ As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever.

Week Two's Focus:

In this week's Scripture reading we find Mary lifting up a song to the Lord with a familiar theme that can be traced throughout God's Word. God puts down the proud man and visits the lowly. He brings down the mighty and lifts up the humble. Those full of themselves are sent away and those who hunger for Him, He satisfies. Mary also rejoices in what God has done for her and how she will be remembered as blessed. This week you and I will focus on our own blessed estate! Let's turn to Luke 11: 27-29 and listen to what Jesus said years later to a crowd of people commenting on Mary's favored place in history.

²⁷ While Jesus was saying these things, one of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that carried You, and the breasts at which You nursed!" ²⁸ But He said, "On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and follow it." NASB

Mary could rejoice in all God had done for her, and she could sing her heart out because she was forever blessed. We can, too. We can lift up our voices and rejoice because of our favored place in God's eyes. As we hear and follow the word of God, we are blessed coming in and going out. We, too, are blessed forever. Whatever else this second week of Christmas brings, be it woes or pleasures, Immanuel is here, and He will never leave us nor forsake us. Selah!

Week Two's Prayer:

Dear Lord, as we go about our week, may we be ever mindful that we are greatly blessed and highly favored. Stir us to compose our own songs of praise. We waver between finding satisfaction in the amount of Christmas preparations we've done and succumbing to anxiety when we feel like we're behind. Shake our spirits awake when this is happening for we are hindered from seeing You when we're so overly occupied with us. Help us thrill instead to Your gracious plan of salvation and find peace in Your finished work. Amen.

Week Three

Week Three's Passage – Luke 2: 1- 5

Read with me... **2** And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. ⁴Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.

Week Three's Focus:

Our Christmas plans and expectations are building. The commercials are bringing up endless gift suggestions sure to delight our loved ones and earn the “best Christmas ever” award. The movies are delivering sugar sweet love stories, and the mailbox is overflowing with beautiful families with faces all aglow. It can feel like the whole wide world is registering for an off the charts Christmas. Pressure, anyone? Have we done enough? Have we done too much? The most rewarding things we can do for our souls this third week is to marinate in the wonder of the birth we're anticipating and share it with those around us. Relishing the true meaning of Christmas and living in celebration and anticipation of Christ requires intention, but we have a superpower called prayer. Let's ask the Father to help us! And then, let's remind ourselves every single day this week that He is nearer still. Grab some sticky notes and spread the cheer. Post the Truth where the whole family can see it and seize every opportunity to share the good news with our friends and neighbors. Jesus is near! Again. Come, Lord Jesus.

Week Three's Prayer:

Dear God, we have such opportunity spread the good news of Jesus at Christmas.. The world around us is celebrating Christ's birth, even if they are commercializing it and the Truth is escaping them. Help the gospel live on our lips and Your glory be seen in our lives! Amen

Week Four

Week Four's Passage – Luke 2: 6-14

Read with me...⁶ So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. ⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. ⁸ Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. ¹⁰ Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹ For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

Week Four's Focus:

Week four is here and so is Immanuel! Hallelujah! He is never anywhere but here. The big word for this is omnipresent, meaning "present everywhere at the same time" and only God fits the description. We know this, of course, at least in a head knowledge way. But head knowledge falls short of nourishing our souls. It's why I remind myself that it's the consciousness of His Presence, the awareness of Him, that I crave and it's why I've learned to turn that desire into a prayer. Does this resonate with you? If so, I've got glorious news. The Spirit of God is more than willing to reveal Himself to our spirits. The problem lies on our end. Let me explain.

We're slow to understand that we often invite the very distractions of things we can see, taste, touch, and feel and these things make it harder to hear the Spirit of God speak to us. For instance, it's not a sin for me to check social media before I sit down to pray in the morning, and I don't believe God holds Himself apart from me if I do. However, I've discovered that responding to digital messages and consuming social media before I seek God makes it harder for me to quieten my thoughts before Him. It's my choice, but our choices make or break our lives.

Many such choices are given to each of us that, should we choose well, turn out to our comfort and joy. We shouldn't let ourselves be deceived into thinking that the direction our lives take are thrust upon us and we have no responsibility in the matter. And with that, we're back to the idiom I mentioned when we began our advent watch. Time will tell... time always tells and where we spend it tells the stories of our lives. Let's pray.

Week Four's Prayer:

Dear Lord, help us prioritize your Presence and make wise choices about where we spend our time. Teach us day by day how to love You more. We've enjoyed watching for You this advent season and we want to live the rest of our lives looking for You. Help us live in holy expectation of Your appearing. Amen.

Merry Christmas, friends. It's been a delight to share the advent season with you. Allow me to speak a blessing over you for the days ahead. I pray that you know the love of God, live in the grace of Christ Jesus, and enjoy the enduring friendship of Holy Spirit.

Hugs, Shellie