# CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONALS

*from Tanner Peake*

Following is a selection of Christmas devotionals written by Tanner Peake, president and CEO of Every Home for Christ. These devotionals are created for the four weeks of Advent leading up to Christmas day. We encourage you to read one each weekend and meditate on these themes throughout the week.

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## Week One — Expect the Unexpected

**READING**

Read Matthew 24:36-44.

**REFLECTION**

Around the world, Christians enter the liturgical season of Advent with a spirit of anticipation. We are reminded to open our eyes—to expect to find Christ in the unexpected. "But about that day and hour no one knows," Jesus says (Matthew 24:36), and so we open our hearts and prepare to encounter him anywhere.

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, we expect to find Jesus in our church services, during our quiet times, central to our nativity scenes, or heralded in our carols. These are all beautiful reminders of his presence to us in this time of celebration. But as you reflect on the scripture reading this week, I invite you to join me in looking for Jesus in unexpected places this Christmas season.

"Truly I tell you," Christ says, "just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40). The writer of Hebrews playfully reminds us: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2).

We may see Christ in the eyes of strangers or in the needs of "the least of these." He may come to us in conversations with our neighbors, in simple gifts from dear friends, in the stress of hosting visitors, or in the mess of family gatherings. "Therefore...be ready," Jesus says (Matthew 24:44). May we open our eyes to Christ in the unexpected this Christmas.

**PRACTICE**

This week, try reflecting on the unexpected places you encounter Jesus during your days. Ask your family to share their experiences around the dinner table, have a conversation with a friend, or make note of these moments in a journal.

**Notes**

Week Two

# How to See Hope

**READING**
Read Isaiah 11:1-10.

**REFLECTION**
The Christmas story is an invitation to see hope in a new way. Angels appear to lowly shepherds. Wise men bow before a child. A young, unmarried woman bears the incarnation of God. The creator of all things is wrapped in helpless human flesh. The whole story provokes us to take a second look at things—this time, through the eyes of the Lord. We must reorient our hopes around the way of Christ.

How does our God view hope? "He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear," this week's reading reminds us (Isaiah 11:3). He sees beyond the surface of things. He sees through "the spirit of wisdom and understanding" (Isaiah 11:2). He sees by the light of hope for peace, healing, and homecoming for all creation.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD" (Isaiah 55:8).

The Christmas story shows us the thoughts and ways of the Lord, inviting us to see and think and hope the way he does. His way—made known in the coming of Christ—is wisdom, understanding, peace, and gathering his people home.

As you recall the Christmas story during your week, invite the Lord in prayer to help you see hope as he does. Ask him to show you his ways and to give you his spirit of wisdom and understanding. Listen for the invitations of the spirit of Christ, and invite him to fill you with his hope—in your hope for all creation, and in your personal hopes close to home.

**PRACTICE**
As you prepare for the day each morning this week, take a moment to reflect on your hopes for the day. Ask the Lord to help you see the day before you through his eyes and to ground your hopes in his wisdom.

## Notes

Week Three

# Seeing Jesus Simply

**READING**
Read Matthew 11:2-11.

**REFLECTION**
Let's be honest about something: it's not always easy to know the way of Jesus. We celebrate the Christmas story—"good news of great joy for all the people" (Luke 2:10)—and yet our news does not always sound good. It does not always make it to all the people. This is nothing new; followers of Jesus have wrestled through what it means to walk in his way since the beginning. Still today, Christmas comes amid mixed messaging.

Yet in this week's reading, Jesus offers us a simple reminder—a simple way of seeing him. When John the Baptist sends his followers to confirm who Jesus is, Jesus tells them: "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me" (Matthew 11:4-6). Open your eyes and ears to witness the things that mark the way of Christ: healing, life, and good news for the poor.

May we be people who enter this Christmas season walking in the way of Christ. May we look for him in healing—healing of mind, body, soul, and fellowship. May we follow him into life. May we proclaim his name alongside good news for people who need it most. May our eyes and ears be open, and may we be unoffended by these simple things.

**PRACTICE**
Practice seeing Jesus in the simple ways of healing, life, and good news. Write those words—healing, life, and good news—somewhere you will see them regularly this week. Spend a moment in prayer daily to invite the Lord to help you discern his presence in these things.

## Notes

Week Four

# A Strange Christmas

**READING**
Read Matthew 1:18-25.

**REFLECTION**
This week, consider with me the strangeness of this part of the Christmas story.

A young, unmarried man and woman find themselves in a predicament: an unplanned pregnancy of mysterious circumstances. They have no apparent social position, are of no apparent importance, and hold no apparent power. The reasonable thing would be to go their separate ways—the woman quietly dismissed, and the man moving on with his life. But they don't do the reasonable thing. They reject religious shame. They reject social expectations. They listen to the voice of the spirit of God, even when it comes in unusual—uncontrollable—ways. They claim, "God is with us" (Matthew 1:23). And they bring Christ into the world.

Let's not get too used to this story.

May we be disrupted anew this Christmas by the unreasonable birth of Jesus. May we be provoked by Mary and Joseph's rejection of shame and expectations by their willingness to to bring Christ into the world. May we listen, like they did, to the voice of the spirit of God—even when we are surprised by what he says or how he speaks. May we trust our own experience with him. May our eyes and hearts be open to his strange ways of coming to our world, this Christmas and always.

**PRACTICE**
As we near Christmas day, remember the strangeness of this story. Each day, do something unusual. Take a different route on your drive to work, try a new food, or listen to a different genre of music. Remember that the Lord speaks to us in unexpected ways.

## Notes