

The Best Gift Ever

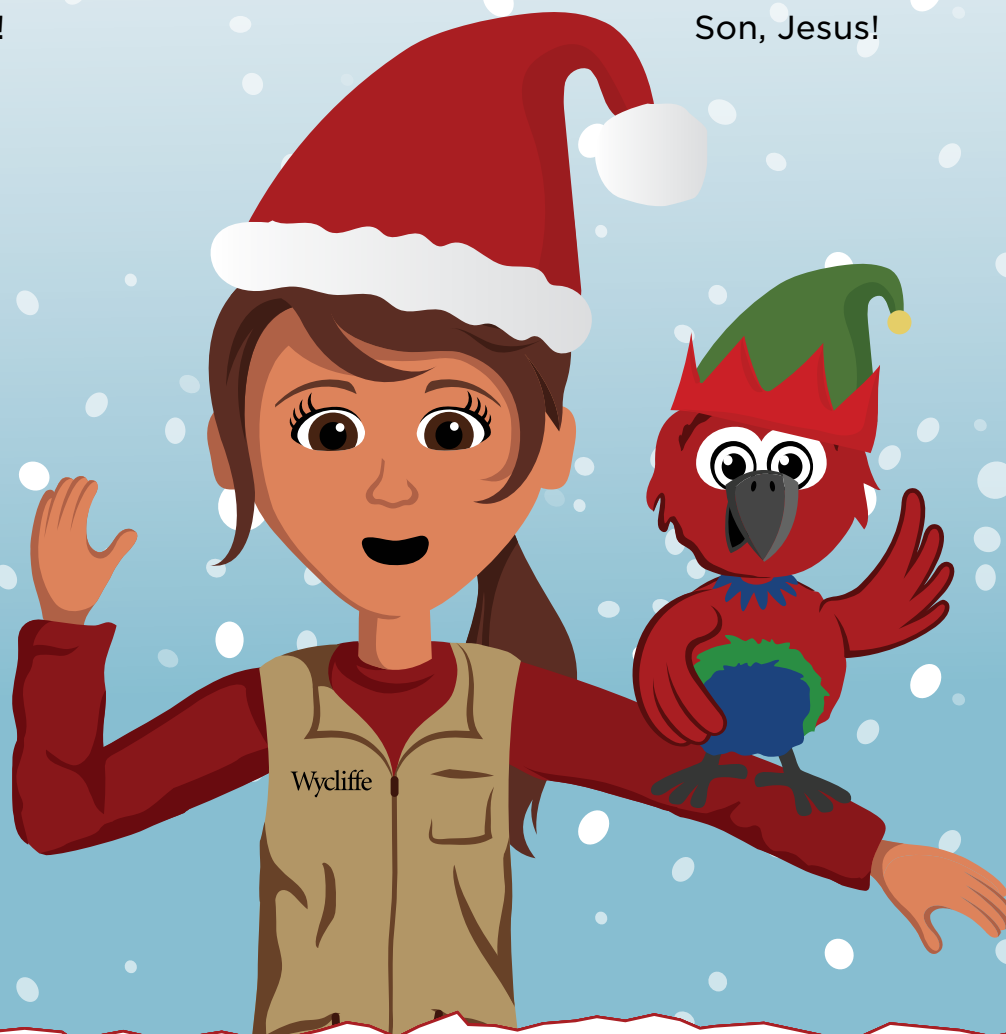
A 5-day Christmas Devotional with Kate & Mack

Christmas is a wonderful time of the year that's loved by lots of people. The weeks leading up to Christmas morning are often filled with family, friends, fun, food and more.

But it's important to take time to slow down during this busy time of the year and remember the real reason we celebrate Christmas — the birth of Jesus Christ!

Mack and I thought we'd share this devotional for you to use with your family as you get ready for Christmas. Each day includes different Scriptures, things to talk about and even a fun activity you can do as a family.

So what are you waiting for? Let's get our hearts and minds ready to celebrate the greatest gift God has ever given us — his Son, Jesus!



Day 1 – God’s Promise

→ **Read Isaiah 9:6-7.**

God always keeps his promises.

Sometimes we might feel like he doesn’t. After all, God’s timing and plans are different than ours, so sometimes it can feel like he’s not making things happen. At least, not very fast — or maybe as fast as we’d like.

I bet the Israelites felt that way as they waited for their savior to be born! God had promised to send his Son hundreds and hundreds of years before Jesus came. To all the people who lived and never got to see or hear about Jesus, it probably felt like God wasn’t living up to his promise. But he did — and at the perfect time in history!

Isaiah 9:6 says, “For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (NLT).

The prophet Isaiah wrote these words many years before Jesus was born, but he knew that it would happen because God told him! And even though he never got to see Jesus, he believed that God would fulfill his promise. And God did, on the night that Jesus was born.

Family Talk

- 🌐 **What’s an example of a time when you felt like God wasn’t going to make something happen in your life, but he did? Did you have to wait a short time or a long time? What did God teach you as you waited?**
- 🌐 **Ask God to help you trust in him to fulfill all of his promises — even if it means waiting a long, long time.**

Family Fun: **Make *buñuelos*, a Mexican dessert served during the Christmas season.**

During this busy time of the year, *buñuelos* are often served with a hot drink or sometimes even ice cream. Tradition says that after you finish eating the *buñuelos*, you make a wish and throw your clay plate on the ground, smashing it to bits. This is one of my favorite Christmas desserts, and the best part is that they're really easy to make!

Ingredients

- ✓ 6 flour tortillas (you can keep these whole, or cut them into pretty shapes)
- ✓ 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ✓ ½ cup white sugar
- ✓ Oil

Here's how you make it

1. Mix the sugar and cinnamon together on a plate.
2. In a medium saucepan, add enough oil to come halfway up the sides of the pan.
3. Heat over medium-high heat until the oil is hot. (You can test this with a small piece of tortilla. If the oil sizzles when it touches the tortilla, it's ready!)
4. Fry the tortillas, one at a time, until they're golden brown. Then remove them from the pan with a slotted spoon or tongs, putting them on a paper towel to drain the oil.
5. While they're still warm, place them on the plate of cinnamon-sugar mix and cover both sides.

Once they're cool, you can eat them!



Day 2 – God’s Messenger

→ **Read Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-24.**

God talks to us in a lot of different ways.

Probably the most common way God speaks is through the Bible, but he has also used angels, dreams and visions to send people messages. And a few people have even heard God’s voice themselves! (Like Abraham, Moses and the crowd of people at Jesus’ baptism.)

When it was time to send Jesus — God’s one and only Son — to earth, God used an angel to take the message to a young woman named Mary. The angel told Mary that she would be the mother of God’s own Son. Can you imagine how crazy that must have been for Mary? She wasn’t even married!

God also used his angel to talk to Joseph, who was engaged to Mary. The angel helped Joseph understand that the baby Mary was going to have was a gift from God — his Son that would come to save the world.

Because Mary and Joseph met God’s angel and heard the message God sent to them, they believed. And because of their belief and faithfulness, God used them to be the earthly parents of Jesus, his Son.

God still speaks to us, through his Word or maybe a friend who talks to us about something they felt God wanted them to share. Even if we never get to hear God’s voice out loud, we can keep our ears open to what he wants to tell us — through his Word, through the Holy Spirit and through other people!

Family Talk

- 🌐 **Have you ever heard a message from God? Was it from his Word or through a person?**
- 🌐 **Pray that God would speak to you and your family. Maybe you have a big decision to make and you’re wanting to see if it’s part of God’s plan for you. Ask him, and then listen for his response — however he might choose to speak to you.**

Family Fun: **Choose a family verse for the new year.**

God speaks to us through the Bible in many different ways.

Sometimes, in different moments of our lives, a particular verse or passage is especially relevant to what's going on. As a family, think about a verse or passage that you could choose as your family verse for the upcoming year.

Print that verse or passage, or buy it as a pretty art piece or wall decal, and post it somewhere in the house that you'll see a lot. Work together to memorize it, and talk together throughout the year about why you chose this verse and what you hope it will mean for your family — both right now and in the years to come!

— **Our Family Verse** —

Day 3 – God’s Gift

→ **Read Luke 2:1-20.**

Sometimes a gift isn’t what you expected.

During all the hundreds of years that the Israelites were waiting for their savior to be born, they were expecting a king — someone who would come and save them from all the people who had hurt them. And God did send a king! But not in the way that the Israelites were expecting.

After all, would you imagine that a king would be born in a stable? Or that he would grow up in a small town, learning how to become a carpenter? But that’s exactly how God sent Jesus into the world!

When he was born, Jesus slept in a manger (that’s the food box for animals in a barn), and the very first people who came to see him were shepherds. Shepherds were viewed as lowly in the community because they just took care of the sheep — something a lot of people didn’t want to do! But God didn’t care about that.

In fact, he wanted the shepherds to be there to meet Jesus, to be the first people to see the savior and king they had been promised so many years before! Think about how God sent shepherds to be the first to see Jesus, who was also called the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, NLT).

He also wanted us to know that Jesus, God’s greatest gift, is for all people — no matter where we live or what language we speak, no matter what job we have or how important we might be. We’re all important because God loves us, and he sent Jesus as the perfect gift for all of us.

Family Talk

- 🌐 **Make a list of some of the gifts God’s given you. Try to think beyond just things like your family, friends, food, a house, etc. and use specific examples (like when God answered a prayer). Then stop to thank God for those gifts. And thank him for the greatest gift of all — Jesus!**
- 🌐 **Pray about how God can use you to give gifts to others. Maybe something as simple as a note of encouragement, a meal to a family in need or even a hug for someone who is having a hard day.**

Family Fun: **Be a secret angel to someone.**

Christmas is a season of giving, and we often give gifts to the people we love. But we can also give gifts to people we don't know — people who might need to feel God's love during this holiday season!

Think of someone you'd like to give a secret gift to. Your family could hide a gift in your mailbox for the mailman or take cookies to a nursing home in your community. If you can keep it a secret from the person, that's even more fun! God loves it when we choose to be a blessing to others around us.



Day 4 – God’s Plan

→ **Read John 3:16-17.**



When God promised to send his Son to save the world, he didn’t necessarily mean it in the way the Israelites understood it. Jesus wasn’t here to save them from evil kings and governments; he was here to save them from something much worse — their sin.

Sin separates us from God because he’s perfect, so nothing less than perfect can live with him in heaven. Before Jesus came, the Israelites had to offer sacrifices so that they could come into God’s presence and pray to him.

But once Jesus came and died on the cross for our sins, he became the ultimate and perfect sacrifice. That’s why God sent Jesus — not to save us from bad people or hard situations, but to save us from our sins so that we can live with him in heaven forever. And now, if you believe in Jesus, you can pray to God whenever you want. And guess what? He hears you!

That was God’s plan from the very beginning — a good and wonderful plan that changed people’s lives all around the world from the moment Jesus was born until today! And it’ll continue to change lives as more and more people learn of God’s perfect plan through having the Bible in their own language.

Family Talk

-  **Have you asked Jesus to save you from your sins? Talk with your parents about what this means and how it should change the way we live when we choose to believe in Jesus as our savior.**
-  **Pray for the many people around the world who still need to learn about God’s plan to save us from our sins through Jesus.**

Family Fun: **Make *kinderpunsch*, a German hot punch served at Christmas.**

When it's cold outside, a hot drink is a special treat that many people love to enjoy — especially during the holidays! Try out this recipe for *kinderpunsch*, a hot punch that many people drink in Christmas markets in Germany.

Ingredients

- ✓ 1 cup water
- ✓ $\frac{2}{3}$ cup sugar
- ✓ 2 pinches ground cloves
- ✓ 1 cinnamon stick
- ✓ 3 cups apple juice*
- ✓ 1 lemon or orange, sliced

**You can use grape juice instead, if you prefer.*

Here's how you make it

1. In a saucepan, bring water, sugar, cloves and cinnamon to a boil.
2. Stir in juice. Heat, but don't boil. Take spices out and pour over lemon or orange slices in a mug.

Now you can drink it!



Day 5 – God’s Message

→ **Read Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8.**

Not everyone knows God’s message.

We learned yesterday that God sent Jesus to save people — all people — from their sins. We also know that people need to learn about Jesus so they can choose to believe in him as their savior. But how can they do that if they’ve never even heard of this message?

That’s why Jesus left his disciples with a final command before he went up to heaven: “Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19, NLT).

God’s plan to save us needed to be told to everyone in the whole world! And we can help.



You and I can tell people about God’s message of love given to us through Jesus! We can tell our family, friends, teachers, classmates and neighbors. And we can help people around the world learn about it by sharing God’s message through missions — by praying, giving money or maybe even reaching other people groups one day ourselves.

When Jesus was born, God’s message of love became more than just words — it came in the form of a person, God’s one and only Son.

And now that message of love continues to be told from one person to the next through the Bible. It’s a message that we all need to hear, and in a language that speaks to our hearts.

So what will you do to help spread God’s message of love to the world?

Family Talk

-  Think of ways that you can tell others about Jesus, God’s message of love. What could you start doing, even now, to tell others about who Jesus is?
-  Pray that God will show you ways to be a light to the world around you — during the Christmas season and throughout the rest of the year, too!

Family Fun: **Make a family resolution for the New Year.**

As a family, sit down and come up with answers to the following statements. Think of things you want to be intentional about doing in the coming year. When your list is done, put it up in a place that you will see often to be reminded of what you're working on together!

This year, we want to ...

Believe _____.

Daily _____.

Do _____.

Give _____.

Grow _____.