



FOCUS^{ON} THE FAMILY[®] Canada

AN
ADVENT
ENCOUNTER

24-DAY DEVOTIONAL

DISCOVER JESUS' HEART FOR ALL PEOPLE
through his interactions in the Gospels



AN ADVENT ENCOUNTER

This devotional should be suitable for tweens and up, but we encourage parents to read through each day's Scriptures and reflections before you share them to make sure they're appropriate for your family.



Written by Subby Szterszky and Amy Van Veen
Designed by Laurisha Blackstock

© 2024 Focus on the Family (Canada) Association. All rights reserved.

FIND A FREE ACTIVITY
on page 27 for you and your family!



DAY 1

GOD THE FATHER

SCRIPTURE

John 1:1-5; John 14:8-11; John 17:1-5

TO TRULY APPRECIATE the love of Jesus for those he encountered while on Earth, we need to go back to his very first relationship. John describes it with simple yet mysterious language: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* Before creation, God the Son existed in an eternal loving relationship with his Father and with the Holy Spirit – one God in three persons.

It was through the Son that God created the universe – time and space, matter and energy, stars and planets and all living things, including us. Then two thousand years ago, the eternal Son of God, who shaped atoms and galaxies, entered his creation as a man named Jesus, born as an infant to a young Hebrew virgin named Mary.

The purpose of his mission was love for his creation – and for us. Everything he did, every interaction he had, was full of grace and truth. If we want to know what God is like, we need only look at Jesus. In his final prayer, Jesus defined eternal life as knowing him and his Father, and sharing in the joy and love they've shared since before they created the cosmos.

PRAYER

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, through you everything came into being. You were before all and you are above all. Thank you for being a relational God, for showing us what it means to be in community, and for teaching us – through your example – how to extend love and grace to those who need it.

Amen.



DAY 2

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:26-38

WHEN THE ETERNAL Son of God entered history as the man Jesus, he became like us in every way. This meant that his first human relationship was with his mother. Although Jesus was God in the flesh, he was also a helpless baby, dependent on his mother to feed him, dress him, comfort him, rock him to sleep. Together with Joseph, Mary taught and nurtured her son, raising him to be a strong and wise young man, in favour with God and people.

Luke portrays Mary as a bright, inquisitive teenage girl, devoted to the unique role God had given her. Mary's song of praise, the *Magnificat*, reveals her creative spark as well as her grasp on the implications of that monumental role. It may be hard to imagine raising a son who never sinned, but Mary treasured the experience in her heart.

Some 30 years later, Mary was a widow, standing at the foot of the cross and watching her son die in agony. From the cross, Jesus entrusted his mother to the care of his disciple, John, before drawing his last breath. As at his birth, so at his death, Jesus' first and final moments were shared with his mother.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, through your choice to come into the world as a helpless baby, we see your humility. And through your mother Mary, we see a clear example of what it means to have a bold faith in uncertain times. Give us courage to say "yes" when you call on us, just like Mary did all those years ago.

Amen.



DAY 3

JOHN THE BAPTIST

SCRIPTURE

Mark 1:1-11

IN ALL FOUR GOSPELS, Jesus' public ministry began with his visit to John the Baptist, but that wasn't the first time the two had encountered each other. While still in the womb of his mother, Elizabeth, John had leapt at the sound of Mary's voice, who was pregnant with Jesus.

John the Baptist was a fiery figure who lived in the wilderness, wore rough clothes, and ate locusts and wild honey. God had called him to baptize his people to prepare them for the coming Messiah. When Jesus came to him and was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove and God declared him to be his beloved Son, placing his public stamp of approval on Jesus' ministry.

Centuries before John and Jesus were born, God had promised to send his Messiah, as well as a forerunner to blaze a path for the Messiah's arrival. John understood himself to be that forerunner. Even though he was six months older than Jesus, he knew Jesus had existed before him eternally as the Son of God and was thus infinitely greater than John. In the Baptist's words, Jesus was the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

PRAYER

Jesus, Lamb of God, your ways are far beyond our understanding, and your methods are often never what we would have guessed. In this precious relationship with your forerunner, John the Baptist, thank you for showing us how you fulfill prophecies and make a way when it seems impossible.

Amen.



DAY 4

SIMON PETER

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 4:18-22; Matthew 16:13-20

AFTER JESUS WAS BAPTIZED, he began to call his first disciples: two sets of brothers who were partners in a fishing business on the Sea of Galilee. The most prominent of these four men was Simon, whom Jesus renamed Peter, promising that from then on, he'd be fishing for people.

The renaming was significant – the name *Simon* has connotations of instability, while *Peter* means “rock.” As a disciple of Jesus, Simon Peter’s life followed a long and winding road from impulsive to immovable. The Gospels are riddled with stories of his rash words and behaviour, getting praised by Jesus in one moment and then rebuked in the next.

Through it all, amidst failures and setbacks, Peter kept his eyes of faith on the Lord. When Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was, Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” On another occasion, Peter confessed that Jesus had the words of eternal life and was the Holy One of God. Even after Peter denied knowing his Lord, Jesus restored and appointed him to lead the apostles in building his Church, caring for his people, and spearheading the promotion of the Gospel to the world.

PRAYER

Jesus, Son of the Living God, thank you for the second and third chances you regularly give us. Thank you for showing us the power of your redemptive love through the impulsive fisherman you turned into the rock of your Church. Thank you for similarly healing and redeeming us when we come to you.

Amen.



DAY 5

MATTHEW THE TAX COLLECTOR

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 9:9-13

WE SOMETIMES THINK OF the Twelve Disciples as a homogeneous group of fishermen, but they were in fact far more diverse in their backgrounds. Matthew, also called Levi, was a tax collector. In our culture, those who collect revenue for the government are not typically regarded with much fondness. It was far worse, however, among the Jews of Jesus' day. The tax collectors worked for the Roman government to collect revenue from their fellow Jews, often skimming from the top to line their own pockets.

These officials were viewed as the lowest level of society, traitors to the Jewish people and their God, who had sold out their nation to its oppressors for profit. Yet Jesus chose one of them, Matthew, to be among his core of Twelve Disciples. Matthew then threw a party for Jesus, inviting his friends and colleagues to come and meet the Lord.

The religious authorities were scandalized, wondering why a respectable Jewish rabbi like Jesus would associate with such people. In response, Jesus told them that he hadn't come to call righteous people, but sinners, because God desired mercy and not sacrifice. Matthew, of course, went on to write the Gospel that bears his name.

PRAYER

Lord God, your love is not limited or conditional. You do not judge as we so often judge. Thank you for showing the people of Matthew's day, and us 2,000 years later, how your love can change a heart. We invite you to change our hearts so we can show this same love to those in need of your saving grace.

Amen.



DAY 6

A CENTURION AND HIS SERVANT

SCRIPTURE

Luke 7:1-10

FROM THE BEGINNING, Jesus' mission was universal – he was to be a source of light and hope for Jews as well as Gentiles, bringing salvation to people from every nation. At his birth, magi from Babylon and Persia travelled over a thousand kilometres to worship him and bring him royal gifts.

Jesus' encounter with Gentiles continued during his public ministry, beginning with a Roman centurion stationed at Capernaum in Galilee. A centurion was a military commander in charge of about a hundred soldiers, equivalent to a modern army captain. This centurion was attracted to the God of Israel and well regarded by the Jewish community, having built them a synagogue in the region.

When his servant became gravely ill, the centurion sent for Jesus, asking him to save the man's life. While Jesus was coming, the centurion sent a message asking the Lord to merely say the word from a distance, trusting that his servant would be healed. As a military leader, the centurion knew authority and saw it in Jesus. His faith in the Lord's power brought healing to his servant and was commended by the Lord as greater than any in Israel. Other examples of Gentile faith would soon follow.

PRAYER

Christ Jesus, you are Lord of lords and King of kings. You rule over all authorities in heaven and earth, but in your sovereignty, you never overlook our pain. As a true servant-leader, you wield your power through love and a healing touch. Help us to love as you do – with grace and forgiveness.

Amen.



DAY 7

JAIRUS AND HIS DAUGHTER

SCRIPTURE

Mark 5:21-43

NOTHING JESUS DID WAS an accident or coincidence. Every event, including delays and interruptions, flowed according to his perfect timing and plan. Over the next two days, we'll look at two intertwined stories of healing, as recorded by Mark and Luke.

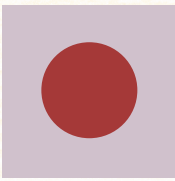
The first is about a 12-year-old girl, the only daughter of a synagogue leader named Jairus. The girl was dying, so her father came to Jesus and begged him to come and heal his little daughter. On the way, Jesus met a woman whose story we'll explore tomorrow. In the meantime, news reached Jairus that his daughter had died.

Overhearing the news, Jesus reassured the father with the most encouraging words: "Don't be afraid. Only believe." Arriving at the house, he dismissed the mourners and entered the child's room, accompanied by her parents. Jesus then took the girl's hand and gently said to her, in their shared Aramaic, "*talitha koum*," which means, "little girl, get up." Lifting her to her feet, he told her parents to give her something to eat. The tender moment was that much more powerful because Jesus restored the little girl to life instead of just healing her, which wouldn't have happened had he not been delayed.

PRAYER

Jesus, you are Lord of heaven and earth. Nothing surprises you and nothing exists outside your will. Even though we don't always understand your timing, we trust that delays and interruptions are all part of your great plan. Forgive us for the times when we doubt you and give us patience as we wait.

Amen.



DAY 8

A WOMAN WITH A HEMORRHAGE

SCRIPTURE

Luke 8:40-56

YESTERDAY, WE LOOKED AT the story of a young girl restored to life by Jesus, a miracle that wouldn't have occurred had Jesus not been delayed on his way to heal her. Today, we'll consider the encounter that caused the delay, none of it outside of Jesus' plan and timing.

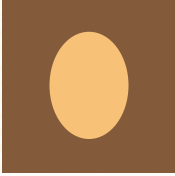
As Jesus headed to Jairus' house, a woman in the crowd approached him. She had suffered from bleeding for 12 years and spent all her money on doctors who couldn't help her. Under Jewish law, she was unclean, ostracized from family, friends, community and worship. No one could touch her, and she could touch no one. Desperate, she snuck up behind Jesus and touched his cloak, hoping to be healed.

The woman was immediately healed, prompting Jesus to ask, "Who touched me?" This wasn't because he didn't know, but to draw her out. Trembling, she came forward and admitted what she'd done and why. Rather than rebuking her for violating the purity laws, Jesus called her "daughter," commended her faith and sent her away in peace. Her illness had lasted 12 years, same as the age of Jairus' little girl, both daughters of God, their encounters with Jesus forever intertwined.

PRAYER

Lord God, your timing of restoration and healing is often not what we'd choose ourselves. In those seasons of waiting, we ask for your spirit of faith and hope to sustain us. And give us eyes to see those who, in their own waiting, feel alone like this woman so we may love them like you love us.

Amen.



DAY 9

A GENTILE MOTHER AND HER DAUGHTER

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 15:21-28

NONE OF JESUS' TRAVELS were random – his journeys always had a goal, an appointment to keep, whether with a group of thousands or with a single individual. This was just as true when he ventured outside Judea and Galilee into surrounding Gentile territory.

On one such occasion, Jesus travelled to the region of Tyre and Sidon, two ancient cities of Phoenicia in present-day Lebanon. There he was met by a Gentile woman, variously described as Canaanite, Greek and Syrophenician, underscoring the fact that she wasn't a Jew. Nevertheless, she recognized Jesus as the Son of David and pleaded with him for her little daughter, who was oppressed by a demon.

At first, Jesus said nothing to her, then told her it wasn't right to give the children's food to the dogs. To this, the woman replied, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Hearing this response, Jesus praised the woman for her great faith and healed her daughter. While this encounter may seem jarring, Jesus was using it to draw out the Gentile woman's faith and heal her daughter, which was always his intention and the purpose of his trip to Tyre and Sidon.

PRAYER

Jesus, Son of David, thank you for inviting us into relationship with you. You do not want us to be passive in our faith, but active, regularly praying, learning from your Word, and wrestling with our doubts. Thank you for equipping us to be part of your great plan to bring your good news to all nations.
Amen.



DAY 10

THE INNER CIRCLE OF THREE

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 14:32-42

AMONG THE TWELVE APOSTLES, Peter, James and John held a special place, an inner circle of Jesus' most intimate friends. When the Lord restored Jairus' daughter to life, these three were the only ones permitted to be present, along with the girl's parents. On at least two other occasions, Jesus included them in crucial moments of his earthly ministry.

After Peter confessed Jesus as the Messiah, the Lord brought him along with James and John up a tall mountain, where he was transfigured, revealing his future glory in the presence of Moses and Elijah. Peter's impulsive comment earned an audible rebuke from God in heaven, whereupon everything returned to normal, and Jesus comforted his three terrified friends.

Following the Last Supper, the Lord led his disciples out to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he was about to be arrested. Being in extreme anguish, Jesus invited his three closest friends into the garden, to stay with him while he poured out his heart to his Father in prayer. The disciples fell asleep three times while Jesus prayed, letting their Lord down in the hour of his greatest need. It was only after the Resurrection that they became dependable disciples of Jesus.

PRAYER

Christ Jesus, thank you for showing us time and again how to live in community with others. Thank you for the sacredness of our closest friendships, where we can be our truest self and know we are loved. Thank you that you offer this kind of relationship freely to all who call on your name.

Amen.



DAY 11

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT THE WELL

SCRIPTURE

John 4:1-42

FOR THE JEWS OF JESUS' DAY, Samaritans were in some ways considered worse than Gentiles. They were descendants of Jews who had intermarried with Gentiles and adopted elements of their religious beliefs. Because their land lay between Galilee and Judea, Jews would go around it, crossing the Jordan into Gentile territory to avoid travelling through Samaria.

Jesus subverted these prejudices and had no problem with passing through the region, on one occasion encountering a Samaritan woman at a well in the heat of the day. Pious Jewish men would never speak with a woman in public, but Jesus subverted that prejudice as well. Drawing water at noon when no one was around suggested this woman was a social outcast, even among her own people. The fact that Jesus asked her for a drink would've been beyond scandalous.

Despite everything, the woman proved to be intelligent and inquisitive, with a keen awareness of religious issues and messianic expectations. The Lord engaged her with sensitivity and respect, answering her questions, challenging her beliefs, and revealing himself as the Messiah she'd been hoping for. The woman then hurried back to her people and told them about Jesus, becoming the first evangelist to the Samaritan nation.

PRAYER

Jesus our God, by humbling yourself to live on earth with us, you showed us – like you showed this woman – that your Kingdom is far-reaching and open to anyone who calls you Saviour. May we similarly be boundless in our love for others so they too can experience the gift of your salvation.

Amen.



DAY 12

THE DISABLED MAN BY THE POOL

SCRIPTURE

John 5:1-16

DURING ONE OF HIS TRIPS to Jerusalem for a Jewish festival, Jesus visited a pool in the city, surrounded by five colonnades. Disabled people would sit or lie in the colonnades, believing that when the waters of the pool were stirred up, the first one in would be healed of their disability.

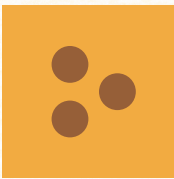
At the pool, Jesus met a man who had lived with a disability for 38 years. When Jesus asked if he wanted to be made well, the man answered that because he had no one to carry him to the pool, someone always got there ahead of him. It's hard to imagine the frustration and discouragement this man must have experienced over such a long time.

All that discouragement and frustration was washed away in an instant, when Jesus simply told the man to get up, pick up his mat and walk, all of which he immediately did. Jesus then slipped away into the crowd, but later found the man in the temple and told him not to sin anymore, so that nothing worse might happen to him. The Lord had delivered the man from his physical disability, but more important, he'd saved him from his sickness of the soul.

PRAYER

Lord God, we don't always understand how you answer our prayers, but we trust that you hear them all. Thank you for showing us that your plans for healing far exceed our earthly expectations. Help us to continually seek the healing of our soul and protect our hearts from discouragement.

Amen.



DAY 13

A WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY

SCRIPTURE

John 8:1-11

ON ONE OCCASION, when Jesus was teaching in the temple, the religious leaders brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand in the middle of the room, and asked Jesus whether she should be stoned to death according to the Law of Moses.

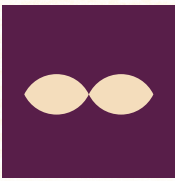
The leaders cared nothing about this woman or the law she had broken. The law required both the man and woman caught in adultery to be stoned, but they'd let the man go free. Moreover, they knew that under Roman law, they had no authority to put her to death. They were laying a trap for Jesus, and the woman was their means to spring it. If Jesus said she should be stoned, they'd report him to the Romans as a rebel. If he said she shouldn't, they'd denounce him to the people as a false teacher.

Jesus turned the tables on them, telling them the one without sin should throw the first stone, at which they all shuffled out of the room, leaving the woman alone with Jesus. The Lord then forgave her and told her not to sin anymore. He welcomed her as she was but invited her to something far better.

PRAYER

Jesus, you are a God of justice, but you are also a God of mercy, and through stories like this you show us how to hold these two in perfect balance. Forgive us for the times we get this balance wrong in our own lives and fill us with your Spirit so we too may invite others into your truth and love.

Amen.



DAY 14

A MAN BORN BLIND

SCRIPTURE

John 9:1-41

WALKING IN JERUSALEM, Jesus encountered a man born blind. His disciples, steeped in the idea that bad things only happen to bad people, asked who had sinned for this to have happened. The Lord's answer was challenging – nobody sinned, but this man was born blind so that Jesus could heal him and display God's works through him.

The power and creativity of the Lord knew no bounds, and he healed people in all manner of diverse ways. To the disabled man waiting by a pool, he simply said, *get up and walk*. For this blind man, he spat on the ground, made mud, spread it on the man's eyes and told him to wash in yet another pool.

Both men, once they had been healed, were hauled in front of the religious authorities, who grilled them and tried to gaslight them about their experience. The formerly blind man, however, was having none of that. He responded to the leaders' condescension with irony, asking whether they wanted to be Jesus' disciples and schooling them in some basic theology. After they threw him out, Jesus found him again and drew him to himself, the light of the world who opens physical and spiritual eyes.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you are the light of the world. You came to save far more than just our physical selves. Your Kingdom is eternal and your plan for salvation goes far beyond our earthly understanding. Thank you for opening our eyes to the truth of who you are and inviting us into eternity in your holy presence.

Amen.



DAY 15

MARTHA, MARY AND LAZARUS

SCRIPTURE

Luke 10:38-42; John 11:1-44

MARTHA, MARY AND LAZARUS WERE among Jesus' closest friends. When he visited Jerusalem, he'd stay at their home in Bethany, about three kilometres from the city. From the Gospel accounts, a family portrait emerges; Martha was a direct woman, head of the household that she shared with her sensitive sister, Mary, and their younger brother, Lazarus.

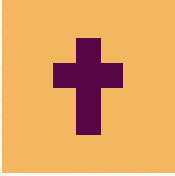
When Lazarus became ill, Jesus delayed coming to them because he knew that raising the dead would bolster their faith more than healing the sick. Both women came to him with the same words, but with entirely different feelings: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died." With Martha, he engaged in a discussion about the Resurrection, but with Mary, he simply wept. Jesus, the Wonderful Counsellor, comforted both women exactly as they needed.

During another visit, Martha was busy hosting while Mary sat at Jesus' feet. This was the posture of a disciple learning from a rabbi, a privilege reserved for men, but Jesus shattered that restriction and allowed Mary to formally study with him. Later, in the week before the Crucifixion, Mary anointed Jesus for his coming burial, showing she understood his mission better than the Twelve did at that point.

PRAYER

Jesus, you are a sovereign Lord, but you are also a personal God, always ready to meet each of us exactly where we are at. While who you are is eternal and unchanging, you are willing to show each of us love in different ways – just like you did for Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Thank you for this great gift.

Amen.



DAY 16

TWO CRIMINALS CRUCIFIED WITH JESUS

SCRIPTURE

Luke 23:32-43

ALL FOUR GOSPELS MENTION that Jesus was crucified between two criminals, but only Luke goes into detail about who they were and what happened to them. Matthew and Mark describe them as robbers, a term the Romans used for rebels or insurgents who had committed acts of terror or murder against the Roman state or its citizens. Luke simply refers to them as evildoers.

Whatever their specific crimes, we mustn't picture these two men as petty thieves or minor felons. The Romans weren't in the habit of crucifying such offenders. They reserved that terrible form of state execution for those who threatened the social order, rebellious slaves and hardened criminals capable of creating serious acts of chaos.

Matthew and Mark note that the criminals joined the crowd and the religious leaders in taunting Jesus as he hung on the cross. According to Luke, however, one of the two changed his tune. First, he rebuked the other man, admitting they deserved their punishment while Jesus did not, after which he threw himself on Jesus' mercy. The Lord assured him they'd be together in paradise that same day. Even in his final moments, this hardened criminal found grace and salvation in Jesus.

PRAYER

Lord, right until the end you were seeking lost souls to save, making yourself available to those who would call on you in their time of need. Thank you that there is nothing we can do that would separate us from your abundant love. Fill us with your Spirit so others may know the grace you freely give.

Amen.



DAY 17

JOHN, THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

SCRIPTURE

John 19:25-27; John 21:20-25

JOHN HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS the apostle of love. His Gospel uses the word more often than the other three Gospels put together. Five of those instances involve John referring to himself as the disciple Jesus loved. This was not to suggest Jesus didn't love his other disciples, but rather that John, as one of the inner three, experienced the love of the Lord in a most profound manner.

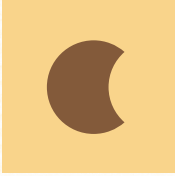
At the Last Supper, John occupied the most honoured position, reclining next to Jesus. When the disciples wanted to know who would betray the Lord, John was the one to ask him. Looking down from the cross, Jesus saw his mother standing next to John, and gave him the responsibility of caring for her once he was gone. After the Resurrection, when the disciples went fishing on the Sea of Galilee, John was the first to recognize the Lord, as he made breakfast for them on the shore.

John's relationship with Jesus was life changing. He outlived the other apostles by several decades, and never tired of speaking and writing about the wonder of Jesus' love. It was John who preserved Jesus' command that we love one another as he has loved us.

PRAYER

Lord God, your love isn't just spoken in words, but shown through actions. The greatest show of your love was the incredible gift of your Son, Jesus Christ. The Early Church continued showing your great love in community. Today we ask for help to follow this example by loving each other as you first loved us.

Amen.



DAY 18

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA AND NICODEMUS

SCRIPTURE

Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA WAS a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. The Gospel accounts portray him as a good man who was looking forward to the Kingdom of God and had become a disciple of Jesus, only secretly, because he feared the Jewish authorities. Nevertheless, he summoned his courage to ask Pilate, the Roman governor, for the body of Jesus. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in linen and buried it in his own new tomb.

In John's account, Nicodemus also participated in the burial of Jesus, bringing the mixture of spices used to prepare the body. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a teacher of the Law, and like Joseph, a member of the Sanhedrin. Earlier he had come to Jesus at night and had a challenging conversation about the new birth through faith in the Messiah. When the Jewish leaders decided to arrest Jesus, both Nicodemus and Joseph were against that decision.

These two prominent members of the Jewish ruling council had been radically changed by their encounters with Jesus. They'd become his disciples, resisting the tide of influence that had risen against him. Although they didn't know it yet, they were preparing their Lord for his Resurrection.

PRAYER

Christ Jesus, in a world of loud voices and convincing influencers, we desire to follow you and you alone. Give us courage to stand firm in your love and truth when others would have us bend and break. Give us wisdom to follow your path when other paths seem more tempting. Help us to hold fast to you.

Amen.



DAY 19

THE WOMEN WHO SUPPORTED JESUS

SCRIPTURE

Luke 8:1-3; Luke 24:1-12

WHEN WE THINK OF JESUS with his disciples, we may typically picture him alone with the Twelve, teaching them as they wandered through towns and countryside. In fact, Jesus had many disciples who followed him, notably a group of prominent, well-to-do women who travelled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem and supported his ministry out of their resources.

Most prominent among these was Mary Magdalene, who is mentioned by name more times than any of the Twelve, except Peter – we’ll explore her story in more detail tomorrow. Also of note was Joanna, the wife a royal official in Herod’s court, a woman named Susanna, and many other women, according to Luke.

When Jesus was arrested, the Eleven abandoned him and fled, but these women stayed with him. They were present at the Crucifixion, witnessed his burial, and returned to the tomb on the third day, hoping to properly anoint his body. Instead, they found the tomb empty, with two angels telling them the Lord had risen. These prominent female disciples were the first witnesses of the Resurrection. Despite Jesus’ approval, when these women rushed off to tell the male disciples, they were dismissed for talking nonsense and the men didn’t believe them.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for reaching out beyond the cultural expectations of the times in which you walked on earth to invite men and women, slave and free, Jew and Gentile into your Kingdom work. Thank you for making your Church a beautiful, diverse group of people joined together under your name.

Amen.



DAY 20

MARY MAGDALENE

SCRIPTURE

John 20:1-18

AS WE NOTED YESTERDAY, Mary Magdalene was among a group of women disciples who travelled with Jesus and the Twelve and supported them out of their personal resources. She is always mentioned first among these women, suggesting she held a place of prominence among them similar to that of Peter among the Twelve.

The only details known about her life are that she was from the town of Magdala, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, and that Jesus had cast seven demons out of her. Despite a common and pervasive belief, there's no evidence that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. It's more likely she was a wealthy widow, with the opportunity and the means to travel with Jesus and support his ministry.

Together with her circle of women, Mary stayed with Jesus during his Crucifixion, witnessed his burial, and returned on the morning of the third day to discover the tomb empty. Mary then had a unique encounter outside the tomb with the Risen Lord. At first, she didn't recognize him, until he gently spoke her name. Jesus chose Mary as the first person to see him risen, which made her essentially an apostle to the Apostles.

PRAYER

Jesus, like Mary all those years ago, we call out to you – our Rabbi, our Teacher – to lead us and guide us. Thank you for your patience when we despair, when we doubt and when we forget who you are. We ask in those moments that you would lift our gaze up to you and remind us of your great love.

Amen.



DAY 21

TWO DISCIPLES WALKING TO EMMAUS

SCRIPTURE

Luke 24:13-35

ON THE SAME DAY that Jesus rose, two of his disciples were walking to Emmaus, a town about 11 kilometres from Jerusalem. They weren't from among the Eleven, just two disciples discussing the events of the past few days. Out of nowhere, Jesus showed up and began walking with them, but they couldn't recognize him. Jesus asked what they were talking about, which made them question whether Jesus was the only person who didn't know about the things that had happened.

“What things?” Jesus asked, with a touch of irony. This opened the floodgates. The two men poured out how Jesus was a prophet whom the people expected to be their Messiah, but the authorities crucified him and now some of the women claimed he had risen, although no one else had seen him.

When they had finished, Jesus gently rebuked them for their lack of faith and explained everything in the Scriptures that was about him. Jesus then joined them for supper, and as he broke bread and blessed it, they recognized him, after which he disappeared. The two immediately headed back to Jerusalem, to tell the Eleven they'd seen the Risen Lord, their earlier despondency and confusion turned to joy.

PRAYER

God, even in the most difficult seasons of our lives, we know and trust that you are there, walking alongside us. Thank you for your patience for when we forget this simple truth, and when we doubt your constant presence. We ask that you would open our eyes to the incredible gift of your nearness.

Amen.



DAY 22

THOMAS THE TWIN

SCRIPTURE

John 20:19-29

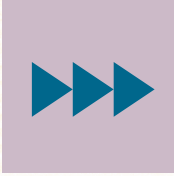
ON THE EVENING OF the day that Jesus had risen, the disciples were huddled together behind locked doors, afraid of the Jewish authorities who had crucified their Lord. Despite the added security, Jesus came and stood among them, spoke with them, and showed them his hands and his side.

For some reason, Thomas wasn't with them that first evening, so the other disciples told him that they'd seen the Lord. Thomas was having none of it – he told the Ten that unless he could place his fingers and hands in the scars of Jesus' wounds, he would never believe.

A week later, the Eleven were together again, this time with Thomas present, and despite the doors being once more locked, Jesus joined them in the room. His first order of business was with Thomas – the Lord invited him to put his finger in the nail marks in his hands and to place his hand in the spear wound in his side. “Don't be faithless, but believe,” Jesus encouraged, to which Thomas replied, “My Lord and my God,” one of the clearest declarations in the Scriptures about the divinity of Jesus. Rather than rebuking Thomas, Jesus provided the evidence he needed to believe.

PRAYER

Christ Jesus, you are our Lord and our God. You are the Messiah, our Saviour. In seasons of doubt, we may forget these essential truths, but when we turn back to you once more, we are filled with hope, peace and joy. Thank you for never failing to remind us of who you are.
Amen.



DAY 23

THE ELEVEN APOSTLES

SCRIPTURE

Luke 24:36-53

THOMAS WASN'T THE ONLY member of the Eleven who needed evidence that Jesus was back from the dead. When Jesus first came to them in the locked room, they were terrified and thought he was a ghost. The Lord invited them to touch him, to see that he was solid flesh and bone, and to examine the nail scars in his hands and feet. For conclusive proof, he ate a piece of fish in front of them, which would've simply passed through him and fallen to the floor if he were an apparition.

Jesus then opened their minds to understand that all of Scripture was about him and commissioned them to be his witnesses to every nation, proclaiming repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name. After spending 40 more days with them, the Lord led them out to the Mount of Olives near Bethany and ascended through the clouds, leaving a promise to return the same way one day.

Through their encounter with the Risen Lord, this diverse group of eleven men, whom Jesus had chosen to be his apostles, were transformed from cowering in a locked room to boldly testifying about Jesus, even in the face of imprisonment or death.

PRAYER

Lord, your plan from the beginning has always been far greater than what we could ever imagine. Thank you for entrusting us to follow through with the work of this great commission. We ask to be transformed into bold witnesses to spread the good news of your salvation to every nation.

Amen.



DAY 24

SAUL OF TARSUS, ALSO CALLED PAUL

SCRIPTURE

Acts 9:1-31

EVEN AFTER JESUS RETURNED to his Father in heaven, he still had one more apostle to call. An apostle needed to have encountered Jesus directly and personally. For that reason, the Lord appeared from heaven to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus and stopped him in his tracks.

Saul wasn't the likeliest candidate for apostleship. He was a well-educated Pharisee and a rising star in Judaism, as well as a zealous persecutor of the new Christian faith. The Jewish leadership had authorized him to hunt down and imprison Jews who had converted to Christianity, a mission he was pursuing in Damascus when Jesus apprehended him.

"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Jesus asked, after which Saul experienced a dramatic conversion and became a passionate witness for Jesus. His theological training, Roman citizenship and knowledge of Greek writings and culture ideally fitted him to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. He changed his Jewish name, Saul, to its Greco-Roman form, Paul, and became the spearhead of the Gospel beyond the Jewish nation to the wider Gentile world – and to us. It's because of Paul's encounter with Jesus that we have the majority of the New Testament outside of the Gospels.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for showing us, through the conversion of Saul, that no one is beyond your reach. Thank you for showing us how everyone, no matter their background and how they came to you, has an essential role to play in your Kingdom. Give us eyes to see the role you've called us to as well.
Amen.

FREE

CHRISTMAS CRAFT DOWNLOAD!

This fun pop-out Nativity scene makes a great gift for grandparents, aunts and uncles, neighbours and friends!



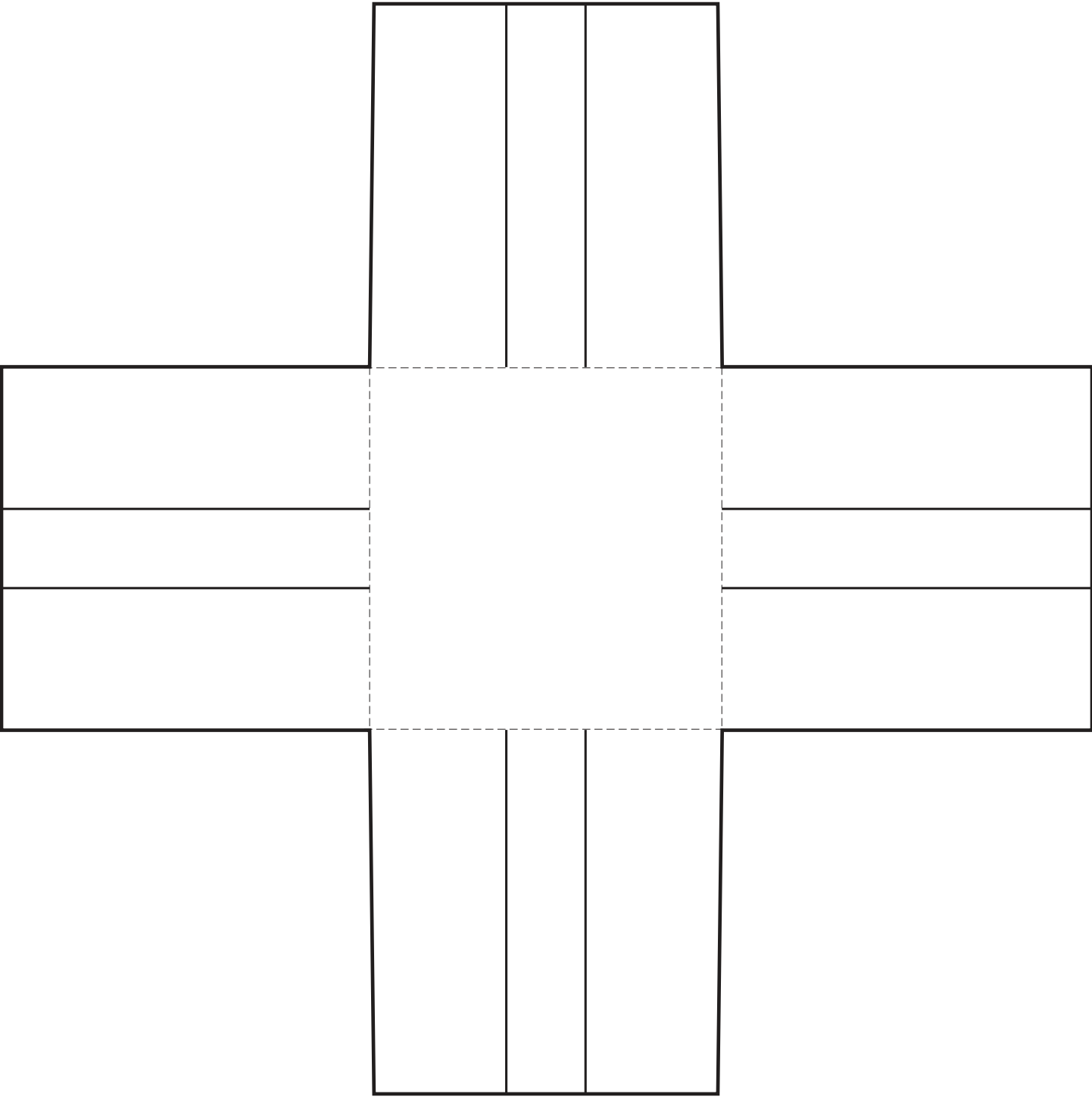
SUPPLIES NEEDED

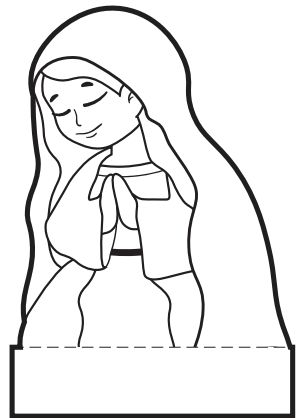
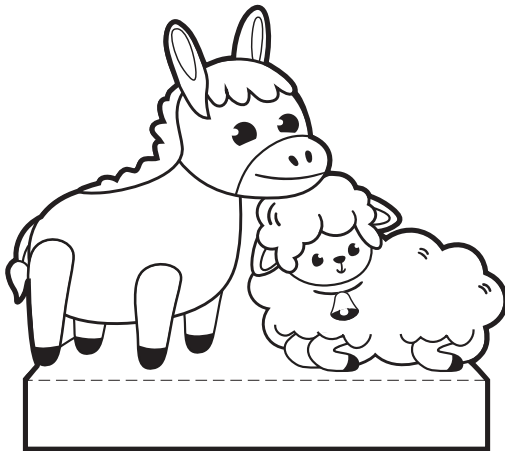
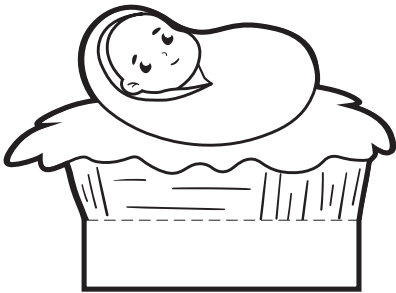
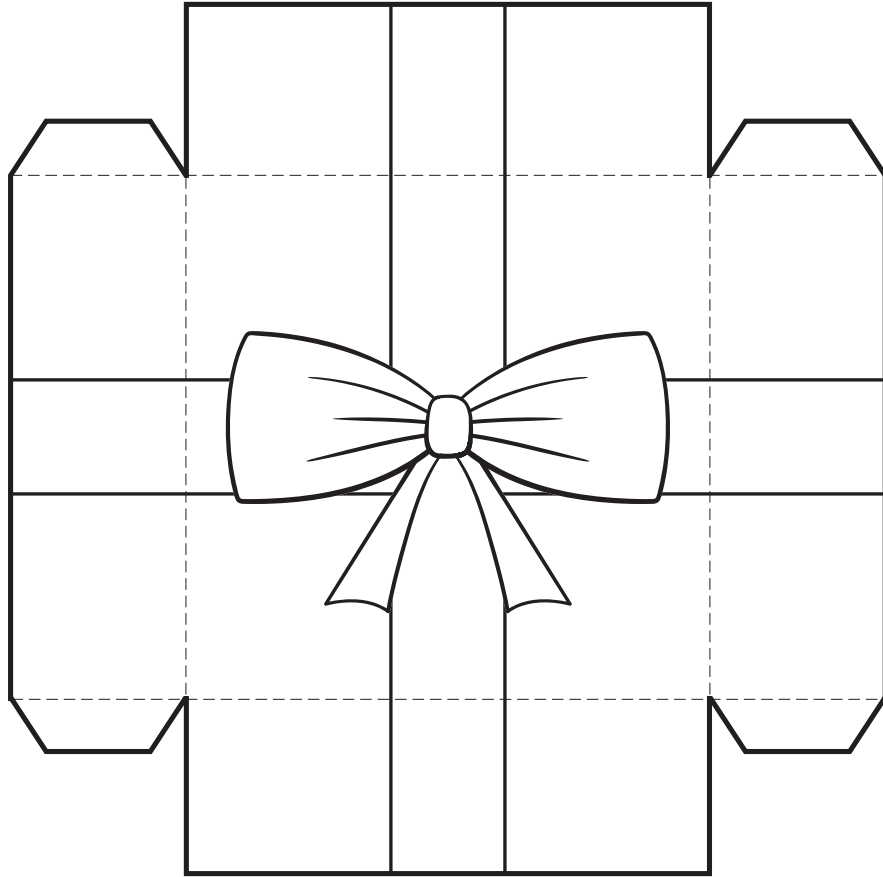
1. Printer
2. Cardstock (recommended) or paper
3. Crayons, coloured pencils or markers
4. Scissors
5. Glue or tape
6. Cardboard (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Print out the pages with all the illustrations.
2. Use your imagination to colour in Mary and Joseph, Jesus in the manger, animals and the present. You don't need to colour in the tabs.
3. Cut on the solid lines – don't cut off the tabs!
4. Take the piece with the bow on top, fold on the dotted lines, then glue the tabs to make a three-dimensional lid.
5. Take the piece that's the bottom of the box and fold on the dotted lines. For extra support, glue the bottom of the box (middle square) onto a piece of cardboard or cardstock.
6. For each of the additional pieces (Mary and Joseph, Jesus in the manger, and the animals), fold the tabs and glue them on the inside of the box like the picture above.
7. Fold up the sides of the box and gently place the lid on top to "close it" then when you're ready for the fun Nativity surprise, pull off the lid and see the Nativity scene unfold and "pop out"!
8. Print out and complete as many as you want to share the joy of Jesus with friends and family this Christmas!







**MERRY
CHRISTMAS!**

— FROM —



FOCUSONTHEFAMILY.CA

19946 80A AVENUE, LANGLEY, BC V2Y 0J8 | 1 800 661 9800 | INFO@FOTF.CA

M00329M