

# Rekindling the Glory of Christmas

by Dr. Jason Hubbard





## Bethlehem's Lamb

To rekindle the glory of Christmas is to take a fresh look at the greatest love story of all time, when God's own Son shed his garments of glory to become Bethlehem's Lamb. This is the story where the author of the book steps into his own tale. The Word became flesh and dwells among us. He will make himself vulnerable to pain and human suffering. He will discover the feeling of a tear rolling down his cheek. He will lay his life down as a Lamb, conquering sin and death and giving eternal life to all who believe! Oh, it's the wonder of the ages. The glory of the incarnation, God himself now with human skin! The Creator has become a created being. Staggering! He who made man is made a man. The infinite has become an infant. The Shepherd of eternity has become Bethlehem's Lamb.

*"Your mother is a cause for wonder; the Lord entered her and became a servant; he who is the Word entered her and became silent within her; thunder entered her and made no sound; there entered the Shepherd of all, and in her he became the Lamb, bleating as he came forth. Your mother's womb has reversed the roles; the Establisher of all entered in his richness, but came forth poor; the Exalted one entered her, but came forth meek, the Splendorous One entered her, but came forth having put on a lowly hue. The Mighty One entered, and put on insecurity from her womb, the Provisioner of all entered and experienced hunger, he who gives drink to all, entered and experienced thirst; naked and stripped there came forth from her he who clothes everyone."-Ephrem the Syrian*

Why Bethlehem? As the prophet spoke, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Though* you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in

Israel, Whose goings forth *are* from of old, From everlasting.”  
(Micah 5:2)

Just seven miles outside of Jerusalem, these were the same hills where David tended his lambs. After God’s announcement came to Mary and Joseph, he sent angels to the shepherds. They were “keeping watch over their flocks by night,” which was only done during the ‘lambing season,’ when the baby lambs were being born in Bethlehem (March/April).

The only people lower than the shepherds at that particular time in Jewish history were lepers. These poor, lowly, unkempt shepherds, the last people on earth you would ever suspect, have seen what no other man on earth was privileged to see. To these lowly men an angel gives them the highest theology! These despised shepherds are the first to receive the announcement of the gospel! These men are the first to learn of “great joy for all the people.” They understand that the gospel is not just for Israel but for all the nations that all may have this joy that comes, “through the birth of a Savior, who is Christ-the Messiah, the LORD!” This the only time in the gospels that this phrase is used. It’s the only time we see these 3 titles of Jesus come together, Savior, Messiah, and LORD! He will save his people from their sins, Jesus is the Christ the promised Messiah to Israel and, most staggering of all, He is Lord, He is God! The angel not only gives the gospel to the shepherds, he reveals the true identity of Christ!

It seems God believes that high theology should be given to low people!

They saw the heavens roll open as the glory of God exploded through the night sky. They watched thousands of angels in glowing splendor declaring the glory of Christ! As Hughes writes and envisions,

“A heavenly flash and suddenly the bewildered shepherds were surrounded by angels. A great company is literally a multitude, not 50, not 150, not 1500—but beyond count. I think every one of God’s angels was there because this was the most amazing event that had ever happened in the entire universe...Job tells us that at the creation of the world, ‘the morning stars (angels) sang together and all the angels shouted for joy (Job 38:7). Now the angels again joined voices at the greatest creation of all—the birth of the God-man—perfect sympathizer and Savior”

And they heard the voice of an angel declaring the birth of a Savior. “This will be a **sign** to you. You will see a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:12)

These shepherds knew that **mangers** were used as feeding troughs and were found in shepherd’s caves, the place where baby lambs were born and wrapped in swaddling cloths! I can only imagine as these rugged, scraggly bearded men, approached the cave, they began to tremble and weep like babies as they looked into the face of God! I can imagine these shepherds, those who carry lambs, laying them down one by one as gifts at the foot of the manger.

But these were not just any lambs. These were Bethlehem lambs, born and bred for one purpose; to be sacrificed at the temple. Because the city of David was just outside of Jerusalem, these lambs born in the hills of Bethlehem, were born to be taken to the temple in Jerusalem and slain for sacrifice. A manger, this humble crib for a king, was the perfect place for a Lamb.

Why must he be brought forth among sheep and lambs? Because he is God’s Lamb, and a shepherd’s cave is a fitting place for a lamb. Why must shepherds be first, among all the people on the earth to attend his birth? Because shepherds always attend the birth of lambs. That’s their job. That’s their calling. And most of all

why must he be born in the little town of Bethlehem? Lambs set for sacrifice were born in Bethlehem. Even as young lambs were slain in the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus-the lamb of God- would be taken to Jerusalem to be slain. That's why in the greatest love story ever told, Jesus was Bethlehem's Lamb.

### **The Wow Factor -The Invasion of the Incarnation**

"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge" (Psalm 19:1-2).

I am always amazed when I read and study the vastness of creation! My son and I finished studying a book called Indescribable, by Louie Giglio and Matt Redman. We learned that astronomers now estimate there to be around 70 million million stars in the visible universe alone. According to the best estimates of astronomers there are at least one hundred billion galaxies in the observable universe. And our solar system is tiny compared to our Milky Way galaxy. By way of comparison, scientists say the size of our solar system relative to the Milky Way would be roughly the size of a quarter in an area as big as North America! One of the largest stars in our known universe is the IRS 65. If our sun stood only 18 inches high, then in comparison IRS 65 would stand as tall as Mount Everest.

Next up we learned about Neutron stars. Talk about the wow factor. Some astronomers estimate that neutron stars may actually be ten trillion times denser than steel. Some neutron stars spin at rates of up to six hundred times per second. Wow! Astronomers estimate that the sun is around 27 million degrees Fahrenheit at its core. It burns up around 4 million tons of its own mass every second. And it's so huge that even at that rate it would last another 5 to 6 billion years! And the sun is just an average star in the universe among billions of others!

Job says, "Stop and consider God's wonders..." (Job 37:14).

"He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names." (Psalm 147:4).

"I am the Lord, who has made all things, who alone stretches out the heavens" (Isa 44:24).

Genesis says that Jesus spoke these galaxies into existence with mere sentences. He upholds all things by the word of his power! Wow.... And yet Job declares that these are the mere fringes of his works,

"how faint the whisper we hear of him? Who then can understand the thunder of his power?" (Job 26:14).

And to think that the God who spoke creation into existence as a mere whisper invaded the human race taking on human flesh, becoming one of us! Just think of the restraining power that must have been yielded to keep the second person of the Trinity wrapped up now in human flesh!

Christmas does not mark just another observance in the churches annual calendar. Rather it defines a monumental, unparalleled, unrepeatable moment where "infinity dwindled to infancy" (Edward T. Oakes). It marks a moment when the all powerful Son of God stepped into frailty, in real time and space and history!

The New Testament message is that the Living God has come to us as one of us! As Bryant writes, "Jesus himself is God among us, permanently united to us, taking strategic action for us, to save us and liberate us. This kind of incarnation requires nothing less than a God-orchestrated

INVASION."

I believe the incarnation, the doctrine of Jesus' full humanity and full deity is the most extraordinary miracle in all of Scripture. Jesus retains unity with the Trinity and with our humanity, both at the same time. He embodies two natures without confusion and without division. He did not change what He was (God), rather he took on what He was not (Human) as well as our frailty without compromising his Deity. Consider that:

- He was born a baby and He sustains the universe.
- He was 30 years old and He exists eternally.
- He was tired and omnipotent.
- He died and He conquered death.
- He has returned to heaven and He is present with us.

The Incarnation is the most profound mystery in all of the universe!

As Bishop of Melito of Sardis writes,

“He appeared as one of the sheep yet he still remained the Shepherd. He was esteemed a servant, yet he did not renounce his Sonship. He was carried in the womb of Mary, yet arrayed in the nature of his Father. He walked upon the earth, yet he filled all of heaven. He appeared as an infant, yet he did not discard the eternity of his nature. He needed sustenance inasmuch as he was a man; yet he did not cease to feed the entire world inasmuch as he is God”

The thunder of God's power speaks of God's person, not just what he does but who He is! He is the All-Consuming One, the All-



Sufficient One, the All-Satisfying One, and the All-Deserving One!  
As David Bryant writes,

"He defies all human categories; there is no language that can adequately describe Him. He is the incomparable One! He remains in a class by himself...no duplicates, no clones. His importance eclipses all others. He outranks every other being in Heaven, earth, or hell. He is the exalted One; for all eternity he holds the primary focus of our praises. He holds a position of unrivaled distinction, prestige, and majesty. He will be the joy of all peoples, the desire of all nations. He is the Victorious One. None of his enemies will prevail, he will defeat all of his foes unconditionally-both human and demonic and will emerge forever unthreatened, unhindered, and victorious over all opposition, permanently and forever. He is the Preeminent and Supreme One...in time and space and history he lays claim to the universe, it all belongs to Him. He is the all sufficient One. Nothing can exhaust his power or resources. He will forever prove totally adequate for all of our longings, fears, needs or heart cries. He is faithful and true!"(Bryant, Christ is All, pg. 41-42)

He is indescribable in his beauty, unfathomable in his wisdom! He is outstanding! He is the well-spring of eternity, the fountainhead of all glory; glory that flows from him and through him and back to him! He is the dazzling one, the radiant one, the chandelier of heaven, and the Light of the World! Jesus' countenance is said to be brighter than the sun. The worth of Jesus is so stunning that the angelic host of the heavens collapse under the weight of his Glory! Literally 100 million angels catch a glimpse of Glory and fall down saying,

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth, and wisdom and mighty and honor and glory and blessing" (Rev. 5:12).

One of the most astounding verses in Scripture is found in the book of Revelation,

"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them" (Revelation 20:21).

The entire universe flees away and is no more when God turns his face towards creation at the end of the age. Wow! There are simply no words to adequately describe the awesome power, presence and glory of the uncreated God. The more we understand the Scriptures, the more majestic and magnificent and awesome Jesus Christ is. May our worship, prayer and service to Him be a direct reflection of that wonder and awe!

And to think that this God is the God who pursues us, who takes delight in us, who enjoys us even in our weakness! As God declares through the prophet Zechariah,

"The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he rejoices over you with gladness; he quiets you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing" (Zephaniah 3:17).

I believe it is God's aim to ravish the affections of the human race with irresistible displays of his GLORY! We were made to know and experience the Glory of God, to enjoy and treasure the Glory of God. His glory becomes our JOY! He is our great Treasure. He is our exceeding Joy.

May Jesus be our Supreme focus this Christmas season!

## Mary Christmas

“For nothing will be impossible with God.” And Mary said,  
“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me  
according to your word.” -Luke 1:37-38

When the angel Gabriel prophesies over Mary that she would be overshadowed with the Holy Spirit and carry the Son of God in her womb, she responds with faith, as opposed to Zechariah who doubted the word of the Lord. Gabriel concludes the message with the promise, “Nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). The word Luke uses for ‘nothing’ is the Greek word ‘rhema.’ It can be translated ‘thing/nothing.’ However, in most cases it is translated ‘word/message.’ Since Mary responds to the prophetic promise, “May it be unto me according to your word (rhema),” I believe a more accurate rendering of Luke 1:37 is this: “No word of God is without dynamic or without power.” The principle is still the same, nothing is impossible with God. However, I believe Luke wants us to understand that every word from God has power! When God says a thing, inherent in what he says is the power to bring it to pass. God’s word is not without ability to accomplish all that God wants to accomplish! God’s word has the power to affect change, the capacity to wield force! We see this when Jesus speaks creation into existence, “and God said” (Gen. 1:3). The psalmist declared,

“He sent out his word and healed them and delivered  
them from their destruction.” -Psalm 107:20

The Lord says through the prophet Isaiah,

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven  
and do not return there but water the earth, making it  
bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread  
to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my  
mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall

accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” -Isa 55:10-11

Inherent in the word itself is the power to bring it to pass! No word of God is without power to accomplish all that God wants to accomplish!

Mary hears the promised word and responds with faith! The text implies that in the very moment she believed and confessed, she was impregnated with the word made flesh (John 1:14). The Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary and Jesus was conceived in her womb! She then acts on her faith, immediately going to see Elizabeth. True faith always leads to obedience. Elizabeth declared over her,

“And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” - Luke 1:45

After the birth of Jesus and through his early years, Mary continues to treasure the words of the Lord!

“And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.” -Luke 2:19

The word for things here is ‘rhema.’ Again, I think the context best renders this text, “his mother treasured all these words of the Lord.”

We have a similar experience when we are born again. When we hear the good news of Jesus, the gospel word of the Lord spoken to us and respond with saving faith, we are impregnated with the word.

“For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” -Rom 10:10

At the moment we believe with our heart and confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord, we are born again. Glory!

Do you remember the parable of the seed, sower, and soil? Luke 8:11 begins the explanation of the parable, "The seed is the word of God." What God has said and what God is saying is the bottom line of every situation. As we hear the Word, receive it by faith in our hearts and confess it as truth, we get pregnant with the Word of God.

"since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for 'all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower fails, but the word of the Lord remains forever.' And this word is the good news that was preached to you" -1 Peter 1:23-25

Not only does faith in God's word bring us salvation but it also sanctifies us and conforms us to the image of Jesus! As Jesus prayed to the Father,

"Father sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth." - John 17:17

Peter declares to us that God's promises help us become partakers of the divine nature and escape the corruption of the world.

"by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desires." - 2 Peter 1:4

As we hear and respond by faith to the promises of God in his Word, we get pregnant with whatever the Word promises;

salvation, forgiveness, healing, deliverance, guidance or encouragement!

Both Joshua and David declare that meditating on the word of God will produce fruit in our lives (Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1:2-3).

God's word nourishes us and helps us overcome temptation. Jesus declared in the wilderness,

"Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" -Matt. 4:4

Like Mary, Job treasured and feasted on God's word,

"I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food" -Job 23:12

As his word abides in us, we speak and sing God's word back to him in the place of prayer and worship. It moves his heart and releases his power on the earth! We wield his word through prayer!

"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you!" -John 15:7

"Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication." -Eph. 6:17-18

As his word abides in us, his Spirit will empower us by his grace to proclaim his word to our generation, the word of the gospel with power as his messengers! (Acts 1:8)

Jesus commended another Mary, Mary of Bethany for doing the 'One Thing' that was necessary,

“And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his word...but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” -Luke 10:39, 42

Let’s follow Mary’s lead (both of them) and get Pregnant with the word of God on the inside until we begin to Show! Let’s do the **One Thing** that Jesus said was necessary, ‘sitting at his feet and listening to his word.’ This Christmas season, let’s get into God’s Word until God’s Word gets into us and show ourselves to be his disciples!

“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free” - John 8:31-32

## **Bread of Life**

Bethlehem, the city of David, where the Son of David was prophesied to be born was one of the smallest towns in all of Israel, maybe 300-500 people. Bethlehem means “house of bread.” I find it fascinating that Jesus the bread of life was born in the city called the House of Bread.

Jesus claimed, “I am the bread of Life, the Living Bread” in the context of the Passover feast. It was the first ‘I am’ claim in the gospel of John, connected with a noun. He will then go on to say,

- “I am the *Light of the world*, whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life” (John 8:12).
- “I am the *Good Shepherd*; the Good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).
- “I am the *Resurrection and the Life*; whoever lives and believes in me shall live even if they die” (John 11:25).

- “I am the *Way, the Truth and the Life*; no one comes to the Father but by me” (John 14:6).
- “I am the *true Vine*; you are the branches. Keep on abiding in me and I in you and you will bear much fruit” (John 15:5).

All amazing claims of Christ, but “I am the bread of life” is hugely audacious! Jesus is saying you cannot make it in life without me. I am absolutely necessary for human existence. You need me as much as you need your next meal. Indeed, more than your next meal!

When Jesus made this claim, John is careful to tell us that “Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand” (John 6:4). The Passover was and still is a time ***to remember*** -a time to remember God’s great acts of salvation when God set his people free from slavery in Egypt. During Passover the Jews remember with sorrow the bitter suffering of their ancestors. During Passover the Jews remember with humility the sprinkled blood of the lambs, blood which protected them as the angel of death passed through Egypt, blood which caused judgement to “pass over” their homes. During Passover the Jews remember with awe the power of God, how the Living God parted the Red Sea so the liberated people could ‘pass over’ to the other side and escape the pursuing armies of Pharaoh. And during Passover they remember with gratitude the gracious gifts of God, how God miraculously provided manna from heaven and the flesh of quail, so the people could survive in the Sinai desert.

And the Passover feast was and still is a time ***to renew hope***. Moses - the one who lead Israel out of bondage to freedom, the one who prayed for the manna from heaven- this Moses promised that one day God would send another leader, like himself, to speak God’s life-giving word. “The Lord your God will



raise up for you a prophet like me, from among you... you shall listen to him" (Deut. 18:15). By the first century, there was a growing expectation that during some Passover the Prophet-like Moses would come. And there was the growing expectation that this Prophet-like-Moses would bring with him the same miraculous deliverance and the same miraculous provision of God. There was a saying in the first century, "As was the first redeemer, so was the final redeemer; as the first redeemer caused the manna to fall from heaven, even so shall the second redeemer shall cause manna to fall" (Barclay, Gospel of John, 1:125).

That is the context that Jesus makes his "I am the Bread of Life" claim. Jesus makes his claim within a larger story being told and celebrated in the Feast. This is the case with all that Jesus says about anything. He is speaking from within and to a larger story. A number of important biblical texts were read and reflected on at the Feast. In Exodus 16:4 the text says that God will "rain down" bread from heaven each day. What a promise! Bread from heaven in the desert every day. And the text says that the people were to go and gather a day's portion each day except on the day before the Sabbath, when two days' worth would "rain down." The point being that God will provide everyday but only one day at a time and therefore the people will need to go and gather the manna one day at a time.

What does this have to do with Jesus' claim? Jesus says, "I am the Bread of Life; whoever comes to Me shall never hunger, whoever believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). The tense of the verbs "come" and "believe" are in the present tense, which emphasizes continual action: "keep on." Jesus is saying, "Keep coming" and "Keep believing." Whoever keeps on coming will never hunger. Whoever keeps on believing will never thirst.

The great multitude at Passover understood the “keep coming.” The people of Israel had to go and pick up the manna each new day (Exodus 16:22-30). He is saying in essence, “I am the bread of Life. You need to come to Me every day, keep coming.” When we find ourselves empty and hungering too much for the bread that perishes, it likely means we have fallen out of the habit of the “keep coming.” Keep coming, keep believing. Every day.

There is another important portion of the Bible read and studied during Passover. It is Genesis 2-3. Jesus works with that text as well when he makes his claim.

At the very beginning God placed Adam and Eve in a garden. In this garden, the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food” (Gen. 2:9). We see two aspects to this. On the one hand it is attractive—this is the earliest reference in Scripture to beauty. But it is also useful—what grows in the garden provides nourishment and sustenance. The name Eden means “delight or pleasure.” So, the garden was to be a place of deep delight, rest, pleasure and provision. God spoke to Adam and Eve, “Eat from any tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat of that tree you shall surely die.” God wanted Adam and Eve to remember, treasure and enjoy him. They were to live dependent on Him! Every meal was to be a place of remembrance, gratitude and worship! And yet they ‘ate’ for their own pleasure unto themselves and were “cast out” of the garden.

Because of their sin of declaring independence from God, which is what eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil means, because of that sin, humanity is cast out of the garden of Eden. “So the Lord cast them out” (Genesis 3:24). And then the Lord stationed angels to guard the way to the ‘tree of life’ to protect them from living independently forever.

This text is in the minds and the ears of the worshippers during the time of Christ at Passover. Jesus declares, "I am the bread of Life." Not just the bread, but the Bread of *Life*. After making this claim, Jesus says next, "All that the Father gives me will come to me. And the one who comes to me, I will certainly not 'cast out.' Do you hear Jesus? The way to the tree of Life has been opened. He opened it by dealing with the problem of sin.

Jesus connects the Genesis part of the story another way. In Genesis 2, God warns Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. "Do not declare independence from me. You will not make it. You shall not eat of it, lest you die. Eat of it and you will die" (Genesis 2:17). Then in Genesis 3:6, "She took and ate." And she died, along with Adam and the rest of the human race. ***Eat of it and die***-the phrase is ringing in the minds and ears of the great multitude gathered at Passover.

Jesus says, "I am the bread of Life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness and they died (John 6:48-49). He presses on. Listen! "This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that you may eat of it and not die" (John 6:50). To eat the Bread that is Jesus is to enter into the life we lost at the fall!

That is the context in which Jesus makes his "I am the Bread of Life" claim. Jesus is saying in essence, "I am that without which you cannot live. I am the final satisfaction of the human soul. Come to Me, every day. Believe in me, every day. I give you Myself as Living Bread!"

This is why communion is so important in the life of the church. When we meet around the Lord's table to remember his dying for the sin of the world, he comes to us and feeds us.

"She took and ate." Took and ate. Those two words do not come together in the rest of the biblical story. We do not find 'take and eat' together elsewhere –

Until the Bread of Life says, “Take, eat, this is my body given for you.”

Let’s Come this Christmas season and eat of this bread that comes down out of heaven and gives Life and hear him say to us,

“Not cast out.”

“Eat and not die.”

## **Eating**

For most of us, eating meals together plays a significant role in our Christmas celebrations! Most of us eat three meals a day. Over the span of a year, that’s 1,095 meals.

It has always been God’s intention that meals would cause us to reflect on who God is, remember, give thanks and worship Jesus together.

The story of Scripture revolves around this theme of meals. Meals were often described in Scripture as a covenant meal because food was an important part of covenant making in the ancient Near East. Eating with other people was a significant event in ancient days, for only parties who were at peace could dine together. An illustration of this covenant meal and its attendant peace is seen in Genesis 31:51–54, where Laban and Jacob come to a truce and solemnize their pact with the breaking of bread. The ancient world of covenant typically concluded a covenant meal with bread and wine (Gen. 14:18). As they gave their covenant partner bread and wine, they were saying, “I give myself to you.”

Even today a meal can be a special sign of love and fellowship. Having meals with other believers is a good way to further peace

among the brethren and to show a hurting world the love we have for each other.

Think about these meals from Scripture:

- Abraham is blessed by Melchizedek with bread and wine (Genesis 14:18-19).
- Abraham provides hospitality and entertains 3 strangers over a meal, one of whom is the pre-incarnate Christ (Genesis 18).
- The Passover meal celebrating God's deliverance and his provision of his people Israel (Exodus 12).
- Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and 70 elders went up on Mt. Sinai and saw the God of Israel and shared a meal together with God (Ex. 24:9-11).
- Daily Manna provided from heaven during Israel's wilderness years (Exodus 16).
- The continual sacrifice of offerings; daily sacrifices, and annual sacrifices during Israel's feasts before the Lord (Exodus 29, Leviticus 23).
- The psalmist talks about a table being prepared for God's people even in the midst of her enemies (Psalm 23:5).
- A glorious meal is promised to God's people and the nations on Mount Zion at the end of the age. When the Old Testament prophets wanted to speak of the day when God's reign would finally come in its fullness, they depicted a great feast. The great poet/prophet Isaiah spoke of a coming day when God will prepare "a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best

of meats and the finest of wines” In the day when all that is wrong is made right and all that is broken is made whole, there’s going to be one extravagant meal (Isaiah 25:6).

- Jesus shares a meal with 5000, multiplying 2 fish and 5 loaves to provide for all in need (Matthew 14:13-21).
- Jesus and his disciples share and celebrate a Passover meal together announcing the new covenant (Luke 22:19-21).
- Jesus shares communion with the two on the road to Emmaus, both bread and wine (Luke 24:30).
- Jesus shares a breakfast meal with Peter and the disciples after he had risen from the dead (John 21:12).
- The Church at Laodicea is encouraged to hear the voice of Jesus and open the door, that he might come in and eat with them (Revelation 3:20).
- The Marriage supper of the Lamb at the end of the age! (Revelation 19:1-8).

Tables are one of the most important places of human connection. We’re often most fully alive to life when sharing a meal around a table. We shouldn’t be surprised, then, to find that throughout the Bible God has a way of showing up at tables. In fact, it’s worth noting that at the center of the spiritual lives of God’s people in both the Old and New Testaments, we find a table: the table of Passover and the table of Communion. New Testament scholar N. T. Wright captured something of this sentiment when he wrote, “When Jesus himself wanted to explain to his disciples what his forthcoming death was all about, he didn’t give them a theory, he gave them a meal.”

We need a recovery of the spiritual significance of what we eat, where we eat, and with whom we eat.

In Matthew's account of the Last Supper, he writes, "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body'" (Matt 26:26). The same pattern of language—blessing, breaking, and giving—also shows up in the accounts of Jesus's miraculous feedings, as well as in the scene in which Jesus is recognized by the disciples with whom he had walked on the road to Emmaus. In his book *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, Eugene Peterson has observed that this pattern of being blessed, broken, and given is at the heart of the Christian story. There he rightly insists, "This is the shape of the Eucharist. This is the shape of the Gospel. This is the shape of the Christian life."

The word that John uses to describe the fire that Jesus made to cook a meal to share with his disciples after he had risen from the dead is a word that occurs in only one other place in Scripture—earlier in his own story (John 18:18). There the word used is of the fire where Peter and the others warmed themselves on the night of Jesus's arrest and trial. The charcoal fire of John 18:18 was the place of Peter's denial. For Peter, shame had a smell—that of burning charcoal. But the charcoal fire of John 21 is the place of Peter's restoration. The simple invitation of Jesus to his friend is, "Come and have breakfast" (21:12). The table is the place where broken sinners find connection, restoration, and belonging.

Jesus spent His time on earth eating and drinking – a lot of His time. It was often around the table and over a shared meal that discipleship took place. The Gospel of Luke is full of stories of Jesus eating with people:

- In Luke 5, Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners at the home of Levi (5:29-32).

- In Luke 7, Jesus is anointed by a woman in the home of Simon the Pharisee during a meal (7:36-50).
- In Luke 9, Jesus feeds the five thousand (9:10-36).
- In Luke 10, Jesus eats in the home of Mary and Martha (10:25-42).
- In Luke 14, Jesus shares about the parable of the large banquet in which He urges people to invite the poor rather than their friends (14:7-24).
- In Luke 15, the Pharisees describe Jesus as one who receives sinners and eats with them.
- In Luke 22, we read the account of the Last Supper (22:14-23).

Even when Jesus is not eating, references to food abound throughout the Gospel. It is safe to say that, throughout Luke's Gospel, Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal.

In Matthew 11 Jesus is called a "glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." Meals were tangible examples of His abounding grace toward sinners. I believe He wants us to follow his lead and open up our homes to sinners, to the poor, to the unclean, and to the hurting. Let's ask the Lord this Christmas season, who we should share a meal with?

### **Here are some questions to consider**

- Do you know any "enemies" who need Jesus with which you could share a meal?



- Could an unexpected guest in your life be an opportunity to minister over a meal?
- Could you offer a meal to someone around you who is hungry or thirsty?
- Are you too busy to spend time with people over a meal?
- What in your heart needs to be cleansed to be hospitable to all kinds of people?
- Is there someone who needs you to reach out and offer to share a meal together?
- Do you see meals as a way to serve others' spiritual needs?
- Is God asking you to reveal Jesus — the Word who became flesh (John 1:14) — over a meal?
- Is there someone you can comfort and uplift through a meal?

## **Hanukkah**

In John 10, Jesus makes an audacious claim during the Jewish Feast of Dedication, known today as Hanukkah or the Festival of Lights.

“I am the good Shepherd... The good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”

The emphasis is on the adjective good. Literally it reads in the Greek text, “I am the Shepherd, the good,” Good meaning noble, praiseworthy, beautiful, fair, or important! He is the best shepherd, the one who will feed his sheep with abundance and

bring them into good pasture! He is the shepherd of Ezekiel 34:15,

“I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and strong I will destroy. I will feed them justice.”

If he is our good shepherd, then we are his sheep! Although most of us would like to be lions, we inherently know that we are basically sheep, easily frightened, easily distracted, very needy and profoundly insecure. However, we have a good shepherd who loves us, nurtures us, guides us and brings us into abundant life!

“I am the good shepherd,” says Jesus!

Jesus employs this imagery during the Feast of Dedication. The Bible mentions the Feast of Dedication by name in the Gospel of John.

“Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon’s Colonnade” (John 10:22–23).

It was an 8-day feast, held in the winter, during the darkest and coldest time of the year. John states, ‘at the time of the feast of dedication’ meaning, what he had just proclaimed in John 10 and following was during the feast of dedication. John uses this statement as a marker to help us understand the context of what Jesus was sharing and demonstrating to the crowds and religious leaders. This is also the scene in which Jesus claims oneness with the Father, for which the unbelieving Jews try to apprehend and stone Him (verses 24–39).

This feast was not prescribed in the Old Testament but was initiated out of a painful time in Israel's history. From 175 BC to 164 BC a powerful leader in the Middle East, Antiochus Epiphanes, ruled over all of Palestine. His headquarters were in Syria. He was devoted to Greek culture and ideals and wanted to change all policy and culture to a Greek worldview. He wanted to civilize the world and destroy all ideas of a Sovereign God who leads and directs human history. He was like a modern-day secular humanist. He believed man is the measure of all things, man determines what is right and wrong, and man shapes his own destiny. This of course put him in conflict with the Jews of Palestine.

Antiochus decided he needed to rid the earth of this religion. First, he began slowly and patiently, gradually changing policies and structures towards a Greek worldview. And then suddenly in 170 BC, he attacked Jerusalem and murdered eighty thousand Jews. The survivors were sold into slavery. He wiped out the Jewish treasury. He determined it was now illegal to own a copy of the Jewish law, the Torah, and anyone who did would be punished with capital offense. He outlawed the observance of sabbath, and circumcision. Mothers who circumcised their children were crucified and their children were hung around their necks. He took the Jerusalem temple as his own and set up an altar to the Greek god Zeus. He turned the priest's rooms into a brothel. Finally, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Chislev, 167 BC, he offered swine blood on the altar. According to the Law,

“And the swine, though it divides the hoof, having cloven hooves, yet does not chew the cud, *is* unclean to you. Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch. They *are* unclean to you” (Lev 11:7-8).

This abomination and desecration of the temple continued for 3 years, until Judah Maccabee and his brothers rose up in heroic military revolt. They conquered this evil dictator and his empire.

Judah Maccabee, whose name means “hammer,” cleansed the temple, reinstituted the sacrificial system and rededicated the temple to Yahweh! The feast of dedication was instituted each year to remember the oppressive reign of Antiochus Epiphanes and celebrate together the Maccabean revolt and rededication of the temple. During the Feast of Dedication Jews remember the courage and victory of Judah Maccabee and his brothers and most importantly remember with great joy the Living God’s promise to come one day and shepherd the people of Israel himself!

The original Feast of Dedication, also known today as Hanukkah, involved a miracle, according to rabbinic tradition. When the Jews re-entered the temple, they could only find one small, sealed jug of olive oil that had not been profaned or contaminated by the Seleucids. They used this to light the menorah in the temple. Although this oil was only enough to last one day, it miraculously lasted eight days—time for more oil to be made ready. This is the reason Hanukkah lasts for eight days. Because of this some have referred to this Feast as the Festival of Lights and quite possibly an extension of the Feast of Tabernacles, celebrating God’s gracious and abundant provision in the midst of a difficult and painful season in Israel’s history!

During these 3 years of desecration and persecution by Antiochus Epiphanes, a number of priests betrayed their office as shepherds. The priests were the most respected leaders at the time and yet many of them stood by and allowed Antiochus and the Syrians to pollute the holy place. Some of them even participated in this desecration and defiled the sanctuary with acts of sexual immorality. During the Feast of Dedication, the people would remember this awful betrayal where the shepherds of God’s flock

deserted their sheep in their time of need. One of the texts of Scripture read each year during the temple service was Ezekiel 34 which speaks of God's judgment against the shepherds of Israel who had not been faithful to shepherd the flock under their care.

It is in this context that Jesus declares himself to be the 'Good' Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (John 10). He doesn't abandon the sheep but protects them and leads them to good pasture! Jesus claims the promise of Ezekiel 34:15,

"I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and strong I will destroy. I will feed them justice."

This is why the Jewish authorities took up stones to throw at Jesus. They understood he was claiming to be the one to do for the flock of God what God himself promised to do! In essence Jesus is saying (paraphrase),

"I am the noble shepherd of Ez. 34, who comes to feed my flock, to seek my lost sheep, to bring back the scattered, and to bind up the broken. I am the fulfillment of the promise that God would come to be your shepherd! Where your previous shepherds had fled, like hired hands, who cared nothing for you, I lay down my life for you!"

During this Feast of Dedication, and celebration of the reinstitution of the sacrifice on the temple altar, Jesus declares he will offer his life as the once and for all sacrifice. Four months later during the Feast of Passover at the very time the Passover lambs were being sacrificed, Jesus becomes the ultimate and final "Passover Lamb." As a good Shepherd, he becomes a lamb, and lays down his life for his sheep!

This phrase 'lays down his life for' is substitutionary language. It means 'in behalf of,' or 'in place of.' This death is on behalf of someone else!

Jesus gives us four basic principles in John 10 during this Feast of Dedication.

## **1. Security.**

10:7 "Truly, truly, I say to you. I am the door of the sheep"-John

"My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand"-John 10:27

Jesus promises that no one can snatch you out of his hand! You are held in the noble shepherd's hands. He doesn't promise us an easy life. The wolves will still come, snarl at us and maybe even bite us, but they can never snatch us out of the good shepherd's hands!

Jesus declares that He is the door/gate in John 10:7. In the Middle East there were two kinds of doors or gates used to protect the sheep folds. The ones out in the fields were often small caves, protected on three sides but without a door on the fourth side. Jesus is saying "I am the door...I lay in the open space! No sheep goes out unless it crosses my body, and no wolf gets in except over my body..." Jesus promises us that he will never desert us or loose us as his sheep. He promises to protect us from the wolves who come to steal, kill and destroy. We are safe and secure in his grace as we hear his voice and follow him! GLORY!

Sheep are not herded from behind. Sheep are always led by someone in front of them. Jesus calls us to new

pastures. The noble shepherd is always leading us to new places we have not been before. His call is not 'go on,' but rather, 'COME." Jesus is not behind us, he is out in front of us inviting us to Come and Follow his good and perfect leadership!

## **2. Intimacy.**

"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father"-John 10:15

Jesus, the good Shepherd, desires an intimate, close, and personal relationship with us. In John 10:15, the word for 'know' is a word used for personal knowledge, or experiential knowledge. This is a staggering statement. He is saying even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father...I know my own and my own know me! Jesus is inviting us to come and experience him with the same depth of intimacy that he has with his Father! We are fully known and perfectly loved! To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. However, to be loved and yet not known is superficial. To be fully known and perfectly loved by our 'good' Shepherd transforms us!

## **3. Communication.**

"The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before him and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice."-John 10:3-4

Four times in John 10 Jesus says, "my sheep know me" or "know my voice" (V3, 15, 16, and 27). Palestinian sheep were raised primarily for their wool. They would be with their shepherd for a long time. The Shepherd would come

to know each of his sheep personally. A shepherd would give a separate and unique name and sound for each one. A sheep would even 'Dance' to the whistle of the shepherd's voice! Jesus knows each of his sheep by name! He warns us of danger, woos us to his side, guides us through hills, leads us to nurturing pastures, and shows us the way forward. His sheep hear his voice and they follow!

#### **4. Nurture.**

John 10:9, "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture."

The word pasture in John 10:9 implies nurture, feeding, and comfort. Jesus promises us a rich and abundant life. He has given us free access to all the blessings of the kingdom! He came to give us life and life to the full! I love the promise of Psalm 23:1, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." In Jesus there is no lack. He laid down his life for us and through his cross, he has provided all that we need! He promises to nurture us, to lead us to good pastures where we can find true rest, abundant provision, and secure protection!

Security, Intimacy, Communication, and Nurture!

No one speaks the way this man speaks!



## Betrothed

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus” (Matthew 1:18-25).

Matthew begins his gospel by talking about the birth of “Jesus Christ.” Christ is not Jesus’ last name but a title meaning ‘Messiah.’ He is the Anointed One, set apart as the King of God’s Kingdom, the place or sphere where God acts as King. The word ‘betrothed’ in verse 18 is much stronger than our concept of engagement. It was a binding agreement of covenant in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Once you were engaged you were legally bound. To call off an ‘engagement’ was equivalent to divorce. After the engagement or betrothal, the only thing left to do was for the woman to go to the man’s home to consummate the marriage physically (Bloomberg, Matthew, 57). Typically this happened a year after the betrothal. So, when Matthew says that she was pregnant, “before they came together,” he is saying that Mary was with child before she and Joseph consummated their

marriage physically. Joseph is said to be a 'righteous man.' Since Joseph and Mary had already been betrothed, he had a couple of options. He could either go public and shame Mary, or he could quietly divorce her. In righteous compassion he resolved to do the latter. Joseph is then confronted by an angel, addressed as 'son of David,' reminding us that Joseph was of the line of King David. Joseph is Jesus' adopted Father. In a sense the Christmas story is an adoption story. Jesus was physically Mary's son. Mary, the mother of Jesus, an unwed, 15-year-old pregnant woman, from a poor town, surrounded now by village rumors of sexual scandal. This is a surprising way to introduce the savior of the world!

The angel gives Joseph the shocking news that "what has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (1:20). Then the angel tells Joseph that Mary will 'give birth to a Son,' a son that Joseph had no part in bringing about, and that his son would be named Jesus because he would save his people from their sins. Joseph is told to adopt this boy as his son, and that his legal name would be Jesus, which means the Yahweh (the Lord) saves!

The story of Joseph and Mary's betrothal was set in the amazing story of God's salvation history. Jewish marriages were typically arranged. The Father would choose a bride for his Son (Eph. 1:4). The Father and Son would leave their home and travel to the girl's home for the purpose of obtaining a wife through a marriage covenant (Gen 2:24). They would meet with the father of the chosen bride and negotiate the bridal price (1 Peter 1:18-19). The price was always a reflection of the value that the man had placed on his soon to be bride. Next the betrothal date would be set. The father and son would return home to sell goods and gather whatever was needed for the bride's price in order to purchase the bride (Matthew 13:44-46, 2 Cor. 8:9).

The Betrothal date would arrive. The young man and his parents would go to the girl's house for the betrothal dinner. This was

usually done publicly -under the canopy-where they would declare their hearts to become betrothed to one another (Luke 22:14-15). The Marriage covenant would be presented and offered. It stated the bridal price, the promise to support and care for her, and the terms of the marriage should she accept (Matthew 26:26-28, Ephesians 5:28-32, Romans 8:32, Hebrews 13:5, Matthew 6:33, Luke 9:32). The *Groom's* Father would then ask the bride if she would accept. When she agreed, the Father would offer a cup to his Son, the Groom. The young man would drink, signifying his **willingness to sacrifice** in order to make her his wife (Matthew 26:39). The Groom then offered the cup to his bride. She would accept the cup, signifying her willingness to enter into the marriage by saying, "I accept your gift and your life and I offer you my life in return" (Matthew 26:27-28). Once they drank, the young man would hand over the bride price to her Father (Luke 23:46).

The young man then presented gifts to his bride. His gifts were called *Matan*, which means gift or pledge. This word is translated into Greek as 'Charismata.' *Matan* was considered a pledge of his love and a promise of his return (Eph. 1:13-14). As she accepted these gifts of value, the betrothal was now complete.

She was now not only set apart (betrothed), but also entered into a time of 'sanctification,' being made ready for the return of her bridegroom (1 Cor. 1:2, 6:11, Heb. 10:10). At this point the bride promised to pay a dowry, which included a yielded life set apart, holy, pure, and belonging to another (1 Cor. 6:19-20, Romans 12:1, Romans 6:12-13). The groom then made a speech, saying, "I go to prepare a place for you. I will come back when it is ready" (John 14:1-3). Then the Groom returned to his Father's house and began building a home for the two of them. His Father had the responsibility of determining when the home was finished so that the young man could go and claim his bride—the son didn't know when that day would come (Matthew 24:36).

As she waited for his return, she was referred to as the one “bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:20, 7:23). She typically wore a veil signifying that she was now SET APART, SANCTIFIED, and belonging to another! She took on his name and was considered his wife with all the rights and privileges (Rom 8:17). During this season the bride prepared her wedding dress (garment) and consecrated herself. This was a time of preparation for the return of her bridegroom (Revelation 19:8). She was to tell everyone she knew about her bridegroom (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8). She was to have an oil lamp always lit and extra oil on hand! As the time grew near she would gather her bridesmaids, and they would sleep in her room, and the bride would often sleep in her wedding gown (Matthew 25:1-6).

When all was ready, the Father would give the command to go. Jewish brides were often stolen at night. The bride was always to be ‘watching and ready’ for his return! When they were close a friend of the bridegroom (John 3:29) would run ahead and stand under the window and say, “Behold, the Bridegroom! The Bridegroom is coming! Blessed is he who comes” (1 Thessalonians 5:2, Matthew 23:39). The Trumpet was then blown and the Bridegroom would charge in and take away his bride to his father’s house to celebrate the Marriage Feast (1 Cor. 15:52, Matthew 25:10, Revelation 19:6-9).

As we study the context of Joseph and Mary’s betrothal this Christmas, let’s reflect on the amazing claim of Jesus our Bridegroom and we as his bride! The Father and His Son met together before the foundation of the world and determined the bridal price—the most extravagant price that could ever be paid—the very life of His Son! The Father made the offer and his Son accepted. With this kind of outrageous love, this bridegroom can be trusted with everything—our lives, our weakness, our dreams, our finances, and all our relationships! We are who we are according the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Strength is not what

qualifies us, weakness does. Jesus wants a bride who will depend on him for everything. A bride who is willing to say, 'yes' to an offer that we could never earn, that we will never deserve! Even when Jesus offered the cup to his disciples, he was fully aware that they would abandon him and even one would betray him. And yet he still invited them into his family, through his gracious affection towards us through the gospel!

## Wisdom

“When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh” (Matthew 2:10-11).

There were no Magi present on the night that Jesus was born. The Magi actually showed up at a house when Jesus was 1 or 2 years old. The Magi were Gentiles, and they were searching for Jesus. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed! They knew the prophecy,

“I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: **a star** shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth” (Numbers 24:17, ESV).

God goes to any length to reveal himself, even maneuvering the heavens himself! As John Piper says, “God wields the universe to make his Son known and worshipped.”

The prophecy of a star -a light- to whom the nations would respond is also found in Isaiah where the prophet tells of God’s coming glory for God’s people:

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. <sup>2</sup> For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. <sup>3</sup> And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. <sup>4</sup> Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip. <sup>5</sup> Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. <sup>6</sup> A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the LORD” (Isaiah 60:1-6).

In Isaiah, nations will come to the light of God’s people. These nations would bring wealth and gifts, including gold and frankincense. In Matthew, nations are drawn to the light over God’s Son! This promised Messiah is not merely King of the Jews, he is King over all nations!

The wise men were astrologers – students of the stars, not kings. They were from the east and needed to go west in order to find Jesus. The text doesn’t tell us how many came, simply that they brought three gifts. When they finally see Jesus, they fall down and worship! These eminent men from the east, nobles of nations, are falling down and worshipping a baby.

The first gift given was gold which represents the glory and nature of God. The second was myrrh which was a burial spice, appropriate for one who was born to die. The third was frankincense which was the incense often related to the prayers of the priesthood (Malachi 1:11). Mary and Joseph, who were

most certainly 'poor,' probably sold these gifts to make their first trip to Egypt. God always provides, even when seeming death is at the front door. Joseph had been warned in a dream that Herod was about to search for the child to destroy him (Matthew 2:13).

Magi means 'wise.' They were wise because they were searching for wisdom himself! They presented their gifts to him and made him their treasure!

"My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, <sup>2</sup> making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; <sup>3</sup> yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, <sup>4</sup> if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, <sup>5</sup> then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God" (Proverbs 2:1-5, ESV).

Let's make space to search after Jesus this Christmas season!

