

\*PASTOR: IT'S A TIMELESS STORY - THE ACCOUNT OF JESUS' BIRTH - WITH FAMILIAR DETAILS SUCH AS SHEPHERDS, A STAR, WISE MEN, AND ANGELS. BUT PERHAPS THE DETAILS, IF NOT THE STORY ITS SELF, ARE ALL TOO FAMILIAR. ARE WE ANY LONGER ABLE TO HEAR THE WONDER OF THIS WORLD-CHANGING, HISTORY-ALTERING STORY?

GOD PLANNED THE BIRTH OF JESUS BEFORE TIME BEGAN, AND THROUGHOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT. THOUSANDS OF YEARS BEFORE A BABY WAS BORN IN BETHLEHEM, GOD HINTED ABOUT THE COMING OF THIS MESSIAH, THIS KING OF KINGS, LORD OF LORDS, PRINCE OF PEACE!

LOOKING AT THESE HINTS, THESE ANCIENT PROPHECIES, AND THEIR FULFILLMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ACCOUNTS OF JESUS' BIRTH, CAN HELP US TO RECAPTURE THE WONDER OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY AND MARVEL AT THE GIFT OF JESUS, A GIFT OF SACRIFICE AND LOVE, OF IMMANUEL... GOD WITH US.

MAY SEEING THE PROMISES OF GOD AND THEIR FULFILLMENT REIGNITE IN US THE VERY HOPE OF CHRISTMAS!

\*ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTER #1 - PROPHECY!

\*ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTER #2 - THE LORD HIMSELF WILL GIVE YOU A SIGN: BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE AND BEAR A SON, AND SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL! - ISAIAH 7:14

THE WOLF ALSO SHALL DWELL WITH THE LAMB,  
THE LEOPARD SHALL LIE DOWN WITH THE YOUNG GOAT,  
THE CALF AND THE YOUNG LION AND THE FATLING TOGETHER;  
AND A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM. - ISAIAH 11:6

\*PASTOR: IT IS AN AGE-OLD STORY, PERHAPS BROUGHT TO LIFE BEST BY THE YOUNGEST OF CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS. IN CHURCHES ACROSS THE LAND, THE BIRTH OF JESUS WILL BE CELEBRATED BY THE SHEPHERD WEARING HIS OVERSIZED BATHROBE AND HOLDING HIS TOO-SMALL CROOK;  
MARY, DRAPED IN BLUE AND BUSYING HERSELF WITH HER FAVORITE, NOW SWADDLED, DOLL;  
THE KING FROM THE EAST WAVING TO MOM, WHO SNAPS PICTURES FROM THE FIRST PEW;  
THE LAMB FROM THE THREE-YEAR OLD CLASS, WANDERING AROUND THE MAKESHIFT CRECHE AS LAMBS DO;  
AND JOSEPH, LOOKING LIKE HE'D RATHER BE ANYWHERE ELSE BUT ON STAGE!  
AS ISAIAH WROTE WHEN HE WAS DESCRIBING THE RIGHTEOUS KINGDOM JESUS WILL ONE DAY ESTABLISH. A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD. AND CHILDREN DO INDEED LEAD US TO THE MANGER AT CHRISTMAS!

\*ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTER #2: FULFILLMENT!

\*ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTER #1: NOW IN THE SIXTH MONTH,  
THE ANGEL GABRIEL WAS SENT BY GOD TO A CITY OF GALILEE NAMED  
NAZARETH, TO A VIRGIN BETROTHED TO A MAN WHOSE NAME WAS JOSEPH,  
OF THE HOUSE OF DAVID. THE VIRGIN'S NAME WAS MARY.  
AND HAVING COME IN, THE ANGEL SAID TO HER,  
REJOICE, HIGHLY FAVORED ONE, THE LORD IS WITH YOU; BLESSED ARE YOU  
AMONG WOMEN!  
BUT WHEN SHE SAW HIM, SHE WAS TROUBLED AT HIS SAYING, AND  
CONSIDERED WHAT MANNER OF GREETING THIS WAS.

THEN THE ANGEL SAID TO HER,  
DO NOT BE AFRAID, MARY, FOR YOU HAVE FOUND FAVOR WITH GOD.  
AND BEHOLD, YOU WILL CONCEIVE IN YOUR WOMB AND BRING FORTH A SON,  
AND YOU SHALL CALL HIS NAME JESUS. HE WILL BE GREAT, AND HE WILL BE  
CALLED THE SON OF THE HIGHEST;  
AND THE LORD GOD WILL GIVE HIM THE THRONE OF HIS FATHER, DAVID.  
AND HE WILL REIGN OVER THE HOUSE OF JACOB FOREVER,  
AND OF HIS KINGDOM THERE WILL BE NO END! - LUKE 1:26-33

\*PASTOR: GOD'S WAYS AREN'T OUR WAYS, AND THE PLAN OF CHRISTMAS  
MIGHT HAVE HAD EVEN THE ANGEL GABRIEL SCRATCHING HIS HEAD,  
PERHAPS MUMBLING TO HIMSELF, "WHAT A PRIVILEGE TO SHARE THE NEWS  
THAT THE LONG-AWAITED MESSIAH IS ABOUT TO WALK THE DARKENED  
EARTH! BUT I CERTAINLY DIDN'T EXPECT A YOUNG WOMAN, ACTUALLY, STILL  
A GIRL, TO BE THE FIRST ONE TO HEAR THE NEWS, MUCH LESS BE THE ONE  
TO GIVE BIRTH TO THE ALMIGHTY'S ONLY SON. AND TO THINK SHE LIVES IN  
NAZARETH! I'VE HEARD IT SAID, CAN ANYTHING GOOD COME FROM  
NAZARETH? NOW SOMETHING, SOMEONE, WONDERFUL BEYOND WORDS, IS!"

MARY WAS UPSET BY THE ANGEL'S SUDDEN AND GLORIOUS APPEARANCE,  
SO AFTER HE GREETED HER, GABRIEL SAID, DO NOT BE AFRAID!  
SOMEWHAT REASSURED, MARY LISTENED, ASKED A FEW QUESTIONS,  
AND THEN SET AN EXAMPLE OF GODLY SUBMISSION AND TRUST, BY  
EXCLAIMING, I AM THE LORD'S SERVANT! MAY IT BE TO ME AS YOU HAVE  
SAID! MAY WE FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF THIS ONE CHOSEN BY GOD.

\*ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTER #1: PROMISE!

\*ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTER #2: SO ALL THIS WAS DONE THAT ALL MIGHT BE  
FULFILLED WHICH WAS SPOKEN BY THE LORD THROUGH THE PROPHET,  
SAYING, BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD, AND BEAR A SON,  
AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL, WHICH IS TRANSLATED,  
GOD WITH US. - MATTHEW 1:22-23

\*PASTOR: SHE WAS FAVORED. WE ARE BLESSED.

MARY YIELDED HER LIFE, HER DREAMS, HER VERY BODY TO THE SOVEREIGN ONE AND HIS PLAN FOR ALL HUMANITY. THE HOLY GOD, WHO HAD BEEN IMMEASURABLY FAR AWAY SINCE OUR FIRST MOTHER AND FATHER SINNED IN THE GARDEN, WOULD NOW COME TO EARTH THROUGH YOUNG MARY'S HOLY WOMB. AND HE WOULD BE IMMANUEL, GOD WITH US. SOME PEOPLE WILL MAKE THEIR ANNUAL OR SEMI-ANNUAL VISIT TO CHURCH IN HONOR OF THIS GOD WHO HAS COME NEAR. BUT IF THIS BABE TRULY IS GOD, DOES HE NOT DESERVE MORE ATTENTION THAN CHRISTMAS EVE AND PERHAPS EASTER SUNDAY?

JESUS HAS COME CLOSE FOR A REASON. ACTUALLY, FOR SEVERAL REASONS!

HE WANTS HIS WANDERING SHEEP, WE SINFUL HUMAN BEINGS, TO RECOGNIZE OUR SIN, RECEIVE HIS FORGIVENESS, AND LIVE WITH HIM, NOW AND FOR ETERNITY, AS LORD OF OUR LIVES!

JESUS HAS COME NEAR TO BLESS US WITH HIS GRACE, TO GUIDE US, TO PROTECT US, TO PROVIDE FOR US, TO FREE US FROM OUR SINFUL WAYS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES, AND TO SHOW AND TELL US THAT HE LOVES US.

MAY WE RECEIVE JESUS' LOVE IF WE HAVEN'T ALREADY.

MAY WE SHARE JESUS' LOVE IF WE HAVEN'T ALREADY!

\*ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTER #1: (SILENTLY LIGHT TWO PURPLE CANDLES)