

## Christmas Characters

THESE DEVOTIONALS PROVIDE ONE LESSON PER WEEK FOR FAMILY OR PRIVATE DEVOTIONS IN THE MONTHS LEADING UP TO CHRISTMAS.

It's never too early to start thinking about Christmas, right? That's certainly what marketers would have us believe as they start the sales of the season earlier and earlier. Since our minds are starting to approach the celebration of the nativity anyway, let's take some time to relish in that grand account.

The amazing thing is that this is not just a story in a book or a drama on a church stage. This devotional series revolves around real characters who were on the scene in the months, hours, and moments before and after Christ's birth. The humans—and even angels—involved in the historical event were every bit as real as you and I. They had strengths and weaknesses, doubt and faith. As we consider the characters involved in the nativity account, let's look at how God used them and contemplate their example to us. Which of their actions and attitudes can we imitate?

When you have the opportunity during the blessed flurry and scurry of the holiday season, discuss these biblical characters with others. Encourage them to see how God worked in real people's lives to bring about the greatest gift humans will ever know—his Son, Jesus Christ. Be sure to pray for godly discernment before and after each study. ■

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*In these devotionals, read the Scripture references to understand God's thoughts on the topics. Discuss what you've learned and how you can apply the truths to stand strong on the authority of Scripture in this confused world.*



## WEEKLY READING

### Week 1—Mary: Contemplation

Joshua 1:8; Psalm 77:12, 119:15, 97–103; Luke 2:16–21, 2:33–35, 2:51; Colossians 3:2; 2 Timothy 3:16–17

Scripture tells us that Mary pondered all that God had done by bringing Christ into the world. We should also meditate on God and his Word. This week, choose several Scripture references to ponder.

### Week 2—Joseph: Obedience

Deuteronomy 5:33; 1 Kings 2:3; Psalm 128:1; Proverbs 10:17; Matthew 1:20–25, 2:13–14; 1 John 2:17

Whether it meant marrying his pregnant fiancée or fleeing to Egypt in the middle of the night, Joseph was willing to change his whole life to obey God. Are there ways that you need to be obedient to God, even if it means making changes in your life?

### Week 3—Elizabeth: Discernment

Luke 1:41–45; 1 Corinthians 2:9–13; Hebrews 3:13–15

Elizabeth recognized the hand of God in action. Because her heart was willing and she was filled with the Holy Spirit, she could discern him at work. What work is God doing in your heart right now?

### Week 4—Zechariah: Believing God

Jeremiah 29:12; Mark 11:24; Luke 1:5–13; Hebrews 11:6

When Zechariah heard that his elderly wife Elizabeth would have a son, he did not believe the angel. Because of his disbelief, Zechariah was unable to speak until after John the Baptist was born. What might you have missed out on because you didn't obey when the Holy Spirit was moving you to take action?

**Week 5—Gabriel: Messenger**

Isaiah 6:8; Luke 1:19, 28;  
Romans 10:13–15; 2 Timothy 4:5

Gabriel was God's special messenger, sent on divinely appointed missions to speak for the Lord. What divine messages from his Word does God have for us to give the world?

**Week 6—Angels: Proclaiming God's Glory**

Psalms 72:19, 96:3; Isaiah 12:4;  
Luke 2:9–14, 19:37–40

When it came to proclaiming Christ's birth, the heavenly host made some noise! We cannot remain silent but must draw others' attention to who God is, what he has done, and what he is doing.

**Week 7—Simeon: Looking for God's Salvation**

Psalms 119:81–82; Luke 2:25–35;  
Romans 9:1–3, 10:1; 2 Peter 3:9

Simeon spent years looking for and anticipating God's salvation for his people. Do you faithfully pray for God's salvation to come to your friends or family members? Now is a great time to start.

**Week 8—Anna: Seeing God's Promises**

Matthew 11:28–29; Luke 2:36–38; John 10:10, 16:33; Romans 8:28; James 1:5

For years, Anna was a familiar sight around the temple as she worshipped God with fasting and prayers. Because of her faithfulness, she saw God's promised Messiah in the flesh. What are some of God's promises that you see in Scripture?

**Week 9—Shepherds: God Is No Respector of People**

Matthew 11:25; Luke 2:8–16;  
1 Corinthians 1:26–29

The shepherds were just doing their job when the angels showed up to announce Christ's birth. Aren't you thankful that God reveals his plan of salvation even to ordinary people like us?

**Week 10—Herod: Recognizing the Messiah's Power**

Isaiah 40:29–31; Matthew 2:3–8, 28:18; 1 Corinthians 2:5;  
Ephesians 3:14–16

Because King Herod was frightened to lose his power to Jesus, he resorted to deceit and even murder. Sometimes we are afraid to submit power over our lives to Jesus. What happens when we try to control our own lives without considering God's plan?

**Week 11—Magi: Searching for Jesus**

1 Chronicles 16:11, 28:9; Psalm 27:8; Proverbs 8:17; Jeremiah 29:13;  
Matthew 2:1–11

"Wise men still seek him" is not just a bumper sticker cliché. The wise men traveled far into unfamiliar territory to seek Christ. Have you ever had to step out of your comfort zone to follow God's leading?

**Week 12—John the Baptist: Living Purposefully**

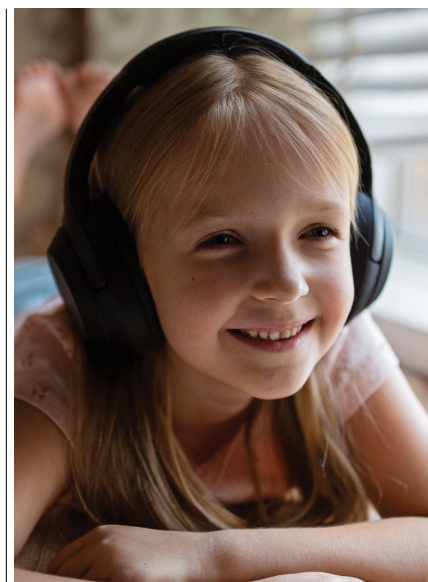
Malachi 3:1; Mark 1:1–8; Luke 1:13–17, 76–79; Colossians 3:1–3

John the Baptist's purpose was totally about Jesus and preparing others to receive Christ. In what ways can we live purposefully for Jesus?

**Week 13—Jesus: Giving Our Lives for Others**

Matthew 1:18–23; Luke 1:31–33;  
John 1:14, 3:16–17; Philippians 2:5–10; 1 Peter 1:17–21; 1 John 5:20

How incredible that Jesus obeyed his heavenly Father and willingly gave us his love, his wisdom, and his life! In what ways can you make sacrifices for others?



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