



What Child is this?



WARRIOR • JUDGE • SAVIOR • PEACEMAKER • LORD



Introduction: **Week of November 26**

A cross-country journey of 90 miles. Bodies sore from a trek that likely took a week or more. Nine months of anticipation, wonder, and raised eyebrows. A deep exhale. At last the night was calm, and the cries of birth pains and the excitement of shepherds had given way to the lowing of the cattle nearby. Finally, Mary had a chance to catch her breath. She, like every Hebrew mother before her in a line that traced back to Eve, had hopes. “Give him health, Adonai. Give him strength. Protect him, Lord.” Mary’s hopes, however, were deeper still. By an encounter with the angel, Gabriel, in a life-changing exchange with a rattled Joseph, and by her cousin Elizabeth, she had been told her son was different.

During the journey, conversation between Mary and her husband would often fade, and her eyes would lift to the horizon ahead, anticipating their resting stop for the night. In the quiet, Mary no doubt pondered the trajectory of her life, just as she would the night that she first held Messiah in her arms (Luke 2:19).

She was in many ways an ordinary Jewish peasant, well-equipped for the daily grind of maintaining a home, mending and cleaning clothes, and feeding a family in a world with no Instacart.



A teenager in a world where a high-school-aged girl bore the full weight of womanhood. Yet, like us, her resume doesn't fully describe her depth.

Forty years ago, Mark Lowry, a member of the Gaither Vocal Band, penned a song that has become common at Christmas. “*Mary, Did You Know?*” asks the young mother rhetorical questions, wondering out loud how she could have possibly known that the babe within her would one day command nature, heal, rule, and receive worship as The Lamb.

In the early months of her pregnancy, Mary visits family in the hill country, trying to make sense of everything she had been told by Gabriel. During the visit, the child inside Elizabeth jumps in excited worship. Baby John, who would become known as “The Baptist,” is already pointing to the one who would take away the sin of the world. Mary breaks out in song at yet another confirmation that God has told her that her baby is different. This song, known as the Magnificat (the first word in the Latin translation), is recorded in Luke 1:46-55. My sense is that the Magnificat tells us: *Mary did, in fact, know*. Her knowledge was veiled and incomplete, with only a dim mirror available to see what God was doing. But she knew.

This year's devotional is written so that we may be reminded of what Yahweh has fully revealed on this side of the BC/AD dividing line. Mary may have not had all the answers to “What Child is This?” but by the grace of God, and His incredible Word, we do. Let us worship this newborn King as we remind ourselves that He was nothing less than God's audacious plan to win back a world crumbling under the weight of its sin.



*Please use this devotional to introduce or enhance a time of family worship in your home. To help bring the rich truths of Advent to younger hearts, please see the “**Family Worship Guide**” at the back of this booklet.*

Prepared by: Pastor Chris Harding, Family Life Pastor

Mary, Your Baby is a Warrior

Week of December 3

GEN 3:1-20 ✳ 1 COR 15:20-28 ✳ LUKE 1:39-56 ✳ ISAIAH 63:1-6

There are few joys more purely shared in life than news of a baby. True today, in Facebook posts shared across the miles. True a few thousand years ago, in a young mother's spontaneous song shared via the pen of gospel author and historian Luke. Even under some "non-standard" circumstances, Mary's soul overflows in today's passage from Luke 1. New life has a way of giving birth to hope, even in the midst of struggle.

Have you ever considered the first birth recorded in the Bible, when Cain was born to Adam and Eve? How overwhelming the transformation of pregnancy must have been for them, with no manual and no obstetrician. Then came the labor pains.

"A young woman writhes in agony as she experiences torment that no one has felt before. The faint traces of wrinkles at the corners of her eyes—wrinkles that never should have been there—deepen to furrows with every spasm of pain that overcomes her. Beads of sweat—sweat that never should have been there—begins to form on her brow and roll down her back as wave after wave of this new and horrible sensation overwhelms her. The intense and overpowering pain—pain that never should have been there—is sharp and relentless, hitting her again and again." – Scott Cheatham

Every time her body involuntarily seizes up inside of her, she remembers what God told her on that fateful day: "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children." (Gen 3:16) Each contraction brings her back to the reality that she had faced every day since they were banished from Eden. The curse is real. Nothing had been the same since that day... another wave of pain, another realization that she owns this.

But in between the thoughts of regret and what could have been, is the memory of another thing she heard God say that horrible day when He was talking to the serpent.

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." Gen 3:15

It sounded hopeful when God said it, even if she didn't know exactly what God had in mind. This baby inside of her, could this be the beginning of God's plan to crush the serpent's head? Will this boy be the warrior that defeats the evil one? Maybe God will reverse the curse through Eve's son.

Hope gets her through the pain. She holds her son, Cain, that night, and hope is in the air. You know that feeling. But if you know this story, it takes a tragic turn. All of Adam and Eve's hopes come crashing down when Cain comes home one day with blood on his hands. The curse was still upon them. Cain would not be the one to crush the serpent's head. He had murdered his brother.

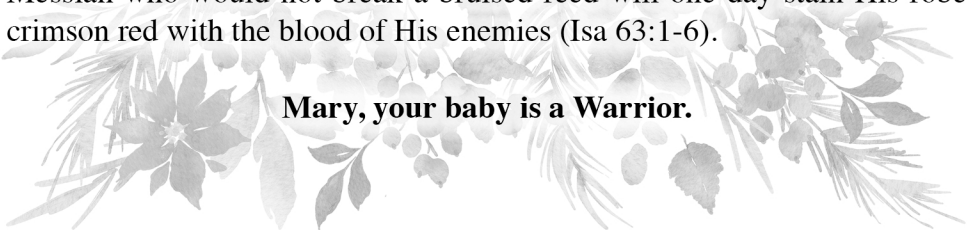
The fuzzy hope of redemption that God had promised that day in the garden - the seed of the woman will crush the head of the enemy - seemed far off that day. Something tells me, though, there was an effervescent hope the night Mary first held baby Yeshua. She may have even been hoping her baby was the warrior King that Israel had been hoping for since David left the throne. The signs of Rome's boot were ever present.

Yahweh had sent His Son to wage war against an enemy far more formidable than the Roman Empire. The Hero of our story was sent to battle against an undefeated enemy that had plagued image bearers since the garden: death itself. This is Paul's reminder in 1 Corinthians 15 about God's war plans:

Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For "God has put all things in subjection under His feet." 1 Cor 15:24-27a

Praise God! The advent of our Liberator is here! A conquering General who will allow the enemy no partial victories, no negotiated peace settlement. He will deliver the death blow to Satan by crushing his head, fulfilling God's hint in the garden at His gospel plan to redeem the world. The same Messiah who would not break a bruised reed will one day stain His robe crimson red with the blood of His enemies (Isa 63:1-6).

Mary, your baby is a Warrior.



Mary, Your Baby Will Judge the Nations

Week of December 10

GEN 18:22-33 ✨ ACTS 10:34-43 ✨ ACTS 17:22-33 ✨ ROM 8:1-11

I remember closing out a Sunday Bible study as a young believer, and the time for prayer requests was at hand. The conversation quickly turned to current events and that lingering sense that things were coming unhinged. It was suggested we should pray for justice.

“Whoa,” was the response. “Don’t pray for justice. Ask for God’s mercy, His provision, plead to Him to show His grace, but don’t ask for justice. You don’t know what you’re asking for,” came the reply of a godly woman whose opinion I held in high regard. I was struck by what seemed to be an appropriate fear of the justice of God. Yet, who among us has never watched the news and whispered a prayer, asking for justice?

We all cry for justice at times. It seems as if it’s a design feature of image bearers. No one must teach a 5-year-old to demand fair treatment. It’s been hardwired into us to appeal to someone to make things right and reestablish our world according to its original design. Mary and Joseph were no different than us in this respect. Every first century Jew must have longed to see the day when Messiah would restore justice and the Romans would go home.

However, God’s story isn’t a fairy tale where Jesus sprinkles restoration dust and we are transformed like Disney characters at the end of *Beauty and the Beast*. If we are to have justice, we must have a judge.

Maybe this is why Peter and Paul preached the gospel to the Gentiles not in terms of Four Spiritual Laws or via a plea to the crowd to ‘ask Jesus into their hearts.’ Instead, they said things like:

*Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, **because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.**” Acts 17:29-30*

In Acts 10:42, Peter even shared an evangelistic directive from Jesus Himself: ‘tell everyone that I have been appointed by God to be your judge.’ If this strikes you as way different from a 21st century gospel appeal, you are on to something. Judgement, it turns out, is central to the gospel.

When was the last time you read the Nicene Creed? For 2000 years, church history has revolved around the question: How would Christians respond to the false teaching of the day? Creeds have long given us a bedrock answer. They represent a shared heritage of Christ followers across denominational lines. The Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds *matter*. Faithful men have been willing to die over their wording.

Both creeds clearly state that the baby in Mary’s lap is coming again to judge both the living and the dead. It seems that judgment is central to Christian orthodoxy. We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ; Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5. Isn’t the gospel supposed to be a message of hope and love? Should we be fearful, or not?

Romans 8 sheds much light. Are there more life-giving words in the Bible than verse 1? “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” We need not fear the judgment. Not because we are without sin, not because the judgment has been set aside, but because we will be judged by a *different law altogether*. Those who have responded to Christ with a saving trust are no longer under the law of sin and death (vs 2) like the rest of the world. That law justly brings death and eternal separation from God. Christian, you will be judged by the law of the Spirit of Life (again, vs 2). This is the higher law. And this law knows no condemnation. All who have cried out to the Father in faith and repentance are subject to the law of the Spirit of Life. But make no mistake, the law of sin and death is still in effect for those not under His grace. God’s character hangs in the balance: both laws will be perfectly administered by the just Judge of all the earth.

Mary, your baby is that Judge.



Mary, Your Baby is Your Savior

Week of December 17

MATT 1:18-25 ✳ PSALM 69:13-18 ✳ EXODUS 15:19-21
JOHN 8:31-38 ✳ LUKE 23:32-43 ✳ ROM 5:6-11

“Susanne, the lifeguards are working with Chris.” My mom’s carefully chosen words awoke my wife from a well-earned nap on the beach several summers ago. As her body processed the adrenaline shock of what a sentence with the words “lifeguards” and “Chris” might mean, she looked up to see me and a young man in red shorts awkwardly stepping out of the strong knee-high surf generated from a tropical storm 100 miles offshore.

It all happened so fast. I was in the water with all four of our sons, being picky about finding the “perfect” wave to body surf back to the water’s edge. Sensing that we were beginning to be pulled out farther than wisdom would dictate, I barked with a father’s authority: “Boys, head back, NOW!” That head start kept them safe. As I paused a second to look around to count heads, one head was coming towards me. It was the lifeguard, dragging along that red buoyant thing they always walk around with. From his perspective, he could clearly see the rip current that had zipped me another 50 feet out to sea in mere moments.

A total mix of emotions ensued: gratitude, embarrassment, and relief. Not to mention being mad at myself. “*How did you let this happen?*” I made it back to the beach with his help, trying not to make eye contact with the predictable mini crowd that had formed to see the action at hand, instead, looking back at the angry waves that could have taken me under. While my story may not exactly be worthy of a blockbuster film, it shed much light on my need for a Savior.

Joseph and Mary didn’t get to pick their baby’s name. It was chosen for them. Unlike the hopes we sometimes embed in the meanings of the names of our children, Joseph was given something more than hope. He was given a *revelation* by the angel that visited him in Matthew 1. “You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” The Hebrew name *Yeshua* literally means the “Lord is Salvation”.

I wonder what that meant to Joseph. Was he like us? I think there is a growing consensus in our 21st century world that something is not right.

Despite a discouraging social consensus that it isn't polite to talk about religion or politics, a diverse room will unanimously shake their heads in agreement at the sentiment, "everything seems so broken." Whether we place our hopes in Messiah, or maybe just the next presidential election, economic recovery, or a unified push towards some form of social justice, we all seem to agree that we need saving.

"We" didn't need saving that day at Bethany Beach. "I" did. I wonder sometimes if we dampen our gratitude for the saving mission of Mary's baby when we forget the personal nature of salvation. Instead, focusing on our collective need for restoration. The lifeguard that day came for me- as did baby Yeshua, true to His name.

Before Christ, you were not a sinner simply because you sinned. No, you breathed out sin regularly because you were a hopelessly enslaved sinner. See the distinction? You were trapped. Israel's national plight in Exodus is meant to be a grand analogy to the plight of your individual soul. Miriam and friends sing in Exodus 15 not in light of forgiveness, but because Israel's slave masters were dead. They were free!

This is the central heroism of baby Jesus and the wonder of His nativity. God doesn't simply choose to wipe the slate clean of sin from a position of power on His throne by smiting His lawbreaking image bearers. Instead, He enters a sin-stained world from a position of temporary weakness, patiently initiating a rescue mission that will one day kill off the slave master inside of you, shielding you from the righteous wrath of the Father. *Your* Savior offers *you* redemption from a life of slavery to the enemy of *your* soul. The price for redemption would be His lifeblood.

Nearly 33 years after that silent night, Mary would see with her own eyes that lifeblood drain from the open wounds of her son. Like many Jews, she may have been confused at times at the things Jesus had said in the months and years leading up to His death. Praise God that we may see clearly now what may have been fuzzy and out of focus that day on a hill in Jerusalem. This boy will live up to His name.

Mary, your baby is our Savior.



Mary, Your Baby is the Prince of Peace

Week of December 24

LUKE 2:8-14 ✳ NUMBERS 6:24-26 ✳ EPH 2:13-22

JOHN 14:25-27 ✳ ISAIAH 53:1-6

All of us know that one person in our closer circles that seems to have a knack for giving the best gifts. Gift giving amidst the prosperity of 21st century America can be challenging. What do you give to the man that has everything? The best givers seem to be able to demonstrate with the gifts they choose an intimacy that surprises us. “Wow, how’d you know I’d love this?” “How did you know that I’d never go out and get this for myself?”

Such it is with peace. For the past year, our church has featured the Hebrew, English, and Greek words for peace on the front walls of the sanctuary. As with any décor that lingers, it may have long blended into the background for you. Yet, peace may be the single most underrated aspect of the hope we share. It tends to have a passive, almost vanilla connotation. However, the gift giver that knows you best, the Redeemer of your soul, seems to see peace as the present your troubled heart has been asking for all along.

If only peace could be purchased! It would fly off the shelves! Mom doesn’t need another sweater, but every young mother craves peace (and quiet, I might add!). Peace between her children within the walls of her home, and peace in her heart as she struggles through the routine of the day wondering if all her efforts are amounting to anything. A young man likely doesn’t need another pair of athletic shoes, but in a way he will rarely admit, he craves the peace of mind that comes from knowing his father loves him and is proud of him. The sense of wholeness that comes from knowing that he is worthy of the respect he craves. The last thing a husband and wife in a failing marriage need is another wrapped box under the tree. They crave the peace from knowing that the God who was present at the altar the day they were married is fighting for their love to be rekindled. Our fallen hearts seem more prone to anxiety than peace by far.

Peace is more than a lack of conflict. In addition to security and an absence of strife, “shalom” (שָׁלוֹם, *Hebrew*) and “eirene” (εἰρήνη, *Greek*) both conjure up a sense of wholeness and fullness to native speakers. Wishing someone peace has a depth beyond a casual greeting. Our desires for peace are like approach lights to a runway, pointing us toward home.

When Aaron prayed his famous blessing over Israel in the desert in Numbers 6, culminating in a request from Yahweh to give them *peace*, we sense not just a casual blessing of tranquility, but a request from God for something greater. Could it be that the Holy Spirit had inspired Aaron to pray something messianic over His people? The angels announced a baby that would bring peace on earth among whom His favor rests. This same baby is the man who would tell His closest friends, “*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you,*” on the night He was betrayed. This baby was also the Savior that Isaiah pointed to in chapter 53 of his book of prophecy. Isaiah told us that His crushing, smiting, affliction, and wounds would bring us peace. This Savior would appear to the ones He loved the most here on earth, permanently scarred from His rescue mission days prior, and what was the first thing that flowed from His heart? “*Peace be with you*” (John 20: 19-21). He, of course, was right. Peace had broken out.

Paul would build on what Jesus said and broaden the sense in which Aaron, the angels, and Isaiah prophesied peace over Israel. In Ephesians 2, Paul says that Jesus *himself* is our *peace*. Jesus’ preaching ministry put the offer of peace in the spotlight, both to those who are far (Gentiles) and those who are near (Jews). Every epistle by Paul opens with a blessing over the recipient: “Grace to you and peace.” These two words seem to form the hub of the saving ministry of Jesus Christ. The conflict is over. Your God is quite literally on your side, desiring and working out your good in a world that so often works to snatch away your sense of peace.

Therefore, rejoice! Our celebration of the arrival of grace and peace personified is nearly here. The God who knows us best is offering each of His redeemed these gifts. May your hearts be made whole in the fullest sense of *Shalom*. Let the laughter and cheers of present *and future* celebrations with friends and family remind you that *Eirene* has broken out. Aaron, Isaiah, Paul, and Jesus himself are smiling this day from Heaven.

Mary, your baby is the Prince of Peace.





Mary, Your Baby is Your Lord

Christmas Day

LUKE 1:39-56 ✳ PSALM 110 ✳ PHIL 2:1-5

ACTS 2:29-36 ✳ JOHN 1:1-18

We began this month of advent preparation by invoking a question. For over a month, our homes and cars and sanctuary at PHBC have been filled with the music of expectancy and joy. Despite what the curmudgeons and cynics might say, Christmas music is one thing our culture seems to get right. We all have something to celebrate. Especially the redeemed.

But back to our question. Because of the ubiquity of Christmas carols, this is a question you have no doubt recently sung softly in your mind, if not in your car or shower, “Mary did you know?” I am more inclined to say yes, she did, more than ever before. The young mother-to-be breaks spontaneously into the Magnificat after baby John leapt in his mother’s womb at the presence of baby Jesus, both in utero. What a beautiful affirmation of the full-fledged, image-bearing humanity of the unborn! The Magnificat is a poem absolutely drenched in allusions to the Old Testament promises of a Messiah to come. How many of our 16-year-old daughters would be capable of this? This young lady had found favor with God in no small part because she clearly loved God’s Word.

What did Mary know? Luke 1:54-55 quotes Mary saying, “He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever.” Mary knew that this baby inside of her was God’s fulfillment of the promise He made to Abraham. If Mary knew this, what else became clear over time?

Did she understand what the Pharisees could not? In Matthew 22:41-45, Jesus tests the Pharisees’ understanding of Psalm 110, a passage that would become the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament.

The LORD says to my Lord:

“Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool.”

Jesus asks the Pharisees a question about their understanding of who the Messiah would be. “If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?”

He is met by silence, exposing the ignorance of a group of men who should have been the most learned in Israel.

I believe that Mary came to know that “The LORD” (Yahweh Himself) said to David’s Lord (Jesus), “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” She understood that all the Old Testament had been pointing to the Christ. She knew that there was someone coming who would be called David’s *Lord*. All of this came not because she was more clever than the Pharisees. It came because the Spirit had shown her, just as David had his eyes opened (Matt 22:43).

Imagine where Mary’s Holy Spirit-given, angelically-verified-head-start-of-insight must have taken her. This teenager whose spontaneous Magnificat clearly showed that she had studied Torah, and the prophets would likely hear everything that her growing son would say in a much different way than the hard-hearted Pharisees.

The same Holy Spirit would cause Peter to culminate his most famous sermon at Pentecost by quoting Psalm 110, saying emphatically, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Paul would take this thread of the Lordship of Christ and put it on the marquee in Philippians 2. There is coming a day that at the name of Jesus, every knee, no matter their faith story, will bow and every tongue, no matter its owner, will confess that Jesus Christ is *Lord*, to the glory of the Father.

Today, we rehearse for that day! Today, we ponder in our heart what Mary pondered in hers (Luke 2:19). This baby is our Lord! In charge! We are made for Him, and through Him, and by Him! We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture. Today, we celebrate Him and confess that the one who humbled himself to spend the first night of His life in a feeding trough made of cold stone is also the One who formed the universe and holds it together by the word of His power (Heb 1:3).

We honor this unrivaled King, who signed a peace treaty stained with his own blood. A Savior who made the first move, coming again to judge the earth in righteousness. A warrior who will never accept defeat. We honor Him by calling Him the title He deserves. Mary, I think you knew.

Your baby is our Lord.



Family Worship Guide

Introduction

Cee Lo Green - *Mary, Did You Know?*

Kids: Is there something about you that has surprised Mom and Dad as you have grown up?

Adults: Did you pray for your child(ren) before they were born? How has God answered those prayers?

What do you think Mary prayed about when she was carrying Jesus in her belly?

Week 1 | Warrior

Lauren Daigle - *Light of the World*

In an excerpt from the lyrics to this week's video, we hear "For all who wait, for all who hunger, for all who've prayed, for all who wonder..."

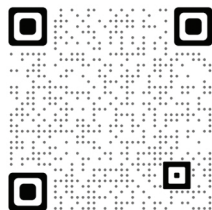
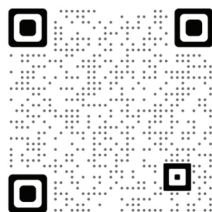
Kids: 6,000 years ago, God made a promise that he would send someone to crush the Devil's head. Have you ever thought of Jesus as the warrior who will one day fight the devil and win? What's the longest you've ever had to wait for a promise to come true? Do you like waiting?

Adults: Share with your kids something that you are praying and waiting for, trusting God that He will answer. What is a battle that you are asking Jesus to fight?

Week 2 | Judge

Chris Tomlin - *Crown Him (Christmas)*

Kids: In a court room on earth, everyone stands when the judge comes into the room. Why do you think that is? Would it be scary to go to court and stand before a judge? How does a good judge help keep us safe? In what ways is Jesus like a good judge here on earth? How is He different?



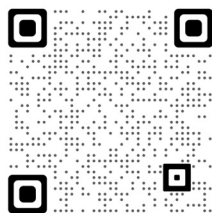
Adults: By which law will you be judged when you stand before the just Judge of all the earth? (Rom 8:1-2)

Week 3 | Savior

Phil Wickham - *Joy to the World (Joyful, Joyful)*

Kids: Why are there always lifeguards at pools and the beach? What is the best thing you can do if a lifeguard comes to save you from danger?

Adults: Jesus was named by His Father in heaven. What does your name mean? Your children's?

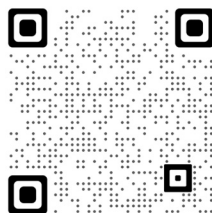


Week 4 | Peace

Journey to Bethlehem - *Brand New Life*

Kids: What is one time of day that everyone, kids included, needs peace? What happens when your peaceful night's sleep is disrupted by a fire alarm or thunderstorm or a crashing sound downstairs?

Adults: What is something that steals your peace regularly? Share with your family and God in prayer why you look to Him for peace.



Christmas Day | Lord

Chris Tomlin, We The Kingdom - *Christmas Day*

Just as Mary sang a poem about God's promises and his faithfulness in Luke 1, pick a song to sing out loud together this morning before all of the festivities begin.



Merry Christmas!

