



grow. pray. study.

December 22, 2019 “The Shepherd King”  
Scripture: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23; John 10:11-16

### A good shepherd for scattered sheep

#### MONDAY 12.23.19 Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23

Ezekiel prophesied during Israel’s exile in Babylon (some 550 years before Christ). Through him, God said the self-absorbed spiritual leaders in the little kingdom of Judah had failed. They pursued their own interests while ignoring the material security, and even more importantly the spiritual growth, of their people. Ezekiel portrayed God as a good shepherd who would “seek out the lost, bring back the strays, bind up the wounded, and strengthen the weak.”

- “[Ezekiel’s] metaphor goes beyond the normal responsibilities of making sure that the sheep are protected and fed. Instead it focuses on the remedial duties, caring for the sick and finding the lost. These equate to the need for kings to bring about justice for alienated and disenfranchised people.” \*  
What are some ways you individually, and your faith community, actively support and work for justice for alienated or disenfranchised people today?
- Human leaders had failed, so God said through Ezekiel, “I myself will search for my sheep” (verse 11). Centuries later, Jesus told a parable about a shepherd who went to find one lost sheep ([Luke 15:1-7](#)). (A shepherd who saw sheep as a commodity would likely write off one sheep and guard the rest.) To God, every person matters. How did this shepherd imagery convey how much God values you? How can you, in words and actions, share with others how much God values them?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, when I lose my way, you search for me. And every time you find me you call me to join in searching for others who need the warmth and safety of your loving embrace. Thank you for your finding and your call. Amen.

\* HarperCollins Christian Publishing. *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, eBook: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Kindle Locations 190424-190426). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

**Advent Family Activity:** As you look at Christmas trees, remember they are called evergreens, reminding us of the everlasting love of God through Jesus! Choose a favorite ornament and share with someone why it is your favorite.

### The night Jesus was born

#### TUESDAY 12.24.19 Luke 2:1-20

The Roman Empire said the Caesar’s brutal power brought the *Pax Romana* (Roman peace). Caesar Augustus, a human who thought he was a god, issued a decree that forced Mary and Joseph to make a hard trip with Mary nine months pregnant. Jesus, the true God become human, spent his first night on earth in a humble animal shelter. When Rome crowned an emperor, they gave him the title “Savior” (among others), choirs sang, and they declared the emperor divine. Luke structured his story in a way that said that from his birth Jesus, and not Caesar, was the true Savior, King and God.

## Did you know?

Some Roman officials and historians called early Christians “atheists,” because the Christians wouldn’t worship Caesar as a god. Instead of “Caesar is Lord” (*kaisar kurios* in Greek) the Christians recognized only one *kurios*, one supreme Lord—Jesus (cf. [Romans 10:9](#), [1 Corinthians 12:3](#)).

- We may miss how astounding the angel’s familiar words truly were. Listen to them as if for the first time (as the shepherds did): “I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David’s city. He is Christ the Lord. This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger.” What do you most find to be “wonderful, joyous news” in this message?
- A song called “The Star” described Jesus’ birth poetically: “Just another homeless family/hoping for a stranger’s charity/Just one night in one safe place to stay/Underneath a star so far away/She carried everything they had, and more/The little one the world was waiting for.../Born beneath that star so long ago.” \* God didn’t stride into our world like a Marvel superhero. What does Jesus’ low-key arrival (a helpless infant with poor peasant parents) tell you about the kind of “kingdom” of which Jesus is Lord?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you didn’t just talk about humility and service as virtues. You lived them out from the very start of your earthly life. Keep guiding me to better grasp the counter-cultural power of your values. Amen.

**Advent Family Activity:** Read the Christmas story found in Luke 2:1-20. Be creative and act it out.

\* Written by: Peter Mc Cann, Lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC. [Click here](#) to hear recording by Kathy Mattea.

## Foreign worshipers “after Jesus was born”

### WEDNESDAY 12.25.19 Matthew 2:1-12

The Greek word *magoi* usually identified students of the stars. They most likely came from modern Iran, though “from the east” could mean a whole range of places. They arrived, not on the night of Jesus’ birth, but an unspecified amount of time “after Jesus was born in Bethlehem.” Israel was just a minor Roman province. No one would expect non-Hebrew scholars to travel far to see, much less worship, a “king of the Jews.” Yet these notable visitors said, “We...have come to worship him.”

- Due to this story’s familiarity, we might miss the oddness. Wealthy people who’d visited King Herod’s court “saw the child with Mary his mother [a young peasant girl]. Falling to their knees, they honored him.” Since it wasn’t outward trappings, what do you believe showed these foreign wise men that this was a king worthy of their honor? Do external cues or less visible spiritual qualities impress you most? What traits of God most move you to “fall to your knees” in worship?
- There’s a tragic irony in this story. The “legal experts” could rattle off Micah’s prophecy about Bethlehem but didn’t seem to care about whether it actually meant anything for them. King Herod only cared out of political paranoia. Yet the guests from far away truly sought the new king. How can your worship and Bible study nurture a holy curiosity like the magi’s, not the settled, routine boredom of the scribes?

**Prayer:** Lord God, we’ve kind of reduced this story to a bumper sticker: “Wise men still seek him.” Give me the gift of true inner wisdom, the ability to value and wonder at what your power is doing in our world. Amen.

**Advent Family Activity:** When your family sits down to eat, sing “Happy Birthday” to Jesus after you pray. You might even bake a cake and decorate it to celebrate the birth of Jesus. After your meal, walk

around to the homes in your neighborhood singing Christmas carols. Include “Happy Birthday” to Jesus among the carols.

## **A promised shepherd from Bethlehem**

**THURSDAY 12.26.19 Micah 5:1-5**

### **Did You Know?**

“Bethlehem of Ephrathah”—we’ve heard of Bethlehem, but what was that “Ephrathah” Micah mentioned? Turns out it meant “fruitful,” and was the name of the district around Bethlehem.

Micah was a prophet in Jerusalem about 700 years before Christ, about the same time as Isaiah. (In [Jeremiah 26:17-19](#), people quoted Micah’s warnings to defend Jeremiah’s ministry.) As the mighty Assyrian Empire’s armies threatened Judah, Micah told the people that God’s power was greater even than Assyria’s. God hadn’t forgotten his promise to David, Bethlehem’s most famous son. The immediate future looked dark, but the day would come when God sent a deliverer, born in Bethlehem, but of a greatness that would “reach to the ends of the earth.”

- Against Assyria, Bethlehem (or even the whole kingdom of Judah) seemed insignificant. “Israel usually lived in the shadow of the world of nations that surrounded it, a divided, threatening, and depressing world. It was in no position to make a difference in that world. The prophecy makes astonishing promises to it. God will be the one who makes a difference.” \* Have you ever seen God do something big through something that seemed little? Can you trust that in the end God’s kingdom is greater than any earthly power?
- The scribes in [Matthew 2:3-6](#) quoted Micah to tell King Herod and the wise men where to look for the Messiah. Micah had reminded Judah’s people that even amid fear and insecurity, God was active and present. “In a different context seven or eight centuries later, Matthew found Micah’s promise strangely illuminating when Jesus was born in Bethlehem.” \*\* We can know God is still active and present in our scary, insecure times. In what sense are you able to “dwell secure” as one of Christ’s flock?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, descendant of David born in Bethlehem, guide me into the peace and security of trusting that you are the ultimate “king of kings,” exercising your patient rule of love over all earthly powers. Amen.

**Advent Family Activity:** Go outside and spend a few moments in silence looking up at the stars. Imagine how the wise men felt as they sought Jesus, leaving their homes to follow a star. As you look at the stars, pray that God will lead you to find Jesus every day in each part of your life.

\* John Goldingay, *Daniel and The Twelve Prophets for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016, p. 172.

\*\* *Ibid.*

## **Jesus: I AM the good shepherd**

**FRIDAY 12.27.19 John 10:11-16**

Remember Ezekiel’s prophetic promise in which God said, “I will tend my sheep with justice....My servant David...will be their shepherd” ([Ezekiel 34:16, 23](#))? Jesus did. He surely grew up hearing about the shepherds God honored on the night he was born. He lived in a culture where many people saw shepherds as “uneducated, unsophisticated and unclean.” \* Yet Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd,” claiming the mission outlined by prophets who compared God’s tender care for his people to a shepherd’s.

- Pastor Bruce Milne wrote that “Shepherding is a hard, demanding and costly life, in contrast to the perception of most western Christians (excepting farmers!) influenced by memories of cuddly lambs....

The true shepherd is the good one who endangers himself if called upon.” \*\* What did Jesus’ calling himself “the good shepherd” (to people who knew clearly what shepherding took) say about how he saw his mission?

- One reality that made (and makes) shepherding hard is the reality that sheep are literally not able to consistently find food, shelter or safety without a shepherd’s guidance. Jesus image pointed to his mission, but also implied that following the good shepherd means accepting the status of one of his “sheep.” How have you learned your need for the good shepherd to guide you?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you faced the “wild beasts” of human nature in order to be my shepherd. Help me grow ever more willing to let you guide me into the safe paths and pastures you offer to your sheep. Amen.

**Advent Family Activity:** Discuss what moments and activities have meant the most to your family this season. What would you like to continue? What are you spending time doing as a family that you would like to stop? How will you continue growing in your relationships with God and one another? In what way will you reach out to those around you? Pray and ask for God’s blessing and guidance in your decisions.

\* Adam Hamilton, *The Journey: A Season of Reflections*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011, p. 116.

\*\* Bruce Milne, *The Message of John*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993, p. 149.

### “Vast authority and endless peace”

#### **SATURDAY 12.28.19 Isaiah 9:2-7**

Did this Isaiah passage also speak to the people of his day first? Scholar John Goldingay said it did: “For Judahites, when people have experienced darkness, defeat, and oppression, the birth of a new son in the royal household is a sign of hope. This section’s opening paragraph mostly speaks of Yahweh’s act of restoration as if it’s past, but the restoration had not happened in Isaiah’s day, so it likely speaks by faith of what Isaiah knows God is going to do....the event that has actually happened is the birth of a son to the king, perhaps the birth of Hezekiah to Ahaz. People would look back to his birth as a significant moment, given his greatness as a reformer.” \* It’s probably also worth noticing that “Jesus hasn’t brought about the fulfillment of the entire vision [especially verse 7], any more than Hezekiah did, but he was another sign and guarantee that God will bring about its fulfillment, and a more compelling one.” \*\*

- After Christmas Eve candlelight, we relate readily to “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.” Yet even after he had met Jesus, the apostle Paul would write, “Now we see a reflection in a mirror....Now I know partially.” ([1 Corinthians 13:12](#)). In what ways has Jesus already brought light into your dark world? In what ways are you waiting for the chance to see and live in the full brilliance of God’s light? We sometimes miss or skip Isaiah’s verse 5: “every boot of the thundering warriors, and every garment rolled in blood will be burned, fuel for the fire.” The child of promise, he said, would bear among other names “Prince of Peace.” How can you more fully follow the Prince of Peace, learning to resolve conflicts his way in your day-to-day dealings with others?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, “Be Thou my vision, oh Lord of my heart...Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.” I so much need your light to guide my steps every day in this often-darkened world. Amen.

**Advent Family Activity:** As we approach this new year, create a “Person of the Day” calendar. Gather your family and create a list of family, friends, neighbors, groups, etc. you would like to pray for and encourage this year. Using a blank calendar for January and continuing each month through 2020, write one person’s name on each day. Feel free to repeat names through the year. Commit to praying for each individual and consider other ways to bless each person or group on “their” day(s). Maybe you can write a

note or draw a picture. Consider baking treats for the person, giving a small gift, or making a phone call to encourage them. You could even arrange to spend time with the person. Thank God for people you know directly and indirectly in your life. Ask God to help you be a blessing to others through the year.

\* John Goldingay, *Isaiah for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015, p. 43.

\*\* John Goldingay, *Isaiah for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015, p. 44.

**Prayer Requests** – [cor.org/prayer](http://cor.org/prayer) *Prayers of peace and comfort for:*

Family and friends following the death of Louella Lyman, 9/22/2019

Sandra Parkins and family following the death of Lois Dikeman (mother), 11/27/2019

Sonnie Brown and family following the death of Art Brown (husband), 12/6/2019

Anita Clark and family following the death of Adelia Clark (mother), 12/7/2019

Cathy Lucas and family following the death of Mary Ann Borbeck (mother), 12/7/2019

Family and friends following the death of JoNell "Jody" Abbott, 12/13/2019

Ed Fellers and family following the death of Florence Fellers (mother), 12/13/2019

Family and friends following the death of Marci Chatfield, 12/13/2019

Janet Clevenger-Allen and family following the death of Rev. Donald F. Allen (father-in-Law), 12/15/2019

Family and friends following the death of Ferne Eisele, 12/16/2019

Family and friends following the death of Kathy White, 12/4/2019

Family and friends following the death of Gerald Moss, 12/16/2019

Barbara Johnson and family following the death of Johanna Lain (mother), 12/18/2019