



*The
Most
Joyous
News*

A 10-Day Christmas Devotional

Gabrielle Kelley

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Day One: God's Plan in a Painful Journey

During those days, the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, ordered that the first census be taken throughout his empire. (Quirinius was the governor of Syria at that time.) Everyone had to travel to his or her hometown to complete the mandatory census. So Joseph and his fiancé, Mary, left Nazareth, a village in Galilee, and journeyed to their hometown in Judea, to the village of Bethlehem, King David's ancient home. They were required to register there, since they were both direct descendants of David. Mary was pregnant and nearly ready to give birth.

Luke 2:1-5, The Passion Translation

The timing seemed terrible. My round belly had fallen low. I knew my son would be born soon. I felt the pains come and go, and my mother would look at me and say, "It will be any day now." But we didn't have a choice about this journey. We had to go. Everyone had seen what the emperor could do to those who ignored his decrees. So as the baby kicked and my muscles cramped, we gathered our few supplies and departed on our 10-day walk to Bethlehem. Little did I know then that, while it seemed so hard and I wondered why God would have chosen *this* particular moment for His Son to be born, this trek we had to

make in the midst of hardship was, in fact, God's hand – His way of fulfilling that which He had foretold through the prophet Micah so long ago: *“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel, whose origins are in the distant past, will come from you on my behalf.”* Micah 5:2, NLT

This most difficult of journeys fulfilled the Word of God. Oh what a humbling honor to be chosen for such a journey! If you are on a painful, difficult path right now, trekking through wilderness with the discomfort of a full promise inside of your belly, don't question God. Instead, fall before Him and worship. Trust the Almighty and know that it is precisely this journey that will take you to the place He has preordained for your promise to come to pass.

-Mary

Thought Questions:

- Are you in the midst of a difficult journey right now? Describe it.
- What is the promise that God might be working to fulfill in your life, either in the midst of the journey or at the other end of it?

Day Two: A Promise Born in a Cave

When they arrived in Bethlehem, Mary went into labor, and there she gave birth to her firstborn son. After wrapping the newborn baby in strips of cloth, they laid him in a feeding trough since there was no available space in any upper room in the village.

Luke 2:6-7, The Passion Translation

Just as we arrived in Bethlehem, my wife went into labor. I searched and searched for somewhere she could lie down, somewhere clean and dry where the baby could be born. But all we could find was this stable full of animals. Surrounded by heavy, musty odors, by the chewing and braying and shuffling of unwashed creatures, I did my best to make a place for Mary.

Oh, how inadequate I felt. It wasn't just that I had no idea how to bring a baby into the world, it was... **everything**. Hadn't I been entrusted with being the earthly father to the Son of God? I didn't even know if my rough carpenter's hands would be capable of getting the Child to His first breath, let alone to help guide and raise him in the way of His Father. What did I have to give? I had lived a simple life. I had done my best to be honorable and to fear God. But my means were limited and I felt so small in the wake of the wonder that started with a dream. All I

knew was that God had told me not to fear, had told me that His Son **would be** born, and that I was to name Him Jesus. So I had to pray in the middle of these circumstances that looked so dire – *Oh God, I trust You! Show me how to use these hands to bring Your Promise into this world. It looks impossible to see something great be born in this hopeless little cave. But You've promised Your Son, and so I must trust You to bring the promise to pass in the midst of these circumstances and in spite of my weakness.*

-Joseph

Thought Questions:

- What is the promise God has given to you, and in what ways does it look impossible?
- Have you found yourself in a hopeless cave? Think on the promise and trust God to bring it to pass, no matter the circumstances, no matter your weakness.

Day Three: The Most Joyous News

*That night, in a field near Bethlehem, there were shepherds watching over their flocks. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared in radiant splendor before them, lighting up the field with the blazing glory of God, and the shepherds were terrified! But the angel reassured them, saying, "Don't be afraid. For I have come to bring you good news, **the most joyous news** the world has ever heard! And it is for everyone everywhere! For today in Bethlehem a rescuer was born for you. He is the Lord Yahweh, the Messiah. You will recognize him by this miracle sign: You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a feeding trough!"*

Then all at once, a vast number of glorious angels appeared, the very armies of heaven! And they all praised God, singing:

*"Glory to God in the highest realms of heaven!
For there is peace and a good hope given to the
sons of men."*

Luke 2:8-14, The Passion Translation

It was a day like every day I had known since I was a small boy. I was in the vast fields outside of Bethlehem with my sheep, settling down to sleep under the night sky. I looked up at the stars with an ache deep inside me. *The stars are so beautiful and vast up*

there, I thought to myself, and I am so small. I have these sheep and I have these fields, but really, I am nothing. As I look at the expanse of the heavens, I can't imagine that, if there is a God, that He can see me. Is there more to this life than what I know – more than fields and sheep and days of endless work under this expansive sky?

Then suddenly - oh I will never ever forget it! – as though God Himself had been listening to my thoughts, one of the stars began to dance and grow larger until I realized, oh, this is not a star! This is a heavenly being, an angel from God! Trembling, I sat up and, for reasons I cannot explain, I began to weep as the angel proclaimed what he said was *The Most Joyous News!* And as he declared, “It is for everyone!” oh how it seemed that he looked *straight at me!* Everyone. Even this tiny shepherd who had felt so utterly lost in the grandness of the cosmos just moments before.

But that wasn't all, we were told a rescuer had come, the long-awaited *Messiah!* But He hadn't come as a king, ensconced in a grand court that would never welcome me. No! He was in a place the other shepherds and I understood so well: in a stable, surrounded by animals, a tiny person in an unseen place that would so easily be lost in the vastness of the universe. Even then – can't you see? - the Savior of the world was reaching out to we who are small and unseen, beckoning us first into His upside-down, glorious Kingdom.

When the angel choirs arrived to share in the singing of this triumphant news, my friends and I couldn't

even move for the awe of it. But when the singing had stopped and the angels had gone, we jumped to our feet and left everything behind to run to the stable in Bethlehem...to run to the Joyous News that had suddenly brought the brightest hope to our little lives.

-The Shepherd

Thought Questions:

- Do you feel too small and too unqualified to be noticed by God? Why or why not? (p.s. good news. He delights in the small and the meek.)
- Is Jesus *your* Most Joyous News? If something else is making you rejoice more than Jesus, you may need to get into the heart position of a lowly shepherd – aware of how small you are and therefore *amazed* by the great love of a God who was willing to become flesh in order to save our souls. *Can you capture this wonder in your heart and come humbly before Him with gratitude for what He has done?*

Day Four: A Sign from God

When the choir of angels disappeared back to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go! Let's hurry and find this Word that is born in Bethlehem and see for ourselves what the Lord has revealed to us." So they ran into the village and found their way to Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in a feeding trough.

Upon seeing this miraculous sign, the shepherds recounted what had just happened. Everyone who heard the shepherds' story was astonished by what they were told.

But Mary treasured all these things in her heart and often pondered what they meant.

The shepherds returned to their flock, ecstatic over what had happened. They praised God and glorified him for all they had heard and seen for themselves, just like the angel had said.

Luke 2:15-20, The Passion Translation

I had just given birth to my Baby. Exhausted and concerned, I kept my hand on the feeding trough that held Him. "Joseph," I'd ask, "Is He ok? Is He warm enough?" I wanted to hold Him, but my strength was waning. Just as I was drifting off to sleep, the shepherds arrived in the dark doorway, and I startled awake.

“A host of angels appeared in the sky above our fields, declaring that a Rescuer, the Messiah had been born today!” one of the shepherds said excitedly. He saw my tiredness. He was trying to remain quiet and calm, but even his body shook with expectation. “He said we’d find Him here, wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a feeding trough.”

At just that moment, the Baby cried out. The shepherd who had spoken burst into tears and, compelled by love, he walked right up to my Son and gently laid his hand on His stomach. “Oh Messiah,” he said, “You have truly come. Thank You, thank You. We had lost hope – but now hope has returned. Hope is alive.” The man’s companions followed, slowly and reverently coming in, one by one, to see the tiny Boy they were already calling *Lord*.

I thought of the angels. Though I was weak, I wept with the shepherd. Earlier that day, as I had lain on the floor in agony, giving birth to this Baby, I had cried out to God to give me a sign that He was with me, that He was with His Son. Here was the sign, and I realized...it wasn’t just for me. It was for everyone, just as the angel had said.

This Child who would be nourished from my body, He was the Messiah, the King of Kings. He was the Rescuer of hearts and the Hope of the world. The miracles I had already experienced overwhelmed me. The reality of the God I served consumed me. The

fact that He had entrusted me with His Son humbled me. And one day, just as His birth had ripped me open, His death would tear me apart again. But it would be in that moment of rending that the rescue would truly begin. Just as I had birthed the Savior, now He was defeating the grave and giving new life to me.

This is the treasure of the angels' joyous news.

-Mary

Thought Questions:

- Do you know this Savior? The angel's news was for all people – and that includes YOU.
- What are the signs God has given you along the way that He is real and He has come to save you?
- Does Love for the King compel you to move toward Him? If not, what can you do to stir up those embers of Love again?

Day Five: The Glory Returns

On the day of the baby's circumcision ceremony, eight days after his birth, his parents gave him the name Jesus, the name prophesied by the angel before he was born. After Mary's days of purification had ended, it was time for her to come to the temple with a sacrifice, according to the law of Moses after the birth of a son. So Mary and Joseph took the baby Jesus to Jerusalem to be dedicated before the Lord. For it is required in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be a set-apart one for God." And, to offer a prescribed sacrifice, "either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Luke 2:21-24, The Passion Translation

The Baby was 5 weeks old. During those days of Mary's recovery, the days of getting used to the idea of being a father, I would sometimes wake in the night and look at this Boy. Could He truly be the Son of God? After all we had seen, after all we had experienced, the answer would come to me again and again – *yes*. Yes. It must be so. This Baby, whom we had named Jesus as God had instructed, was the Messiah. The Savior of the world.

That day as we entered the temple, I looked around and thought about how far it had fallen from its original holy intent. Animal sellers hawked their wares. Moneychangers looked greedily at the Jews who had come from other lands, wanting to extort their naiveté for profit. I knew the story of the Ark of the Covenant, how it had been captured and taken from Israel centuries before. Wasn't that where the glory of God resided? No wonder the temple had fallen into such disarray.

A coo from the Baby interrupted my thoughts. I looked over at Him, lying there in Mary's arms. His face was peaceful but serious. A weight fell on my heart, an awe. For all these hundreds of years, the glory of God had been gone from His temple. But today – oh today as we crossed the threshold to do what the law had instructed – the glory had returned in the form of this Boy who was, in fact, God Himself. No one knows it...*yet*. But they will. And then, *everything will change*.

-Joseph

Thought Questions:

- Where do you see something God intended for His glory being turned into something shameful? How can you take Jesus into that place, restoring it to its original intent?

Day Six: A Promise Fulfilled

As they came to the temple to fulfill this requirement, an elderly man was there waiting—a resident of Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. He was a very good man, a lover of God who kept himself pure, and the Spirit of holiness rested upon him. Simeon believed in the imminent appearing of the one called “The Refreshing of Israel.” For the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not see death before he saw the Messiah, the Anointed One of God. For this reason the Holy Spirit had moved him to be in the temple court at the very moment Jesus’ parents entered to fulfill the requirement of the sacrifice. Simeon cradled the baby in his arms and praised God and prophesied, saying:

*“Lord and Master, I am your loving servant,
and now I can die content,
for your promise to me has been fulfilled.
With my own eyes I have seen your Word,
the Savior you sent into the world.
He will be glory for your people Israel,
and the Revelation Light for all people everywhere!”*

Luke 2:25-32, The Passion Translation

It was not the first time the Lord had beckoned me to the temple courts. Many times He had taken me there

to weep, to worship, to wait, and to pray. As I grew older, my expectation increased, for the Lord had made me a promise: that I would not die before seeing the Messiah with my own eyes. And so, that day, just like every other day He had beckoned me, I went to the courts and I waited. My God could be trusted, and I had settled in my heart long ago – *if I meet my Promise today, I will trust God. And if I don't, I will still trust Him.* Living all these years as one who had been given the gift of hearing the Lord (my very name means “one who hears”!) in a land where His prophets had been silent for 400 years was not something I took lightly.

If He was speaking, I would trust and obey Him. And that's all there was to it.

But this day – *oh trustworthy God, this day* – as I watched and I waited, a young couple entered the courts, a Baby swaddled and resting in the woman's arms. And oh, I knew immediately that *this was Him*, the promised Messiah! My heart swelled up inside of me and streamed in joyous tears down my face. My frail old body moved like a young man, running to see the face of my King. Shaking with ecstasy, I reached for the Child, and His mother gave Him to me. For a moment I could not speak; I could hardly breathe for my weeping. I held Him close, so close to my heart which Loved Him so dearly, and I looked into His tiny face and I worshiped Him. For He was the

promised One, the One that I – *and not only I, but the entire world, everyone past, present, and future* – had been longing for, the Revelation Light for **all people everywhere.**

-Simeon

Thought Questions:

- What has God promised you? Are you willing to obey, to watch, and to wait for as long as it takes to see the promise fulfilled?
- Are you having a hard time trusting God? He's not afraid of your fear, of your unbelief. Ask Him to reveal to you His faithfulness, to show you who He truly is. He is faithful to hear and answer prayers like these.
- When's the last time you ran to the Lord in ecstasy because of your intense affection for Him? Fan the flames within your soul, because you can be sure of this: *you can never out-Love Him.* He is furiously Loving you every moment of every day.

Day Seven: Pierced with a Sword

*Mary and Joseph stood there, awestruck over what
was being said about their baby.*

*Simeon then blessed them and prophesied over Mary,
saying:*

*“A painful sword will one day pierce your inner being,
for your child will be rejected by many in Israel.*

And the destiny of your child is this:

*he will be laid down as a miracle sign
for the downfall and resurrection of many in Israel.*

*Many will oppose this sign, but it will expose to all
the innermost thoughts of their hearts before God.”*

Luke 2:33-35, The Passion Translation

The old man holding my Son was weeping with joy. As he spoke these words about the Baby, declaring that He was the long-awaited Messiah, the Refresher of Israel, Joseph and I also began to cry from awe. The old man’s prophecies over my Son were more than even we had understood from our encounters with the angels. It was too incredible, too marvelous, too miraculous; I could scarcely stay on my feet for the holy wonder of it all.

But then the man’s attention turned from Jesus to me. His old eyes looked straight into mine, eyes clear as the sky, belying his age. I could sense the Spirit of God in my soul as he began to speak. He spoke of the

suffering that Jesus would endure. He spoke of His destiny of death, that this was in fact the entire reason He had been born...*to lay down His life.*

Generation after generation would benefit from this life laid down. It would be the very reconciliation of God and man. But I was the mother of this Life. My story with Jesus had just begun, but wouldn't I spend years holding Him, kissing His scrapes when He would fell down, singing Him lullabies and telling Him stories about the Father who had sent Him? My whole heart would be invested in this Child in a way only a mother's heart can be. And that day, the day He would lay down His life to redeem the world, my whole world would fall apart. To see my Son in the most agonizing pain would be my greatest anguish, like a broadsword cutting straight through my soul.

And yet I respond, as I did from the beginning, *"I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."*¹

-Mary

Thought Questions:

- Are you willing to walk in obedience, trusting the Lord's plan, even if it causes you great pain?

¹ Luke 1:38, ESV

Day Eight: A Fiery Faith

A prophetess named Anna was also in the temple court that day. She was from the Jewish tribe of Asher and the daughter of Phanuel. Anna was an aged widow who had been married only seven years before her husband passed away. After he died she chose to worship God in the temple continually. For the past eighty-four years she had been serving God with night-and-day prayer and fasting.

While Simeon was prophesying over Mary and Joseph and the baby, Anna walked up to them and burst forth with a great chorus of praise to God for the child. And from that day forward she told everyone in Jerusalem who was waiting for their redemption that the anticipated Messiah had come!

Luke 2:36-38, The Passion Translation

I was so very old, but my heart still felt young. In fact, as my body aged, my soul became more tender and free. For eighty-four years I had been in the temple of my God, worshiping Him, fasting, and praying. I didn't do this out of guilt or duty - no. I had tasted of the love of God and I had found that He was worthy of my entire life. Though my youth was stained with sorrow (I had no children and my husband had passed away), I rejoiced, for the Lord had found me worthy to serve Him in His temple. After tasting of this Love there was nowhere else I would rather be.

How I had experienced the truth declared by the psalmist: “Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere!”² As I worshiped His house, the fire of Love in my heart for the presence of the Lord only increased through the years, until here as an ancient of days (I joke! A long life depends on that, too!), I felt like my innermost being might burst from the flames.

Never did I think my life could be any better than this constant living in the presence of the Lord. That is, until the fateful day when something I hadn’t dared even hope for happened to me: *I got to see the face of the Savior, the Messiah, the Salvation of the World.* Simeon beat me to it, but I hobbled over with my old knees (this old body could not keep up with my young soul!) and burst into song upon seeing the Holy Child.

I know I will die soon, but oh until then, I will hobble to anyone who will listen and tell them, “*Oh! The Messiah has come!*” Christ Child, thank You for allowing me, this old woman in Love with her God, to be the very first missionary, the first messenger of the Hope of your salvation! I will praise Your Name forever!

Thought Questions:

- How will you ensure that your faith won’t dim but will burn brighter and brighter as you age? Get to the end more on fire than at the beginning!

² Psalm 84:10, NIV

Day Nine: Uncanny Wisdom

When Mary and Joseph had completed everything required of them by the law of Moses, they took Jesus and returned to their home in Nazareth in Galilee. The child grew more powerful in grace, for he was being filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him.

Every year Jesus' parents went to worship at Jerusalem during the Passover festival. When Jesus turned twelve, his parents took him to Jerusalem to observe the Passover, as was their custom. A full day after they began their journey home, Joseph and Mary realized that Jesus was missing. They had assumed he was somewhere in their entourage, but he was nowhere to be found. After a frantic search among relatives and friends, Mary and Joseph returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After being separated from him for three days, they finally found him in the temple, sitting among the Jewish teachers, listening to them and asking questions. All who heard Jesus speak were astounded at his intelligent understanding of all that was being discussed and at his wise answers to their questions.

Luke 2:39-47, The Passion Translation

Who was this Boy? Throughout my years of teaching at the temple, I had seen many children come with their families to celebrate Passover. But there was something different about this Boy. He was curious about everything. I observed Him walking around the courts with a look of both joy and sadness on His face. What was He thinking about, this boy with the eyes that looked as though they contained the whole world?

He did not seem afraid, as so many of the children did among the strangeness of the world within these walls. In fact, He looked as though He belonged there, carrying Himself with a gentle confidence that belonged to someone much older than He. I was strangely drawn to this Boy, feeling in my heart as though somehow I knew Him. But I didn't recall ever seeing Him before.

One morning, soon after Passover had ended, the other teachers and I gathered (as we often did) to discuss the scriptures. I was in the middle of explaining a particularly interesting passage, when I looked up to see the Boy. He didn't speak. He didn't make a sound. But He came and sat among us with that same quiet confidence I had seen before as He walked through the temple courts. I paused for a moment, looking at Him quizzically. He looked back at me with a great respect in His eyes, and so I simply continued with my expounding of the scriptures.

When I had finished teaching, I waited for the next teacher to speak. So I was astonished when this boy, the quiet one with the world-containing eyes, asked

me a question about what I had said. The question was brief, but it was so poignant that I sat stunned for a moment. And then, I spoke to Him. And for the remainder of the morning, this Boy, the other teachers, and I had the deepest, most interesting, most thought-provoking discussion about the scriptures I could ever remember having.

The other teachers and I were absolutely astounded by the wisdom and understanding of this young boy. Where had He learned all of this insight? Who was His teacher? How did He know how to answer without hesitation some of the questions I had long held within me, questions which somehow I felt compelled to ask Him that day?

I do not know, but I am praying for God to show me why this Boy was so special. I hope that one day I will know where He came from, that I will know who He is.

-The Rabbi

Thought Questions:

- Who do you know that needs an encounter with Jesus?
- Will you engage with the Holy Spirit and walk as an ambassador of Christ in this world, astounding the wise with the knowledge and hope of God that you carry (see Acts 4:13)?

Day Ten: In My Father's House

His parents were shocked to find him there, and Mary scolded him, saying, "Son, your father and I have searched for you everywhere! We have been worried sick over not finding you. Why would you do this to us?" Jesus said to them, "Why would you need to search for me? Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be here in my Father's house, consumed with him?"

Mary and Joseph didn't fully understand what Jesus meant.

Jesus went with them back home to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother treasured Jesus' words deeply in her heart. As Jesus grew, so did his wisdom and maturity. The favor of men increased upon his life, for he was loved greatly by God.

Luke 48-52, The Passion Translation

I came to do the will of My Father (John 6:38). Zeal for His House consumes me (John 2:16-17). I was born to be the final sacrifice, the Spotless Lamb who would take away the sins of the world (John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:19). I lived my earthly days compelled by the Holy Spirit in everything, never doing anything except that which the Father instructed me, though I Myself Am God (Mark 1:12; John 5:19; John 8:58; John 10:30). God's House, the Temple, was where I

belonged, and in Heaven, the New Jerusalem, the Father and I *are* the Temple (Rev. 21:22).

You have read My story. You have witnessed how I came to save the world – to save *you*. And oh, how I Love you and would do it again to bring you into my Kingdom. But it is finished (John 19:30)! I came and I lived among you (John 1:14). I lived in flesh and I can sympathize with your every weakness (Hebrews 4:15), for I experienced them all, walking blamelessly as your High Priest so that I might atone for your every sin, and not only yours, but those of the whole world (1 John 2:2).

Mary and Joseph found me in My Father's house. Will I find you dwelling in Me (Psalm 90:1; Psalm 23:6)? “Remain in me and I will remain in you.” (John 15:4, NLT) You are to walk as a representation of Me on this earth, and oh how I will grace you to do it (2 Cor. 5:20; Phil. 2:13; Hebrews 13:21). So I leave you with this, the heart of the story from the very beginning, and the part that you play in it: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. **And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**”* Matthew 28:19-20, ESV

-Jesus

Thought Questions:

- Will you be found in Him?
- Will you live a life that is missional, with a focus on this final instruction Christ left us with before He returned to the Father: *Go and make disciples?*
- How can you start doing this even today?

A Note from the Author

Merry Christmas, dear friends! I sincerely hope you have enjoyed this devotional and that it has made you fall in love with Jesus in a whole new way. As I wrote these words, I was awed by this story as though I was encountering it for the first time. Truly, this is a time of year to be filled with cheer, not because of stuff, not because of presents and hot chocolate and lights and trees, but because ***the Savior has come***, He has ransomed our souls, He has reconciled us to the Father, and we will live with Him forever!

Oh hallelujah! What a Savior! This truly is *The Most Joyous News!*

-Gabi Ruth

[I'd love to hear what you thought of this devo!
Shoot me an email at gabiruth84@outlook.com or
connect with me at GabiRuth.com and via my social
media outlets: @gabiruth.]

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