

HEAVEN COME

ADVENT

2023

TO EARTH



ADVENT
2023

HEAVEN COME TO EARTH

HEAVEN COME

THIS BOOK BELONGS TO:

.....

TO EARTH

✦ LETTER ✦ TO THE READER

The season leading up to Christmas is traditionally called “Advent” and celebrates the coming of the Lord Jesus to earth. The word “advent” has its origin in a Latin word that means “coming” or “arrival.” In Advent, we look back on the first coming of Jesus, born as a baby in Bethlehem, while also looking *forward* to his second coming – when he will return to make wrong things right and renew all things. Just as the season of Lent precedes our observance of Good Friday and Easter, so too the Advent season precedes Christmas Day and gives us space to reflect, to remember, and to respond in worship and adoration.

This resource is designed to help you navigate this season with *anticipation* and *expectation*. We know that it’s so easy to get swept up in the busyness of the holiday season. There may be times in the coming weeks where you can’t wait to “get through” the holidays. Our aim here is to ground you in the timeless truth of Scripture while releasing you to be on mission in your circle of influence.

The theme of the 2023 Advent season here at The Chapel is, “Heaven Come to Earth.” That’s what happened that very first Christmas: Jesus stepped out of Heaven and into the story of humanity. We could not reach heaven on our own. In our sin and brokenness, we could never make our way to God. But God reached down to us, and everything changed. “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). This is the Gospel, and this is what we are celebrating this Advent. Heaven came to Earth that first Christmas, and nothing has been the same since. Thanks be to God!

There are a number of resources in this book, all aimed at fueling your discipleship journey. Our hope is that we can journey together, as a church family, throughout this Advent season, receiving all that God has for us this year. MERRY CHRISTMAS!

✦ **SERMONS**

You'll find sermon note pages in the beginning of this Booklet, so you can follow along through the entire Heaven Come to Earth sermon series. In this series, we will have live preaching locally at each campus. These messages are not sequential or chronological, and each campus will be going through them in a different order. So each Sunday, find the corresponding page to the sermon you're hearing and follow along!

✦ **DEVOTIONALS**

There are a series of five devotionals to help you remain rooted and grounded in the truth while you navigate this Advent season. These devotionals are themed around the Reasons for the Incarnation - why Heaven came to Earth that first Christmas. We know this is a time of year when many things fill up our calendars, so these devotionals are not just "one more thing to do." But aim to go through one or two each week, and that will carry you to Christmas.

✦ **LITURGIES**

You'll also find some guided liturgies for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. There's more explanation on page 46 about how to use these liturgies.

✦ **REFLECTIONS**

There is also space to reflect on the year that was 2023. After Christmas Day, leave some space in your devotional time with the Lord to look over the previous year. There's also space to pray about the year ahead. As we embark on 2024, commit the year to the Lord and submit your goals, plans, and resolutions to him.

✦ **MISSIONAL LIVING**

Finally, we want to remain on mission and not lose sight of the importance of this season. There is an invitation card in the back of this booklet that you can use to hand-write a note to someone, inviting them to join you at The Chapel on Christmas Eve. Prayerfully consider, even now, who God may be leading you to invite this year. You'll find a recipe for some delicious cookies to deliver to a neighbor, friend, or loved one along with that invite to Christmas Eve. There's a suggested calendar of activity to help you get your arms around this season.

TABLE OF

CONTENTS

SERMONS

IMMANUEL 9
WORD 13
SAVIOR 17
CHRISTMAS FROM HEAVEN'S PERSPECTIVE..... 21
(CHRISTMAS EVE)

DEVOTIONALS

THE REASON FOR THE INCARNATION:

// TO REVEAL THE FATHER..... 26
// TO SERVE IN HUMILITY 30
// TO TASTE DEATH FOR EVERYONE..... 34
// TO TAKE AWAY SIN..... 38
// TO DESTROY THE WORKS OF THE DEVIL..... 42

LITURGIES

CHRISTMAS EVE // EVENING..... 47
CHRISTMAS DAY // MORNING 49

REFLECTIONS

DAY AFTER CHRISTMAS 50
YEAR IN REVIEW // 2023 52
THE YEAR AHEAD // 2024 54

MISSIONAL LIVING

CHRISTMAS GIVING..... 57
CALENDAR 58
CHRISTMAS COOKIE RECIPE..... 61
CHRISTMAS INVITE CARD INSTRUCTIONS..... 62
CHRISTMAS INVITE CARD..... 63



MATTHEW 1:18-22

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

ISAIAH 7:14

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

◆ NOTES ◆



JOHN 1:1-2

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning.

JOHN 1:14

¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

◆ NOTES ◆



SAVIOR



LUKE 2:8-20

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on
whom his favor rests.”

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them

about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

◆ NOTES ◆



CHRISTMAS

★ FROM HEAVEN'S ★
PERSPECTIVE

REVELATION 12

The Woman and the Dragon

¹ A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. ² She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. ³ Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads.

⁴ Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. ⁵ She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. ⁶ The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

⁷ Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. ⁸ But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. ⁹ The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled

to the earth, and his angels with him.

¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

“Now have come the salvation
and the power and the
kingdom of our God,
and the authority of his
Messiah.

For the accuser of our brothers
and sisters,
who accuses them before our
God day and night,
has been hurled down.

¹¹ They triumphed over him
by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their
testimony;
they did not love their lives so
much as to shrink from death.

¹² Therefore rejoice, you heavens
and you who dwell in them!
But woe to the earth and the sea,
because the devil has gone
down to you!

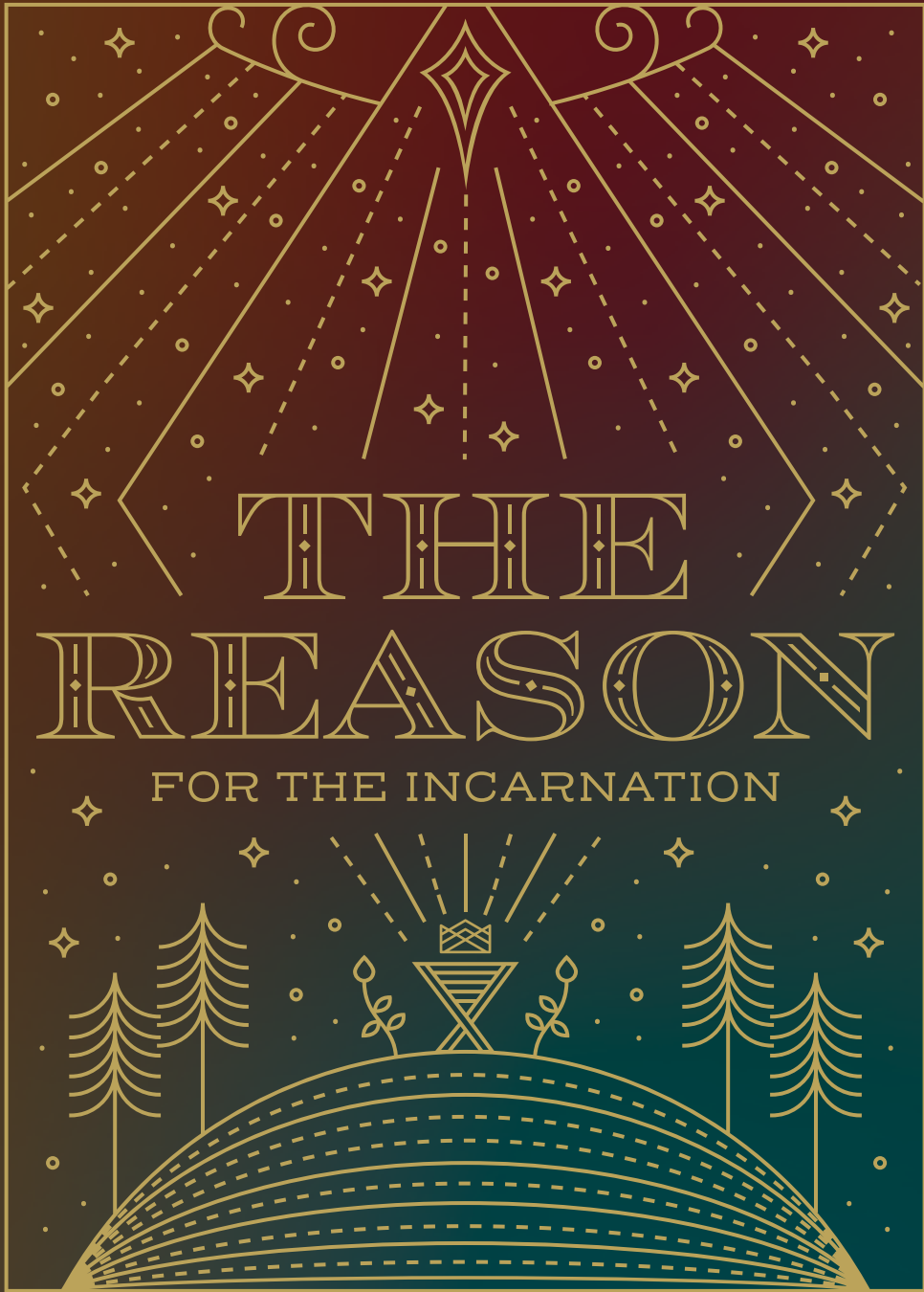
He is filled with fury,
because he knows that his
time is short.”

¹³ When the dragon saw that he had
been hurled to the earth, he pursued

the woman who had given birth to the male child. ¹⁴The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. ¹⁵ Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with

the torrent. ¹⁶ But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. ¹⁷ Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

◆ NOTES ◆



THE

REASON

FOR THE INCARNATION



TO REVEAL THE FATHER

JOHN 1:1-18

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵ (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, “This is the one I spoke about when I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’”) ¹⁶ Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

DEVOTIONAL

Before the beginning, God was. Father, Son, & Spirit existed in perfect harmony and love - this tri-unity of eternal wholeness. Our minds bend and contort to fathom a time before time, to comprehend a relationship before creation. Yet God is always previous. He has no beginning. He will never end. He is eternal. And yet, this same God became *human*. Imagine that: *the infinite One put on finite flesh*.

God told Moses, “You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live” (Exodus 33:20). In his holiness and purity, the very sight of God would have overwhelmed and consumed even the most righteous of people. That’s why John says in the beginning of his Gospel: “No one has ever seen God” (John 1:18a). Until Bethlehem, no one had. No one *could*. Even the Jewish high priest could not enter the Holy of Holies in the Temple, except once per year to offer atonement for sins. But they tied a rope around the ankle of the high priest, lest he drop dead in God’s presence and need to be dragged out. God dwells in “unapproachable light” (1 Timothy 6:16). Just



as no one can get near the sun in our galaxy without being consumed, so too God's holiness is so radiant that no one could see him and live.

Until now. John continues: "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known" (John 1:18). The Son, who is God and is at the Father's side from the beginning, *has made him known*. This is Christmas: ***the unapproachable God has approached humanity***. God has come near! In our sin, in our brokenness, even in our rebellion against God, we could not (and would not) come to him. But he has come to us. What a miracle!

Ultimately, here's what the incarnation means: *God can be known*. More than that, *God wants to be known*. He is not hiding, he is not concealing himself, he is not trying to throw you off his scent. God wants to be known, and in Jesus, you can know him. One of Jesus' disciples, Philip, said to Jesus, "Show us the Father" (John 14:8). Imagine the audacity! Essentially Philip says, "Give us something that not even Moses could handle - to look at God." But Jesus doesn't scold Philip. He simply says, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). He came to make the Father known, to give access to ordinary people like Philip, and like you, and like me. Thank God for Christmas!

✦ REFLECT & RESPOND ✦

Take a “spiritual inventory” of your heart as you begin this Advent season. How are you approaching this time of year? Are there any areas where you are overwhelmed? Would you describe your disposition as one of excitement and anticipation - or is it more defined as dreaded obligation and busyness? Make some notes for yourself as you take your “spiritual pulse.”

Incarnation simply means “in the flesh.” It’s a term that describes God coming to earth and being born in Bethlehem. Have you ever considered the significance of the incarnation before? What would you say are the reasons that Jesus came to this earth? List as many as you can think of.

After spending time in reflection, write out a prayer to God.

God I am in awe that you would come to earth, because...



TO SERVE IN HUMILITY

MARK 10:35-45

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

³⁶ “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.

³⁷ They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

³⁸ “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

³⁹ “We can,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with,⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”

⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,

⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

DEVOTIONAL

God is infinite. He is all powerful and all knowing. He ordains everything that comes to pass. He is Creator of the heavens and the earth; He is Creator of the seen and unseen. He is everywhere and knows everything. Yet this perfect, holy God still chose to take on human flesh in Jesus Christ, the Messiah. And he did this – not to be served, but to serve.

The incarnation reveals God’s compassion, humility, and kindness. It reflects the beauty of His glory. Jesus was born to show us that God cares deeply about us.

This is the Christmas story: Jesus came to serve. During his short time on earth, Jesus fed others. He healed the sick. He raised the dead. He washed his disciples’ feet. But undoubtedly the greatest way Jesus served is described in Mark 10:45. Jesus came to “give his life as a ransom for many.” Jesus came to serve by sacrificing his life. He served sinners by dying for sinners. God served us by humbly bearing the weight of our sins, purchasing everlasting life through his death on the cross.

Because Jesus came to serve us, we should serve others. We all want to be great disciples, and even the original Twelve had discussions about this. Jesus’ response to their desire for greatness is counter-cultural: “...whoever wants to become great among



you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.” (Mark 10:43-44). Though society measures greatness by highest status, a “great” disciple is one who serves. Kingdom living is demonstrated by humble service. We know this because this is what Jesus, the King, did! The greatest One, God, came as a humble servant.

We live most like Jesus when we serve others. But remember this: we serve because Jesus served us. We cannot serve in our own power. We need him! Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5). We must humble ourselves like children and rely on Jesus – the greatest servant to ever live. Only then can we serve like him.

During this Advent season, remember that Christ came to serve. Let this be the reason you serve others in this season.

REFLECT & RESPOND

Read John 15:1-17. What does it mean to abide in Christ? How often do you try to serve God or others without relying on God?

In Mark 10:43-44, Jesus invites the disciples to serve. Where is God inviting you to serve in your home, community, your workplace, or church? What steps will you take to obey God and serve?

After spending time in reflection, write out a prayer to God.

God, thank you for coming to earth as a humble servant. I want to serve you and others more because...



TO TASTE DEATH FOR EVERYONE

HEBREWS 2:5-18

⁵ It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. ⁶ But there is a place where someone has testified:

“What is mankind that you are mindful of them,
a son of man that you care for him?

⁷ You made them a little lower than the angels;
you crowned them with glory and honor

⁸ and put everything under their feet.”

In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them. ⁹ But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

¹⁰ In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. ¹¹ Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. ¹² He says,

“I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the assembly I will sing your praises.”

¹³ And again,

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again he says,

“Here am I, and the children God has given me.”

¹⁴ Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.



Hebrews 2:9 starts this way: “But we do see Jesus...” What does the writer of Hebrews want us to “see” about Jesus? What are we to observe from this one, incredible life? The author continues: “...who was made lower than the angels for a little while.” We are to consider and contemplate why, for a little while, Jesus was made lower than the angels. Why did he become human and take on flesh?

It’s apparent that from this passage, Jesus became fully human so that he could die *for us*, as us: “so that...



he might taste death for everyone.” His death was substitutionary, standing in our place and taking our death. It had to be this way in order for him to be our substitute and representative. He could not vicariously experience this from the throne of Heaven; he had to come down in this way, and for this purpose.

Through the incarnation, Jesus took the death we deserved. Our death became his. But it is through God’s grace that Jesus’ life becomes ours. Think about it: “I have been crucified with Christ,” Paul said in Galatians 2:20, “and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Jesus took on flesh, experienced the fullness of humanity, died in our place, freed us from death, and brought us into relationship with the Father. To truly “see Jesus” is to recognize the length to which God has gone to bring us into a loving relationship.

But the author of Hebrews also wants us to “see” that the story doesn’t end at the cross. Though for a little while, he was made lower than the angels, he is, “now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death.” Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection was such a complete work that he is now, and for all time, the King of the Kingdom. He reigns! He defeated death, and those who have given their lives to Jesus are free. We cannot “see” the full impact and fulfillment of the Kingdom right now, but don’t be fooled. If the King has taken up his crown, then his Kingdom is come – now in part, later in full. Right now, the reality of Jesus’ rule must be confessed by faith and seen in the lives of those who belong to him. We live by faith, and not by sight. So to “see Jesus” as the writer of Hebrews teaches us is to believe in our King and the forever reality of his kingdom.

✦ REFLECT & RESPOND ✦

What aspect of Jesus' sacrifice means the most to you personally? Have you considered the significance of Jesus' death personally - that he tasted death for you? How does this impact you?

Do you truly believe in the reality of the Kingdom? How do you know? What difference does this make in your daily living as a citizen of his Kingdom?

After spending time in reflection, write out a prayer to God.

God, thank you for tasting death for me. I am in awe of this act of love because...



TO TAKE AWAY SIN

1 JOHN 3:1-6

³ See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

⁴ Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. ⁵ But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. ⁶ No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.



One day, John the Baptizer was at the Jordan River, living up to his name by baptizing the people who were coming to him in droves. John looked up and saw Jesus walking toward him and announced to the crowd, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Our text today, written by a different John, confirmed that very reality: “But you know that he appeared so that he might take

away our sins” (1 John 3:5a). Christmas is a reminder that Jesus came to take away our sins.

John the Baptizer chose his words intentionally and purposefully. We may expect to read, “Look, the Savior of the world, who takes away our sin!” But he said, “Look, the Lamb of God.” Why a lamb? Lambs were so common in the sacrificial system for Israel. Daily in the temple there were morning and evening sacrifices where lambs would be slaughtered. Every Passover, each family in Israel would slaughter their own lamb in observance of the ancient tradition. Lambs were being sacrificed all the time in payment for sin.

In reality, these sacrifices could never take away sins - it merely postponed the penalty. No lamb could ultimately and forever remove sins, and the annual observance of the Day of Atonement was one more reminder of that. The lambs, goats, and bulls that were offered could never remove sin. The writer of Hebrews put it this way: “Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins” (Hebrews 10:11).

But John the Baptizer recognized what was happening: **God sent his own Lamb to take away sin** - forever. Every other lamb sacrifice would postpone the penalty; the Lamb of God, however, would absorb the penalty himself. While all other sacrifices maintained the relationship that Israel had with God, the Lamb of God would take away the sins of the world. This would be one sacrifice for all time, never to be repeated.



The cross may feel distant from the manger, but the two are inseparably linked. The Son of God came to this earth in order to become this once-for-all-sacrifice for sin. He was born to die. He is the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world - and He did. The writer of Hebrews compared Jesus to both high priest and sacrifice in one: "But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12). He sat down, because the work was complete. He did what he came to do: take away our sins.

✦ REFLECT & RESPOND ✦

Take a moment to reflect on the weight of your sin. Allow yourself to become acutely aware of the heaviness of this burden; don't rush past it. Read these words out loud: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). Jesus bore the weight of your sin - and that of every human ever - on the cross. How does this reality affect your view of Jesus' sacrifice?

Now read this verse out loud: "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). What does it mean to you to be cleansed and purified from all your sin? How does this change you and how you view your own sinful decisions?

After spending time in reflection, write out a prayer to God.

Thank you, Jesus, for being the perfect, spotless Lamb of God who took away my sin. I praise you because...



TO DESTROY THE WORKS OF THE DEVIL

1 JOHN 3:7-10

⁷ Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. ⁸ The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. ⁹ No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. ¹⁰ This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.



No doubt you've heard this famous Christmas carol before:

***God rest ye merry, gentlemen
Let nothing you dismay,***

***Remember Christ our Savior
Was born on Christmas Day***

***To save us all from Satan's power
When we were gone astray.***

***O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy
O tidings of comfort and joy***

In the beginning of the Bible, we see God declare to Satan that he will be destroyed by Eve's offspring. These opening lines of "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" and our Scripture passage today show us how God in fact destroyed Satan. Jesus, the offspring of Eve, came into this world to "save us all from Satan's power," and to "destroy the devil's work." But what does John mean in this text when he says "the devil's work"?

Let's look a second time at 1 John 3:8-10, to see how John develops this idea further:

⁸ The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. ⁹ No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. ¹⁰ This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

The devil's work is a life of sin. It's his *magnum opus*. He "has been sinning from the beginning." Through the incarnation, Jesus came to destroy sin, and in doing so, destroyed the works of the devil. Don't misunderstand: we are culpable for our sins, and the guilt sits squarely on our shoulders. But it is through our sin that the devil holds us captive to his will and ways (check out Ephesians 2:1-3 for more evidence of this). But because Jesus was born and lived and died and rose again for us, we have new life, the devil is destroyed, and he will be ultimately and totally conquered. Paul reminds believers in Romans 16:20,



“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”

Until we see Christ face to face, the battle with sin is ongoing. But the difference is our relationship to sin, which changed at the cross: we are no longer slaves to sin, we are born to a new life - a life of obedience and love. We are able to do right, by God's grace; we are capable of loving our brothers and sisters as God calls us to love. We are born of God! This Christmas season, remember that the devil is destroyed. Jesus has dealt a death blow, and you are no longer a slave to sin. You are made new to live the life God intended for you! O tidings of comfort and joy!

◆ REFLECT & RESPOND ◆

How does 1 John 3:8-10 describe what a Christian is and how a Christian should live? What words or phrases stand out?

Based on this passage of Scripture, what should someone's life look like once they are "born of God"? How should their relationship to sin change?

If there is a sin that remains unconfessed in your life, apply the truth of this text to your life. Name your sin for what it is. Now complete this sentence: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy _____." If Jesus came to destroy this sin, why hold onto it any longer? How does this truth impact your life right now?

After spending time in reflection, write out a prayer to God.

***Thank you, Lord, for destroying the devil's work through Jesus' sacrifice.
Without you, I would still be enslaved to...***



✦ LITURGIES ✦

A WORD ABOUT LITURGIES

A liturgy is simply an order for worship. Think of it as a guide for ordering your praying, reading, and worshiping. Instead of falling prey to the distractions of our surroundings (or our thoughts) a liturgy can keep us on track, and direct our worship in a particular direction. A liturgy is also intended to be corporate. The term comes from a compound of two Greek terms for “work” and “people.” A liturgy is a “work of the people” meaning it should be done together.

For these guided times of reading and prayer, find at least one other person to go through it with you. Whether that’s your spouse, your child, a neighbor, or the loved ones around your dinner table, go through these pages with others. If you live alone, call a friend on FaceTime or get your small group together on Zoom. Unlike the devotionals on the previous pages, these are not individualistic projects.

The power of the liturgy is in worshiping God together.

CHRISTMAS EVE

EVENING LITURGY

As you conclude your day read the following passage out loud. Share the reading responsibilities with others.

Together, let us open our Bibles to:

LUKE 2:1-20

Use the prayer below as a starting point, or pray using your own words in light of what you just read.

Heavenly Father, Thank you for the Gospel – the good news that has brought great joy through your Son, Jesus. We celebrate that our Savior has been born – and he came to die for our sins. We identify with these lowly shepherds who first heard this good news, and we are humbled that you would bring this message to us – the undeserving. As we sleep tonight, we rest in your peace and in your favor, which has come to us through Christ our Savior. Amen.



CHRISTMAS DAY

MORNING LITURGY

Before you unwrap any presents this morning, read the following passage out loud. Once again, share the reading with others, especially if you have school-aged children who can read and are extra eager to open presents.

Together, let us open our Bibles to:

MATTHEW 2:1-12

Use the prayer below as a starting point, or pray using your own words in light of what you just read.

Heavenly Father, thank you for waking us up in your mercy and grace today. Just as the Magi came to worship, we start this Christmas by worshiping you, Jesus. You are our Savior, our God, our Mediator, our Lord, our Friend. As we exchange gifts with one another today, remind us that you are the Greatest Gift of all. Teach us to be grateful for the gifts we receive, but even more, teach us to be grateful for the people who give the gifts. We also want our lives to be gifts to you today – that we would bring you glory in how we speak, think, and act. We praise you, Jesus, and thank you for this Christmas. Amen.

CHRISTMAS

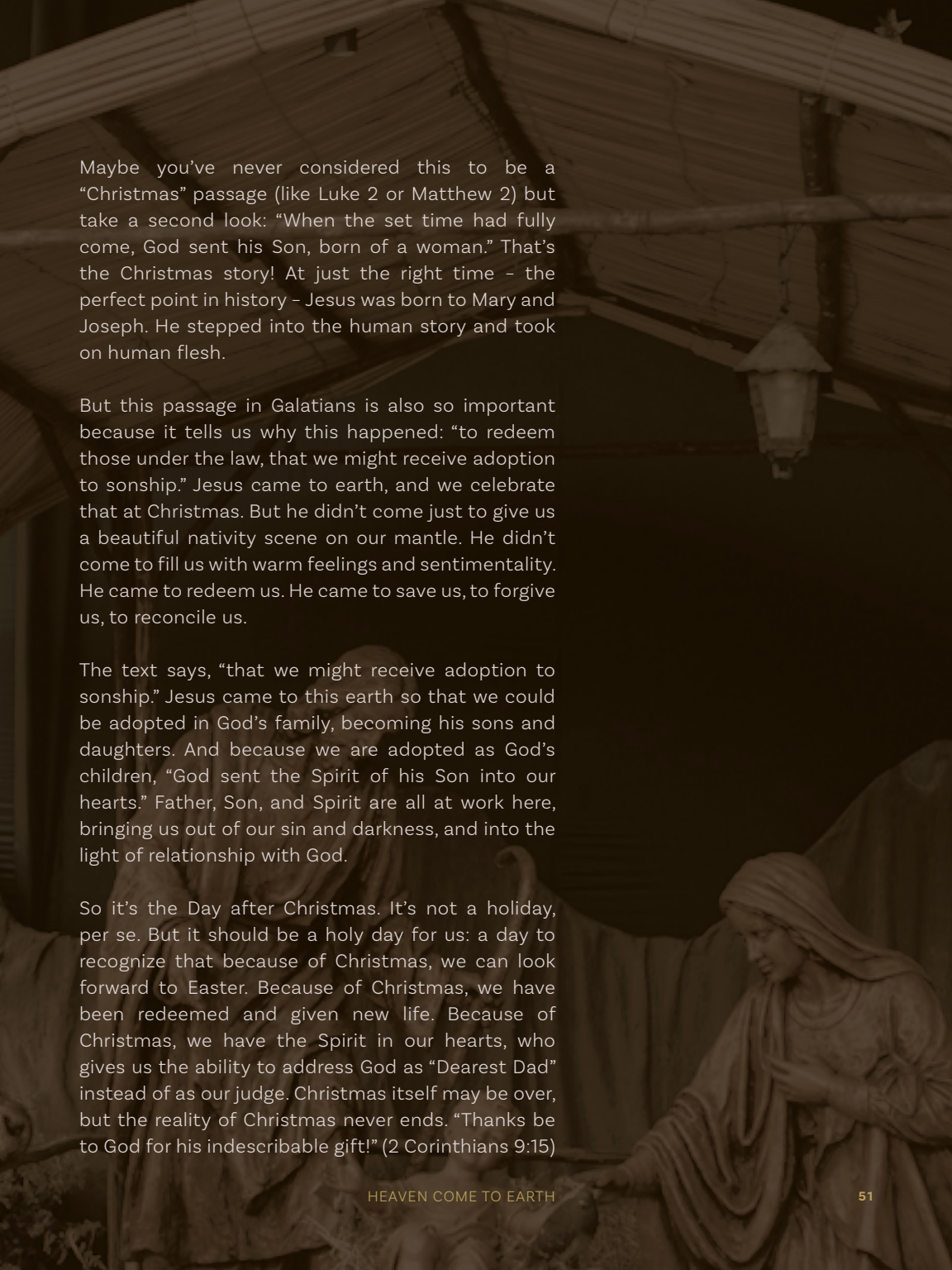
Once we move past the 25th of December, we learn that there are two major groups of people in the world. There are those who never want Christmas to end, and who will have their artificial tree up until Valentine's Day. There are others who have the tree undecorated and out to the curb before you can even finish cleaning up Christmas Dinner. Interestingly, sometimes these two types of people marry each other, which makes today even more entertaining. But the question remains: what is the right amount of time to celebrate Christmas?

We can't settle the debate here, but it should give us reason to pause and think. Advent is officially over according to the calendar, but what do we do now? Do we just get back to "our previously scheduled programming" and start planning for New Year's? What was it all for?

Maybe you've wondered about that before. Yes, the purpose of walking through the season of Advent is to prepare our hearts to celebrate the birth of our Savior, but it doesn't end there. Its true purpose is to carry us forward beyond the 25th, to step into the beautiful reality that the Savior has come, and he has changed everything!

GALATIANS 4:4-6

⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. ⁶ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."



Maybe you've never considered this to be a "Christmas" passage (like Luke 2 or Matthew 2) but take a second look: "When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman." That's the Christmas story! At just the right time - the perfect point in history - Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph. He stepped into the human story and took on human flesh.

But this passage in Galatians is also so important because it tells us why this happened: "to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship." Jesus came to earth, and we celebrate that at Christmas. But he didn't come just to give us a beautiful nativity scene on our mantle. He didn't come to fill us with warm feelings and sentimentality. He came to redeem us. He came to save us, to forgive us, to reconcile us.

The text says, "that we might receive adoption to sonship." Jesus came to this earth so that we could be adopted in God's family, becoming his sons and daughters. And because we are adopted as God's children, "God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts." Father, Son, and Spirit are all at work here, bringing us out of our sin and darkness, and into the light of relationship with God.

So it's the Day after Christmas. It's not a holiday, per se. But it should be a holy day for us: a day to recognize that because of Christmas, we can look forward to Easter. Because of Christmas, we have been redeemed and given new life. Because of Christmas, we have the Spirit in our hearts, who gives us the ability to address God as "Dearest Dad" instead of as our judge. Christmas itself may be over, but the reality of Christmas never ends. "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15)

What has God taught me about himself this year?

What has God taught me about myself this year?

YEAR IN REVIEW: 2023

A passage of Scripture I keep coming back to is...



.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



A sermon that God used to get my attention was...

because...

I am most thankful for:

An unexpected joy:

The highlight of this year was:

An unexpected sorrow:

JANUARY 1, 2024

If you could travel back in time to January 1, 2023, and if you could tell yourself all of the things that would happen in 2023, you wouldn't have believed it! None of us can predict tomorrow, let alone the entire next year. Scripture testifies to this idea as well:

ECCLESIASTES 8:7

Since no one knows the future, who can tell someone else what is to come?

PROVERBS 27:1

Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.

Only God knows the future. He knows how he wants to shape us more into the image of his Son, and he knows exactly what circumstances will be necessary to bring that about. He can be trusted! Therefore, we don't need to worry about what is to come. The future is secure in God's hands, and so are we.

But we must admit that time moves so quickly; after all, wasn't it just the other day that we rang in 2023? As Ferris Bueller once quipped, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it." The wisdom of Ferris sounds like it was borrowed from the wisdom of Moses:

PSALM 90:12

Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

A heart of wisdom comes from a sober-mindedness about the brevity of life. Our days are limited, but none of us knows exactly how limited. So Moses, who wrote this Psalm, asks God to be our Teacher: "Teach us to number our days." God uses many things to teach us this lesson. Some are beautiful, wonderful lessons: reaching milestones, celebrating birthdays, getting married, welcoming our first grandchild. Other lessons may be harder: sending your son to college, walking your daughter down the aisle, burying your dearest friend too soon. God will teach us to number our days, if we will only enroll in his courses.

THE YEAR AHEAD:
2024

The heart of wisdom looks like this: “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16). Making the most of every opportunity means I recognize the season that God has me in, and I don’t want to waste it. Tomorrow is not guaranteed. 2025 isn’t either. But I want to live wisely to redeem the time that God has allowed me to have. And that means living for him.

Write out a prayer of trust and dedication to the Lord for 2024.

◆ MY PRAYER FOR 2024 ◆

A large rectangular box with a thin gold border, containing 18 horizontal dotted lines for writing.

ON MISSION THIS ADVENT SEASON

God is on mission, and he wants us to join him. Here at The Chapel, we talk often about God's mission in the world, which is our mission as a church: we exist to ensure that every man, woman, and child has repeated opportunities to hear and see the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Christmas season provides some unique Gospel opportunities. At this time of year, Christ's people should allow his light to shine even more brightly through their lives. That doesn't just mean an invite to a Christmas Eve service at The Chapel (though, it certainly could include that!). It means looking for spaces and places to be a blessing to others.

What would it look like for you to be a light to others in this season? Who is around you that needs to see and experience Christ's love in action? Is there someone in your office? At your child's school? A neighbor down the block? A family member that no one really talks to? How can you build a bridge to the Gospel words through your Gospel actions?

Maybe it's as simple as shoveling your neighbor's driveway or helping string

Christmas lights. Maybe it's something more: buying gifts for a family who is struggling financially (and maybe you do so anonymously, with the help of your Community Group). Maybe you can bless your co-workers with coffee and donuts without asking for reimbursement. Or maybe you can buy a gift for someone who is not expecting it.

One activity we can all do together: let someone know that they are welcome to be your guest on Christmas Eve at The Chapel. You'll see a greeting card in the back of this booklet. Write a note to someone, expressing how much you'd love to have them join you and sit with you during the Christmas Eve celebration at our church. Maybe you'd even use the cookie recipe to accompany the handwritten card, as a way to bless someone along with your invite.

Ask the Holy Spirit to lead and direct your steps, and to prepare the hearts of others around you. Commit to prayer every invite, every conversation, every gift. Ask God to do immeasurably more than all you could ask or even imagine. Then be ready to walk through the doors that he opens!



One way we can all be a blessing as a church family is through our giving. Of course, this includes our regular, weekly giving to God's mission through this local church. But one of our Chapel family traditions at the Christmas season is a special **Christmas Eve offering**. This offering is over-and-above our weekly giving, and 100% of the Christmas Eve offering is strategically invested outside of our ministry.

When we gather on Christmas Eve, you'll hear about where that offering is going this year. To participate in the Christmas Eve offering, you can make a tangible gift using one of the Christmas giving envelopes that are available at every campus. Or, you can use our online giving platform and choose the "Christmas Eve offering" designation.

God has been generous with us. Christmas is a reminder of his Greatest Gift, his one and only Son. It is because we have been blessed in Christ that we can respond in generosity to others!

CALENDAR ✨

DECEMBER 2023

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY
<p>NOVEMBER 2023</p>			
3	4	5	
<p>HEAVEN COME TO EARTH: Week 1</p> <p>First Sunday of Advent!</p>		<p>INVITE a friend or family member to the Christmas Festival</p>	
10	11	12	
<p>HEAVEN COME TO EARTH: Week 2</p> <p> @ CHIEFS 4:25pm</p>			
17	18	19	
<p>HEAVEN COME TO EARTH: Week 3</p> <p>COWBOYS @  4:25pm</p>	<p>PRAY for a friend or family member to join you on Christmas Eve @ The Chapel</p>	<p>WRITE a card inviting that person to join you on Sunday</p>	
24	25	26	
<p>CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP GATHERINGS: 9AM & 11AM (plus 1pm @ Cheektowaga, CrossPoint & Niagara Falls)</p>	<p>✨ . . . ✨</p> <p>JESUS CHRIST IS BORN!</p> <p>✨ . . . ✨</p>		
31	1	<p>NOVEMBER 2023</p>	
<p>NEW YEAR'S EVE WORSHIP GATHERINGS: 9AM & 11AM</p> <p>PATRIOTS @  1pm</p>	<p>PRAY for this year ahead (see page 55)</p>		



✧ CUT-OUT COOKIES ✧

INGREDIENTS

- ½ CUP** SHORTENING OR CRISCO
- 1 CUP** GRANULATED SUGAR
- 1** EGG
- 1 TEASPOON** VANILLA EXTRACT
- ½ CUP** SOUR CREAM
- 3 ¼ CUP** ALL-PURPOSE FLOUR
- ¼ TEASPOON** SALT
- 1 TEASPOON** BAKING POWDER

INSTRUCTIONS

- In a mixer, cream together shortening and sugar until well combined.
- Add egg, vanilla, and sour cream. Mix until combined.
- Mix flour, salt, and baking soda in separate bowl.
- Add to wet ingredients until dough forms.
- Refrigerate dough for at least 30 minutes.
- On a lightly floured surface, roll out dough to desired width and use your favorite cookie cutters to make shapes.
- Bake at 325° for 10-12 minutes.
- Decorate with your favorite decorator icing or use the Buttercream Recipe as follows.

✧ BUTTERCREAM FROSTING ✧

INGREDIENTS

- 1 CUP** UNSALTED BUTTER, AT ROOM TEMPERATURE
- 3 CUPS** CONFECTIONER'S SUGAR
- ¼ TEASPOON** SALT
- 1 TABLESPOON** VANILLA EXTRACT
- 4 TABLESPOONS** HEAVY CREAM
- FOOD COLORING, PIPING BAGS & YOUR FAVORITES SPRINKLES!

BAKER'S TIP:

To make chocolate buttercream, add ½ cup sifted cocoa powder to the confectioner's sugar.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Cream butter, on medium speed for a few minutes.
- While creaming butter, **sift** the sugar into a separate bowl.
- On low speed, add in sugar one cup at a time, until incorporated.
- Add vanilla, salt, and heavy cream.
- Beat for 3 minutes on medium-high speed until light and fluffy.
- Now get to decorating!

HOW TO USE THE INVITE CARD IN THIS ADVENT BOOK

The Christmas season is filled with opportunities for us to invite our friends, family, and neighbors to hear about the good news of Jesus. Maybe that will mean bringing some Christmas cookies to a neighbor that tends to be forgotten, and telling them that you're there for them. Maybe it will be a chance to share your Grace Story with a family member around a dinner table. Or maybe it will mean inviting someone to join you at one of our Christmas Eve services.

As we all take time to pray for those in our circle of influence, we want to give resources that can help you to initiate a conversation. On the back cover of this book is blank tear-out Christmas card. Before you write, pray and ask God to give you the right words to say. If you need help getting started, maybe it could look something like this:

◆ INVITE ◆

*Hi Friend,
I hope you're enjoying this Christmas season. I wanted to send you a little note to tell you how much I appreciate you and your friendship. I'm sure you have plans for the evening of the 24th, but I wanted to invite you to join me/us for a Christmas Eve worship service at my church that morning. I'm going to be attending the service at the Campus, and would be more than happy to give you a ride. I thought it would be great to celebrate Christmas with you in this way...*

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE TIMES:

9AM & 11AM // ALL CAMPUSES

***ADDITIONAL 1PM SERVICE**

at Cheektowaga, CrossPoint, and Niagara Falls



HAPPY
NEW YEAR!



MERRY
CHRISTMAS

