

Monday, December 23. Read Luke 2:1-7, Hebrews 11:1 & Ephesians 3:20. Because of prophecy, the Jewish people had anticipated a savior for centuries, and they were expecting a royal king who'd set them free and establish an earthly kingdom. Imagine their surprise and disbelief when they were told their savior was born to a common family in a manger in Bethlehem, the lowliest of places in a lowly town. What the Jewish people got did not meet their expectations. But God isn't in the business of meeting expectations. He's in the business of blowing them out of the water. Jesus is an incredible example of God's exceeding goodness. Through Jesus, God met needs the Jewish people didn't even realize they had. He provided much more than the fleeting prosperity of an earthly kingdom. He established His eternal kingdom, provided salvation, reconciled humans to right relationship with God, and brought hope to a broken world. How often do we place our expectations on God, assuming He'll work according to our timeline and plan? This habit isn't great for our faith because God rarely moves on our schedule, and His answers rarely match what we envision. We need to understand the difference between placing our expectations on God versus trusting in His plan and being *expectant* that He will see it through to completion in our lives. Placing our expectations on God can set us up for disappointment, frustration, and resentment when they go unmet, but having a healthy expectancy of God can feed our faith. What desire has God placed in your heart? This Christmas, find comfort in knowing that God wants to do more than meet your expectations. He wants to exceed them. Take heart in the fact that God can do far more than we can even think to ask of Him. Expect God to move, trust His process, and watch your faith grow. *Prayer: Father, thank You for the reminder I have in Jesus that You are graciously meeting needs I don't even know I have. This Christmas, I pray for confidence in what I hope for but cannot see yet. Help my faith in Your faithfulness increase. Thank You for being the God who exceeds expectations. Your timing is perfect, and Your plan is best. Have Your way in my life!*

Tuesday, December 24. Read Luke 2:8-9, 1 Corinthians 1:28. Ecclesiastes 9:10 & Colossians 3:23. God loves to operate differently from the world's perspective. He doesn't honor people for the same reasons the world honors them. He values faithfulness over fame and humility over power. On the night of His greatest miracle, instead of revealing it first to kings or world leaders, God sent an angel to tell common shepherds. Luke 2:8 tells us that the shepherds were "living in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks." It's worth noting that these men were devoted workers, living next to their sheep and caring well for the things they'd been entrusted to steward. The shepherds were of low social status, but they were faithful people, and God chose them to be the first recipients of the greatest news in history. Then, they were at the front of the line to meet the Son of God in person! If you are feeling unimportant or overlooked today, don't stop investing in what God has given you to do. Even if you feel your task is small, give it everything you've got. Don't be discouraged! God is looking for people who will be faithful with little so that He can entrust them with more. Whatever you've been assigned to do today, do it with all your might. God sees your diligence and rewards those who faithfully complete the task in front of them. *Prayer: Father, thank You for placing value on what the world seems to overlook. No matter what task You give me, I commit to working at it with all my heart. Help me not to get discouraged by worldly standards, but instead remember how You chose the humble, hardworking shepherds to be the first to know about the miracle of Christmas. Like the shepherds, thank You for choosing me to be a carrier of Your Good News. And thank You in advance for giving me more as I'm faithful with what You've entrusted to me*

Wednesday, December 25. Read Genesis 1:1-4, John 1:9-14 & John 8:12. Christmas is here! It's time to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ—the Light of the World! In the first act of Creation in Genesis, God spoke and light was immediately separated from darkness. But it wasn't long before Adam and Eve chose to sin, and God's presence, His light, was separated from man. At that moment, the redemption story had to be written: The need for light to shine through darkness was no longer just night and day, but life and death. God's greatest desire was to be in relationship with us, so He sent a Light to guide us out of our darkness and back to Him. This is Christmas: "The One who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world!" God's only Son was born so that with the forgiveness of sin, we could be reconciled back to Him. The separation that kept us in darkness was overcome by Jesus' light. Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world; whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." No matter where you are today, and no matter what you've done, the Savior of the world has come! For YOU! Let His light shine on all the dark places of your life and restore what has been lost in the darkness. The Light is here, and He has declared that you never have to walk in darkness again. Receive His love and experience Christmas like never before! *Prayer: Father, thank You for preparing a way since the beginning of time for us to be close to You again. Thank You for sending Your Son to be born, and to die, so I could live! Today, as I celebrate Christmas, help me have a deep appreciation of Your love for me and the Light You have brought into my life. I praise You for making it possible for me to never walk in darkness again!*

Thursday, December 26. Read Luke 2:13-14. Can you imagine what the shepherds experienced when an army of “heavenly hosts” appeared that Christmas night? They were simply tending their sheep in a field, and suddenly: a sky full of angels. It’s likely they had heard of angels, but actually seeing one was probably both terrifying and amazing. Imagine hundreds of angels shouting praise together to make what must have been a deafening, glorious sound. What an incredible moment! Angels probably appear worthy of worship in their own right. They’re so different from anything we see here on earth, reflecting the light of heaven, and commanding full attention and respect. But they are not the focus of worship. As remarkable as they were, the angels focused completely on praising God for who He is and what He would bring to earth through Jesus. Angels, amazing in the eyes of humans, were amazed by the sight of God. It must have been that much more convincing to the shepherds that God was worthy of their highest worship and praise. *Prayer: Father, I can’t fully grasp how awesome You are. During this Christmas season, keep my eyes focused on how worthy You are of my worship. Never let me lose the wonder of Your greatness. Everything in heaven and on earth was made to worship You. No one comes close to how glorious You are.*

Friday, December 27. Read Luke 2:15-20 & Proverbs 3:5-6. Think of a time when you heard from God, whether it was a promise, a confirmation, or a conviction. What was your immediate response? Did you act on what He said, or did you sit and ponder whether it was really His voice? Maybe you were sure you heard what He said but still hesitated. (Disclaimer: It’s okay—we’ve all done it!) Luke 2 says that when the angels told the shepherds the Good News about Jesus’ birth, they “hurried off” to find Him. Instead of waiting around and letting doubt creep in, they responded immediately. This took great faith! Certainly, they wanted to meet Jesus, but they also had earthly concerns. What would they do with their flock? Should they tell their families first? Were they dressed appropriately? Were simple shepherds really worthy of meeting the King of Kings? They didn’t let any of the questions we might have asked in the same situation keep them from quickly responding to God. As we follow Jesus, we need to embrace this kind of faith. When we hesitate with God, we create a breeding ground for doubt, fear, and insecurity—none of which come from Him. When you hear a specific word from Him, trust His direction. He will equip you to do what He’s asked you to do. All you need to do is respond. Stir your faith today and decide in advance that you’ll move when God’s says to move, no matter what! *Prayer: Father, thank You for Your patience with me. Forgive me for the times I’ve hesitated when You have spoken to me. I want to follow Your plan for my life. Strengthen my faith, and help me to respond quickly when I hear from You.*

Adapted from <https://www.churchofthehighlands.com>