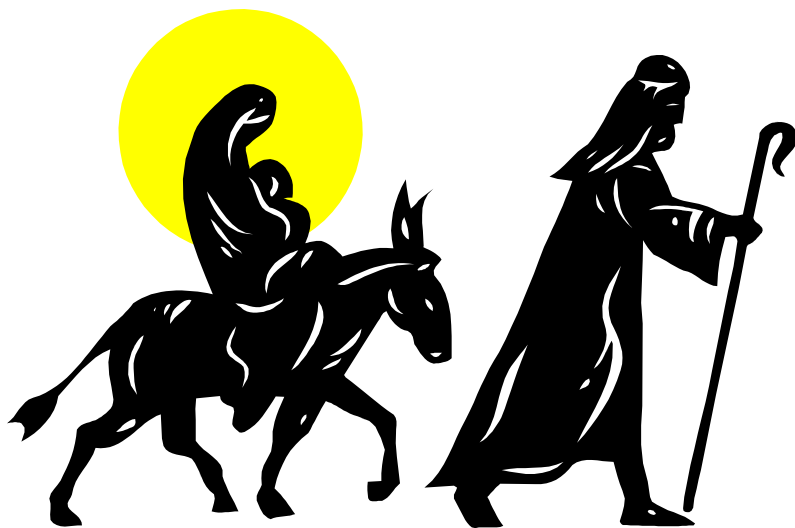


Countdown to Christmas 2024



16th – 24th

(The readings this year are based on material from RBC Ministries)

Monday 16

ROOM FOR JESUS

Read:

Luke 2:1-7

There was no room for them in the inn.

—Luke 2:7

The words "there was no room for them in the inn" remind me of a story of a family's trip. The father recalls 'We had been travelling all day, and I was trying to find a motel where we could spend the night. As we drove along the highway, our hopes were dashed time and again by the sight of No VACANCY signs. As a father, responsible for the well-being of my family, I was frustrated and discouraged.'

Now think of Mary and Joseph. How much worse it must have been for them when they arrived in Bethlehem

and found no rooms available! You can imagine Joseph pleading with the manager of the inn, telling him of Mary's condition and their desperate need for a place where she could give birth to her child. But "there was no room for them in the inn." So when Jesus was born, His mother "wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger" (Luke 2:7).

Today, 2,000 years later, millions of people have no room for Jesus. Although they participate enthusiastically in the festivities of the Christmas season, they keep Him out of their lives. The No VACANCY sign is there.

How about you? Is there room in your life for Christ? What better time than during this season to rededicate your life to Him or to receive Him as your Saviour!

*Have you any room for Jesus,
He who bore your load of sin?
As He knocks and asks admission,
Sinner, will you let Him in? —Whittle*

**If Christ is kept on the outside,
something is wrong on the inside.**

Tuesday 17

**THE
SHEPHERDS**

Read:

Luke 2:8-20

You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. —
Luke 2:12

The angel bypassed Jerusalem, the religious centre of Israel. He didn't go to Herodium, Herod's villa near Bethlehem. He appeared instead to a band of shepherds tending their flocks (Luke 2:8-9).

Back then no one thought God would be interested in shepherds, or that shepherds would be interested in God. Shepherds were notoriously irreligious, ranked by the rabbis with prostitutes and other "habitual sinners." They were outcasts, barred from the synagogue and polite

society. They assumed that God would never accept them, and they feared Him.

But God spoke to them. I think He knew that these shepherds, like so many people who appear indifferent to spiritual things, were quietly longing for God.

All of us have a longing for something more. And no matter how hard we try to appear self-sufficient, sooner or later we run out of something essential—love, money, time, or life. Isolation, loneliness, and fear of death lead us to acknowledge our need for a Saviour. But where can we find Him?

The angel's words to the shepherds were simple and direct: "There is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). You can find Him too.

*Come to Bethlehem and see
Him whose birth the angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee
Christ the Lord, the newborn King. —Anon.*

God's gift to a dying world is the life-giving Saviour..

Wednesday 18

**THE STAR IN
THE WINDOW**

Read:

Ephesians 2:1-10

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. —
John 3:16

During World War II, it became a custom in the United States for a family who had a son serving in the military to place a star in a front window of their home. A gold star indicated that the son had died in support of his country's cause.

Sir Harry Lauder told a touching story about this custom. One night a man was walking down a New York City street with his 5-year-old son. The little boy was interested in the brightly lighted windows of the houses and wanted to know why

some houses had a star in the window. The father explained that those families had a son fighting in the war. The child would clap his hands as he saw another star in the window and would cry out, "Look, Daddy, there's another family who gave a son for his country."

At last they came to an empty lot, and a break in the row of houses. Through the gap a star could be seen shining brightly in the sky. The little lad caught his breath, "Oh, Daddy," he cried, "Look at the star in the window of heaven! God must have given His Son too."

Yes indeed! There is a star in God's window. Do you realize what He did for you? Because of God's love for us, He gave His Son, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:4). Have you thanked Him?

*For God so loved the world, He gave His only Son
To die on Calvary's tree, from sin to set me free;
Someday He's coming back, what glory that will be!
Wonderful His love to me. —Smith*

**Many give their lives for their country,
but Jesus gave His life for the world.**

Thursday 19

**IF CHRISTMAS
ISN'T MERRY**

Read:

Luke 2:21-33

Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. —
Luke 2:19

Joanie Yoder reflects: One Christmas I saw a cartoon that showed a boy gazing into a store window at a sign that read:

HAVE THE BEST CHRISTMAS EVER!

Thoughtfully, he said, "It's pretty hard to top the first one."

Years ago my husband and I had an experience that drew our attention to that first Christmas. In mid-December, I gave birth prematurely to a much-wanted son. As our "Tiny Tim" struggled for life, he was rushed to another hospital. Then, miles away from us, he died all alone. Christmas

that year was not jolly but grievous.

In our grief, however, God gave us a moving glimpse of His original Christmas. We saw that God also experienced empty arms, but in a much greater way. His baby Son had been born to die—a death that would bring eternal life to us all. Like Mary, we cherished and pondered these thoughts in our hearts. Slowly, the unhappiness that had threatened to diminish the meaning of Christmas enlarged it instead. In time, that Christmas became the most meaningful one we've ever had.

Christmas this year will be unavoidably sad for many people—perhaps for you. Take heart! Christmas needn't be merry to be meaningful. It's the Christ of Christmas we celebrate, not Christmas itself. Ponder Him!

*Come with the spirit and heart of a child—
It matters not what we share,
For Christmas isn't Christmas at all
Unless the Christ-child is there. —Anon.*

**To put meaning into your Christmas,
give Christ first place.**

Friday 20

**WEIGHED DOWN
AT CHRISTMAS**

Read:

Luke 4:14-21

He has sent Me to heal
the brokenhearted, ... to
set at liberty those who
are oppressed. —Luke
4:18

One December, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, There was a magnificent Christmas tree. It was covered with angels and surrounded at its base by an elaborate 18th-century nativity scene. Nearly 200 figures, including shepherds, the Magi, and a crowd of townspeople, looked in anticipation toward the manger or gazed up in awe at the angels.

But one figure appeared different from the rest—a barefoot man, who carried a heavy load on his back and looked at the ground. This man, like

so many people today, was so weighed down that he couldn't see the Messiah.

Christmas can be a difficult time for those who carry the burden of hard work, stressful family situations, and personal loss. But we should remember that Christ came into our world to lift up all those who are bowed down. Jesus used the words of Isaiah to announce His God-given mission on earth: "To preach the gospel to the poor; . . . to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18).

Jesus came to lift our burdens so we can raise our eyes to welcome Him at Christmas.

*Help us, Lord, to give our burdens
To Your tender, loving care;
Grant us faith to trust You fully,
Knowing that each one You bear —D. De Haan*

To find true joy at Christmas, look to Jesus.

Monday 23

THE BABY GREW UP

Read:

John 3:13-18

You shall call His name
JESUS, for He will save
His people from their
sins.

—Matthew 1:21

Even Christians can miss the point of the Christmas story if they aren't careful. Halford E. Luccock warned of that danger in a thought-provoking essay. Here is what he wrote: "We can become so charmed with the story of a baby that we grow sentimental about it. It does not ask that we do anything about it; it does not demand any vital change in our way of thinking and living.

"The great question for us is this: Is our Christmas still only a story about a baby, or is it more, a . . . story about a Person into whom the baby

grew, who can redeem the world from its sins, and who calls us into partnership with His great and mighty purposes?"

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, he said, "You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). It is only as we see the birth of Jesus in light of His crucifixion and resurrection that we are able to grasp the full meaning of Christ's coming.

With your eyes wide open this Christmas, respond to God with love and commitment for the gift of His Son. Focus your thoughts and actions and motivations toward honouring the Baby who grew up and died for all our sins. Christ the Saviour is born!

*When we look beyond the manger
To the cross of Calvary,
We will know the reason Christmas
Brings such joy to you and me. —D. De Hann*

**The mission of the cross
is hidden in the message of the cradle.**

Tuesday 24

HE CAME NEAR

Read:

Matthew 1:18-25

Behold, the virgin shall be
with child, and bear Son,
and they shall call His
name Immanuel,
which is translated, "God
with us." —Matthew 1:23

One wintry day a man was walking down the street and noticed some grain on the ground. A flock of sparrows was having an unscheduled feast. As the man took a step toward the birds, they became uneasy. Another step, and their nervousness increased. When he was almost upon them, they suddenly flew away.

For a few moments the man stood there reflecting on what had happened. Why had those sparrows scattered in flight? He had meant no harm. But then he realized that he was too big.

Another question came to mind: How could he walk among those birds without frightening them by his size? It would only be possible if he were able to become a sparrow and fly down among them.

The spiritual analogy is clear. In Old Testament times God appeared to people in various ways—to Abraham through heavenly messengers, to Moses out of the burning bush. They were afraid because of God's awesomeness. But centuries later the angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds and announced, "There is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

Yes, God became a man so that we would not be afraid to draw near to Him

*Without reluctance, flesh and blood His substance,
He took the form of man, revealed the hidden plan.
O glorious mystery, sacrifice of Calvary,
And now I know Thou art the great "I Am." —Booth-Clibborn*

**Jesus' birth brought the infinite God
within reach of finite man**