



# PREFACE

Advent is a season when we celebrate the coming of Christ and look forward with expectation to His second coming!

Each year our family has a tradition of opening one Advent Bible reading starting on December 1 and finishing on Christmas Day, December 25. I am sharing those Bible readings with some thoughts based on them for use as a devotional during this season.

This book is to help us with this joyful sense of wonder. It also functions as a prayerful reminder: to celebrate the real meaning of Christmas. Christmas, at its most basic, is about the gift of Christ to save us from our sins. It speaks of the humility of God. It speaks of the grace of God. It speaks of the peace of God. It speaks of the beauty of the Savior in His infant lowliness reaching down to lift us to His divine loftiness. It means that anyone—anyone from any background, culture or socio-economic

bracket, anyone at all, no matter what they have done or said or thought—may rejoice this Christmas!

May your hearts and souls be filled with Christ this Christmas by His Spirit. May you 'taste and see that the Lord is good' (Ps. 34:8). And may, as Isaiah put it, you hear the message of 'comfort, comfort my people' and see the 'glory of the Lord...revealed' (Isa. 40:1,5).

DECEMBER 1:

# SHOCKING JOY

*In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.'* (LUKE 1:26-28)



In Luke's Gospel, the master historian and medical doctor, Luke, records all the facts with care. Like all good storytellers, he also has a taste for the dramatic. It was 'in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy' that once again God is on the move. He sends an angel to give the most shocking news any young virgin could ever, and would ever, receive. She is highly favored. And the Lord is with her.

This Christmas, would you reflect upon the extraordinary truth of Emmanuel, God with us? That in Christ, God Himself is with us! That as Mary was 'highly favored' to play her extraordinary role in the drama of salvation that first Christmas, so we are now eternally assured of God's loving presence in the midst of heartache, trouble, unexpected pregnancy, pain, or disease.

Mary was not famous. She was not powerful. She was by all the world's standards insignificant. A forgotten person in the middle of a forgotten corner of a far-flung empire. A people who had been in exile, recently returned, and were still under the power of a foreign regime.

To say that she was 'highly favored' was at least counterintuitive, if not downright shocking! But to receive Christ this Christmas is to be part of this great high favor of having God Himself with us. How amazing it is that people like you and me (and Mary) can be recipients of God's high favor! How extraordinary that the lowly, the ignored, the marginalized, the forgotten, the small and (apparently) insignificant can play such a pivotal part in the drama of God's salvation! How wonderful it is that God is *with us*, the God of all grace and comfort. To have God with us, this God, this God of love and favor, is a truth that can feel almost too good to be true. How can it be? How can someone like Mary, someone like me or you, experience God's personal presence with us? And yet, at Christmas we remember *God with us*. And we not

only remember, we also have the opportunity to receive. To receive *Him*, to know the very presence of God, to encounter Jesus, this Emmanuel. Amazing but true, wonderful, extraordinary, stunning, shocking joy.

Reflect on the great Christmas carol 'O Come, O Come, Emmanuel' at the start of Advent:

*O come, O come, Emmanuel  
And ransom captive Israel  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*



“

THE WHOLE MESSAGE OF  
CHRISTMAS IS SOMETHING  
THAT, WHILE ON THE  
ONE HAND GRANTS  
US THE POTENTIAL  
TO BE FAVORED WITH  
GRACE FROM GOD, ON  
THE OTHER HAND IS  
ALSO DISTURBING.

(p.9)