



— FAMILY —

Christmas Countdown





Introduction

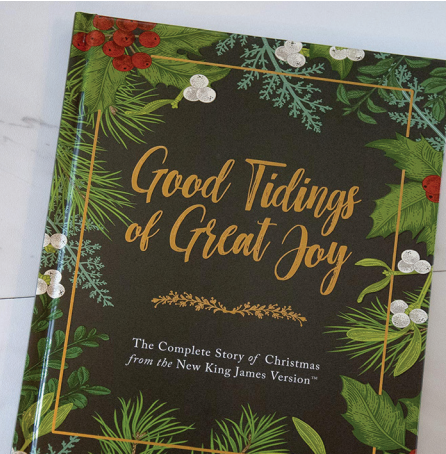
It's the beginning of December—the “unofficial” start of the Christmas season! This is often when we often begin listening to Christmas music, planning our Christmas shopping, and launching our favorite family Christmas traditions.

This year, join with Thomas Nelson Bibles in anticipation and celebration of Jesus Christ's birth. From now until Christmas Day, make time to gather with your family to read Scripture and participate in fun activities that point everyone to the true meaning of Christmas.

In a year so different than any other in our lives, we invite you to find peace and comfort in the One who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Welcome Christmas 2020!

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December 1

It's beginning to look like Christmas

Read as a family

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

(John 1:1–5)

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And

He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

(Colossians 1:15–17)

Something to talk about as a family ...

The beginning is a great place to start, right? But we're not talking about the beginning of the Christmas story in the New Testament. Instead, both of these Scripture passages take us back to what we read in the first verse of the Bible: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Think about that!

- **Why do you think it's important that in these verses, both John and Paul connect Jesus with creation?**
- **With the Christmas season beginning, what are you most excited about this year?**

All Scripture utilizes the NKJV translation



December 3

The Gift of Serving and Helping Others

“And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

Acts 20:35b (NKJV)

So much of Christmas centers around gifts, especially now when we are excitedly telling our family members *exactly* what we would like to receive. However, we read in the Bible (and know in our hearts) that it is truly better to give than to get.

This Christmas season, while we are all trying to stay safe there is still so much we can do to help those around us. Your church likely has some opportunities, as do many national ministries.

Perhaps you would like to pack shoeboxes for under-resourced children around the world. Or maybe it's purchasing gifts for kids without.

You could also help others through your local food pantry. As a family, you could shop for groceries and then donate them to a pantry so other families will be able to eat this Christmas season.

Another option is to write Christmas cards with notes of encouragement and small gifts to the residents of a nearby nursing home.

Whatever you and your family do, know that you are honoring Jesus when you look away from yourselves to serve the needs of others.



December 5

Prepare the Way

Read as a family

“Behold, I send My messenger,
And he will prepare the way before Me. ...
Behold, He is coming,”
Says the Lord of hosts.
(*Malachi 3:1*)



The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
“Prepare the way of the Lord;
Make straight in the desert
A highway for our God.
Every valley shall be exalted
And every mountain and hill brought low;
The crooked places shall be made straight
And the rough places smooth;
The glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
And all flesh shall see it together;
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”
(*Isaiah 40:3–5*)

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.

(*John 1:6–9*)

Something to talk about as a family ...

Malachi and Isaiah were prophets in Old Testament times. Yet they shared a similar message long before Jesus’ birth: a messenger, a voice of one, would prepare the way for the Messiah’s arrival.

- **Hundreds of years before Jesus’ birth, prophets like Malachi and Isaiah shared that the Messiah, that Jesus, would be born. He told His People of His plans. Why do you think God wanted people to know about this ahead of time?**
- **How can we share of Jesus’ birth with the people we care about this Christmas? Maybe you can make cards for your Mailman or delivery Drivers sharing God’s love? Send out an invite for Virtual Christmas Caroling? You never know who needs a holiday pick me up.**



December 7

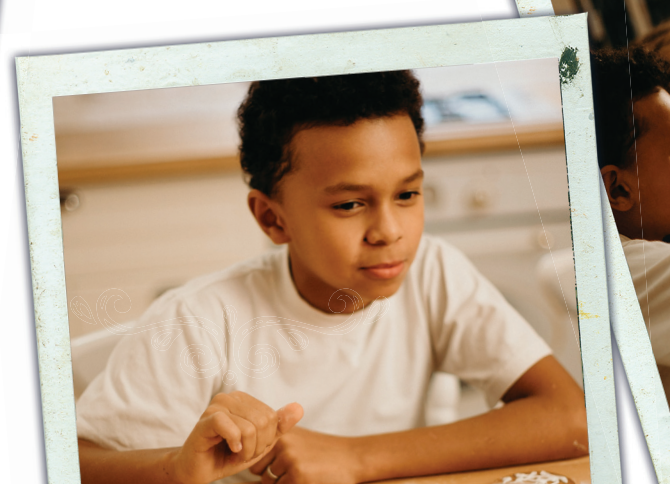
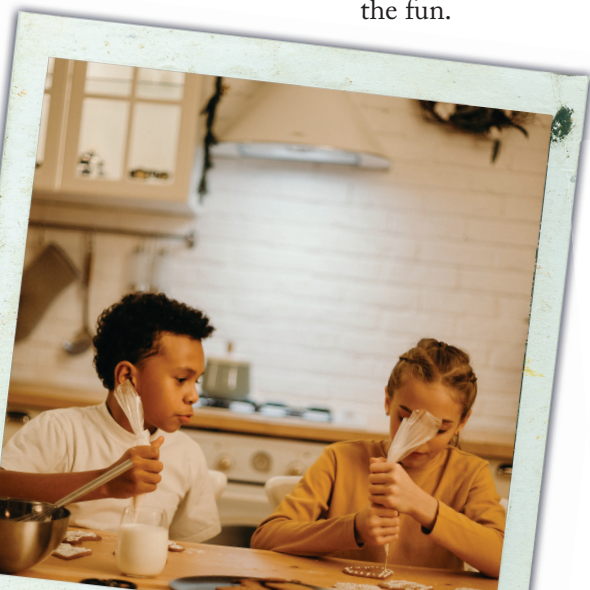
The Great Family Bake-Off

Chances are, baking cookies is one of your family traditions each year, but this year you can mix it up by adding a little competition.

Whether you use an old family recipe or just roll out the tube of sugar cookies it all works this year. Divide up your bakers and decide on the rules and crown someone the Cookie King!

Looking to make it a little more fun this year for the family? Mix it up and pull out all of the cookie cutters, regardless of season. Unicorns and rainbows, clovers, crosses and flowers. Let's see what the family can come up with and the most fun will be the decorating and eating.

Take pictures or Facetime with family along the way to get everyone in on the fun.



December 9

With God Nothing Will Be Impossible....Nothing

Read as a family

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"

But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end. ...

"For with God nothing will be impossible." Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

(Luke 1:26–33, 37–38)

Something to talk about as a family ...

In the Gospel of Luke, we learn what happened in Bethlehem *before* Jesus was born. As we read, Mary was not expecting to play a key role in God's story. Yet there was Gabriel, an angel sent by God, to let Mary know her life—and the entire world!—was about to change.

- **Do you know the story of where you were born? Take some time to share stories about each person in your family's first "birth" day.**
- **Mary was, of course, caught off guard when Gabriel told her she would give birth to the Messiah. But he also reminds her that "with God, nothing will be impossible!" Talk about a time or two when your family has seen God do something that otherwise would have been impossible without Him.**

December 12

Family Fun Night at Home

There's nothing better than enjoying time around the table with your family. Today's let's get creative and see what we can pull together using only what we can find in and around the house. You will have fun creating memories that last for Christmases to come.

Cardboard-Roll Carolers

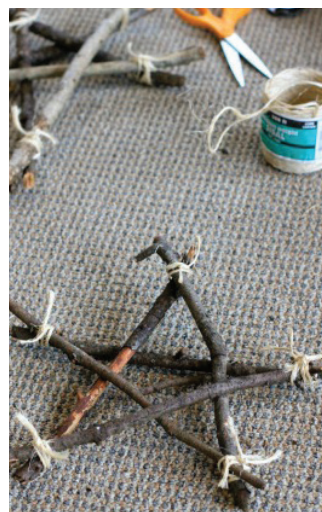
The possibilities are endless, while the supply list is as simple as what you have on hand. Start with empty paper-towel or toilet-paper roll holders and create Christmas carolers that will bring joy to your world. Feeling extra creative: make wise men, shepherds, and other nativity members using the same material.



In addition to the rolls, you can use paint, paper, or tissue paper to cover the cardboard. Add personality with markers, crayons, yarn, felt, ribbons, poms, pipe cleaners, felt, socks, fabric scraps, googly eyes, and more. Don't forget the scissors and glue or tape.

DIY Ornaments, au Natural

What's more fun than getting a little exercise and gathering elements for the tree. Whether you decide to use twigs or acorns, pinecones or shells, everything works.



December 13

God With Us

Read as a family

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.”

Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son.

(Matthew 1:18–25)

Something to talk about as a family ...

Christmas is getting SOOOO close, right? We are less than 2 weeks away! But that still feels like forever right now, doesn't it? Imagine Joseph's feelings in the months, weeks, and days before Jesus was born. He finds out Mary, his fiancée, is pregnant. Then an angel visits him, assuring Joseph this is God's plan for Mary's life, and for his too. Now, all he can do is wait for Jesus to be born ... the Son of God.

- **The angel of the Lord appears to Joseph and informs him he will become the earthly father to Jesus, who will be “God with us.” What are some of the feelings you think Joseph would have had when he heard this?**
- **Discuss some of the miraculous and impossible things that your family and friends could use God to do in their lives this Christmas? Take a minute to write them down on paper or even post-it's and post them somewhere you can remember to pray for them daily.**



December 15

Family Memories

After dinner and clean up, sit down at the table with pieces of paper and a pen or pencil for every family member. Have each person write down or draw a favorite family memory from this year. Also have each person write down a favorite Christmas memory from years past. (You can share more than one memory for each of these.)

Do not share these stories with everyone yet. Instead, fold them and put them in a jar. Place the jar under your Christmas tree, and then on Christmas Eve, take time for each family member to share their favorite memories. For added fun and creativity, you can decorate the special Memory Jar together and add to it each year.

Be sure to take time to thank God for all of the special moments your family has been able to enjoy together.

December 17

The Ultimate Christmas Gift

Read as a family

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

(John 3:16)

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”

(John 6:35)

“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”

(John 8:12)

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.”

(John 11:25)

“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

(John 10:10)

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

(Mark 10:45)

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

(Philippians 2:9–11)

Something to talk about as a family ...

Each of these verses focus on Jesus’ ministry and why He “humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). Jesus came to serve so that we could have abundant life, both now and forever with Him. Now THAT is the ultimate Christmas gift!

- **What is the best gift that you ever received? Birthday Gift? Christmas? What would it take for you to give that gift away?**

God loved each of us so much that he was willing to give up the most important thing, His Son, in order to protect and save all of us. That’s a lot of love.



December 19

Christmas Light Scavenger Hunt

This evening, have everyone put on their pj's (or at least comfy clothes), load up the car, and drive around your nearby neighborhoods and go for a little Christmas Light Scavenger Hunt. Grab a tin full of cookies and hot chocolate before you head out and blast your favorite holiday tunes.

Before you go, you can print up a checklist of items to look for as you drive around. Be sure to have everyone select the house they think has the best decorations. And remember: Jesus is the light of the world! (John 8:12)



Christmas Lights Hunt



Star



Snowman



Nativity



Presents



Angel



Snowflakes



Nutcracker



Candy Canes



Candles



Lighted Deer



Lighted Tree



Wreath



December 21

Let the Star Lead Us All

Read as a family

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”

(Matthew 2:1–2)

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.’”

(Matthew 2:3–6)

... When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

(Matthew 2:9–11)

continued...

Something to talk about as a family ...

When we look at the Nativity under the tree or on the mantle, we see three wise men from the East. As we read in Matthew 2, it is likely these learned travelers arrived after Jesus' birth in the manger. When they met Jesus, they reacted the way we all should: worshiping Him and offering Him gifts. That is something we can do not only at Christmastime, but each day throughout the year.

- **Matthew references Micah 5:2 when he says the prophet has foretold the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem. While the Old Testament is filled with prophecies concerning Christ, Matthew also tells us that Herod and “all of Jerusalem” was troubled by the arrival of the “King of the Jews.” What would you say to a friend who isn't sure Jesus is really the Messiah?**
- **The wise men brought Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. What gift can your family give to Jesus (or give in honor of Him) this Christmas?**

December 23

We are just two days away from the celebration of Jesus' birth. Chances are, when someone in your family is having a birthday, you celebrate with a birthday cake. So today, let's bake a birthday cake for Jesus and celebrate the most-important birthday in history.

All you need are the usual ingredients for a great birthday celebration: cake mix, frosting, candles, balloons, streamers, confetti. Celebrate today or wait until Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. Enjoy the celebration! After all, He is worthy of our praise (see Psalm 145:3).



December 24

Scripture (NKJV)

Read aloud as a family ...

And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

continued...





And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

“Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.
(Luke 2:1–20)

Something to talk about as a family ...

Christmas Eve has arrived! This is a day filled with family traditions, from church service to carol singing to extended family gatherings to gift exchanges. A family reading of Luke 2:1–20 is a great way to make sure everyone is focused on why Christmas Eve is such a special celebration.

- **In addition to the birth of Jesus, we read about the census, Joseph and Mary traveling to Bethlehem, the lack of room at the inn, the shepherds, the angels. Besides the birth of Jesus, what’s your favorite part of the Christmas story and why?**



December 25

Scripture (NKJV)

Read aloud as a family ...

Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth;
Break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises.
Sing to the Lord with the harp,
With the harp and the sound of a psalm,
With trumpets and the sound of a horn;
Shout joyfully before the Lord, the King.
Let the sea roar, and all its fullness,
The world and those who dwell in it;
Let the rivers clap their hands;
Let the hills be joyful together before the Lord,
For He is coming to judge the earth.
With righteousness He shall judge the world,
And the peoples with equity.

(Psalm 98:4–9)

For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of His government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.

(Isaiah 9:6–7)

Something to think about as a family ...

It's Christmas Day! "Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth!"
May your family enjoy a day filled with joy and laughter,
peace and love as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Messiah.
"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given."

.....

Merry
Christmas ...

Merry
Christmas
indeed!