



LOOKING FORWARD TO
the nativity

Jon Farrar



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois

Visit Tyndale's exciting Web site at www.tyndale.com

TYNDALE and Tyndale's quill logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Looking Forward to the Nativity

Copyright © 2006 by The Livingstone Corporation. All rights reserved.

Cover photo copyright © by Tom Walker/Getty Images. All rights reserved.

Designed by Jacqueline L. Noe

Previously published in 2000 as *Looking Forward to Christmas* by Baker Books under ISBN 0-8010-1200-7, in association with The Livingstone Corporation.

Looking Forward to the Nativity first published by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. in 2006.

Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

ISBN-13: 978-1-4143-1502-7

ISBN-10: 1-4143-1502-3

Printed in the United States of America

12 11 10 09 08 07 06
7 6 5 4 3 2 1



contents

Introduction • ix

December 1

The Seed of the Christmas Story • 1

December 2

A Brave Journey • 5

December 3

The Ultimate Test • 9

December 4

Jacob's Restless Night • 13

December 5

A Passover Lamb • 17

December 6

A Mountain Set on Fire • 21

December 7
Aaron and God's Holy Tent • 25

December 8
A Surprising Harvest • 29

December 9
The Sons of Eli • 33

December 10
King David and His Palace • 37

December 11
In Need of a Friend • 41

December 12
The Promise of a Son • 45

December 13
The Little Town of Bethlehem • 49

December 14
A King Is Coming! • 53

December 15
Daniel's Vision • 57

December 16
Out of a City's Ruins • 61

December 17
An Angel's Visit • 65

December 18
Gabriel's Message for Mary • 69

December 19
Mary's Song • 73

December 20
John the Baptist's Birth • 77

December 21
Joseph and Mary • 81

December 22
Simeon and Anna's Long Wait • 85

December 23
The Wise Men's Journey • 89

December 24
The Shepherds at Night • 93

December 25
Jesus' Birthday • 97

About the Author • 103



introduction

The Christmas season is filled not only with great joy but also with eager anticipation. Children yearn for Christmas morning, with its ribbons and wrappings, stockings and gifts.

Often, the days leading up to Christmas can be harried, with presents to be bought and wrapped and goodies to be baked. Sometimes in the hustle and bustle of the season, the reason we celebrate gets hopelessly lost.

Looking Forward to the Nativity can help your family savor the Christmas season. Beginning with December 1, take some time each day to gather your children around you for reflection and prayer. Read the short story and related Scripture passage that illustrate the excitement, the wonder, and the true meaning of Christmas. Then encourage your children to participate in the simple, yet meaningful, family

activity to further enhance their anticipation of the celebration of Jesus' birth. *Looking Forward to the Nativity* shows your children how people throughout human history—from Adam and Eve to King David to the Virgin Mary—looked forward to the birth of Jesus in the same way that your children are looking forward to this year's Christmas. On December 1, you'll start with the story of Adam and Eve and why they yearned for the promised Savior. As you read through December's readings with your children, you'll realize with them that many of the important people of the Bible were looking forward to the Nativity. From December 17 through December 25, you'll read a little of the Christmas story every night to your children.

The Advent Season

As you read daily devotions during the month of December, you'll be doing what many Christians have done for thousands of years. Christians have been counting the days before Christmas since the sixth century A.D. In that

century, a church council established the season of Advent—the four weeks before Christmas—and invited Christians to fast and pray during those weeks. Today, many Christians use the four weeks of Advent to remind themselves of the story of Jesus' coming (the word *Advent* means “coming”).

You can calculate exactly when Advent begins by finding the Sunday nearest November 30. Depending on what day Christmas is, the Advent season can last anywhere from twenty-two to twenty-eight days. *Looking Forward to the Nativity* starts the devotional readings on December 1 to make it easiest to create a daily habit of reading about Christmas during the busy holiday season.

The Advent Wreath

During the season of Advent, a green Advent wreath with flickering candles has served as a gentle reminder of the true meaning of Christmas for many Christians throughout the centuries. Traditionally, the wreath has consisted of four candles placed in a circle

of evergreen branches. Sometimes a fifth candle—the Christ candle—is placed in the center. The circle represents the unending love of God, and the evergreen branches represent eternal life.

On the first Sunday of Advent, the first candle is lit. Then on each of the three following Sundays, an additional candle is lit. Each candle represents another week of Advent. The glowing flames are reminders of how people throughout the centuries awaited Jesus' birth with great hope and joy. Usually the candles are blue, a color that symbolizes hope in God's promises. Sometimes they are purple, a royal color signifying Jesus' kingship. Finally, on Christmas Day the white Christ candle in the center is lit.

An Advent wreath placed in a central location in your home—on a dining room table or on a fireplace mantle—can be the perfect place for you to gather your children for the short stories in *Looking Forward to the Nativity*. Each of the candles can represent a part of the Christmas story.

FIRST WEEK—the promise candle symbolizes God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and other Israelites. Through their family, all people would one day be blessed.

SECOND WEEK—the prophet's candle reminds us of the prophets of Israel who foretold a coming Savior—a great High Priest, a Prophet, and a King.

THIRD WEEK—John the Baptist's candle symbolizes John the Baptist's warning to the Israelites that Jesus was coming soon.

FOURTH WEEK—Mary's candle reminds us that Mary believed the angel's announcement of good news and rejoiced in Jesus' coming.

CHRISTMAS DAY—the Christ candle represents Jesus, the Light of the World.

Christians have used the candles of the Advent wreath to symbolize other ideas as well. For instance, some call the first candle the promise candle; the second, the Bethlehem candle; the third, the shepherds' candle; the fourth, the angels' candle. Whether or not you use an Advent wreath, use this devotional, *Looking*

Looking Forward to the Nativity

xiv

Forward to the Nativity, to remind your children of the great number of people who *yearned* for their Savior, who looked forward to the coming of Jesus.



december 1

The Seed of the Christmas Story

It was the beginning of all time, the start of human history. There was a garden called Eden. Within that garden, God planted the seed of the Christmas story.

As Adam and Eve walked around the Garden of Eden, God told them they could eat any of its fruit, except the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

But one day, history was forever changed. Adam and Eve ate some fruit from the tree God had told them not to eat from. The devil, in the form of a serpent, had tempted them to demand their own way. Because Adam and

Eve disobeyed God, he threw them out of the garden.

Although God was angry, he promised that someday a Savior, one of Adam and Eve's own seed, or offspring, would come to overthrow all evil and the devil as represented by the serpent in this story. Adam and Eve looked forward to that day. That day of course is Christmas, the birthday of Jesus—Eve's Seed and our Savior.

Bible Promise

The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all animals, domestic and wild. You will crawl on your belly, groveling in the dust as long as you live. And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."

—Genesis 3:14-15

Prayer

Dear Jesus, during this Christmas season we're reminded of the sacrifice you made in coming to earth as a baby. We, like Adam and Eve, know

we aren't perfect. We need a Savior. Thank you for coming to save us. Amen.

Family Activity

Sing a verse of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" with your children. Throughout the ages, this hymn has been sung during the first week of Advent. Explain to your children that *Emmanuel* is another name for Jesus and means "God with us."

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!





december 2



A Brave Journey

Abram (or Abraham, as God named him later) lived in a land called Ur. One day, God told him to leave his friends and family and travel to a faraway land. God promised Abraham many rewards if he would obey this command. One reward was that Abraham's family would grow into a great and mighty nation. The most important reward though was that through Abraham's family God would bless all nations.

But there was one problem. Abraham and his wife Sarai (later named Sarah) had no son, no one to inherit these wonderful promises. It seemed impossible that they would ever have a



baby, for both of them were so old. Abraham had no idea how God's promises could come true. Yet he believed and bravely set out to that distant land. He looked forward to the day when all the world would be blessed through his family. That day was Christmas, the day when Jesus—both an offspring of Abraham and the very Son of God—was born. Through Jesus, all people would be blessed—a fulfillment of a promise made long before to a man named Abraham.

Bible Promise

“I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”

—Genesis 12:2-3

Prayer

God, help us to depend on your leading in our lives. Sometimes we're afraid to try something new. But you're a God of fresh beginnings, as

you proved in the story of Abraham. Thank you for blessing us through Abraham's family line, through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Family Activity

Show your children a map or a globe. Ask them how they would feel about going to a faraway land. Would they be excited? Would they be afraid? Ask them what they would do if they could never return home. Would they refuse to go? Point to the places where your relatives live. Show your children places they themselves have visited. Point to faraway places such as China, India, or Africa. If you know some missionaries, show your children where missionaries live. Discuss how Abraham must have felt when he left his home for a distant, unknown land.



december 3





The Ultimate Test

Just as God had promised, Sarah gave birth to a baby boy. The young Isaac was truly a miracle child, and he brought much joy to Abraham and Sarah.

Then one day, God told Abraham to take Isaac to a mountain far away. It wasn't a happy journey, for God had asked Abraham to give up Isaac, his only son. Abraham didn't know how he could live without his son—the boy in whom he had placed his hopes. Yet God had spoken, so Abraham obeyed.

When Abraham reached the mountain, an angel of the Lord called out, “Abraham!



Abraham! Don't hurt your son. The Lord knows now that you trust him so much you won't withhold your only son. You have passed God's test. Because of this, your family will grow into a nation through which the Savior will come."

From then on Abraham treasured his son all the more. Isaac was a gift from the Lord. Through Isaac's family would come a Savior—Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bible Promise

"Because you have obeyed me and have not withheld even your son, your only son, I swear by my own name that I will certainly bless you. I will multiply your descendants beyond number, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will conquer the cities of their enemies. And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed—all because you have obeyed me."

—Genesis 22:16

Prayer

Lord, like Abraham, you didn't withhold your only Son. Instead, you sent him to earth to save us from our sins. Thank you for your great gift! Help us to be more like you—wholehearted in our giving to you and to others. Amen.

Family Activity

Have your children bring their favorite toy to you. Discuss with them what it means to give away something they love and cherish. Would they give away their favorite toy? their favorite pet? Explain to them that God gave his only Son to save us. Help your children think of one thing they can give back to God as a thank-you for giving them his Son.



december 4

Jacob's Restless Night

Bright stars filled the night sky as Jacob sat alone on a rock. This youngest son of Isaac had been traveling all day. He was dusty and tired. He needed to rest, but he didn't have a pillow or a tent. All he could do was roll a small rock closer and use it as a pillow for his sleepy head.

Jacob fell sound asleep and dreamed of a stairway that reached far into heaven. Angels—more than he could count—were going up and down this heavenly staircase. At the top stood God himself! His voice thundered throughout the earth. “I am the God of your grandfather Abraham, and your father, Isaac. I promise that

your family will own this land. Your family will grow into a nation that will, in turn, bless all peoples and all nations.”

Suddenly, Jacob woke up. “Surely this is the house of the living God,” he said to himself. “God has given me a place in his great plan.” So Jacob, like his grandfather Abraham, and his father, Isaac, before him, believed God’s promise. Through their family, God would bless all nations.

Bible Promise

At the top of the stairway stood the LORD, and he said, “I am the LORD, the God of your grandfather Abraham, and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I am giving it to you and your descendants. Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will spread out in all directions—to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants. What’s more, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go.”

—Genesis 28:13-15

Prayer

Father God, thank you for keeping the promises you made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, to save and bless us. Help us to be as loyal to you as you are to your promises. Amen.

Family Activity

If you live in an area where snow has fallen, consider bundling up and going outside to make “snow angels.” (Have your children lie on their backs in the snow and move their arms to make “wings.”) If you prefer to stay inside, draw outlines of angels on white construction paper and have your children cut them out. Cut out a ladder as well. Discuss with your children how the angels reminded Jacob of God’s promises.



december 5





A Passover Lamb

After many years, the number of Abraham's children and grandchildren increased. They were called Hebrews, and they lived in Egypt, where Egypt's evil king had made them slaves. Their life was very difficult, so they cried out to the Lord their God.

God heard their cries and sent Moses to order the Egyptians to let the Hebrews go. But the king refused to let them go. Instead, he made them work even harder.

Finally, God had enough of this stubborn king. He would free his people, even if it meant taking away every one of Egypt's firstborn sons.



God wanted the Hebrews to always remember his power and might, so he commanded Moses and Aaron to tell them to sacrifice a Passover lamb that very night. The Hebrews were to paint the lamb's blood on the doorposts of their homes. This would save their own first-born sons, and it would represent God's love for them. It would also point to Jesus—God's only Son—who would one day show his Father's love to everyone.

Bible Promise

Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us. So let us celebrate the festival, not with the old bread of wickedness and evil, but with the new bread of sincerity and truth.

—1 Corinthians 5:7-8

Prayer

READER: Dear Jesus, reading about the Passover reminds us of your purpose in coming to this earth. You are our Passover Lamb. You gave up your own life for our sins.

A Passover Lamb

19

CHILDREN: Thank you, Jesus, our Passover Lamb.

READER: In this season of joyful giving, may we not forget how much you gave up for us.

CHILDREN: Thank you, Jesus, our Passover Lamb.

ALL: Amen.

Family Activity

Place a lamb ornament on your tree to represent the Passover Lamb and to remind you of Jesus, the person who saved you through his own death on the cross. If you don't have a lamb ornament, you can make one out of construction paper. Use cotton balls to add "wool" to your lamb.