

THE CHRISTMAS GLORY

Four Week Advent Bible Study

*Celebrating Jesus' Birth
Through the Lens of the Epistles*

SAMPLE

ADVENT CHRISTIAN
GENERAL CONFERENCE

THE CHRISTMAS GLORY

Celebrating Jesus' Birth Through the Lens of the Epistles

Sometimes Christians celebrate Christmas without celebrating Christ.

You might start December aiming for a worshipful holiday but find yourself stressing your way through the season instead. You might have heard the nativity story since you were a kid and, if you're honest, now it feels a bit like watching "A Christmas Carol." It's nostalgic, but you struggle to respond with praise like you know you should. Or your attention span may be so diminished by short-form entertainment that you can barely focus on anything important anymore.

To overcome these challenges this year, let's look at Christmas through the lens of the epistles (the letters the apostles wrote to early Christians). In so doing, we'll grow to cherish not only the Christmas story, but the Christmas glory—the theological realities and life-changing implications of Jesus "being born in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7).

After all, we're not just celebrating the story of a baby born under strange circumstances. We're celebrating God sending his Son "so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:5). Jesus came to die so that we could live. He came in the flesh so we could walk in the Spirit. He became poor so we could become rich.

Over the next four weeks, let's slow down and think about the transformative truths behind Jesus' birth. Let's not just survive or even enjoy Christmas. Let's celebrate Christ.



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WEEK ONE



Day One

In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh

Romans 8:3-8

Have you ever wondered why God sent Jesus the way he did? Why did Jesus have to be born like us, with a physical body? The Father and Holy Spirit have always worked in creation without coming “in the flesh” like this. Why couldn’t the Son?

Romans 8:3-8 explains. It is, however, a confusing passage. Think of it like a tangled strand of Christmas lights. Slow down and work at it. It’ll be worth it once the lights click on.

Read Romans 8:3-4 and write down everything it says God has done.

God sent his Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh” so he could physically die for your sins, paying for them in full. Since he was able to die for your sins, he was able to set you free from them.

The law couldn’t free you from sin like this. It could only show you your sin and indicate your need for a flesh-and-blood Savior. Because Christmas is about this flesh-and-blood Savior’s birth, it’s about freedom from condemnation, sin and death.

Jesus dealt with sin for those “who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:4).

What does it mean to walk this way? Read Romans 8:5-8 and write down what it says about each way of living:

Fleshly Living

Spiritual Living

'Flesh' can literally mean the physical body. It can also figuratively mean the sinful desires and weaknesses of human beings. "Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh" (v.5). To set your mind on the flesh is to focus on your physical desires or your weak human abilities.

A fleshly mindset can look like what the Bible calls "the works of the flesh," things like sexual immorality, jealousy and drunkenness (Galatians 5:16-21). It can also look like trying to do better by your own willpower, instead of relying on God (Romans 7:18-24). Often it looks like both.

This way of living is characterized by resistance toward God and the inability to please him.

"But those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit" (v.5). This is the opposite of setting your mind on the things of the flesh. It is focusing your thoughts on what the Spirit desires and can accomplish in you.

This way of living is characterized by life and peace and leads to what the Bible calls "the fruit of the Spirit," things like love, joy and patience (Galatians 5:22-23).

Read Galatians 5:16-24. Which way are you living as you enter the Christmas season?

- Are you more focused on your physical desires or the Spirit's desires?
- Are you relying on your own abilities or the Spirit's abilities?
- Are you seeing more "works of the flesh" or "fruit of the Spirit" in your life?

What steps can you take to set your mind on the things of the Spirit instead of the things of the flesh?

Mind your mindset this Christmas. Jesus was born in the flesh so you could live in the Spirit by setting your mind on the Spirit's desires and abilities.



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Day Two

For Your Sake He Became Poor

2 Corinthians 8:9

Generosity is an important part of Christmas. We don't give gifts on Thanksgiving or New Years, but it's the centerpiece of Christmas morning.

Think about your favorite Christmas movies. I bet many of them depict acts of sacrificial generosity. "It's a Wonderful Life" is a perfect example. George Bailey finds out his life of sacrifice has made a difference in Bedford Falls when the whole community comes together to be generous to him in his time of need. There's a theological reason generosity is associated with Jesus' birth.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:9. What does it reveal about the connection between Jesus and generosity?

Jesus demonstrated his grace by becoming poor so that you could become rich.

What riches did Jesus give up for us? (See Philippians 2:5-8 for hints.)

What riches did he give to us? (See Ephesians 1:3-14 for clues.)

Jesus gave us the ultimate gift. He emptied himself and took the form of servant when he was born in our likeness. Then he further