

abwe



Good News of Great Joy

An Advent Devotional from the Mission Field

Once you see it, you can't unsee it.

I'm talking about all the connections between Christmas and missions:

- Jesus left his home in heaven to reach a lost, poor, and tired people
- Heaven announced the good news for the whole world
- A hostile government tried to suppress the message
- Wise men from a foreign culture came to worship the one true God

Every scene in the Christmas story shouts of God's heart for the nations.

So this year, to give back to our faithful ministry partners, we asked our missionaries serving on the frontlines around the world to reflect on Christ's birth through their own eyes.

The sights, sounds, and smells of experiencing the holiday overseas. The heartaches of missing home. And the wonder of the good news they share every day.

The pages of this devotional correspond to the Sundays of Advent. We invite you to read each Scripture and meditate, praying the prayers provided at the end.

We also asked our missionary kids from around the world to create artwork to express how they experience Christmas from their unique vantage point. Each illustration in this devotional comes from children whose families are serving the Lord across the globe. We invite you to pray for each family and their ministry as you enjoy their beautiful creations.

May this resource be a blessing to you and your family, as you spend time with the Lord and consider how his gift is the reason for our mission to reach the world.

Merry Christmas,

Alex Kocman
Director of Advancement and Communications
ABWE



November 26



Kyle Farran

📍 Portugal



“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

— *Philippians 4:6-9 ESV*

At the birth of Christ, the angels proclaimed: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (Luke 2:14 ESV)

The peace that God gives believers is such a blessing. It’s a peace about our eternity and a peace about our tomorrow that stops worry and fear. We can rest in his promise that our salvation and our future is secure.

But the events of the past couple of years have rocked the world. Everything seems more uncertain and less secure. As a result, we’re tempted to let worry and fear take root in our lives.

Through all of this, we’re reminded, once again, about how God doesn’t promise peaceful circumstances in this world. Instead, he promises troubles and tribulation (John 16:33). However, in the midst of trouble and uncertainty, he grants us peace that “surpasses all understanding”.

Paul tells us to *“let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts”* (Colossians 3:15 ESV).

Fully receiving the gift of peace this Christmas involves our heart and our mind.

I close with what has been my greatest gift this year, a verse that is hidden in my heart and keeps giving peace, day by day.



Grace — Brazil

“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.” —Isaiah 26:3 ESV

Prayer

Father, thank you for the peace you’ve granted us through your heavenly son. Keep our minds fixed on you during this busy, holiday season, and remind us of who you are and the peace we can find in your presence. Amen.



December 3



Hannah Strayer

 Togo

“An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.’” — Luke 2:9-10 ESV

Sometimes we’re tempted to think that all the familiar Christmas traditions—baking cookies, shopping for presents, and decorating the Christmas tree—are the “great joy” that the angels promised. Growing up, I often assumed as much.

At age 27, I was living in Europe, studying French. It would be my first Christmas away from the familiar. No stocking, no tree, no cookies, no family. When Christmas day came, they were celebrating an ocean away, and I was in France with another family, lovely yet not my own.

The next two Christmases I was in Togo, Africa. Again, I was with wonderful families but mine was still an ocean away. And in Togo, it’s hot! There’s no chance of a white Christmas, no matter how hard Bing Crosby dreams of one! No radio stations play the familiar classics—especially not in English. The truth is, Togo doesn’t really celebrate Christmas. To the western world, Togo Christmas is entirely lacking.

Now, I can hear you saying, “Yes, but Hannah, Christmas is not about all that stuff,” and you’re right. What we call “holiday cheer” was not what the angels came to announce. I know that, and you know that.



Maeva — Togo

The real joy they spoke of is the reason I’m in Togo. And that is the joy I share every day as a missionary.

But when you sit back and reflect on your own “Jesus is the reason for the season” statements, do your actions, attitudes, and thoughts truly put Jesus at the center of your Christmas celebration?

Could you see a Christmas without the lights and decorations? Could you smell it without the baking of cookies? Could you hear it without the music? Could you still say, “Jesus is the reason for the season” in a place devoid of all the “Christmas” scenery?

Christmas has changed over the centuries. Today, the holiday season is cluttered with commercialism. This season, let’s examine our hearts and minds. How might our views and practices change if we were to skip the frills and simply revel in the joy of the coming Messiah—the fact that God became man, only to be born in a crowded stable?

I’ll leave you with a favorite quote of mine from the devotional “Christmas Through Jewish Eyes”. During my first year in Togo, it reminded me of the true value of Christmas.

“Christmas is about the joy found in the announcement of the coming Messiah.”



Prayer

Dear Lord, Thank you for the birth of your Son and the joyful reminder of what Christmas is. Thank you that we get to worship and celebrate you. Help us clear our minds of all distractions during this time and focus on you. Amen.



December 10



Stephanie Boon

 Tanzania

“And he said, ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.’ — Job 1:21 ESV

One of the hardest things about being an American living in a developing country is the constant tug between the world you left and the world you’re in.

To Americans, we’re the missionaries who are always in need, the ones who sacrificed all. But to many in our host country, we’re the wealthy who should give more.

I felt this internal tug-of-war acutely one Christmas morning. I sat watching my children open their gifts, my grandmother’s coffee mug in hand. We ran the AC all morning for relief from our unwelcome guest, the hot season. I felt so thankful, as I looked at our beautiful, glistening tree and the many gifts under it.

And then the feeling came. That familiar puncture to the heart. I thought about the local children who rummage through our trash. I thought about the lady who had just knocked on our door begging for money. I thought about the many parents desperately looking for funds to pay their children’s school fees. And I felt guilty as I watched my children’s joy.

I hadn’t taken another sip from my coffee when my mind and heart switched to my other mode, my American side. I looked at that same tree and felt embarrassed by its size. I scanned the gifts and considered how sad our little display would look to an American. I wiped sweat off my forehead, because, let’s be honest, one AC unit can only mitigate the heat so much. I coveted the sweaters, boots, and cozy, blanketed family nights I had seen on social media.

I thought about taking a picture and posting it online, but I didn’t want to provoke either of my two worlds to pity or envy. That emotional tug-of-war was even less welcome than the hot season itself.

It’s hard to articulate the pendulum swings between guilt and jealousy, gratitude and shame. Enjoying life is far from simple, but this is where God has placed us.

This Christmas let’s face our circumstances bravely with the faith that God is in control. Like Job, who lived faithfully in plenty and in little, may we always bless the name of the Lord. Finding peace and contentment in our shaky and fluctuating middle ground.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of where you’ve placed each one of us in life. No matter what, we can always rest in the promise that you’re guiding us and watching over us. As we go into Christmas, give us a heart of peace and contentment with where we are. Help us fix our gaze on you and not on the material world and the expectations placed on us. Thank you for the gift of your son! Amen.



Alethia — Togo

December 17



Steve Mayo

 Australia



“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” — Isaiah 9:6 ESV

Can you imagine what it would be like if 100,000 football fans belted out an anthem of heaven with greater gusto than the national anthem?

This happens every Christmas in Australia. 100,000 people sing a rendition of The Holy City, punctuated by fireworks, echoing off the famed sails of the Sydney Opera House.

“Jerusalem! Jerusalem! Sing for the night is o’er. Hosanna in the highest – Hosanna forever more!”

This unusual sight raises questions for newcomers. How can an overtly Christian song supplant Santa Claus as the grand finale of a taxpayer-funded, nationally-televised event?

It’s not because Christianity is a major force in the country. Australia is a mission field where atheists easily outnumber evangelicals. In fact, it’s only because Christianity is so small that Australia’s secular society feels no threat from an occasional hymn.

Still, why do they choose a song that’s not about Christmas at all but about Christ’s sacrifice and second coming?

Unknowingly, the Aussies are theologically correct (though certainly not politically correct) to make the Christ the center of their Christmas celebration. Even before his birth, the power and kingship of Christ was shown to God’s chosen people.

Luke 1:32–33 (ESV) says: *“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to 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.”*

Christ’s kingdom will be glorious—without pain, sorrow, or darkness, as the song says:

“No need of moon or stars by night, nor sun to shine by day. It is the new Jerusalem that will not pass away.”

Eternal life in the Holy City holds appeal even to a country like Australia that consistently ranks as the most liveable on earth. Does it hold appeal for you? Enough to sing loud and strong for everyone to hear?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the wonderful gift of your Son. Point our hearts towards you, as we prepare for Christmas this year. Help us remember the true value of Christmas, even when it’s not politically correct to recognize. Amen.



Natalie — Portugal

December 24

Steve

 Germany

“I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” — Isaiah 49:6b ESV

Having lived and served in Berlin for over 20 years, my family has come to love Christmastime in Germany. With its Advent calendars, wooden pyramids, smoking nutcrackers, stollen cakes, Christmas markets, and the singing of Stille Nacht, it's hard to beat Germany during this season.

Of all the holiday traditions in Germany, the one that stands out the most is the lighting of the candles in the Advent wreath on the four Sundays leading up to Christmas. The tradition culminates on Christmas Eve, with the lighting of the “Christ candle” in the middle of the wreath. Upon lighting the candle, our congregation reads the words:

“On this Christmas Eve, we join with Christians all over the world who are gathered to celebrate the birth of the One who is the light of the world. We are here to worship God and his Son, Jesus, born in Bethlehem of Judea. We light the Christ candle to remind us that the light of the world was born. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.”

In Isaiah 49:6, the prophet proclaims that Yahweh's appointed servant, the coming Messiah, will be “a light for the nations.” This truth takes on a special meaning living in Berlin because the nations have come to our city. Of the 3.7 million residents in Berlin, over a third of them (1.3 million) are immigrants. In total, there are about 180 nations represented here.

Although Berlin is a very spiritually dark place, in which less than 3% are committed Christians, one by one, people from various nations are coming to the light of Christ. A few months ago, our international church had the privilege of baptizing an Iranian, Muslim-background believer. In his testimony, he referred to himself as the prodigal son who was lost but now is found! By the grace of God, he has seen the light and is now sharing it with others.

In Matthew 5:14, Jesus makes it clear that every one of his followers has the duty and privilege of being a light to the world. We can see this in action in Acts 13:47. After launching out on their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas used the words of Isaiah 49:6 to guide their ministry, as they brought the gospel to all nations. Just like Paul and Barnabas, the mission of every believer is to be a little light, who points others to the one great light of the world.



Prayer

Our Father, this Christmas may we look anew to your Son who is the light for the nations. May you use us as little lights to point others who are walking in darkness to Jesus so that they also may find him to be their light and salvation. Amen.



Kylie — Togo