

HOW TO CREATE A FACEBOOK ADVENT CALENDAR

Step by step instructions and resources
to share the story of Christmas with your community

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Worship leaders, creative arts team, pastors:

Whoever you are and whatever your role in ministry I know you are passionate about people in your world hearing about Jesus and being invited in to God's great story.

I know this because I'm one of you! I've been leading worship for 20 years and in full-time ministry for 10+ years. I help design and lead worship services 52 weeks a year and the reality is that I think about Christmas for 50 of those Sundays!

Christmas is this incredible time of year where people in your neighborhoods - near or far - are very willing to be reminded of the story of the birth of Christ and very willing to say yes if they're invited to a Christmas service at your church.

Whether you are a small town church plant, a big city megachurch, a campus in a multi-site movement or a missional expression of the love of Jesus we all have the opportunity and the responsibility to use every means possible to invite people in to this incredible story of God with us, especially at Christmas!

We know this and yet one of the real issues at Christmas is how to get the message of Christmas heard in a world full of noise, distraction and urgency! How can we simply, strategically and successfully share the world-changing, life-shaping story of the birth of Jesus Christ in a way that people will actually hear and pay attention to?

From newspaper ads to postcards mailings to billboards to community events I have seen churches around the world use their creative muscle to passionately invite their friends and neighbours to Christmas. We have all seen some incredible examples of leveraging the opportunities around us to help tell the story of Christmas.

So...

What about Facebook? How are you using Facebook, the largest social network in the world, to share the story of Christmas, invite your neighbourhood to attend services and continue to tell more and more people about Jesus?

Last year at our church we decided to try something pretty new - a Facebook Advent Calendar.

Wait.. say that again?

Facebook Advent Calendar

You mean Facebook can deliver a sweet little chocolate every day when I crack it open?

Well, not exactly! But Facebook can deliver this great message of Christmas in a way that people can find and share in a very simply. I don't need to tell you how many people from your church have Facebook accounts but stop for a minute and think about how many connections in your region/city/town – people who don't go to your church – there are through Facebook.

How many people in your church are on Facebook? You probably have a rough idea.

Now think about how many people each of those people are connected to on Facebook who live in your area but don't attend your church. The number is incredibly high.

It is entirely possible that because of the people in your church and how they are connected to others on Facebook that you could get word out to every single person who lives in your area that you are trying to reach this year.

So why not use a great resource like Facebook to help reach those people in a medium they're already used to engaging?

My goal in this resource is to give you everything you need and lay out the action steps very clearly so that you can very simply share the story of Christmas for an entire month leading up to Christmas Eve!



So what is Advent anyways?

This really isn't crucial to our understanding of how we're going to do this but you might as well learn a bit about this great season if you've never spent some time thinking about what it is.

Essentially, Advent is a time of remembrance leading up to our celebration of the birth of Jesus. Not just waiting, there is a sense of expectation and hope that comes along with it. You may be part of a tradition that lights pink or purple candles each Sunday of Advent, representing the hope, love, joy and peace which has come because of Jesus.

Advent has served as a way to mark a symbolic journey to Bethlehem as we again, like the magi and the shepherds, come to the manger to be filled with wonder at this incredible arrival of the perfect Son of God.

Advent also reminds us that we are waiting with great expectation and hope for the return of Christ. We do this actively, not passively, living out the hope, love, joy and peace we have in our lives because of the Holy Spirit and His work in us.

Advent expectation has naturally turned to Advent countdowns which are helped along by Advent calendars, beginning originally as a way to help us focus our hearts and minds on the birth of Jesus but now becoming ways to sell chocolate and marketing and movie characters.

At the heart, Advent is a beautiful opportunity for us as followers of Christ to take an extended season and acknowledge that Christ has come and that this story of Christmas is worth remembering and celebrating!

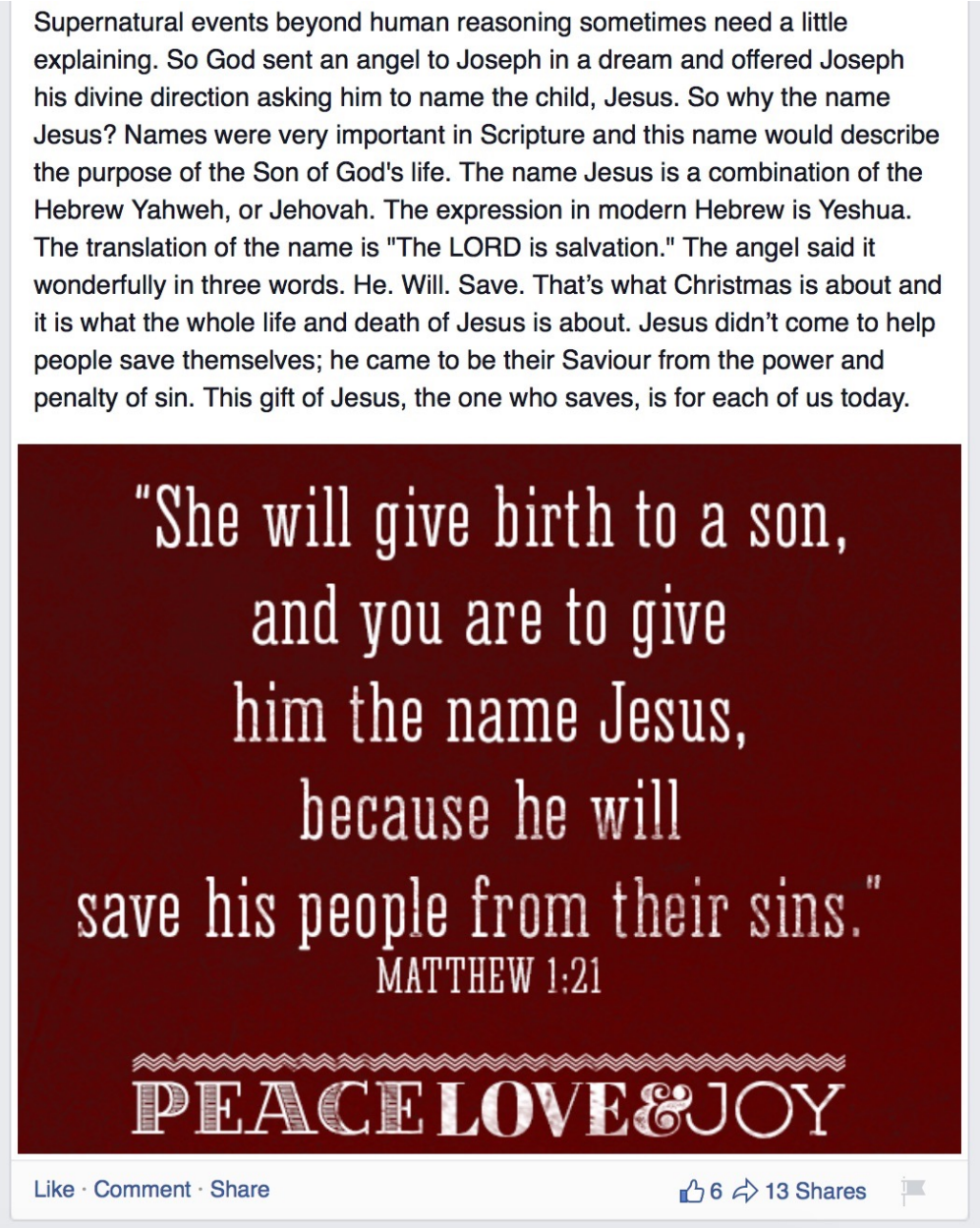
The exact dates of Advent change each year. Advent Sunday, the beginning of the season, is the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day. Generally that will fall anywhere between November 28 and December 3. It's really up to you how strict you want to be with your observation of the dates of Advent. You may want to start on Advent Sunday itself or you may want to start this calendar on December 1.

So what is a Facebook Advent Calendar?

For this example we're going to run this calendar from December 1 through December 25. We'll take the spirit of Advent and the excitement around Christmas to help get people thinking about Christmas for the whole month, whether they're attending your church or not.

Each day from December 1 through December 25 you'll be posting a graphic on your church's Facebook page with an Advent verse along with a short (one, two, three paragraph) reflection on that verse and how it impacts all of us at Christmas.

Here's what it will look like once we start posting our daily Facebook Advent Calendar on our page:



(Let me stop here and take a little sidestep. If you don't yet have a Facebook page for your church, you'll need to set that up. Very easy to do but I'm not going to walk you through that as part of this resource. If that isn't possible for you right now these will work just as well on your personal Facebook page with an encouragement for others you know to do the same.)

Because of the social nature of Facebook and how liking and sharing are already encouraged as natural parts of engaging, you'll be encouraging people to like and share these posts each day to help spread this great message of Christmas far and wide. You can do that in the posts themselves, in a short announcement on Sunday morning or in a church-wide email to your congregation. Make sure people know you want them to share these posts!

I'm sure you are pretty excited to see how God will use this little act of faithfulness at Christmas to share the story of the birth of Jesus with your online audience and the ones your church are connected to. Remember, you're not sharing with your friends but their friends and their friends and… you get the point.

If you are super stuck on this and really want to just make this happen, I have included all 25 Advent graphics you can use. They are prepared and ready to go beginning December 1 through December 25. You'll find those at the end of this resource.

Okay so want to know how we made this happen? Here are the step-by-step notes with some visual examples on how you are going to do this.



Come up with your list of 25 Advent verses. Search online or you can use this list of December Advent verses if you'd like a head start:

Date	Verse Reference
December 1	Isaiah 9:2
December 2	Luke 1:28-30
December 3	Matthew 1:21
December 4	Luke 2:8-9
December 5	Matthew 2:11
December 6	Isaiah 7:14
December 7	Luke 1:31
December 8	Matthew 1:22-23
December 9	Luke 2:10
December 10	John 1:4-5
December 11	Micah 5:2
December 12	Luke 1:32-33
December 13	Luke 1:46-47
December 14	Luke 2:11-12
December 15	Luke 2:14
December 16	Isaiah 9:6
December 17	Matthew 1:18
December 18	Luke 2:4
December 19	Luke 2:16-18
December 20	Psalm 95:6-7
December 21	Luke 1:26-27
December 22	Matthew 1:20
December 23	Luke 2:6-7
December 24	Matthew 2:1-2
December 25	John 3:16



Design a graphic template you can use each day. Although the ideal size for Facebook images is always changing you should be safe using an image size of 1200x900 pixels. (The best way to confirm this is to google “facebook image sizes” and see how these ideal dimensions should change based on Facebook’s platform.)

You may want to go with a look that is consistent with your Christmas series service design but that’s not crucial. The idea is that you want something with a look that will be familiar all the way through Advent. If it helps to have that look continue through your Christmas series artwork, maybe some other invitations you’re doing to the community, newspaper ads, etc then try and use the same design/look for these graphics to help build some visual consistency and familiarity people who will be seeing them.

One design decision I would strongly suggest is to not include your church’s name or logo on these graphics. That may be a bit counter-intuitive since you’re trying to spread the word on your church’s Christmas plans but remember that whenever these graphics are posted, liked and shared the original photo will appear as originating form your church’s Facebook page.

People are more likely to post and share content that they want to support but if it is branded with your name or logo that may act as a discouragement for people to hit share.

Remember that every time these photos are liked or shared there is a link back to your Facebook page so be willing to go with something unbranded in this design.



Use Photoshop or your favourite graphic design software to make images from your template which include the text of the verse. Yes, you'll need to do 25 of these graphics! **#slowbutcheap**

This would be a great task to involve a high school student or even hire someone on **fiverr** (my secret weapon for lots of jobs!) to make this happen.

Here's what a few of them together looks like:





With 25 Advent verses, we asked 5 people to each write 5 short devotionals. The outline we asked the writers to follow was:

What:
What is the meaning of this verse and in particular to the original audience?

So What:
Why this is important for us (relevance to 21st century audience)?

Now What:
What do I do with this?

Don't ask these writers to produce a new Christmas devotional book. The audience here is social media which means short and sweet is what we're after. One or two paragraphs is the most people will pay attention to when these are in the context of Facebook.

This is a tough part of the process because people will often want to write everything they know and are passionate about when you ask them. Be very clear with expectations if you are inviting multiple people to contribute in this way.



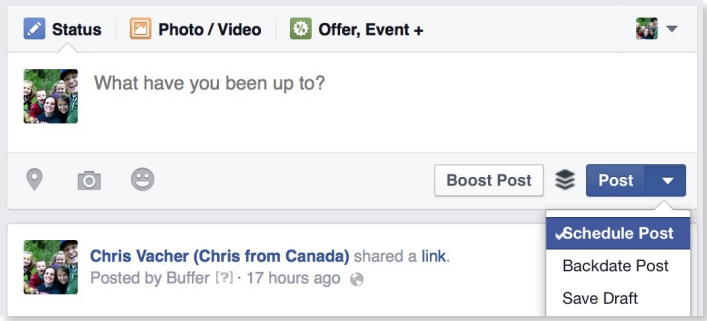
From here, we are ready to begin posting these graphics. You may already have a social media team with a process in place so simply run your process and include these graphics and devotional thoughts early each day for people to see during Advent all the way to Christmas.

The exact process will depend on how you have it structured but I would strongly encourage you to build a process lasting the month of December rather than trying to take it on yourself to remember to do it each day at a specific time. Our intentions are great but there is nothing worse than seeing someone launch a new initiative and then drop it after 4 or 5 days simply because they forgot to post and it would be too tricky to play catch up.

With our method, we needed to upload the photos somewhere so they could be accessed by our social media team to post on Facebook. We do this on our website since it's built on WordPress and we can just upload files as media until we need them. You can use any file host server to have a place where the files can live until they're ready to go live on Facebook.

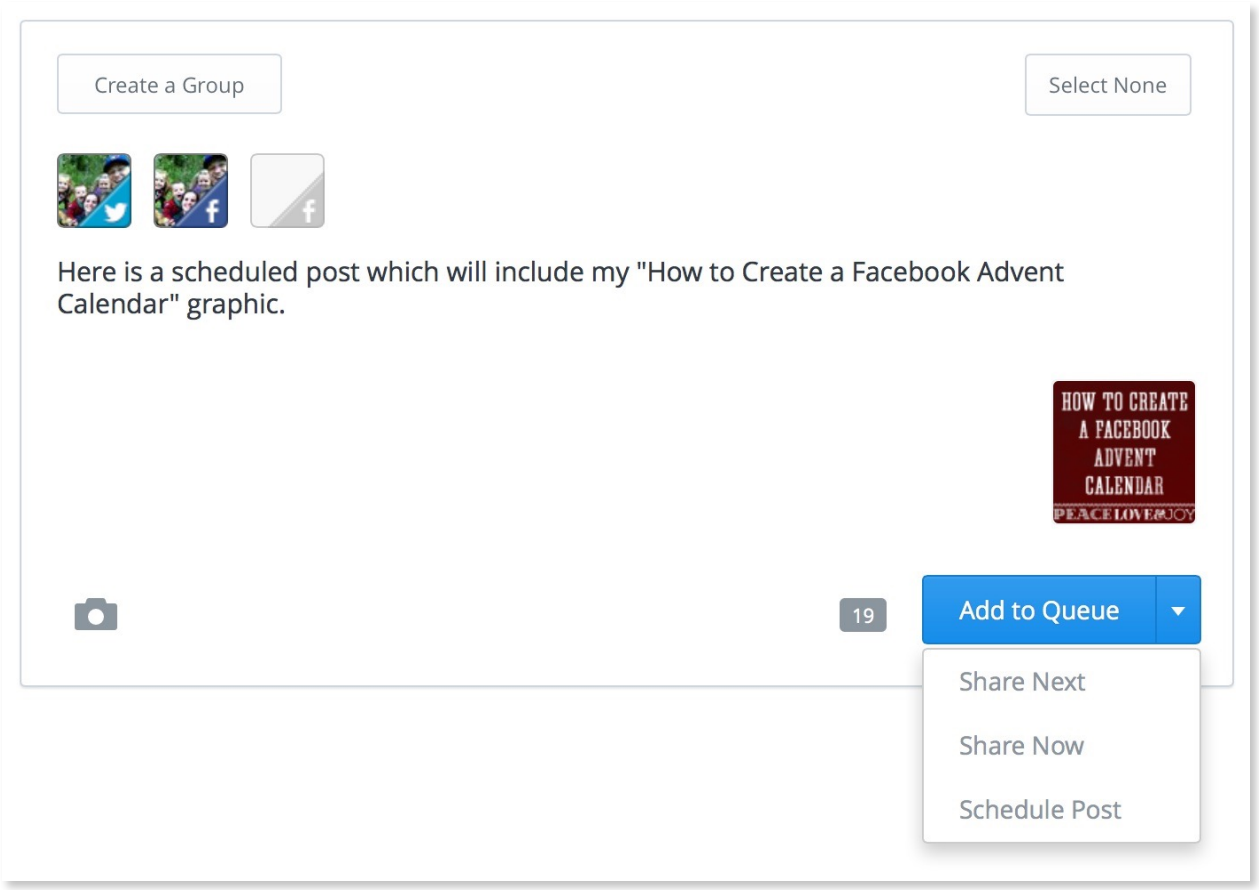
You have a few ways to help simplify this.

If you are posting to a Facebook page as the administrator you are able to schedule posts in to the future. Check this out:



Take some time to post all 25 of your Advent calendar graphics and thoughts and simply schedule them to hit your Facebook page each day from December 1 to December 25. A little bit time consuming but, again, #slowbutcheap!

You can use a service like Buffer to help you schedule posts in to the future. Hootsuite is another social media client that allows you to do this. Both of these services have free and paid versions. This is what a scheduled post looks like in Buffer where I've set it up to send a text and graphic post to my Twitter and Facebook accounts:





Once the devotionals are written and your graphics are designed, you can use Facebook's posting tools to add your updates and set them to go public each day from December 1 through December 25. If you are wanting to do this on your personal page you'll need to post it manually each day. Setting the time for each post to go live is only available on pages.

All in all, putting together a Facebook Advent Calendar is a simple operation but it does take some lead time. Working backwards from December 1 you might find you need to receive all of the devotional content by November 26. You could have the graphics ready to go before then or design them each day as you go. Of course the process will be easier to manage if all of the content is finalized before Advent starts.

So hopefully you feel excited about how this could be used to spread the word about Christmas in your community through your congregation. Remember that we do have a responsibility to use every means possible to invite people into this great story of God with us.

Merry Christmas! Praying that God would use all of your work to invite many more to find hope, love, joy and peace through Jesus this year.

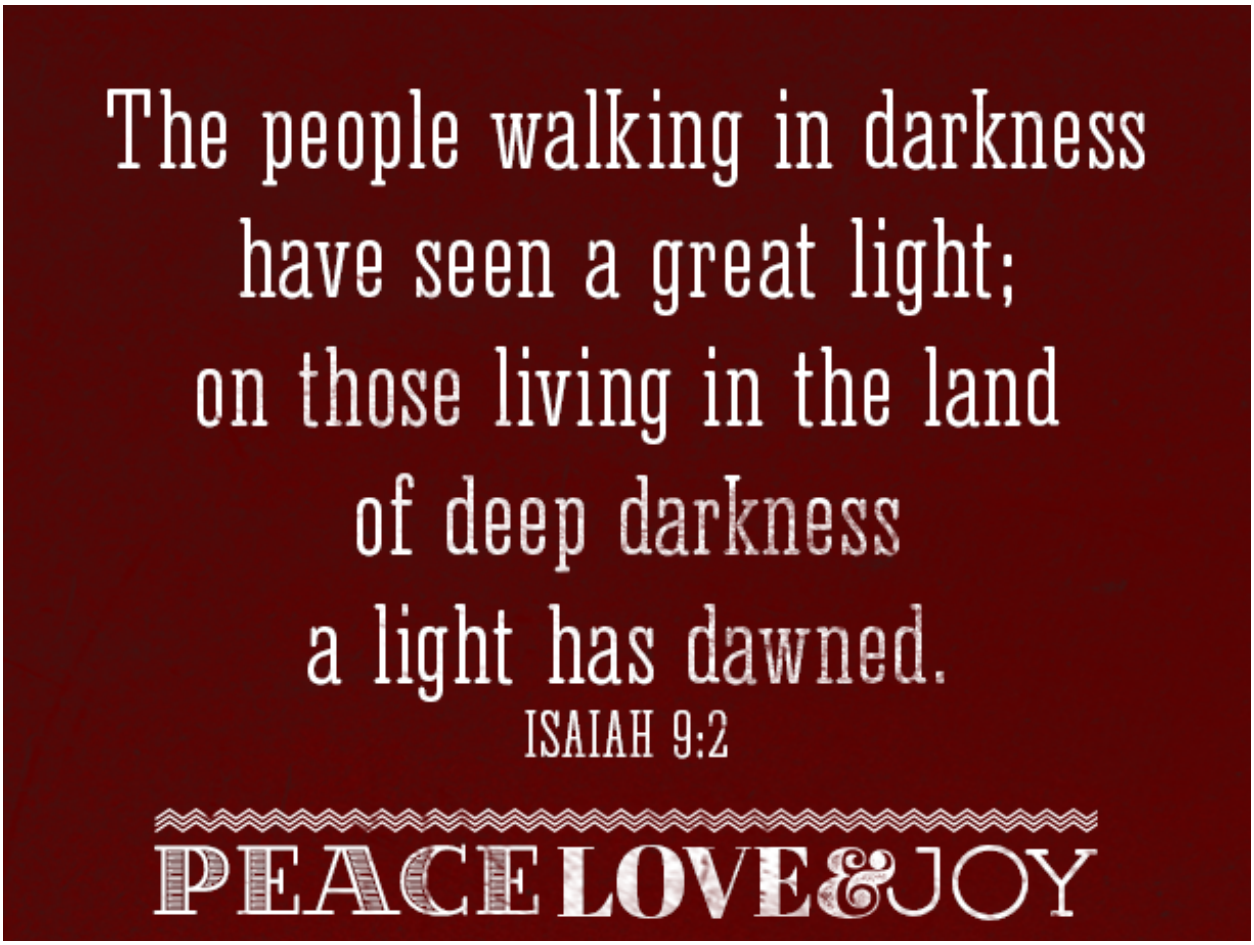
Have you got other ideas or ways that your church is trying to engage your audience with the message of Christmas. Is there anything you've done which has really been successful? Anything you're trying for the first time this year?

I would love to hear from you and possibly include those ideas in some follow-up to this resource. You can find me online or simply email me at chrisvacher@gmail.com

Please visit my blog where you can find other free ebooks and resources for worship leaders to help you do what you do and do it better.

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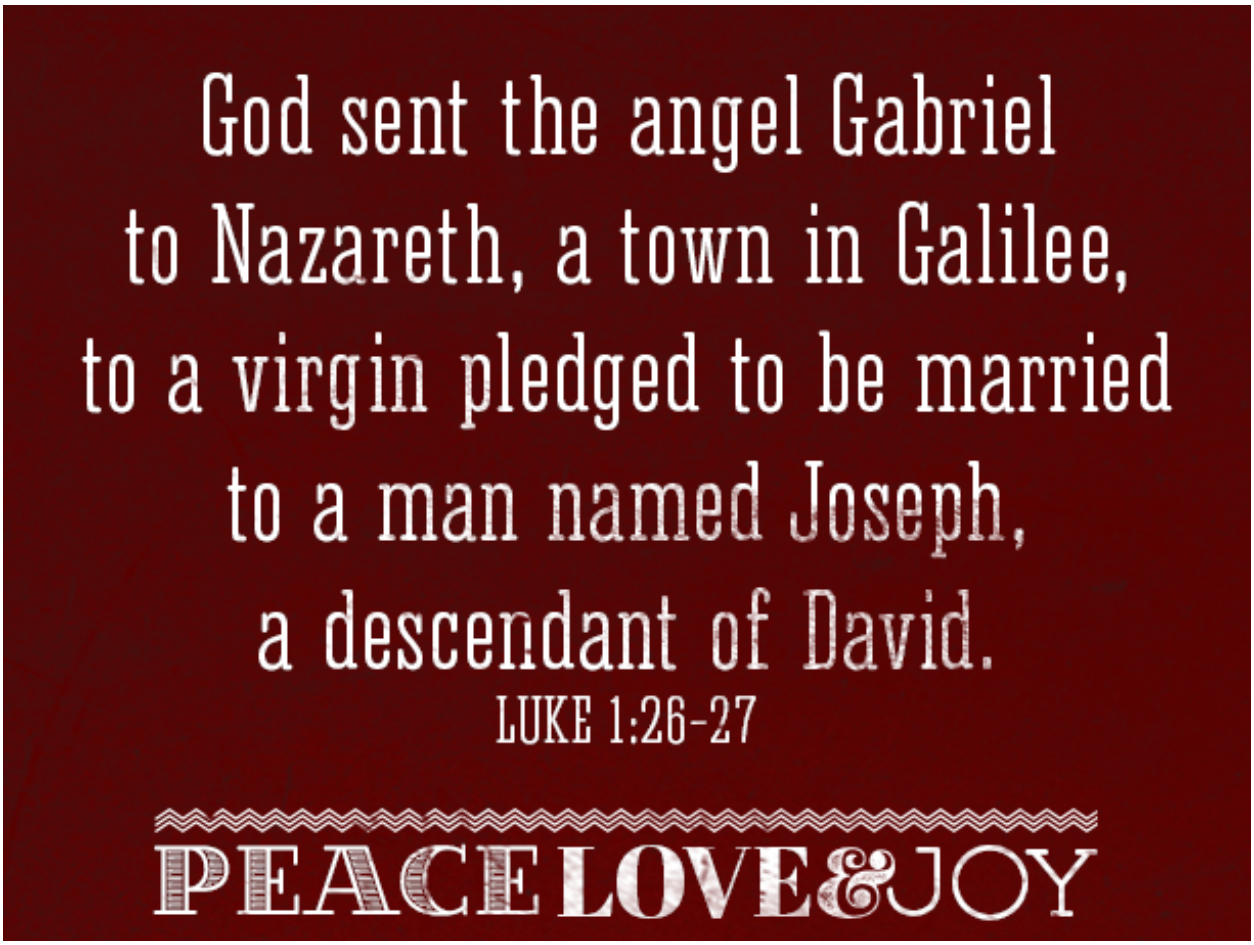
As promised, if you are really stuck and just looking for some pre-packaged content, those graphics are on the following pages.


The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land
of deep darkness
a light has dawned.
ISAIAH 9:2
PEACE LOVE & JOY


Therefore the Lord himself
will give you a sign:
The virgin will conceive
and give birth to a son,
and will call him Immanuel.
ISAIAH 7:14
PEACE LOVE & JOY


"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small
among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel"
MICAH 5:2
PEACE LOVE & JOY


For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government
will be on his shoulders.
ISAIAH 9:6
PEACE LOVE & JOY


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.
LUKE 1:26-27
PEACE LOVE & JOY

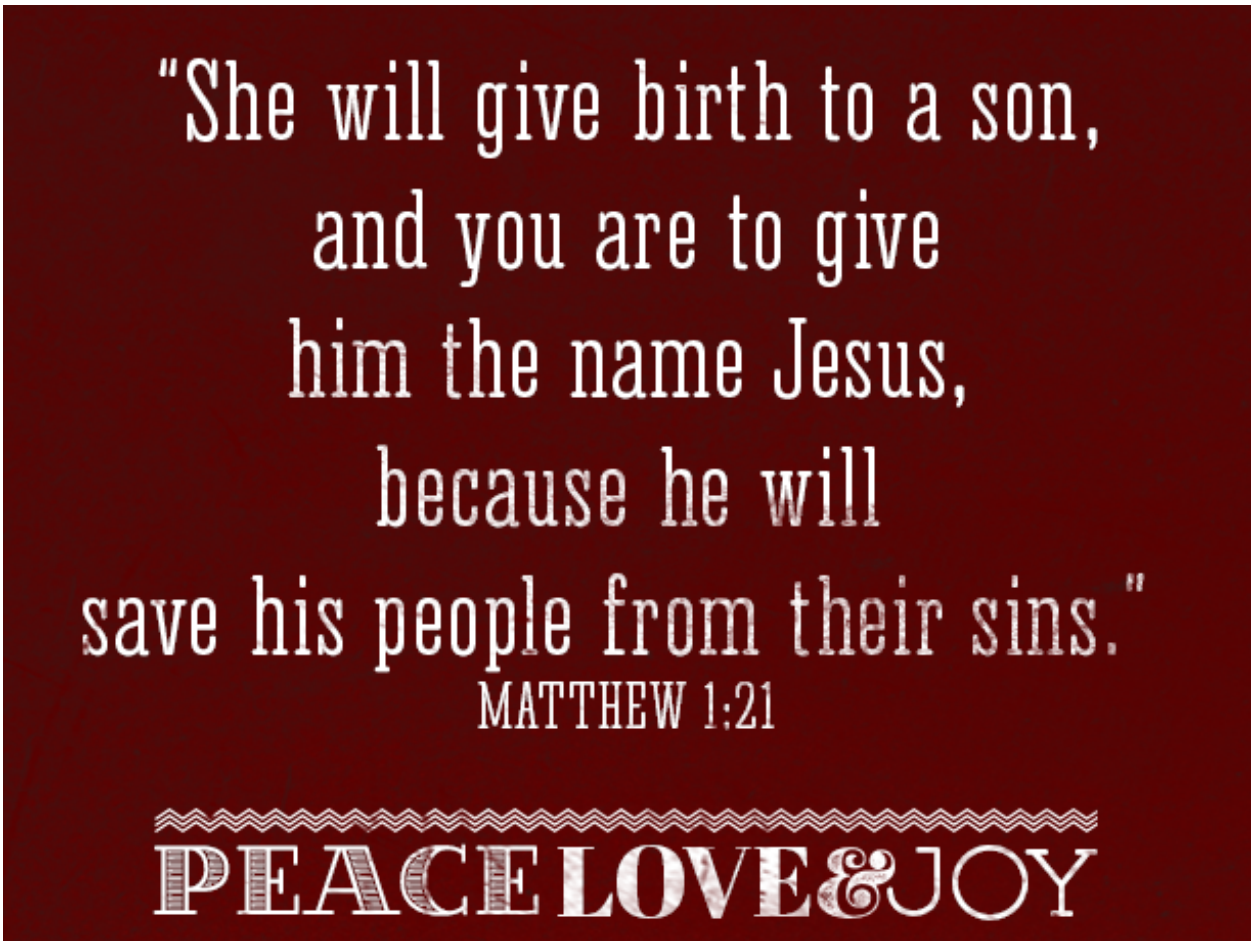

The angel went to Mary and said,
"Greetings, you who are
highly favored!
The Lord is with you."
LUKE 1:28
PEACE LOVE & JOY


You will conceive
and give birth to a son,
and you are to call him Jesus.
LUKE 1:31
PEACE LOVE & JOY


He will be great
and will be called
the Son of the Most High.
LUKE 1:32
PEACE LOVE & JOY

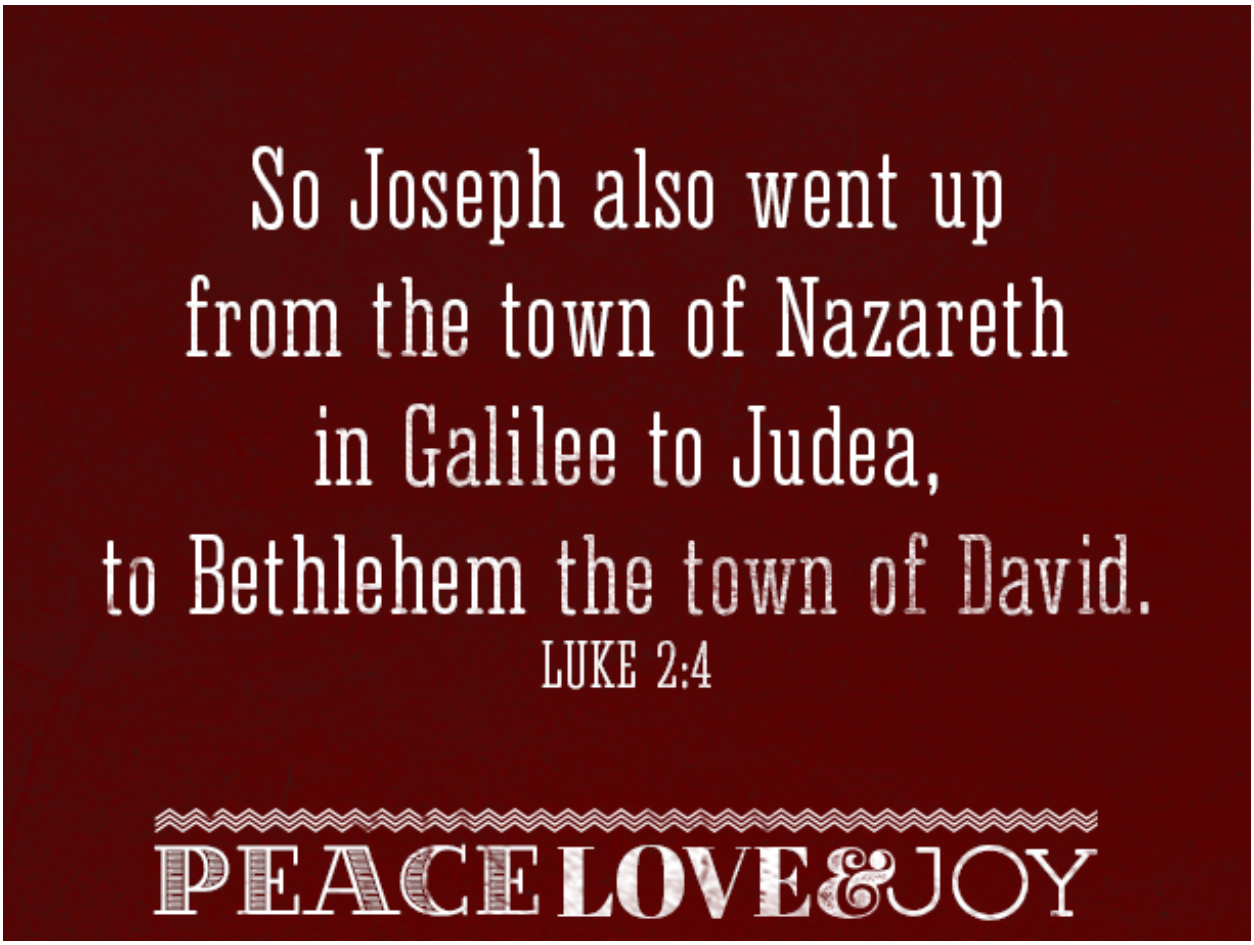

His mother Mary was pledged
to be married to Joseph,
but before they came together,
she was found to be pregnant
through the Holy Spirit.
MATTHEW 1:18
PEACE LOVE & JOY


"Joseph son of David,
do not be afraid to take Mary
home as your wife,
because what is conceived in her
is from the Holy Spirit."
MATTHEW 1:20
PEACE LOVE & JOY

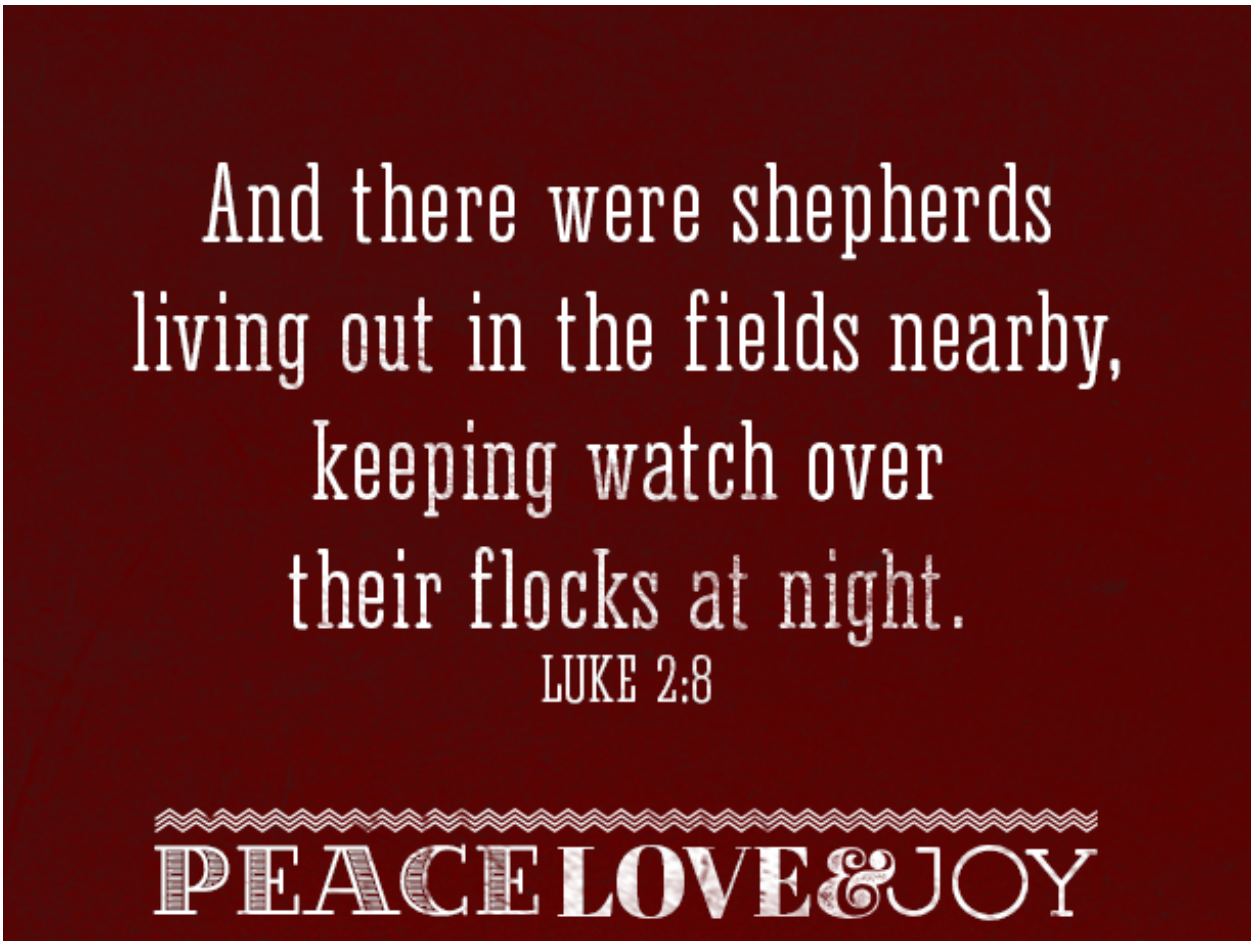

"She will give birth to a son,
and you are to give
him the name Jesus,
because he will
save his people from their sins."
MATTHEW 1:21
PEACE LOVE & JOY


"The virgin will conceive
and give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel"
(which means "God with us").
MATTHEW 1:23
PEACE LOVE & JOY


And Mary said:
"My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices
in God my Savior"
LUKE 1:46-47
PEACE LOVE & JOY


So Joseph also went up
from the town of Nazareth
in Galilee to Judea,
to Bethlehem the town of David.
LUKE 2:4
PEACE LOVE & JOY


While they were there,
the time came
for the baby to be born
LUKE 2:6
PEACE LOVE & JOY


And there were shepherds
living out in the fields nearby,
keeping watch over
their flocks at night.
LUKE 2:8
PEACE LOVE & JOY

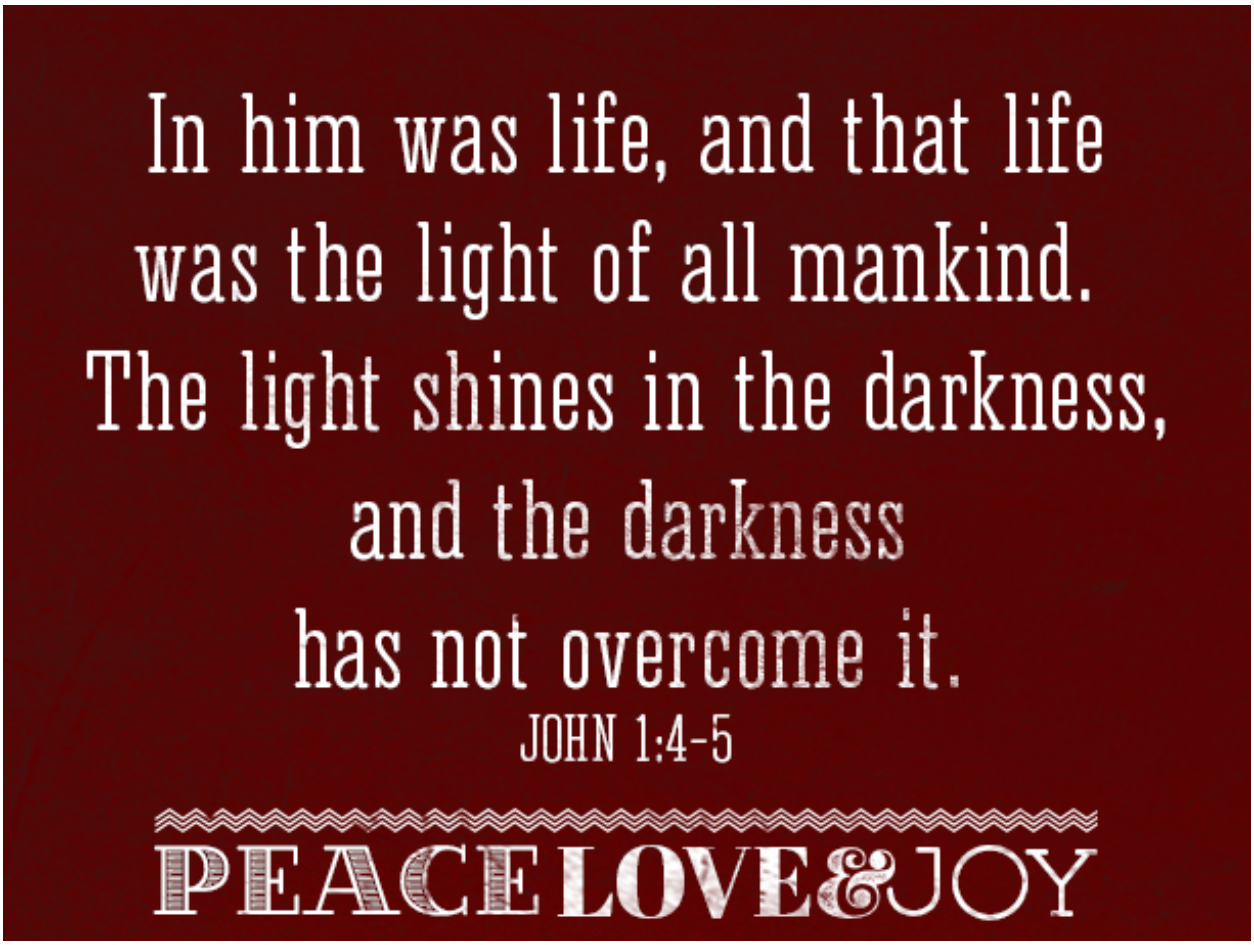

The angel said to them,
"Do not be afraid.
I bring you good news
that will cause great joy
for all the people."
LUKE 2:10
PEACE LOVE & JOY


Today in the town of David
a Savior has been born to you;
he is the Messiah, the Lord.
LUKE 2:11
PEACE LOVE & JOY


When they had seen him,
they spread the word
concerning what had been told them
about this child.
LUKE 2:17
PEACE LOVE & JOY


After Jesus was born
in Bethlehem in Judea,
during the time of King Herod,
Magi from the east
came to Jerusalem
MATTHEW 2:1
PEACE LOVE & JOY


On coming to the house,
they saw the child
with his mother Mary,
and they bowed down
and worshiped him.
MATTHEW 2:11
PEACE LOVE & JOY


In him was life, and that life
was the light of all mankind.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness
has not overcome it.
JOHN 1:4-5
PEACE LOVE & JOY


"Glory to God
in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace
to those on whom his favor rests."
LUKE 2:14
PEACE LOVE & JOY


Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the Lord
our Maker; for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.
PSALM 95:6-7
PEACE LOVE & JOY


For God so loved the world
that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him
shall not perish
but have eternal life.
JOHN 3:16
PEACE LOVE & JOY