the heart has a home

CHRISTMAS
THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JOHN



vineyardresources®


“My Father’s house has many rooms....”
John 14:2a



The Heart Has A Home

Introduction 3

Week 1: The Heart Comes Home – To Hope 5

Week 2: The Heart Comes Home – To Peace 7

Week 3: The Heart Comes Home – To Joy 9

Week 4: The Heart Comes Home – To Love 11

Christmas Eve: A Long Wandering To The Place We Call Home 13

Christmas Day: Home For Christmas 15

Why Celebrate Advent And Christmas? 17

© 2016 Vineyard Resources. All rights reserved.

All Scriptures taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Introduction

Perhaps no theme is more resonant and present in Christmas literature – and throughout the literature of humankind – than the theme of coming "home." In our most popular stories, people are always – either physically or metaphorically – wandering *from* home, looking *for* home, coming *back* home, or feeling *at* home.

A *homecoming* is the soldier's nightly dream, the team's big day, and the prodigal's greatest act of courage. And this theme of "home" runs deeply through the Scriptures, mapping out the path of the human heart as we start at *home,* wander in *exile,* then finally commence our *return*. Home. Exile. Return. This is the way of the human heart in the biblical narrative.

According to the earliest visions of Eden in Genesis 1, humanity began, alive and aware, in the safe abode of God's enveloping love. Then, with the sweet bite of a forbidden fruit, and a newly found hatred for our brother and sister, the Scriptures document our wayward wandering into exile – separated from God and one another by a wedge called *sin*. At the fullness of time, the moment redemption casts its penetrating light on our dire illusion of contentment, we are welcomed by the person of Jesus to *return* home to our loving, heavenly Father – our true, original *dwelling place*.

Home. Exile. Return. It is the progression undergirding the story of humanity, leading us to God's great consummation of history.

The Unique Gospel Of John

Have you ever noticed that, when compared to the other Gospels, the Gospel of John gets little attention during the Christmas season? John, known as the "Beloved Apostle," does not begin his telling of the life of Jesus with a birth narrative, a documentation of His lineage, or anything resembling a "hark the herald angels sing" moment. There are few Christmas plays that attempt to bring the cosmic metaphors of John 1 to the stage; Matthew, Mark, and Luke get top billing as children dress up in shepherds' robes, angels' gowns, and cow costumes, all to reenact the vivid scenes of the nativity.

A Retelling Of Genesis

Instead, John begins his Christmas story with what amounts to a retelling of Genesis! Launching from here, John delivers to us a *21 chapter* Christmas story, unveiling the Light that has come into the world for the reader. He reaches far back, past the beginning of time, for his first, poetic words.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came

from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1,14).

From this remarkable starting place, the apostle John, inspired by the Spirit, begins to lovingly craft the most artful and metaphor-laden of all the Gospels. More a van Gogh than an engineer's blueprint, more poetry than prose, the Gospel of John weaves together story after story to unpack the holy mystery of Christ's incarnation. John chooses the same communication tools as his Lord Jesus to articulate the ineffable – the language of metaphor, symbol, and story. John sings us a song of the Kingdom through an epic masterpiece, with a stirring prologue, a miraculous first movement (called 'the book of signs'), a passionate second movement (called 'the book of glory'), and a fascinating epilogue.

The House Of My Father

Perhaps one of the most powerful and central of John's metaphors is found in chapter 14, verses 1-3.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

Like the disciples in John 14, we are not sure exactly what Jesus means by "My Father's house." Is He talking about heavenly mansions? Or is it a metaphor? In the ancient Near East, the oldest son was given a larger inheritance as he had the responsibility to maintain the extended family home for the growing number of generations living under one roof. Living in a subsistence economy, families built rooms onto their houses to accommodate members rather than building separate homes. The "father" of that house cared for 3-4 generations in the same extended home, providing for their needs.

In this setting, the "father's house" was intended to be a place of familial closeness, lavish provision, and vocational security: it was a place designed to nurture significance as each person had the potential to bear fruit, both in character and in impact on the world. When Jesus is telling His disciples that there are *many rooms* in His Father's house, He may have been saying, *"There is a home for your heart; a place for you in this world. Your heart was made to find its true home in the love of your Father and mine – now and for eternity. Come home from your exile, from your wandering, and return to the abiding place where love, security, and care are your inheritance."*

This Christmas, your heart has a home. Our Father's house is a place where people who are different can live in harmony, and where those who have orphaned themselves through sin and fear can find welcome and restoration.

How To Use This Devotional

Read each weekly devotional on each of the four Sundays of Advent before Christmas Day. Read the fifth on Christmas Eve, and the sixth on Christmas Day. Use a journal if you can, noting insights each week.

The Heart Comes Home – To Hope

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Your Advent Promise

The gift of Jesus reveals that the Father is aware – and involved in – our real-world struggle for hope.

Scripture

"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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God" (John 3:16-21).

Devotional

Perhaps the most famous passage in the Gospel of John – even in the Bible itself – is John 3:16. We see the verse reference on banners, being waved enthusiastically behind the goal posts at professional football games, and on the bumpers of countless cars. But what do these words mean, and how do they speak of Advent?

"For God so loved the world..." that "He gave..." are phrases that reveal two fundamental characteristics of the God of Christmas.

For God So Loved

First, "For God so loved" reveals to us the underlying motivation in the Father's heart in all He does in the world and in each one of us. No matter what we have done, when God looks at us, *He loves us*.

It has been said that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely (Lord John Dalberg-Acton). But what if a mind-bogglingly selfless *love* is the guiding motive behind that power? What if the God of the heavens

and the earth, all-powerful and all-capable of doing whatever He so pleases, is motivated by a love so pure that we have no human frame of reference for it? One could say that power then rests on its only proper foundation – unconditional love. Power, uprooted from a foundation of God-shaped love, can quickly become a weapon of injustice, violence, and dehumanization.

Power must find its foundation in love. But what kind of love?

That He Gave

"For God so loved... that He *gave*." Here we experience a second remarkable characteristic of the God of Christmas, evidenced in the gift of His Son to us all.

It is this – that God is an unsurpassed *giver*. Here, in the incarnation of Jesus, we begin to understand the most elemental nature of love according to the Bible.

Love, at its purest and most mature, is *kenotic*; meaning *love empties itself out* for another (*kenosis*, Phil. 2:7), sacrifices its desires for another, and offers its life for another.

Power, the ability to do anything one wants, is now balanced and intoned by kenotic love – the pure desire for the ultimate benefit of another. This love is *cruciform* – ready to spend itself to save another.

In this brief Christmas vision of God's heart expressed in John 3:16, we are schooled in the arts of leadership, parenting, friendship, marriage, and family. Power, rooted in a selfless desire for the wellbeing of the other, is the only power that is *safe* in this world. This Christmas vision of love-shaped power has confounded leaders of myriad cultures and generations throughout history.

This Christ-framed vision of love gives us the most reliable of hopes – a hope that springs from knowing that a loving God is in control.

Hope lives and grows in our Father's house. Our hope rests on Him.

Ask God For A Gift This Christmas

Christ is the gift of God to us. Without Him and His example, we wander in our self-reliance, putting our hope in political powers to fix all the ills of the world. Our ultimate hope lives and grows in our *Father's house*. We are in the safest place when our expectation for change is rooted in God's great and precious promises (2 Pet. 1:4), and we learn to live in the way of sacrificial, self-emptying love – just as Jesus has modeled for us.

Act On This Devotional

Consider immersing yourself in the Gospel of John this season. Read a chapter a day to keep the story fresh as you go. Allow John to tell you the story of Christmas in a new way.

The Heart Comes Home – To Peace

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Your Advent Promise

Peace within comes from being known for who we are, and being accepted without judgment or a need to perform.

Scripture

"Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?' (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water'" (John 4:4-10).

Devotional

In the Christmas story so familiar to us all, there is one woman who gets most of the attention – *Mary*. As the mother of Jesus, this young girl courageously resists all ridicule to be found faithful to what she has seen and heard. Mary is iconic, a feminine vision of faith and trust in God for all the ages.

In John's Gospel, however, Mary is only mentioned *twice* – once when she asks Jesus for some practical help with a little wedding-wine-wonder-working (John 2:1-11), and the second time, at the foot of the cross, where Jesus asks John to care for her as he would his own mother (John 19:26-27). A different woman takes center stage in John's Gospel, with almost an entire chapter devoted to her encounter with the "Word-made-flesh."

The Woman At The Well

From Genesis to Revelation, God makes it clear that when He is looking at a person, He is looking at their heart. The heart is where peace begins and ends. Those who claim that peace can fully come outside the changing of human

hearts are severely mistaken.

In this familiar story, Jesus is by Jacob's well at noon time. As John recounts, Jesus is alone. Alone, that is, until a Samaritan woman comes out to draw water from the well to take back into town. The context should not be lost on us. In the Bible, wells are often places where interpersonal discoveries happen (betrothals and revelations), where peace enters dire situations in the form of love discovered and love requited, and where water is used as much as a metaphor as it is for drinking.

When God is looking at a person, He is looking at their heart.

The Heart Searches For Peace

Jesus suggests He is the bearer of *living water*, even as the woman draws from the natural well. After Jesus prophetically tells her unseemly facts about her life that He could not have known except by revelation, the woman declares Him to be a prophet. Then something happens that reveals her heart, and why the Word-made-flesh has chosen to step into her story. In her fascination – and without skipping a beat – she asks Him the *most important question she can think to ask*. *"'Sir,' the woman said, 'I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.'"* She is asking which place is *correct*.

Upon encountering the Word-made-flesh, we all might ask a selfish question, realizing we may not get this opportunity again! But this woman? She asks a question about *worship*. She wants to know what location for worship *brings God pleasure*.

Jesus does not regard her question as silly or ignorant. It is clear she has a soft heart that is ripe for *return* and *redemption* – and, with a few words, Jesus opens for her the door of her Father's house. She is coming *home*. In her excitement, she runs toward her Father's house after a long exile in her heart. Running to tell others, many come to believe in the Incarnate Word that day.

Ask God For A Gift This Christmas

The innocence in this seemingly "worldly" woman is striking. She is hungry for God's peace, and is looking for it in (unstable) relationships. She, like so many of us, is longing for acceptance, searching for it in a hundred different places.

Act On This Devotional

Reorient to your Father again. Just as He had a 'room of peace' in His house for this woman, so too He has a room for you. If your heart is restless, come to the well – and renew your rest in your Father's acceptance.

The Heart Comes Home – To Joy

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Your Advent Promise

Joy is a bubbling and sustained sense of God's nearness, affection, and provision; Jesus is giving you Joy this season.

Scripture

"On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, 'They have no more wine.' 'Woman, why do you involve me?' Jesus replied. 'My hour has not yet come.'

...Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water;' so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.'

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. ...Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, 'Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now'" (John 2:1-4; 7-10).

Devotional

Apparently, God loves a good *party*. From the divinely-commanded feasts of the ancient Hebrews, to Jesus' first miracle happening at a wedding reception, it seems that the God of the interstellar fireworks has a penchant for *celebration*.

Weddings are "parties with a purpose." After the ceremony and formal rituals of marital union are performed, well-dressed partiers of all ages typically join in a meal, a dance, and a time of festivity that rivals few others. In our time, constricting ties are loosened, and high heels are kicked off for a few hours of remembering that life is fleeting, and some parties should be embraced when they come along!

Only the Gospel of John records that Jesus' very first miracle was at a *wedding*. As far as we know, from the time of Jesus' nativity until this moment in Cana, Jesus has not done *anything* publicly that would signal that He has power beyond that of the average person. And if you were going to do your first miracle in a public place, wouldn't raising a dead person be closer to your first choice?

But Mary knows, as only a mother can, that something very special is quietly unfolding in her son's life. And for some reason, she thinks that the simple situation of a banquet running dry of wine is the perfect opportunity to invite Jesus to do something "special." And, as any young man knows, when your mother hints for you to do something, you should probably consider doing it.

Average Water To Flavorful Wine

The Word-made-flesh tells the servants to fill up six water jars to the brim. Upon serving some to the master of the banquet, only those in-the-know discover that a miracle has occurred. The God of the heavens and the earth seems to find joy in converting the everyday waters of sustenance into the joy-evoking nectar of the vine! Who knew?

And it is here that John, using metaphors of water and wine, reveals just how transformative a touch from the Christ can be. What feels plain and insignificant in our lives can be given flavor and quality by the touch of Jesus. That's the kind of *cool* that happens in the Father's house!

From Ordinary To Extraordinary

The seemingly simple and unremarkable are made to be striking and extraordinary. People that no one else in the world would notice – bland as water – become as flavorful as a fine wine when the Lord touches them. The bitter become forgiving. The angry become compassionate. The hateful become loving. That's what happens when the Word-made-flesh is invited to the party. Here, in this simple story, we see that our God is not sitting in an isolated corner of the universe, judging sinners as we might. Here, in this moment, we see that the Water-To-Wine-Maker is in the house – and it's His house He's revealing! Bubbling joy is the result of a never-ending stream of God's kindness directed our way, and a thankful heart that receives it.

Joy enters our hearts through a simple act of faith.

In John's Gospel, Jesus is the place where heaven and earth meet. And where heaven and earth meet, there is *always* a redemption party.

Ask God For A Gift This Christmas

Ask God to remove any lingering "killjoy" images of who He is from your heart. Ask Him to fill you with "Joy in His presence" (Ps. 16:11) – and "...Do not get drunk on wine..." but "...Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18)!

Act On This Devotional

The Creator knows the hearts of human beings; He made us, and He knows what steals our joy. Write down the 'joy-stealers' in your life, then ask God to turn your focus from those things to a fresh focus on His gifts.

The Heart Comes Home – To Love

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Your Advent Promise

In our Father's house, unconditional love for *everyone* defines the emotional climate.

Scripture

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ...As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. (John 15:5, 9-15).

Devotional

For a moment, think about what you saw or read in your social media newsfeed over this past year. For the last 365 days, we woke up to news that made us laugh (cute kitten videos) or warmed our hearts (a newborn baby). We also woke up to interpersonal, national, and international news that shocked us, frightened us, or offended us. Each morning many of us turn on our mobile phones before having *even one moment* of silent reflection with God. When we do, we leave ourselves unguarded as a parade of injustice, violence, argument, and division – all publicly displayed on social media – assaults our emotions to start the day. Remaining "in the vine," as Jesus taught His disciples in John 15, becomes ever more important as we walk as God's people through times that are troubling.

Jesus At The Center

John has a very high Christology (view of Christ). In other words, for John, the Word-made-flesh sits at the very center of his views on how we are to live, love, and

engage in relationships (in our time, in person or online). Jesus is the lens through which John sees creation, redemption, suffering, and hope. And for John, the relentless love of the Father for each human being is the cosmic voltage powering every one of these planet-shaking themes.

Loving Without Barriers

We live in a world where people who see the world differently than we do receive less than dignifying respect from us. We see others through our own story, privately judging them according to our limited experience. Then, when an incident occurs, our judgments (and pain) spill out onto the world. We quickly dismiss others in our minds when we see them at their worst, forgetting that, given the same circumstance and environment, we could look as horribly deficient as those we judge. Racial tension claws at the soul of the United States, spurred on by acts of violence that confuse us in the story they tell, while truth gets distorted by the spin put on those stories by some who tell them.

Into the middle of our inability to love another, Jesus walks.

Into the middle of our inability to love the *other* – that person who is not like us or from our background – Jesus walks. He knows it is hard for us to have compassion for someone who is not like us. He also knows that one drop of revelation can change us in an *instant* – yet He knows that we will resist that revelation to maintain the status quo and our internal level of comfort. *He knows.*

But when He teaches His disciples in John 14-15 what it means to follow Him, He doesn't let any one of us off the hook. According to John 15:5, when we are disconnected from the vine of Jesus, we cannot love in a holy and comprehensively loving way – like Jesus. But when we are in the vine of Christ, we can do *anything* – even love our greatest enemies. Loving in Jesus' way – without judgment, without need for accolades, without fear – will keep us connected to the Father's heart for the world (John 3:16). Laying our lives down (John 15:13), we become the friends of God (John 15:15) – learning how to befriend people we may have never befriended before.

In the Father's house, we become like Him – loving without barriers.

Ask God For A Gift This Christmas

Ask God for a revelation of His love; to give you eyes to see others, especially those who are different than you, as He sees them.

Act On This Devotional

Pursue friendship with someone in your network of relationships that is not from your cultural background. Allow Jesus to teach you to love.

A Long Wandering To The Place We Call Home

CHRISTMAS EVE

Your Christmas Eve Promise

There are no orphans in the Father's house; only children, learning to love and to be loved.

Scripture

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.

Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.

Jesus replied, 'Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me'" (John 14:18-21; 23-24).

Devotional

The story of *Little Orphan Annie* has intrigued generations of readers for almost a century. The 10-year-old orphan with curly red hair is loved and cared for by "Daddy" Warbucks, a wealthy benefactor who has come to treasure Annie.

Clever and feisty, Annie triumphs over all manner of trouble with quick-thinking and the loving support of her caregiver. Before living in her "Father's house," Annie is alone, abused, and fighting for her life. But the day she comes to live with Daddy Warbucks is her salvation – she finds renewed courage, faith, and strength to face every challenge before her.

Orphans Of The Heart

For many today, waking up with a feeling of loneliness, even though surrounded by people, is a common experience.

All of us, at one time or another, feel misunderstood, left behind, abandoned, or, in our very worst moments, *unlovable*.

Loved people, who have had their orphan spirit displaced by the heartening love they can only experience in the Father's house, do not try to end their lives, grasp for power, or climb over others on their way to success. Loved people do not grapple for affirmation, jostle for recognition, or intentionally harm others. Love displaces fear.

The Word-made-flesh, at a key point in the discipleship of His followers, said that *"The one who loves me (Jesus) will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them. ...Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (John 14:21b, 23)*.

The Father's Love Is Our Home

The word for "home" here carries the meanings "to dwell with, abide with, to take up residence with." The idea of *coming home*, being at home with the Father, is the central metaphor John uses in his Gospel as he works to convince us that finding our place in the Father's love is the healing balm for *all* our ills.

Like Annie, we are scrappers in this world, fighting for our lives as we seek to gain our identity through what we do, who we know, and how many people like us. But in the Father's house, there is no need to perform for love; there is no need for a show to prove we're worthy of acceptance. In the Father's house, love is driven by the Lover's heart – not the beloved's actions. The inner affirmation that the Word-made-flesh dwells with us, abides with us, and has taken up residence in and with us, can overpower our most intractable fears. Grace and forgiveness are the food we eat in the Father's house.

> ...We will come to them and make our home with them.

On a silent night millennia ago, God gave us the gift of Jesus – born in humble surroundings a world away – to prove that love can invade the most loveless parts of the human heart. This Christmas Eve, you no longer need to live from an orphan spirit, in any part of your life. Your long wandering of self-sufficiency, no matter its grade or kind, has spent itself – and your true home is alight and bright with the hearth-fire of the Father's love for you. Tonight is your homecoming; make it count.

Give God A Gift This Christmas

Homecoming is the theme of Christmas Eve – as Christ came to us to make His home in us, and we come home to Him.

Act On This Devotional

Find a quiet moment tonight to thank God for bringing you to your true home – in your Father's arms.

Christmas Day: Home For Christmas

CHRISTMAS DAY

Your Christmas Promise

This Christmas, the Word-made-flesh enters your neighborhood, where you live, and comes to stay.

Scripture

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 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.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-14).

Devotional

It is Christmas Day, and the Light of all humankind shines brightly on us all!

In the first chapter of his Gospel, the apostle John retells in microcosm the story of Genesis, the beginning of humankind – only this time, through the lens of Christ.

John's vision of Christ is perhaps the highest we have in the Scriptures. For John, Jesus is the everlasting "Word," the "Word made flesh," the One through whom "all things were made," and the "Light of all mankind." Later, John will call him the "Alpha and the Omega," the "First and the Last," and the "Beginning and the End" (Rev. 22:13).

Illuminating one of the most magnificent truths of the Christian life, John writes:

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

This idea of "dwelling" is then repeated over and over throughout the Gospel of John. Christ makes His dwelling *among us* (John 1:14). The Father has made a dwelling *for us* where we will forever abide in and with Him (John 14:2-4). The Father and the Son make their dwelling *within us* (John 14:23).

One can't get around it. Jesus Christ is at home in your presence and mine! He is at home in the middle of our messes, of our joys, of our fears. As Eugene Peterson put it, he has "moved into the neighborhood" to be intimate with our every concern.

Christ has come to us, full of Grace and Truth.

"The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish" (John 1:14, *The Message*).

Your Christmas Invitation

And the follow-up to the reality that God is *with us* (*Emmanuel*) is the greatest of Christmas invitations: You are designed to be *with Him* – at home with Him, abiding with Him, dwelling with Him, and reveling in the love that fills your Father's house.

The Father has room for you, a place of spiritual "home" where you are provided for, sustained, given identity and direction, and invited to share in the benefits of living from a place of unconditional love. The Father is building onto His house, just as the image of the under-one-roof, growing household of the ancient Jews models for us. And in His house, you are accepted and loved for eternity.

Come Home For Christmas

Coming home for Christmas is a theme embedded in thousands of personal stories every season. But for you and me, this Christmas, coming home is about saying "Yes" again to living under the roof of your loving heavenly Father, saying "Yes" to the values and compassion that mark His household, and saying "Yes" to the invitation to become like the One who will love you to life – both in this world and the next.

Receive God's Gift This Christmas

Jesus shows us that our Father God is no distant deity, dwelling apart from us in isolated splendor and glory. Your God, my God, revealed in Jesus Christ, is the God who draws *near*. Receive His presence with you now.

Act On This Devotional

Today, in your heart, come home to the house of your Father. Take out your journal, and write down all the benefits of being a part of God's family. Take a few moments on this Christmas Day to offer thanks for this past year, looking toward the New Year with expectation.

Why Celebrate Advent And Christmas?

"It's the most wonderful time of the year..." ring the words of an old Christmas song. But why? Why does celebrating Christmas, and the season of Advent that leads up to it, matter?

In the early centuries of the Church, it became clear that the rhythms of time – days, weeks, years, and lifetimes – could be used to **help Christians remember and reclaim the saving events of Jesus' life.** Jesus' birth (the Incarnation), and Jesus' triumph over death (the Resurrection), were the two obvious themes that would shape the year.

By repeating certain "cycles" each year based around these two themes, Christians could begin to **orient their entire lives** around remembering, reclaiming, and retelling what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. This was called the "Christian Year," or for our purposes, the **Worship Year**.

Two cycles take us through the year and enable us to order our lives around a Christ-centered spirituality. The *Cycle Of Light* includes Advent (*anticipation*), Christmas (*celebration*), and Epiphany (*proclamation*). The *Cycle Of Life* includes Lent (*anticipation*), Easter (*celebration*), and Pentecost/ After Pentecost (*proclamation*).

Advent is the official beginning of the Worship Year, and is a season of hope, of expectation, and of waiting. In Advent we remember the longing for deliverance from evil and oppression experienced by the ancient Jews, and the anticipation of God's Kingdom breaking in on their behalf.

Like a child who loves to have a story read over and over again, we reclaim the powerful saving events of **Christmas** by *retelling them* – the Story of God's love breaking into our reality in Jesus.

Have you ever considered reading the Christmas story aloud with family or friends on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day?

To the right are the Christmas passages you can read, in order.

The Christmas Story

John 1:1-18

(Jesus is the Word-made-flesh, Light of the world, and the God who dwells with us)

Luke 1:26-38

(The Angel visits Mary, Mary's response, the *Magnificat* - Mary's song of worship)

Matthew 1:18-25 or Luke 2:1-7

(Matthew: The engagement, Joseph's dream; Luke: Census and short birth narrative)

Luke 2:8-20

(The Shepherds see the Angelic Host)

Matthew 2:1-12

(The Wise Men come from the East)



As a special gift for you this Christmas, **Vineyard Worship** has put together a **free download** of some selected Christmas songs.

Just visit the link below, and download this fresh music for your personal Christmas library this season.

Download your free songs at:
www.vineyardworship.com/christmas

The Vineyard Movement, since birth, has valued seeing individual Christians experience God in their daily lives. Through spiritual practices such as worship, fellowship, mission, the reading and application of Scripture, soul care, family care, healing of the broken, cultural influence, the compassionate ministry of the Holy Spirit, and loving our neighbors, the Vineyard community of churches seeks to be intentional about nurturing the lives of those who call us their family.

FOR MORE RESOURCES LIKE THIS, VISIT
www.vineyardresources.com

vineyardresources®