

Stars of Christmas

by Sharon Stults

Part Two

December 8-13

Welcome to Week Two! If you are new to this devotional, no worries. If you miss a day, going forward, no worries. Each devotional is a stand-alone meditation on one prophecy concerning Christ.

To those who completed Week One, I hope you've been encouraged and challenged in your walk with God. Times are hard for many people, and I am on a mission of encouragement to remind people that whatever they are facing, God is greater and will show you your way through.

Our Messiah, our Immanuel, came and took on human form so that we would never need to feel alone again. He is the helpless babe in the manger, the humble Christ child and the soon and coming King, the Lord of Hosts. He is everything we long for and all that we need.

May you find him and know him in fresh ways this season.

December 8

“Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this,” Isaiah 9:7.

Prophecy: Messiah would be heir to King David’s throne

Fulfilled: Luke 1:32-33, Romans 1:3

One of the most remarkable conversations in Scripture occurs in 2 Samuel 7 between King David and God (via Nathan the prophet). The kingdom of Israel is in peace after a long season of war and the king’s thoughts turn to God’s tabernacle. David is struck by the contrast between the expensive cedar palace around him compared to the worn tents of God’s house, which Nathan points out.

David decides, without asking God, that he should launch a temple project. The idea sounds great to Nathan, and he encourages David to go for it. That night, God speaks to the prophet again, expressing surprise that David is making plans to build a temple without consulting God. The original Hebrew indicates that God says something like this,

“David, I love the fact that me mentioning the contrast between my house and yours inspired you to start a temple building project. However, I didn’t ask you to build one and to be honest, I don’t want you to. I’ve already decided that your son will be the builder. But I love the that you were so moved by love for me that you started making plans immediately. Because you did that, I promise you that I will build you a house. Your family line will become a holy kingdom that will last forever.”

King David got ahead of himself, but God saw the intentions of his heart and placed a prophetic star over his life with massive significance. One day Messiah himself would return to earth a second time and rule in the authority of David’s intact bloodline. Remember, King Saul’s bloodline was completely cut off because of his disobedience but David’s would remain protected for millennia.

Part of this prophecy came true in ancient Israel as David’s bloodline ruled for 400 years. The greater part of the promise will come to pass when King Jesus steps down to earth once again and rules from David’s throne in Israel.

For you and me, this prophetic star is a reminder that God is always, always, looking at our heart and motives. David’s motives were pure, and God saw that. Secondly, even when we make mistakes and attempt to or succeed in doing something out of order in God’s plan, if our hearts are right, God is still pleased. He may not bless our *plans*, just as he didn’t approve David’s building project, but he will shower gifts and favor on *us*.

This star reminds us that when we are generous towards God, the generosity he returns far surpasses what we wanted to do for him. Ask him where he is already at work this Christmas season and how you can join him in what he’s already doing and blessing. Look for the paths God has prepared for you to show generosity to someone and join Messiah there.

Prayer: God, help me to align my love for you and my desire to serve you with the plans you already have in motion. Show me who needs your touch of generosity this season.

December 9

“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness... you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you...” Psalm 45:6

“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed...” Daniel 2:44

Prophecy: Messiah’s throne will be eternal and anointed.

Fulfillment: Luke 1:33, Hebrews 1:8-12

If ancient rulers time traveled to the present, how do you think they’d react to the condition of their empires and kingdoms now? Earth contains countless archeological ruins of once great empires. Some empire’s remains are yet to be found. Consider the Assyrian, Roman, Babylonian, and Mongolian empires. All that’s left of any of them are crumbling walls and often mere remnants of foundations.

I think they’d be speechless to see what became of their mighty fortresses and surrounding towns. Many rulers, even King Solomon, built incredible palaces and temples with some of the finest and rarest materials in the world, with longevity in mind. Even today, Buckingham Palace is currently up for sale, the royal family no longer in residence. I doubt that the people of the UK ever imagined their iconic castle becoming a private residence.

The wood, hay and stubble of this life is only that to a God-follower but to an unenlightened heart it is the very stuff of which life is made. I believe this prophetic star was not only for Israel but for anyone, in any century, who has eyes to see and ears to hear.

Even ancient rulers lived on an earth with the ruins of civilizations that came before them. When Daniel interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, he told him that God, not King Nebuchadnezzar or any other ruler, would establish a kingdom that would last for eternity. Shocking for an arrogant king.

Not only would Messiah’s kingdom be eternal, but God’s anointing would rest upon it. Very few rulers in history could claim that distinction. Even those who walked with God, like Solomon and David, experienced seasons where the anointing of God left them for a time.

Solomon told us in Ecclesiastes 3:11 that God placed eternity in every human heart. The lost soul will spend their lives trying to establish a shadow of eternity in this life. I think this prophetic star challenges them to consider aligning themselves with the only empire that will last forever, the kingdom of the Messiah. God wants people to see the contrast between investing their lives in God’s eternal kingdom or devoting yourself to things that will be ruins one day.

This is a prophetic star of hope for a darkened world. There is an everlasting, wondrous kingdom where goodness and light rule. This Christmas season consider which kingdom is getting the best of your limited resources, the world’s temporary empire, or God’s eternal kingdom.

Prayer: God, thank you that you called me into a kingdom that has no end and is filled with unimaginable goodness and light. Help me to properly balance my stewardship of the things of my earthly life with my investments in your heavenly kingdom

December 10

“Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel,”
Isaiah 7:14.

Prophecy: Messiah would be born of a virgin

Fulfillment: Matthew 1:22-23, Luke 1:26-31

I wonder what the Israelite’s of Isaiah’s day thought when he gave this prophecy. If they faithfully studied Moses’ books, they knew that God promised to send the heavenly Messiah through the body of a woman in Genesis. Perhaps it took this centuries for Israel to accept the concept of a divine birth in a human vessel.

Now, Isaiah drops the bombshell that there will no man involved to create the holy pregnancy. Boom. Was he ridiculed? Did people accuse him of not hearing rightly from God? We don’t know but consider that what is a normal, accepted tenet of our faith was brand new information for the people of that day.

God wanted his people to know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary alone, was their promised Messiah. Doubting minds of Jesus’ day, including Joseph, couldn’t accept the fulfillment of this prophecy in this nobody from nowhere. They assumed she had intimate relations with another man. That’s why Joseph almost divorced her until an angel set him straight.

The beauty and wonder of this star is that no human could manufacture this miracle. God, and God alone placed the first cell of Jesus’ earthly body into Mary’s womb. Mary knew the truth immediately, but the poor girl stood alone in that knowledge for a time. God did something supernatural in Mary that had never been

done before and has not been done since. He is Creator. His nature is to generate things that are original.

God will always be creating. His thoughts become reality. His word generates matter. He is continuously doing something new and fresh in the body of Christ. Sadly, many are like the people of Mary’s day, rejecting God’s original ideas and plans because it doesn’t fit into their paradigm of Christianity. What did it look like to conceive a baby without a man? It looked like Mary.

As God spins out his new concepts and approaches for spreading the news of Christ and making disciples will we recognize and accept them? What is he doing this Christmas that’s different than past Christmases? This prophetic star reminds us that we can participate in the miraculous, unheard-of things God wants to do when our hearts are filled with faith, not human reasoning.

Let’s stop trying to make God reasonable, shall we? Was it “reasonable” to invade a teenage girl’s quiet life with a one-of-a-kind pregnancy? Was it reasonable to allow circumstances to force her on a long journey in the late months of pregnancy? Was it reasonable to allow every room in Bethlehem to fill up forcing her to give birth amidst farm animals? The natural mind says, “Absolutely not!” And this is where our human reasoning will fail us.

The heart that chases after God says, like Mary, “I am your servant. Let it be to me according to your word.” What if we positioned our hearts like that this Christmas season? What miracles might God long to do through us?

Prayer: God, give me faith like Mary’s to believe that your plans are perfect even when they seem strange and new to me. I am available for whatever way you wish to use me.

December 11

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...” Isaiah 9:6

Prophecy: Messiah will come as a baby.

Fulfillment: Luke 1:31-35, Luke 2:11

Think about the greatest challenge you face currently, whether it's relational, career, financial, health or something else. You've prayed, waited, and believed God's word, yet nothing changes.

Now imagine you've shared your frustration with a friend. One day, that friend calls you, eager to share great news. A woman you don't know, recently gave birth to a little boy. Your friend assures you that baby is going to be the solution to your problem. Are you getting the struggles Israel experienced when Messiah turned up as a helpless baby instead of a conquering king charging?

God tried to prepare Israel with Isaiah's prophetic star. Messiah would come in human form but enter this world like the rest of us, vulnerable and powerless. God in flesh must begin as we all began. How else can credibility be established for him to speak into the pains, sorrows and limitations of these frail, human shells?

The second significant aspect of this messianic star is that Creator of All that Exists humbled himself and willingly allowed his power, majesty, and glory to be confined within a human body. The Apostle Paul nailed it, in Philippians 2, when he said, “who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”

King Jesus became an infant, dependent on humans for food and shelter. He was a little boy who scuffed his knees and stubbed his

toes on Nazareth's dusty streets. As a youth, his parents expected him to learn the carpenter's trade and work it like any other son. Did he feel the sting of splinters and the pain of hitting his thumb instead of a nail? Most likely.

Jesus experienced the deep sorrow of rejection and betrayal from many directions including, his family and neighbors, leaders of the Jewish faith, and even his closest friends. He knew the sorrow of being misunderstood and misquoted. He lived with death threats and a bounty on his head, from birth to the cross.

If Messiah came as an adult, in heavenly splendor and power, yes, he could have easily crushed the Roman Empire and set Israel free, temporarily. God is playing the long game though. His love for humans is so great he wants to live with us for all of eternity. That's why he sent Messiah the first time as a baby who became a Savior.

Israel's greatest threat has never been earthly tyrants. The grave danger that threatened Israel is the same one that puts humans in peril to this day. It is a heart that rejects Christ's gift of salvation and chooses instead an eternity separated from God. A Messiah who came as a conqueror could crush any external enemies but would not affect permanent change in the broken relationship between Creator and created. We can only choose, individually, to leave the kingdom of darkness and enter the kingdom of light. It is the baby of Christmas, the light of the world, that shows us the way.

The beauty of this prophetic star is that the same humility that enabled shepherds and wiseman to recognize a helpless baby as the King of Heaven is the same humility that will always lead a heart to Christ, time and time again.

Prayer: Jesus, I humble myself before you again today. Use me as you wish.

December 12

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel, whose origins are in the distant past, will come from you on my behalf,” Micah 5:2 NLT.

Prophecy: Messiah will be born in Bethlehem

Fulfillment: Matthew 2:1, Luke 2:4-6

The God of the unlikely and unusual doesn't disappoint in his selection of the Christ child's birthplace. Obscure, rural and backwards, by Jerusalem's metropolitan standards, Bethlehem seemed like an odd place for the Jew's Messiah to take his first mortal breaths. Except for those faithful Jews who diligently studied the prophets and kept their eye on Bethlehem because of Micah's words.

To most of the Israelites, Jesus' birth and early life went unnoticed because they forgot their history and prophecies. They didn't notice that as Ralph Stockman says, “The hinge of history hung on the door of a Bethlehem stable.” Understanding Bethlehem's past gives light to why God chose it for this world-changing event.

Bethlehem is the birthplace of Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel, who died in childbirth. Secondly, this is the city Ruth chose to live in with her mother-in-law Naomi, far from Ruth's own people. The way she honored Naomi caught the notice of the man who became her second husband, Boaz, and the respect of the town who compared her to Rachel and prayed that her descendants would be great.

Finally, Israel's hero king, David, came from Bethlehem. In this obscure town, God led the prophet Samuel to a nobody shepherd boy, to be anointed as the next king of Israel.

God used Micah to place a prophetic star over Israel, reminding her of her great past, during a dark period in Israel's history. Micah's ministry took place during the years when Israel collapsed onto itself after a series of wicked, idol-worshipping kings. Micah also lived through the nation's tragic fall to the Assyrian empire who decimated Jerusalem and carried away her fortunes and the best of her people into captivity.

Into that shadowed season, God used Micah to remind Israel that Bethlehem had produced a great king for them in the past and would do so again. The city whose name meant, “the house of bread,” would be the birthplace for the man who called himself “The Bread of Life,” the provider and sustainer of life.

In our hard seasons, we can find comfort and strength in remembering the great stories of our history with God. Think back to when he made a way for you where there was no way. The times he provided for your needs when you could not. The healings, provisions, deliverances, and victories of your past are the seed of faith for your future. How many of them started out in small ways, like little Bethlehem? I remember well a part time, challenging teaching position that turned into my dream job of teaching High School English. I'll bet you have stories too.

Micah's prophetic star reminds us to remember our past with God during dark times and not miss the new things he wants to do to make provision for us here and now. Often, God uses the obscure to give birth to some of the greatest blessings in our lives.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, please bring to memory the many ways God has healed, delivered, and provided for me that I may be given fresh courage and faith to say, “I don't know exactly what God is going to do in this hard time, I just know he will do something great.”

December 13

“...the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’),” Isaiah 7:14 NLT.

Prophecy: Messiah will be called Immanuel

Fulfillment: Matthew 1:23

The setting for this prophecy of Isaiah is the court of wicked King Ahaz of Judah, the southern part of Israel’s divided kingdom. Syria and Israel formed an alliance to conquer Judah. Instead of seeking God, Ahaz made his own alliance with another pagan king, which turned out to be useless. As Israel and Syria’s armies bear down on Judah, Ahaz, the coward who threw his own son into Molech’s fires, is terrified and immobilized. God sends Isaiah with a word.

God declares that Judah will not be overrun by Syria and Israel. The armies that caused Ahaz to tremble, God called “two stubs of firebrands,” in other words, all bark, and no bite. God challenges Ahaz, through Isaiah, to believe God and ask him for a sign if he wants victory over Syria and Israel. Ahaz’s pride refuses to believe in God and instead puts his confidence in the king of Assyria, of all people.

God gives a prophetic sign anyway, as a rebuke to Ahaz. He says that the conquering king will be born and known as “Immanuel,” which means “God with us.” God’s point? Israel was the beloved nation of God demonstrated in countless ways through their history. His presence stayed with them if they stayed faithful to him. He was always God with them from the very beginning, shown by the cloud and pillar of fire that led them in the wilderness.

God was saying to Ahaz, “If I am with you, which I am, why are seeking help from anyone other than me?” He is asking us the same question.

This star, so precious in its idea of our Lord’s nearness to us, is our reminder and challenge to take everything that concerns us to the Lord first. Too often, when life goes sideways, we run to people before we kneel in prayer. We try to numb our minds from the pain of something through entertainment instead of sitting quietly before the Lord, minds actively seeking to hear him.

Jesus, the Messiah, is God with us. He is our ever-present help in times of trouble, the friend who stays closer than a brother. His promise to never leave or forsake us still stands. He wants us to cry out to him for direction, insight and understanding. Although he often uses other people to help us with our problems, he wants to be the one that arranges that for us.

Did troubles disturb the peace of your sleep last night then wait at the foot of your bed to challenge you this morning? He is Immanuel. Are you experiencing pain and loss like you’ve never experienced before? God is with you. Are you experiencing a major health crisis or tormented by chronic illness? God draws close. God is near to every broken heart, wounded body, and damaged mind.

Immanuel, God with us, can hear the cries of our heart for which we cannot find words. Draw near to him, and he will draw near to you.

Prayer: God, I thank you that you are always speaking words of life and hope over me when my circumstances are discouraging or hopeless. Help me to sense your nearness and presence today that I may go out with peace and carry on with joy.

