

LEADERTREKS



STAR OF WONDER

A 25-DAY ADVENT DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL

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STAR OF WONDER

The first Christmas was quite different from the modern one. Today, stores start stocking their shelves with Christmas items weeks before the actual day. The Christmas season seems to creep into Halloween, making it almost impossible for anyone not to realize Christmas is approaching. It was quite the opposite during the first Christmas.

Over two thousand years ago, there were only a handful of people gathered on the night Jesus was born. Even though a nation of people had been waiting and longing for that very moment, almost everyone on the planet missed the event. There were no Christmas advertisements, no endless carols on the radio, no countdowns to signify that the first Christmas was about to arrive. The only indicator pointing the way to the child Jesus was a wondrous star, and only a select number of wise men followed it.

Advent literally means arrival. The Advent season is about remembering the day when the God of the universe came to earth. When Jesus arrived on the very first Christmas, humankind received the greatest gift ever given. The Christmas story tells of wise men who travelled far and brought gifts to honor Jesus. And 2,000 years later, we're still exchanging gifts to celebrate Christmas.

This Advent journal is designed to help you explore the greatest Christmas gift ever and to prepare your heart to receive Jesus as your King, God, and Sacrifice.

HOW IT WORKS:

This book has four weeks of journal pages to help you focus on Christ as you journey through the Advent season. The first three weeks contain seven days of devotions and activities, centered around the three gifts brought by the wise men, and what they proclaimed about Jesus. Here you'll have an opportunity to see the nativity story with new eyes, study the Bible with engaging tools, revisit the heart behind your favorite Christmas carols, or take on challenges that help you take a closer look at how Christ's Advent (his arrival) is God's ultimate gift to us. At the end of each week, you'll find a FAMILY DAY. This is an opportunity to share what you're learning with friends and family. The fourth week contains four days of devotions and activities that tie everything together as a final countdown to Christmas. We've included a special Family Devotion for you to go through together on Christmas Day.

Remember, you'll get out of this book what you put into it. The challenges you'll encounter won't always be easy—they're designed to stretch you! Take a risk and use this journal to run hard toward God. When we make ourselves available to him, he'll transform us and use us in ways that will blow our minds!



The wise men's first gift was gold, symbolizing Jesus' royalty.

Christ came to be our King, and we should recognize and obey him. This week, you'll take a look at how Jesus' royalty meets us in our need, and you'll have the opportunity to honor him as King.

DAY ONE KING FOREVER



The wise men's first gift was gold, symbolizing Jesus' royalty:

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 with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Isaiah 9:7 (ESV)

Many Americans pride themselves on not giving allegiance to any king or queen. The idea of submitting to someone who did not earn their status but merely inherited it does not suit the American work ethic. The good news is that Jesus is a king like no other. He was born in poverty, lived essentially homeless during his final years of ministry, and his earthly family lineage was nothing to brag about. Yet he is the King of the universe and the ultimate ruler over all! Instead of forcing obedience, as most kings do, Christ gives us the choice to follow him or not. Every person in history has faced that decision, and it carries eternal repercussions. Once you submit to Jesus as King, your life should reflect his lordship.

NOWED THE EALLOWING ALLECTIONS

ANSWER THE FULLOWING QUESTIONS:
Are you interested in the royal families of other countries? Why or why not?
How do you think your life would look different if you were part of a royal family?
What does it say about Jesus that he would be "on the throne of David and over his kingdom"?
What are some stories about Jesus that remind you of his royalty?

DAY TWO A RIGHTEOUS KING



The American Revolution took place for a very good reason. King George III, who was then king over America, did not have the interests of his subjects at heart and made decisions as a leader that harmed his people instead of protecting them. In this passage from Jeremiah, the prophet wrote to a people being oppressed by the kings who had conquered them. The prospect of safety and a righteous king would have been a welcome message. The good news for us is that this message promising peace and a wise and just ruler is true under the ultimate Righteous King that Jeremiah prophesied about: Jesus. No earthly kings or rulers, in all of their sinful frailty, can ultimately take that promise of peace and safety we find in Jesus away from us.

Read **Jeremiah 23:3–6** and ponder it using the **5P** method of Bible study. This title, **5P Method**, is simply a way to help you remember this Bible study technique so you can use it to learn from other passages later.

PURPOSE

Why do you think the author wrote this? Why is it important enough to be in the Bible?

PRIMARY VERSE
Which verse seems to contain the most important thought in the passage? Which one stands out most to you? Write it out.
PROMISES Make a list of any promises you find in this passage.
PROBLEMS If you find anything you don't understand—even if it's just a word—write it down as a question. Then ask someone for the answer or look it up yourself.
PRACTICAL APPLICATION What do you need to change or work on so that what you have read is real in your life? Be specific—your application should tell who, what, and when.

DAY THREE YOUR FIRST CHRISTMAS

You have probably heard the carol "The First Noel" many, many times. Perhaps so many that you no longer pay attention to the words anymore. In today's activity, you will listen to it one more time, but with an ear to hearing it as if you were the storyteller.

Find a version you like online and listen to it verse by verse. Then, go back over each verse and the chorus and rewrite it in modern language, as if the story was happening to you. (We've rewritten verse one as an example.)



A few nights ago, I was in a field watching the sheep with a bunch of other shepherds when an angel appeared and started talking to us!

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

What was it like to try to place yourself into the story?
What portion of the story struck you the most as you rewrote it?
How did imagining yourself there change the way you felt about the statement made in the chorus ("born is the King of Israel")?
As you retold the story of the first Christmas, did it shift how you perceive Jesus and his kingship? How so?

DAY FOUR OVERJOYED



In Matthew 2, we learn about a group of scholars who, through a combination of scientific and religious studies, developed the remarkable theory that a new king was to be born in Israel. They were so convinced that they traveled an incredible distance to find him and were surprised when the locals knew nothing of this coming king.

Imagine their delight when they found their theory to not only be true, but of a far greater magnitude than they had expected. The king that their studies predicted was, in fact, the King of kings! God cared so much about spreading the word about Jesus that he led these scholars on a journey to discover the King of the universe.

"...the gospel is not about choosing to follow advice, it's about being called to follow a King. Not just someone with the power and authority to tell you what needs to be done but someone with the power and authority to do what needs to be done, and then to offer it to you as good news."

Timothy Keller¹

READ MATTHEW 2:1-12, THEN ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

Have you ever made an important discovery, either about yourself or the world around you? What did that feel like?
Why do you think Matthew included this story in his gospel?
The Christmas story features a diverse cast of characters, including shepherds, angels, wise men, etc. Who do you identify with the most? Why?
How does thinking of Jesus as your King change the way you experience the Christmas season?

DAY FIVE KING OF ALL



Most of us have no real-world experience of living under a king. Politically speaking, those days are in the past for most of the world. It's hard to imagine submitting to one person just because they happen to be a king. Yet as Christ-followers, we are called to submit to our King. Unlike in Medieval times, however, our King gives us a choice as to whether or not we will submit to his authority and ways.

The Bible shows us how to live a life submitted to Jesus' reign. Today, let's start by looking at Jesus' greatest command, given to us in Matthew 22:

"And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment."

Matthew 22:37 38 (ESV)

Take some time today to imagine what it would look like to submit your heart, soul, and mind to King Jesus. Write down three tangible ways that you could live under Jesus' authority in each of these areas. For example, you could choose to set aside time to pray every day until Christmas or create new space for Jesus in your mind by fasting from social media after dinner for a week.

Choose one bullet point from each category to do between now and Christmas. Better yet, do all nine! Find an accountability buddy, share your plan with them, and ask them to both pray for you and check in with you on a weekly basis to see how it's going.

HEART			
SOUL			
MIND			

DAY SIX OUT OF THIS WORLD



After listening to a lot of Christmas carols and being steeped in the sentiment of the season for too long, we can be tempted to think of baby Jesus as cute and sweet and manageable. This passage in John helps remind us that even though Jesus came as a vulnerable baby, he didn't stay that way. He was always much greater and more powerful than we could ever imagine. While Pilate tried to put Jesus in a tidy box that he could understand (political king of the Jewish people), Jesus refuted him by saying that he reigns over something much bigger than the world. We can all be guilty of limiting Jesus to the ideas we have about him, but he is so much greater than we can ever imagine this side of heaven.

Study **John 18:33–38** using the **OPA** method for Bible study. Helpful tip: the more effort you put in to making observations, the easier it will be to see principles and applications.

OBSERVATION:
Compile all the facts found in these passages. Try to make 10–15 observations about what you read.
DDINCIDI EC.
PRINCIPLES: Draw a few principles from the observations you made. What is God trying to
teach you in this passage?
APPLICATION:
How will you apply these principles to your life? Be specific—a good application will tell who, what, and when.

FAMILY DAY CHOOSING THE PERFECT GIFT

The wise men presented Jesus with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The song "We Three Kings" puts those into three categories: Gold to signify Jesus' kingship, frankincense to highlight Jesus' deity, and myrrh to foreshadow Jesus' role as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. Their gifts were specific to who Jesus was and had great significance beyond their monetary value.

HOW TO GET YOUR FAMILY INVOLVED:

Invite your family to spend 15–20 minutes imagining what it would be like to give gifts with significant meaning to each other. You'll need some paper and pens.

"The Son of God became a man to enable men to become the sons of God." C.S. Lewis²

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Play "We Three Kings" (or even better, sing it all together!)
 and draw attention to the significance of each of the three
 gifts. You can find the lyrics in the Appendix on page 64.
- Have everyone list out the names of each family member on a piece of paper.
- Under each name, write three traits that you love about that person. Try to go beyond outward or surface-level characteristics.
- Now, imagine the best possible gift you could give each
 person based on that trait if money and logistics were no issue. For example, if you love that your Dad is a history buff,
 you could give him a time-traveling opportunity to watch
 Abraham Lincoln give the Gettysburg Address. Let your
 imagination run wild!
- Spend a few minutes sharing the gifts you'd like to give each other.

KEEP GOING!

Check out these devotional journals made just for you:

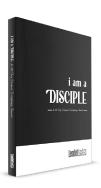
Go to leadertreks.org for more info.



I AM NEW



I AM A WORSHIPER



I AM A DISCIPLE



I AM A LEADER

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FOLLOW THE STAR.

Over two thousand years ago, there were only a handful of people gathered on the night Jesus was born. Even though a nation of people had been waiting and longing for that very moment, almost everyone on the planet missed the event. There were no Christmas advertisements, no endless carols on the radio, no countdowns to signify that the first Christmas was about to arrive. The only indicator pointing the way to the child Jesus was a wondrous star.

This Advent journal is designed to help you explore the greatest Christmas gift ever and to prepare your heart to receive Jesus your King, God, and Sacrifice.

Star of Wonder contains:

- Devotions that bring the nativity story to life
- Interactive Christmas carol experiences
- Bible studies focusing on why Christ came at Christmas
- Family Activities to help students share their experience with loved ones



