



T H E C O S T
CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL

Welcome to The Cost Christmas Devotional

Join us on this devotional journey as we reflect upon the cost involved in God's bringing us salvation. Each day centers on a Biblical character from the Christmas story and includes a Scripture reading, a reflection paragraph, and two application questions. The first question is geared towards both children and adults, while the second question more deeply challenges our obedience and faith. After answering the questions, spend time in prayer. We encourage you to carve out time daily as an individual or as a family to reflect on Jesus during this Advent season. This devotional can also be inspirational as you prayerfully consider your participation in The Cost.

The Cost of Disobedience: Adam and Eve

Read: Genesis 3:1-8

The Christmas story begins in Genesis. Adam and Eve's colossal failure to obey God set the whole creation under the rule of sin. But God was not surprised by their disobedience. God had known long before He spoke the world into existence that they would eat the forbidden fruit and fracture their relationship with Him, leaving all humanity trapped in the same broken relationship with God. And so, God enacted His sovereign plan to undo the consequences of Adam's choice by sending His Son. The plan required the participation of many people over the course of thousands of years, but God was faithful to orchestrate the circumstances to prepare the way for Jesus to enter human history, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

Have you ever realized you are a sinner in need of God's salvation?
How?

How can your faith grow stronger by realizing that God was able to enact His plan of salvation over thousands of years through numerous people?

The Cost of Faithfulness: Abraham

Read: Genesis 12:1-4; Matthew 1:1

Thousands of years before Jesus was born, God chose a man named Abraham to participate in His plan to resolve what Adam and Eve had done. Although they had passed on sin to all generations of humanity, God reversed the effects of sin by working through grace – His undeserved favor. Abraham, though he had done nothing to earn it, was given a promise of extraordinary blessing. He would be the great-great-great-great-grandfather of the Savior of the world: Jesus. But God's blessing would also come at a great cost to Abraham. He had to leave his familiar and comfortable surroundings and, under God's direction, relocate his family to an unknown place. Abraham had to face many challenges and sufferings throughout his lifetime; still, he chose to step out in radical faith, trusting that God would accomplish what He had promised.

What is the most difficult circumstance you have faced because you followed God?

How willing are you to serve God faithfully when circumstances get difficult?

The Cost of Becoming Flesh: Jesus

Read: John 1:1, 14

“In the beginning was the Word...” and this Word was Jesus Himself. Jesus has always been God. There was never a time when He was not. John then proclaims the most profound statement ever written, “The Word became flesh.” In order for God to bring us into right relationship with Himself – in order for us to know God and be acceptable to Him - He had to send His Son. Jesus was not simply God with skin; He was as human as you or me and remained fully God. This coming of God in the flesh cost many people many things, but no one paid the cost as much as Jesus did. It cost Him His very life.

Do you feel gratitude that Jesus became flesh in order for us to know God and be acceptable to Him? Does your life show this?

What can you specifically do today to be like Jesus so that others see Him in you?

The Cost of Comfort: Jesus

Read: John 17:5; Revelation 5:11-14

Streets paved in gold, a world without sin, an existence without pain, continuous worship and adoration, and unquestioned authority - this is what Jesus enjoyed in heaven. The transition from the glory of heaven to the filth of a manger and the vulnerability of a human body was indeed radical. Yet, He chose to leave his perfect home because He understood the Father's plan to bring sinful people back into relationship with God. Jesus stepped into the cesspool of human disobedience and suffering in order to offer hope and healing to a hurting world. He lived faultlessly in constant fellowship with the Father despite the fact that He dwelt among sinners. He embraced the cost because He loves us passionately, and we are worth more to Him than His heavenly comfort.

What do you think Jesus was thinking as He left heaven for Earth?

Like Christ, how can you live in deep fellowship with the Father while engaging the worst of sinners?

The Cost of Doubt: Zechariah

Read: Luke 1:5-20

Zechariah was working in the Temple doing religious activities. God showed up in the middle of his work and announced through an angel that He had a new purpose for Zechariah. God wanted Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth to give birth to a child who would become John the Baptist. John the Baptist was going to get the world ready to hear the message that Jesus would bring. When Zechariah heard this news from the angel, he couldn't believe it. He thought that he and his wife were too old for God to use them to bring a baby into the world. This unbelief cost Zechariah his ability to talk for nine months because he didn't trust God's ability to do what He said He could do. What a day it must have been when John was born and Zechariah could tell others the good news!

Do you ever doubt that God can use you? Why?

Are you ever so involved in religious activity that you miss God's deeper purpose for your life? How can you not miss those moments?

The Cost of Waiting: Elizabeth

Read: Luke 1:24-25

Why is waiting so hard? In our Bible passage today, Elizabeth learns she is expecting a child she thought she would never have. Her response? She spent five months in seclusion praising God. She waited with joyful gratitude because she knew God had a wonderful plan for her. People in Biblical times often viewed the inability to have children as an indication that the couple did not have God's favor. Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah were faithful servants of the Lord, so they must have grieved when others viewed their childlessness as a curse. Elizabeth faithfully waited, and then, she praised God for taking away her disgrace among the people.

How is waiting part of God's plan?

How can you glorify God in your waiting when you are anticipating joyful events? How about events that may bring sorrow?

The Cost of Dignity: Mary

Read: Luke 1:26-38

Good Jewish girls were to behave a certain way. Can you imagine the glances and gossip the young, unwed girl generated? Neighborhood women, as they cackled and rolled their eyes, whispered behind her back, “She says the father is God.” But Mary knew the angel had spoken. She believed what he had told her, and she was beginning to feel the results stir in her belly. God was faithful despite the public loss of her dignity. And soon, Jesus the King of Glory and Savior of the world, would emerge from her womb. Their laughs did not shake her, for her dignity and the grace to handle their mocking came from her identity in God.

Have you ever been mocked or scorned because you follow Jesus?

How can you live your life so that you put Christ on display, even if it costs your dignity?

The Cost of Welcoming: Elizabeth

Read: Luke 1:39-45, 56

When Mary entered Elizabeth's home and greeted her, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped with joy. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and blessed Mary and the baby she was carrying. She also affirmed her young cousin for believing God and having faith that His plan would be accomplished through her despite the strange circumstances. Elizabeth knew that welcoming a young, unwed pregnant mother into her home could raise some eyebrows in the neighborhood. Despite that cost to Elizabeth, she spent three wonderful months together with Mary. Each woman was unexpectedly expectant. Elizabeth had the chance to serve and encourage the mother of the promised Messiah, and Mary found someone who knew that her baby was from God. Instead of being cast out because she was unmarried and pregnant, Mary was welcomed and treasured.

How can you be kind and welcoming to someone today?

How do we view unexpected visitors or callers? Are some of the interruptions in your day really divine appointments?

The Cost of Fame: John the Baptist

Read: Mark 1:1-8

Elizabeth finally had her promised child. As this cousin of Jesus grew, he became known as “the Baptizer.” John attracted huge crowds with his preaching and his call for repentance. He was definitely on the short list of well-known religious leaders, yet he understood his God-given role. He wasn’t to be the star or center of attention, Jesus was. John was preparing the way for the coming King. And so, he came as a servant decreasing his own prestige and fame in order that Jesus’ name may increase. It not only cost John his superstar status but ultimately his very life. Indeed, John possessed an exceptional humility to make Jesus known.

How tempting is it to desire to be famous?

What are you doing to make Jesus famous in your school, workplace or around the world?

The Cost of Humility: Mary

Read: Luke 1:46-55

Mary could have easily become arrogant. After all, she was carrying the Son of God. The hope of the world grew within her womb, but Mary never demanded to be waited on, served or pampered. Instead, she glorified God and sang a song of praise for what He was going to do for the world through her. God chose Mary because of her humility, and she remained God's humble vessel. She delighted in her privilege to be the mother of Jesus, which inspired an attitude of thankful praise towards God. It was in this humility that God honored her life, making her name known to the generations that followed.

Do you ever take pride in something which, in actuality, was accomplished by God?

What can you do to remain humble when God dramatically uses your life for His glory?

The Cost of Reputation: Joseph

Read: Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph and Mary were engaged to be married when they discovered she was pregnant. Joseph knew this was not his baby. Imagine what the neighbors were thinking about him as well as Mary! Joseph was a righteous man and had good standing in the community. He had done no wrong in this situation, yet he did not want public shame to come to Mary. What was he to do? Because he loved Mary so much, he considered breaking off the engagement, but an angel told Joseph in a dream not to be afraid. He was to take Mary home as his wife because she was carrying Jesus, who would save the people from their sin. All of this surely caused Joseph to doubt. Who would believe this story? Even though Joseph knew it could cost him his reputation, he did as the angel commanded because he trusted in God's plan. He overcame his fear and followed God.

Have you ever been afraid to do what is right because of what others might think of you? How did you overcome it?

Do you let fear or faith aid you in making decisions, big and small?

The Cost of Ignorance: Caesar Augustus

Read: Luke 1:46-55

Caesar ruled over the most powerful empire on the planet, giving orders to be carried out without question. Yet, God was more powerful than any earthly ruler. Caesar's order for a census served to fulfill a promise given by God thousands of years before—Christ would be born in Bethlehem. God used the declaration of a census by Caesar to get Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Caesar's decree was directed by the hand of God; yet, Caesar remained ignorant of the fact that God was utilizing him as an earthly accomplisher of a divine purpose. How sad it must have been for Caesar to have missed the fact that God was using his census decree to bring salvation to the world.

How often do you fail to see God's purposes accomplished through your life?

What can you do to be more sensitive towards God's work around you?

The Cost of Convenience: Innkeeper

Read: Luke 2:7

No vacancy. The sign out front stated it clearly, and the innkeeper didn't budge. He didn't outright reject Mary's need as he pointed her to a stable out back. How would the simple phrase, "I'll make room for you," have changed the innkeeper's life? He would have had the privilege of hosting the Savior of the world. The innkeeper did not find room because he didn't see the importance. Are we any different? As believers, we host God within our hearts, but we can all be the innkeeper at times, pushing our own agendas. We always find room in our lives for what we want and feel is important. At Christmas, we make a place for parties, shopping, family and friends. Surely as believers we don't completely forget Christ, but too often, we make a place for Jesus when it is convenient instead of allowing Him to live at the center of our hearts.

What distracts you from Jesus during Christmas?

How can you make sure you are creating room for Christ to dwell in your heart this season?

The Cost of Fear: Shepherds & Angels

Read: Luke 2: 8-14

On a sleepy night in the rural countryside, the shepherds were working their regular shift on the hillside. There was nothing extraordinary about this night; they had seen nights like this hundreds of times before, as the city of Bethlehem glimmered alongside the stars in the distance. In an instant, everything changed. An inexplicable light burst through the sky, and the shepherds were terrified. While they cowered and shook, the angel spoke words of comfort and celebration, “A Savior is born and lying in a manger.” The skies instantly erupted with joyful praise from the heavenly creatures. The angels’ message of God’s greatest promise transformed the shepherds’ terror into awesome celebration. What a privilege for lowly shepherds to receive this incredible news! We, too, can turn our fear into celebration and share in their joy as we spread the good news about Christ.

What fear is keeping you from sharing the good news of Jesus Christ? Who can you share with?

How can you learn to respond to God without having to see bright lights and heavenly hosts?

The Cost of an Immediate Response: Shepherds

Read: Luke 2:15-20

When the shepherds heard the news of Jesus' birth, the Bible says they "hurried" to worship Him. They instantly obeyed as they left their flocks on the hillside to seek after the newborn King. God rewarded the shepherd's immediate obedience by allowing these poor peasants the honor of being the first guests to see Jesus. What a blessing it must have been! No other diplomats or royalty were present, only the lowest of the low praising their Savior, amidst the mooing of cows and the bleating of sheep. God continued to bless the shepherds' obedience letting them be the first gospel sharers; all who heard their story were amazed.

What is God calling you to do that you are resistant to immediately obey?

Are you obeying God to the degree that others are amazed at how He is using your life?

The Cost of Waiting: Simeon

Read: Luke 2:25-32

Simeon was God's devoted servant. Today's Bible verses call him "righteous and devout" and imply he had waited a long time for the Messiah to bring peace to Israel. Because of his obedience, God gave him an amazing reward: Spirit-filled vision that allowed him to see the coming salvation of his people. Each day, he rolled out of bed wondering, "Will this be the day when I see Messiah?" When he finally saw the baby Jesus brought to the temple by Mary and Joseph, Simeon knew that he was seeing the fulfillment of the promise God had made to him. He lifted Jesus in his arms and praised God in the middle of the temple courts. The blessing of seeing Jesus cost Simeon his time. Day after day, he worshiped and waited on God in the Temple. When we faithfully use our time to seek the Lord through Bible study and prayer, we too can have Spirit-filled vision to see God's hand at work around us.

How much time do you spend waiting and watching for God and His activity?

What spiritual disciplines do you need to develop in order to wait on God?

The Cost of Consistent Prayer: Anna

Read: Luke 2:36-38

Anna's husband died after only seven years of marriage. As a young widow, she chose to spend the rest of her days worshiping in the temple. For approximately 60 years, she praised God "night and day" with prayer and fasting. Such devotion cost Anna a lot of time and energy. She put aside her physical need sleep and for food in order to devote herself to God. By the time she was an old woman, Anna was known as a prophetess, someone inspired by God to foretell the future. One day, she saw Simeon blessing Mary, Joseph and the newborn Jesus in the temple, and God's promise hits her like a bolt of lightning. She walked to the little family and thanked God. Then, she went to tell others that God's promised One had arrived.

How consistently do you pray?

How has God used difficult circumstances to make you seek Him more deeply through prayer?

The Cost of Culture: Rahab

Read: Matthew 1:1, 5

Rahab was Jesus' great-great-great-grandmother. Her life was colored with sin and rejection, but Rahab came to recognize the One True God. She lived in Jericho during the time that the Hebrews left slavery in Egypt. When Joshua sent two spies into the Promised Land, she hid them from their enemies; then, provided their escape by lowering them out of the city in a basket (Joshua 2 & 6). Because of her faith, this woman of ill repute was spared when Jericho fell. She escaped destruction, but it cost Rahab her city and even her culture. She joined up with God's people and began to live in faith. Little did she know her willingness to leave her city and culture would place her in the family tree of the future Savior of the world.

Do you ever wonder if you are beyond God's use because of the choices you have made?

If you could see the long-term effects, how would you be more obedient to God and less yielding to culture?

The Cost of Worship: Wise Men

Read: Matthew 2:1-10

This was not your ordinary trip, only mile after mile of sand and desert for days on end, months on end, as they followed a star to the middle of nowhere. They didn't know where they were going, but they knew whom they were seeking. Scripture records the words of the Magi: "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." They knew that this was no ordinary king, but one with a divine nature—born a king and worthy of worship. God revealed a bit of Himself to the hearts of these pagan wise men, and they responded. The long dusty miles, the thirst, the heat and the homesickness were brushed aside, and though it cost them several years of their lives, the journey to worship Jesus was worth any inconvenience.

Think of trips you have taken. Which was the worst and why? Which was your favorite and why?

How much inconvenience are you willing to endure in order to worship Jesus?

The Cost of Value: Wise Men

Read: Matthew 2:11-12

The wise men brought the most valuable gifts that could be found in the ancient world and gave them to a toddler, a two-year-old Savior. These gifts were not toys or trinkets but costly and symbolic gifts that foreshadowed Jesus' purpose for dwelling among us. The gold, an appropriate gift to offer to the King of kings, symbolized royalty. Frankincense was burned as incense, and the rising smoke symbolized the people's prayers going before God. This was the perfect gift for Jesus our High Priest, who will for all time represent us and intercede for us before the Father. Myrrh was wrapped in the burial clothes of the dead as an embalming process. This gift foretold Jesus' dying for the forgiveness of our sins. The wise men gave these expensive gifts without hesitation, for they understood the incomparable worth of Jesus.

Are you ever greedy with your stuff?

How can you leverage your resources to honor Jesus and make known His Kingdom?

The Cost of Jealousy: Herod

Read: Matthew 2:1-6, 16

Herod craved power. He had carefully negotiated his way to his current position and he guarded his crown jealously, refusing to share his authority or rule with anyone. The stakes were high in the cut throat politics of that day. When the Magi told him about the birth of the King of the Jews, Herod panicked. No one, not even a baby, would be allowed to threaten his reign. And so, Herod enacted his cruel plan to eliminate the competition. With one brutal mandate, he ordered his soldiers to kill every male child under the age of two in the region of Bethlehem. How often do we act as Herod did? When our own selfish wills are threatened, we kill the Kingship of Christ in our hearts by ignoring what He tells us to do and who to be. Like Herod, we clutch our crowns, dig in our heels, and refuse to relinquish authority.

Do you like to be the boss and call the shots? When is this not healthy?

What can you do today to yield to the Kingship of Jesus Christ in your heart, attitude and actions?

The Cost of Familiarity: Joseph

Read: Matthew 2:13-15

The visitors were gone, and things had settled down for Mary and Joseph. Would life become peaceful? Not when your child is the King of kings. The current king, Herod, sought to have the potential competition to his rule removed, and the toddler Jesus was in danger of being killed. God brought a message to Joseph: “Head to Egypt.” Joseph had learned to trust God, and he again obeyed. It was a costly decision. He would have to leave behind his extended family and his culture for a strange and distant land. Joseph left all that was familiar for the unfamiliar adventure of following God. Through the challenges of living in a new location and learning new customs, Joseph learned more about the character of God and fulfilled the ancient promises of God to deliver His people.

If God called you to move, what would be the hardest thing about leaving your home and moving to a new place?

What geographical barriers have you placed on your Kingdom usefulness by being unwilling to follow God wherever He leads?

The Cost of Relocating: Joseph

Read: Matthew 2:19-23

You would think returning a place you had considered “home” would be grand. But Herod’s son, Archelaus, was now in power and, like his father, might fear Jesus as a rival and seek to kill him. Because of this, Joseph and his family couldn’t leave Egypt and return to Bethlehem. Instead, God told Joseph to take his family back to Joseph’s original hometown, Nazareth. Would his job skills as a stone mason be needed there? Would they find a community of friends and be received back despite all that had happened? After being gone for so many years, would Nazareth still feel like home? But those worries didn’t stop Joseph from believing God and stepping out in obedience. He knew God had been faithful to them while they lived in Egypt. Surely God would continue to care for them in Nazareth, so Joseph stepped out in faith and obedience once again.

Are you willing to follow God no matter how uncomfortable it makes you? Even if it required you to relocate?

How has God’s faithfulness to you in the past helped you to be obedient in the present?

The Cost of Forgiveness: Jesus

Read: Philippians 2:5-11

The shadow of the cross loomed large over the manger. This baby was wrapped in burial cloths. From His first breath, Jesus came to Earth for one purpose: to reconcile us to God. His entire life was centered on this mission. He lived righteously for us. Not only did He not do anything wrong (sin), but He also did all that was required to fulfill the Law as given in the Old Testament. He never used His Godhood for selfish gain but constantly gave of Himself. He died for us though He did not deserve to die, giving of Himself in the ultimate manner upon the timbers of forgiveness. His perfection lived out from that first day in the manger was pinioned to a cross so you and I could be in a right relationship with God.

Have you ever given your life to Christ? When?

How can you remember the death, burial and resurrection of Christ during this Christmas season?

Jesus is Born

Read: Isaiah 7:14; Luke 2:1-7

Today is the day Jesus is born! God has given us His Son to bring hope and forgiveness. Thousands of years before His birth, prophets proclaimed this day would come. A virgin would bring forth a child who would be called Immanuel. The name Immanuel means, “God with us.” Today, we celebrate a long-awaited fulfillment of the prophecy. God is with us!

We praise and adore You, Lord God, because throughout the ages, You were faithful to bring Your plan of redemption to completion. Thank You, God, that You are with us in Jesus Christ. This day is truly merry because of Your great love. In Jesus' name.

Amen

Tell about your experience of the joy of Christmas. What are you thankful for today?



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