



# TRUE & BETTER

HOW JESUS IS THE HOPE OF THE BIBLE  
AND THE HOPE OF THE WHOLE WORLD



2017 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

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## INTRODUCTION



Christmas is a time of year that Christians become particularly interested in the Old Testament. To be sure, this is fitting. Before the coming of Christ, the people of God had only their Old Testaments. Before the coming of Christ, the people of God had only these grand promises—promises spectacular, yet still unfulfilled. The Old Testament, though God-breathed, was certainly incomplete, full of promises yet to be realized. But as soon as we turn the page to the New Testament, as we see Jesus Christ burst onto the scene, we begin to see the various strands of the Old Testament come together. Promise by promise, God begins to fulfill them all in one single individual.

As Jesus bursts onto the scene and proclaims John 5:39—“*You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me*”—he is inviting us to re-read our Old Testaments in light of him. As the crucified and resurrected Jesus gives his disciples a Bible-reading lesson in Luke 24:27—“*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself*”—he is inviting us, along with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, to re-examine our Old Testaments in light of him. Jesus is inviting us to see how, in the “definite plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23), the Old Testament is intentionally comprised of persons, events, and institutions that purposely prefigure the ultimate plans of redemption that will come in the person and work of Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup>. Now that he is fully and finally here, Jesus is inviting us to see him foreshadowed and foretold on every page of the Old Testament.

So it makes perfect sense that Christians reacquaint themselves afresh with their Old Testaments every Christmas. It makes sense that we would rehearse the many promises made, so that they would be all the more clear when we realize that every promise made in the Old Testament becomes a promise kept in the form of a baby, born in a manger with the hope of the whole world on his shoulders. It makes sense that we would re-tell ourselves all the old, various stories, so that we might be rightly swept up in the great big story of Jesus Christ. As Sally Lloyd-Jones says in her introduction to *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, “There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one Big Story. The Story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them. It takes the whole Bible to tell this Story. And at the center of the Story, there is a baby. Every Story in

the Bible whispers his name. He is like the missing piece in a puzzle—the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together, and suddenly, you can see a beautiful picture.”<sup>2</sup>

This Advent, we invite you to take up your Old Testament with us in order to see Jesus, the true and better fulfillment of every picture of redemption we see in our Bibles. We invite you to see Jesus as that missing puzzle piece of the Old Testament, and to see how he fits into every story, every scene, and every great and precious promise of the most magnificent book in creation. We’ll look at individuals, from Adam to Ezra; we’ll look at institutions, from the Passover to the priesthood; and we’ll see how every one of them is but a pointer to Jesus, the true and better fulfillment of all of the promises of God.

A special thanks is due to pastor and author Timothy Keller, whose brief snippet from a 2007 sermon is the impetus for this year’s devotional. In addition, we credit pastor Rich Lusk for his similar work on Jesus as the typological fulfillment of the Old Testament.



1. *Graham Cole, He Who Gives Life (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 289.*
2. *Sally Lloyd-Jones, The Jesus Storybook Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 17.*

## Jesus is the true and better Adam.

It's not often that we're drawn to the "begats" of the Bible, but Christmas is one of those times, isn't it? Indeed, the New Testament opens with a well-known and carefully arranged genealogy, ending with the birth of the Messiah: "...and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, *who is called Christ*" (Matt. 1:16).

But there is another family tree in the Gospels, lesser known but no less important. Whereas Matthew's genealogy runs down through the years, from Abraham to Jesus, Luke's races upwards and backwards through the generations. Indeed, it reaches past David, past the patriarchs, all the way back to Adam himself. "...the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, the son of Enos, the son of Seth, *the son of Adam, the son of God*" (Luke 3:37–38).

So, what's the significance of another genealogy, but this time in reverse? Well, the genealogy in Luke's Gospel is not simply to establish that Jesus is a real man. That is true, of course. But Luke is seeking to demonstrate something more profound—not simply that Jesus is a real man, but that Jesus is the Last Man—the true and better Adam.

You see, Adam was made not for Adam but for God. Adam was created to glorify his Creator, to reflect the God in whose image he was made. But Adam's legacy is tragically otherwise. What we remember about Adam is not his faithfulness but his fallenness. After all, his "one trespass led to condemnation for all men" (Romans 5:18).

Adam's fallenness highlights that what we need—what the world needs—is not a trespasser but an "obey-er". And that lands us right back at Luke's genealogy and, connected with that, what follows his genealogy: "And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry" (Luke 4:1–2).

Notice the connection. Luke's genealogy ends at Adam, the son (or image bearer) of God. That's Jesus' bloodline. That's his lineage. But from there paths radically and gloriously diverge. Whereas the first man was placed into a garden paradise and fell to temptation, the "Second Man"

(1 Corinthians 15:47) was placed into a barren wilderness and triumphed over temptation. Whereas the first man ate from the forbidden tree to satisfy his own desires, the Second Man died on a cursed tree to satisfy God's wrath toward us. Whereas the first man failed to rule and subdue the earth, the Second Man is now raised and exalted as God's King and is bringing all of creation under his sovereign Lordship (1 Corinthians 15:27). Simply put, whereas the first Adam brought death into the world, the Second Man brought life for all who believe (Romans 15:18).

So, this Advent season, let's do what often sing:

*Come behold the wondrous mystery, he the perfect Son of Man  
In his living, in his suffering, never trace nor stain of sin  
See the true and better Adam, come to save the hell-bound man  
Christ the great and sure fulfillment of the law, in him we stand.*  
(“Come Behold the Wondrous Mystery” by Matt Boswell)

Jesus is the true and better Adam, and because of that, well, everything is better.

## Jesus is the true and better Abel.

After the disastrous fall of Adam and Eve into sin in Genesis 3, you can't help looking for some hope in Genesis 4. After all, God did promise the serpent that one of Eve's offspring would crush the head of the evil one (Gen. 3:15). And so Genesis 4 begins with the birth of two boys, Cain and Abel. Perhaps one of these boys will be the one to crush the serpent and reverse the curse.

Their story is brief but tragic. Abel is a shepherd and Cain a farmer. In due time they bring an offering before the Lord. Cain brings an offering from his crops, and Abel brings one of his firstborn lambs. The Lord looks favorably upon the offering of Abel, but has no regard for Cain's offering. Cain is at a turning point. He is exceedingly angry, and the Lord warns him that sin is ready to pounce and take him (Gen. 4:7). He must rule over sin and wage war against it.

Instead, Cain acts in retaliation against his brother. "Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him" (Gen. 4:8). Just as the Lord came to Adam and Eve a chapter earlier, He comes to Cain. He gives Cain an opportunity to confess his sin, but Cain responds in cold indifference: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9).

But God knows that innocent life has been taken. The blood of Abel cries out to the Lord from the ground (Gen. 4:10). The blood of Abel cries for justice to be served, for wrongs to be put right, for judgment to come upon the guilty. And so Cain is cursed as his father and mother were, cursed to struggle and toil at the ground, to be a fugitive and wanderer on the earth (Gen. 4:12).

Death and sin entered our world at the Fall, and Abel is victim number one, the first person to taste death's sting, to suffer violence at the hand of another. But he is merely the first in a long line of innocent sufferers. From Abel in Genesis 4 to the saints in Revelation 6:9-10, the blood of the innocent calls out to God for justice against their oppressors.

But there is one innocent sufferer whose blood calls for a different kind of justice. Jesus is the true and better Abel, whose blood calls out from the ground, and calls out to his Father for justice. But the justice it calls for is not condemnation on his accusers, not judgment and torment for his enemies. Jesus' blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Heb. 12:24). It cries out with Jesus from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). And because Jesus is the true and greater Abel, his blood still speaks not only of his innocence, but of our acquittal before the judgment seat of God. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

## Jesus is the true and better Noah.

Our cultural images of Christmas often clash with what we know of the real thing. The story of Christmas is not well portrayed in shopping sprees or decorative lights or warming oneself by the fire. Those things are enjoyable and not inherently wrong, but it is true that the actual story of Christ's birth is far messier and scary. After all, alongside the visit of the wise men you have the massacre of the Bethlehem babies. Mary sings, yes, but she also must consider what Simeon means when he says that "sword will pierce through your own soul also" (Luke 2:35). Jesus will grow up in Nazareth, but not before his parents seek asylum in Egypt.

None of this is surprising for those who take seriously the point of Jesus' birth: She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, *for he will save his people from their sins*" (Matthew 1:21). Not education. Not reformation. Salvation.

The same sentimentality can invade the story of Noah and ark. It's (rightly) a favorite Bible story for our children; it's often (wrongly) stripped of its horror and tragedy. When we tell it to our kids, we focus on the different kinds of animals or how they how they got there or how bad that ark must have smelled! Interesting, of course, but hardly the point of the story. If we want to understand Genesis 6-9, we have to go to the beginning and the reason for it all: "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5).

The Bible then tells us two critically important details. One, the Lord was grieved by the rebellion of men—hence, the flood by which the world was destroyed. And, two, Noah found favor in the eyes of God—hence, the ark by which Noah and his family were saved. In other words, the real story of Noah and the flood that allows for no sentimentality. God is a holy God who judges rightly, and God is merciful God who saves powerfully.

How much more amazing is the mercy we have found in Jesus Christ? What we deserve is the flood of God's wrath. That's our birthright (Ephesians 2:1); those are our wages (Rom. 6:23). But we have been delivered from the wrath that is to come (1 Thess. 1:10). By His grace, Christ descended into the self-wrought chaos of our lives and assumed the judgment we so richly deserve. Jesus is the true and better Noah, by whose righteousness we can now find favor in the sight of the LORD (Gen. 6:8). Now, like Noah's family, we too can safely come aboard.

## Jesus is the true and better Abraham.

*Father Abraham had many sons,  
and many sons had father Abraham.  
I am one of them. And so are you.  
So let's all praise the Lord!*

“In hope he believed against hope.” That’s the way Paul describes the faith of Abraham in Romans 4:18. That seems odd until you remember the story of Abraham. Abraham had risked everything on God’s promises. He had left home and kindred and possessions, believing that God would do what He said He would do. And the linchpin of all those promises recorded in Genesis 12 was God’s pledge of a son.

We first meet Abraham in Genesis 12, when God calls him and makes a grand promise to him. God promises Abraham that he will make a great nation out of him, that he will bless Abraham and make his name great, and that through Abraham all the nations of the earth will be blessed. At the crux of this promise is that Abraham would become a father. Though for virtually all of his life, this was not true for Abraham. For almost all of his life, father Abraham was not a father at all. So Abraham, like mother Mary long after him, treasured up this beloved promise, pondering it in his heart (Luke 2:19).

But time presses on and Abraham continues childless. A few chapters later, we get a glimpse into Abraham’s prayer life in Genesis 15. Abraham has believed God, he has banked everything on this promise that God had made to him. But Abraham cries out to God, “I continue childless” (Gen. 15:2). The key component of the promise—a son—had still been withheld. No doubt, Abraham feared. Even before the promises were ever made, we are told that Sarah was barren. No doubt this crept into his mind. But as the years continued to pass Sarah and Abraham began to consider the prospect of a child laughable, like a biological impossibility. But God directs Abraham’s gaze upward. He tells him to look at the stars in the night sky, and to try his best to count them. Then God says, “So shall your offspring be.” And so they clung to hope. Abraham believed that God would bring about a resurrection—a son from a barren womb—and fulfill His promise to make him the “father of many nations.” He was, the Bible says, “fully convinced” (Rom. 4:21).

A few chapters later, we get the long-awaited birth announcement—and

it's a boy! The Bible tells us that Abraham was a hundred years old when Isaac his son—the son of the promise, the line through whom the promises of Genesis 12 would be kept alive—was born (Gen. 21:5). And though one son may have seemed like a meager beginning, Isaac would have a son named Jacob. And Jacob, later named Israel, would have twelve sons that would turn into a mighty nation. Surely, Abraham's faith had not been in vain.

Yet as great as Abraham's faith was, there is One whose trust was even greater. There is one who left even more than Abraham—not just houses and lands and kindred, but heaven itself. There is One who, kneeling in dark Gethsemane, clung to belief in the face of despair. There is One who, even more than Abraham, trusted in resurrection in the face of death: “As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day” (Matt. 17:22–23).

And there is One in whom, like Abraham but infinitely more than Abraham, all the nations will be blessed. Jesus, the true and better Abraham, takes the promise made to Abraham and extends it worldwide. From a man (Abraham) comes a nation (Israel), through which comes a Savior (Jesus) by whom the nations are blessed with renewed access to God's presence.

Father Abraham had many sons. And many sons had father Abraham. Jesus, is one of them. Indeed, Jesus is the One that matters most, the one that makes the promise forever sure, the one that seals the promise with blood. Father Abraham had many sons. Jesus is one of them. And because Jesus is one of them, if your faith is in him, “so are you.” Because of Jesus' place in the line of Abraham, when Abraham looked up at the stars in Genesis 15, he saw us in those stars.

Father Abraham had many sons, and many sons had father Abraham. Jesus is one of them. And so are you. So let's all praise the Lord.

## Jesus is the true and better Isaac.

The first promise of the gospel in the whole Bible comes immediately after the Fall. The tears have not dried on Eve's face and the horror of the first sin has not left Adam's eyes when God says, with the very first words of comfort in the scriptures, that a seed shall be born of Eve (Genesis 3:15). This seed, the promised son, shall come and crush the head of the serpent. In many ways, the rest of the Old Testament unfolds in longing for this promised seed of Eve. Many promised sons arrive on the scene and fade away, revealing more of God's plan of redemption and pointing to the longed-for Savior, the one who really would crush the head of the serpent.

Isaac is one such promised son. And the life of Isaac as a son of promise is remarkably parallel to the life of Jesus, the truer and better Son of Promise. Consider: Isaac was born of Sarah, who was too old to bear a child. When the promise of Isaac was given, Sarah laughed to herself, and we must imagine her laugh as a bitter one. She was old and her hopes were careworn and fragile. She was worn out with age, longing, and the futility of life after Genesis 3. But, as the Scriptures tell us, the Lord was gracious to her. In her old age she bore a son—Isaac, whose name means laughter because he turned Sarah's bitter laugh into a laugh of joy.

So also Jesus was born of Mary, an impossibility according to nature. As Sarah was too old to bear a child, Mary was the opposite. As the birth of Isaac brought laughter and joy to his mother Sarah, so the birth of Jesus brought laughter and joy back into a world that was weighed down and worn out with the consequences of the fall and aching for redemption. The trembling, longing joy of the Advent season points us to this reality and helps hold us fast in hope for the return of the Son of Mary.

But Isaac lets us behold Jesus in more than his birth. Isaac was the delight of his father Abraham, the apple of his eye. Jesus was the one of whom the Father's voice testified from Heaven, "This is my Son, with whom I am well pleased!" (Matthew 17:5). Isaac was the son of his father, who carried the wood up the mountain for the sacrifice of worship (see Genesis 22). Jesus carried the wood of the cross up the mountain to be a sacrifice of worship. Isaac was bound by his father for the sacrifice. Jesus, too, was bound by his Father to the cross, but unlike Isaac, no ram was caught in the thicket to be his substitute. Jesus, the true and better Isaac, became the fulfillment of Abraham's testimony that "on the mount of the Lord it shall be provided" because he was himself God's provision on that very mount. He was at once Isaac and the ram, the Son and the sacrifice, the one who crushed the head of the serpent with a bruised heel. This Advent season, then, recall the coming of one truer and better than Isaac. Laugh with joy at his coming, and look with anticipation for his return.

## Jesus is the true and better Jacob.

From his very birth, Jacob was grasping at things that weren't normally given to the second-born son. Yes, he is a twin, but his brother Esau is technically the first-born. Still, Jacob comes out of the womb grasping at the Esau's heel, a picture of the coming struggle between the two brothers and the prophecy spoken by the Lord: "The older shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23-26).

This prophecy begins to come to life just a few verses later. After a day in the field, Esau sees Jacob with some stew and bread. Exhausted, he asks Jacob for some of the red stuff. But Jacob is shrewd, seeing his brother in great need, he sets the price of a bowl of measly stew high: it will cost Esau his birthright, his claim to a greater portion of his father's inheritance. In his desperation, Esau sells his birthright for some thin, lentil gruel (Gen. 25:29-34).

But Jacob's tricks did not stop at cunningly receiving Esau's birthright. His father Isaac is growing old and knows that he does not have long left on this earth. So he commands Esau to go out into the field, hunt some game, and prepare a meal. Once he has done this, Isaac will bless Esau. But Jacob and his mother, Rebekah, hatch a plan to deceive the old man. Rebekah prepares a meal, Jacob covers his smooth skin in goat's hair and puts on Esau's clothes to smell like his brother, and the ruse is ready. Isaac, old and blind, is tricked into blessing the younger brother, Jacob. The promise that God gave to Abraham and to Isaac before him is now placed upon Jacob's head and passed on through him instead of his brother (Gen. 27).

One last event in the life of Jacob highlights the stubborn determination that characterized him. In one of the more mysterious interactions in the Old Testament, a man wrestles with Jacob one night at the Jabbok River (Gen. 32:24). After the all-night wrestling match, the man simply touches Jacob's hip, putting it out of joint. But stubborn Jacob will not relent and demands a blessing before releasing the man. The man changes Jacob's name to Israel and departs. And as Jacob limps away, he recognizes that this was no random stranger. Jacob had wrestled with God, but his life was spared (Gen. 32:30-31).

After all of this trickery, this stubbornness and cunning, Jacob does not come off as much of a hero. And as we turn to the New Testament, Jesus looks pretty dissimilar to Jacob at first glance. Jesus does not take by

trickery and deception what is not rightfully his. No, just the opposite. The Son of God gives up the eternal glory that he enjoyed with the Father, emptying himself and taking the form of a servant, even being born as a man (Phil. 2:5-7). He sets aside his birthright and his blessing for a time, walking among men and women. But what results is not just blessing for him. As Jesus rises in victory and exaltation, the blessing that was rightfully his is expelled outward, blessing all those who follow him.

Jesus too wrestled with God in a desolate place. Kneeling alone on the Mount of Olives, asking God to take away the cup of his wrath, drops of blood ran down Jesus as he looked toward the crucifixion and desertion that lay ahead of him (Lk. 22:41-44). But unlike Jacob, stubbornly grasping hold until he gets a blessing, Jesus willingly lets go: “Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Lk. 21:42).

For Jacob’s deceptive and stubborn grasping, Jesus shows the way to humble and obedient letting go. But there is one striking resemblance to close the story. Jacob’s limp was a constant reminder of the wrestling match he had with God. He leaves his encounter permanently changed. And just as Jacob walks away limping, so we now see Jesus risen, not unscathed and unmarred. He took the blows of Justice, the spear in his side, the nails in his hands, a constant reminder to those who follow him of the price paid for our redemption. He is the true and better Jacob.

## Jesus is the true and better Joseph.

In many ways, Joseph is a character whose story primarily serves to advance the narrative arc of the Old Testament. He is one of the many great-grandsons of Abraham, to whom God made that great promise in Genesis 12 that has driven the book of Genesis. It's through Joseph that the offspring of Abraham get relocated to Egypt, which is an important pit stop in the journey that sets up the miraculous trip to the promised land. Unlike his father (Jacob) and grandfather (Isaac), Joseph isn't actually a part of the line through which Jesus would come—his seedy brother Judah gets that privilege. So why does Joseph get so much airtime in the Bible, some fourteen chapters worth? It's because Joseph points us to Jesus in a way that is unique. It is less about lineage and more about character and vindication.

The story of Joseph is one that would make a great movie. It's filled with unexpected turns, dramatic irony, hints of revenge, and redemption. We meet seventeen-year-old Joseph in Genesis 37. He was the eleventh of the twelve sons of Jacob. Of all of Jacob's sons, Joseph was his favorite. The Bible is clear in Genesis 37:3 when it says that Jacob "loved Joseph more than any other of his sons." So Jacob was loved by his father, but he was actually hated by his brothers. The brothers disdained Joseph for his privileged status in their father's eyes. They considered him a tattletell (37:2). And they didn't care much for his arrogant sounding dreams, which Joseph seemed willing to share, and which featured all of Joseph's brothers bowing down before him.

So one day, Joseph's brothers saw an opportunity to do away with the brother that made them so jealous. They hatched a plan to kill him, but eventually settled for selling him into slavery for twenty shekels of silver. The brothers return to their father, having faked the death of their brother. Though they act saddened, they are happy to have that nuisance of a brother out of their hair, not to mention a little extra cash in their pockets.

But the story follows Joseph in his slavery. He ends up in Egypt, working for a man named Potiphar, high in the chain of command under the pharaoh. And as Joseph works with skill and integrity, God blesses everything he does. This becomes so noticeable to his superiors that he is placed over all of Potiphar's household. However, one from within Potiphar's household—namely his own wife—slanderingly accuses Joseph of making advances on

her. And despite Joseph's track record of integrity, he is imprisoned, even though the accusation is false.

While in prison doing all things well, Joseph is again promoted to ruling over the rest of the prisoners. And eventually, he is released from prison due to his ability to interpret a dream for the pharaoh. And as the Lord would have it, pharaoh names Joseph second in command over all of Egypt. Once in command, Joseph becomes responsible for maintaining all of Egypt's grain supply in the midst of a famine. And as the Lord would have it, this famine would eventually bring Joseph's ten older brothers to Egypt, in search of food to buy for their families. And as the Lord would have it, these ten brothers of Joseph's came in and bowed before one of the governors of the great land of Egypt, who just so happened to be their little brother.

Then, through a long series of emotional events, Joseph discloses to his brothers—his brothers who hated him, who had sold him into slavery, and whom he had not seen in years—that he was their long-lost little brother. And the brothers are stunned. Their minds are racing, wondering what will become of them, wondering how their aging father would handle this miraculous yet incriminating news. But Joseph quickly meets their fretful hearts with full and free forgiveness. He quickly makes arrangements to reunite all of his family in the land of Egypt where they and their offspring would be generously provided for.

The story of Joseph, while a beautiful one, is but a piece of the puzzle that tells the story of Jesus. Indeed, Jesus is the true and better Joseph, who is sold into the hands of evil men for a handful of silver. Jesus is the true and better Joseph who, as Rich Lusk says, was humiliated and left for dead by his brothers, but is later vindicated and exalted. Jesus is the true and better Joseph, whose integrity upholds him even in the midst of false accusations. Jesus is the true and better Joseph, who takes the ultimate act of evil done against him and turns it for good, so that many people might be saved through it (Gen. 50:20). Jesus is the true and better Joseph, who reunites his estranged family through his abundant mercy. And Jesus is the true and better Joseph, at whose feet every knee will bow—be that brothers, wise men, or you and me this Christmas.

## Jesus is the true and better Moses.

There is no figure in the Old Testament quite as seminal as Moses. Throughout most of the first five books of the Bible, Moses is both the mouthpiece for all of God's instruction and the main human character involved in the action. Among the humans detailed in the Old Testament, Moses is truly a hero. Again, there is no figure in the Old Testament quite as seminal as Moses. But Moses doesn't exist to bring glory to Moses. Moses exists to point us to Jesus. Any heroism, any virtue, any redemption that we see in Moses is meant to direct our gaze to Jesus. Indeed, Jesus is the true and better Moses.

Moses was born into Egypt under the rule of a harsh pharaoh who wanted every Hebrew baby boy murdered as soon as they entered the world (Ex. 1:16), but was safeguarded and kept alive by his mother. Likewise, Jesus was born into the reign of king Herod who, in search of Jesus (whom he feared to be a threat to his throne), had every Hebrew boy under the age of two murdered (Matt. 2:16). The first Christmas was a harrowing one.

Moses, led by God, would orchestrate the Exodus event, challenging the tyrannical rule of Pharaoh and leading his people out of slavery and into freedom—the quintessential salvation event of the Old Testament. Likewise, Jesus would orchestrate the true and better exodus, crushing the tyrannical rule of Satan under his feet by leading his people out of slavery to sin and death and into the freedom of everlasting life in the promised land of heaven.

Moses, standing upon Mount Sinai and standing in the gap between God and his people instituted the old covenant, marked by blood, giving the people of God a way to live in his presence. Likewise, Jesus hung upon Mount Calvary, standing in the eternal gap between God and his people, transforming that distance into nearness. On that mount, Jesus instituted the true and better new covenant, guaranteed by the blood he shed on the cross.

Moses on Mount Sinai gave the people of God the laws of God, so that they might live as a distinct people, as representatives of God in the world. Likewise, Jesus issued a sermon from a mount, one which did not abolish the law of Moses or the message of the prophets, but actually served as the fulfillment of them (Matt. 5:17).

Moses led the people of Israel through the wilderness for 40 years. Jesus, the true and better Israel, was led into the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights where he was tempted by the devil, yet unlike Israel, was without sin.

Moses struck the rock in the wilderness and out poured streams water to quench the thirst of Israel. Jesus, according to 1 Corinthians 10:14 was that rock, who now pours forth streams of living water so that his people might drink and never thirst again (John 4:14).

And at the end of the book of Deuteronomy (which is Moses' final word to the people of Israel), Moses is led up a mountain to see the promised land that the people were about to enter. But Moses does not get to enter that promised land. He dies. Moses dies and is buried by God in an unspecified location. Jesus, the true and better Moses, also dies. But the story doesn't end there. Unlike Moses, when Jesus is buried in the ground, it is a temporary arrangement. He is raised from the dead on the third day. And unlike Moses, Jesus' story does not end with him passing the baton before his graveside service. Instead, Jesus ascends into heaven, where he is still leading his people, still ruling and reigning until the day that he comes back for us.

And when Jesus does come back, and when the resurrected bodies of the children of the King are ancient in their youth again, we'll find Moses rising out of some unmarked grave doing what he has been doing all along—pointing us to Jesus, the true and better fulfillment of all of the promises of God.

## Jesus is the true and better Passover Lamb.

After years of serving as Pharaoh's slaves, God had finally brought his prophet Moses to set the people free. But Pharaoh was a stubborn ruler. Diplomacy and a few miraculous signs were not enough to convince him to release the free labor he had in his Israelite slaves. So God appointed more extreme means of judgment in the form of the plagues. Still, even after nine terrible plagues Pharaoh refused to release the people of Israel out from bondage. Yet there was one more plague left, a plague that would be so dire that Pharaoh would drive Israel out of the land completely (Ex. 11:1). God would pass through the land and strike down the firstborn in the land of Egypt. From Pharaoh on his throne to the prisoner in his chains, judgment would fall upon the people of Egypt (Ex. 11:4-6).

There was, however, a way to escape this judgment. God gave instructions to His people that would spare their children from this great tragedy (Ex. 12:1-13). Each household must take an unblemished lamb. They were to slaughter the lamb, take some of its blood, and spread it on the doorpost and lintel of the house. It was a bloody and strange ritual, but it is the way to life for those who obey. God promised, "when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt" (Ex. 12:13). There would be death in the house, but it would not be the firstborn. The blood of the lamb was the substitute that meant life for children throughout Israel.

And so it happened. God passed through the land. For Israel, where blood was splattered on the doorposts, God spared their children, seeing the blood of the lamb as the substitute for them. But for Egypt, "At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt... And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead" (Ex. 12:29-30). And just as God promised, the Egyptians sent Israel out in haste. Through this bloody ritual of Passover, God provided a way for judgment to pass over his people and set them free from bondage to a hostile pagan king.

For over a thousand years after this first Passover, thousands if not millions of lambs were slain in Israel, their blood splattered on their doorpost as a reminder of what God did for them in Exodus 12 and 13. But through it all, God was pointing to something bigger, something permanent.

We catch a glimpse of it in John 1:29 when John the Baptist looks up

from the Jordan river and cries out, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” We see it in Matthew 26 in the Lord’s Supper, which is after all a Passover meal. Jesus takes bread which up to that point served as a reminder of the redemption out of Egypt. But instead of saying, “Remember what God *did* for us,” he says, “Take, eat, this is my body.” If they didn’t realize it during the events of the crucifixion, the apostles certainly recognized Jesus as the true and better Passover lamb after his resurrection. It’s how Peter could write in 1 Peter 1:18-19 that “you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” It’s how Paul could write in 1 Corinthians 5:7 that “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” And it’s why in Revelation 5 John sees at the throne of God a Lamb that is standing as though it had been slain. The elders fall down before the Lamb in worship and proclaim, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

Brothers and sisters, the original Passover we read of in Exodus 11-13 was a gracious provision, but it was ultimately a shadow. It was pointing forward to the true and better Passover Lamb who would not be sacrificed year after year, but who would shed his blood once for all so that those who deserved death and judgment—you and I—might find ourselves not living under the curse of death, but walking in freedom as the redeemed children of God. God has provided a substitute to escape judgment and his name is Jesus, the Son of God.

## Jesus is the true and better Passover Sabbath.

In the opening act of the Bible, God spoke the world into existence. God is all-powerful and entirely capable of creating without growing weary in the slightest. But on the seventh day he did something interesting: God rested, according to Genesis 2:1-2. God—the source of all life and energy—rested. In the following chapters, the readers see the perfect world that God spoke into existence begin to rebel against him. In those first moments of rebellion there in the Garden of Eden, God in His justice tells of the punishment that will come as a result of Adam’s sin. God had called Adam to keep the garden, and he had done so up to this point in a world without sin. Adam would still work the land going forward but would have to do so, as Genesis 3:19 says, “by the sweat of his face.” Yet even in that moment of sin that God did not forget about his people, and he promised to one day crush sin and its results “as far as the curse is found.”

Fast forward one book of the Bible to Exodus. The descendants of Adam and Eve, though still cursed with sin, have grown mightily and have been blessed by God. One particular group of them was a nation called Israel. They were called to be a special people, and they were to display God’s good character and faithfulness to the whole world. God gave his people some instruction to help them accomplish that; they could be found in his law. Specifically, he gave them Ten Commandments that summarized the covenant relationship that God desired to have with his people. There were a lot of good and obvious things in them: don’t worship idols, don’t kill, don’t steal, etc. But there was one seemingly odd commandment found right in the middle of those obvious ones: “Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8). Exodus 20:9-11 continue by saying that people are to work only six days, and they that and all those who are in their household should do no work on that seventh day. Why? The answer is that God himself, in his mercy, did not work on the seventh day as a way of showing his people their need for rest. That need of rest has only been magnified exponentially after the fall of man. People in God’s kingdom must recognize their need for true rest.

As people have been broken by the curse of sin, no one can keep a covenant perfectly. God, in his grace, knew that people would need a greater rest than they even first realized. They had not perfectly kept the Sinai Covenant and the Sabbath laws; they needed true and better rest. Over 1,500 years after Moses received the commandments from God, Jesus came to earth. In Matthew 11:25-30, Jesus bid all who would to come to him that they might find true and better rest—the rest that God’s people have needed since leaving Eden. Jesus came not to merely talk about rest but to be our rest. What an incredible thought it is that this Jesus, who came as baby in this Advent season we now celebrate, came so that He might give the people of God the true and better rest that the Sabbath never could have. The author of Hebrews in Hebrews 4:1-11 picks up on this beautifully when he says that the rest that God intended for His people can only be found in knowing this Christ, whose birth we celebrate now. Brothers and sisters, in this season of great busyness, let us encourage one another to find our rest in Christ today.

## Jesus is the true and better Priest.

Ever since the Fall in Genesis 3, mankind has needed a mediator to represent them before God. The corruption of sin is so utterly offensive before a holy God that unmediated access is no longer possible. And so, with the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, God set up a structure that would allow His people Israel to come before him with their petitions and sacrifices. Out of the 12 tribes, one tribe (Levi) was set aside to keep the tabernacle and temple in working order (Num. 3:5-13). Out of this tribe of Levi, Moses called upon the sons of Aaron to be consecrated as priests, offering up the sacrifices of the people before God (Lev. 8-9). And out of this one family of Aaron one person was made the high priest. It was this high priest who had the incredibly important position of entering the Holy of Holies before the Lord on the Day of Atonement every year to present a sacrifice for the sin of all the people of Israel (Lev. 16).

For all the talk about priests found later in the Pentateuch (Leviticus and Numbers in particular), the first mention of a priest in the Bible happens in an obscure story in Genesis 14. After returning from rescuing his nephew Lot from a raiding party of four kings, Abraham is greeted by one of the most mysterious characters in the whole Bible: Melchizedek. Here's the entire story concerning him:

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he blessed him and said,  
 “Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
     Possessor of heaven and earth;  
 and blessed be God Most High,  
     who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”  
 And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. (Gen. 14:18-20)

That's it. He departs the biblical scene just as quickly as he appeared. Just three short verses in Genesis is the entire story of this priest-king, Melchizedek.

But as the author of Hebrews looks back on the whole Old Testament, he sees that something has drastically changed in the priesthood. To a group of Christians who are tempted to fall away from the faith and to fall back into their former way of life, the author says that Jesus is our sure and steady anchor, who like the high priest of old entered behind the curtain into the Holy of Holies on our behalf (Heb. 9:24).

Jesus is indeed the true and better priest. He enters God's presence without having to make sacrifice for his own sin because, though he was tempted, he never sinned (Heb. 4:15; 7:27). He never passes on his obligations to another because he lives forever, making him able to save to the uttermost (Heb. 7:23-25). And he does not need to consistently offer sacrifices for the ongoing sin of the people, for his blood, his sacrifice, is the perfect plea to God, bringing perfect cleansing for his people (Heb. 10:11-18).

But there is a problem with seeing Jesus as just the high priest. Jesus is no Levite. He is from the tribe of Judah. And while kings have come from the line of Judah (Gen. 49:10), there are not priests from this line.

And all of a sudden, the obscure, brief, random story of Melchizedek makes sense. It was not as random, not as unimportant as it seemed on the surface. Jesus is not a Levitical priest; he is a Melchizedekian priest. Like Melchizedek, he is a priest-king (Heb. 7:1). Melchizedek's very hard to pronounce name is not inconsequential, for Jesus, just like Melchizedek is the king of righteousness (*melek* in Hebrew is "king," and *zedek* is "righteousness") and king of peace (*Salem* is roughly translated as "peace") (Heb. 7:2). Abraham was perhaps the most revered Old Testament figure for Jews of Jesus day. But Hebrews shows that Abraham revered and honored Melchizedek as greater than himself (Heb. 7:4-10)!

The payoff comes in Hebrews 7:11-22. The Levitical priesthood could never perfectly cleanse God's people. It was not meant to. But God's people do still need a mediator, one who would be a priest of a different type. And so, in the fullness of time, God raised up his eternal Son, the perfect one who brings a better hope than the Levites could ever bring. "This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant" (Heb. 7:22). Better than the old covenant, better than the Levites, better than the high priests, and even better than Melchizedek, Jesus has come as our perfect mediator. Hope has come.

## Jesus is the true and better Joshua.

We first meet Joshua in the books of Exodus and Numbers, a few years before the action that occurs in the book that bears his name. In the book of Exodus, we see a developing young Joshua who customarily followed closely behind Moses, and who would even linger in the tent of the meeting after God and Moses would have their conversations together (Ex. 33:11). We also see Joshua in the book of Numbers as one of the twelve spies sent to scout out the promised land. As the story goes, ten of the spies question Israel's ability to enter the land (which is in effect questioning God's ability to get them into the land). However, there are two spies who break with the ten, claiming that God is with them, and they can take it. Those two men are named Caleb and Joshua.

Fast-forward forty years, and Moses is dead. Through Moses, the Lord had accomplished the great work of redeeming his people from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. But even though Moses was gone, God's work of redemption continued. (God may bury his workers, but he never buries his work.<sup>3</sup>) And it would continue under the leadership of Joshua, as the Lord would fight for his people, bringing them to and planting them in the promised land. The task was large. And the shoes that Joshua had to fill seemed larger. Yet God commanded his new leader to be strong and courageous, for the Lord would be with him wherever he would go (Josh. 1:9), just as he was with Moses.

And through Joshua, God would do the miraculous—stopping the flow of the Jordan River, collapsing the walls of the city of Jericho through the simple shouts of the people. Through Joshua, God would lead his people to systematically conquer those nations that currently inhabited the land that God had promised to his people. Consistently, the odds seemed militarily stacked against them, but so long as the people obeyed and trusted God, he gave them the victory. Of course, the people faltered from time to time. Often, their faith was mixed with fear, if not full-fledged unbelief. But under Joshua's direction, the people of God took hold of their land.

At the end of the book of Joshua, Joshua dies. And just like his predecessor Moses, Joshua the son of Nun is given one of the highest commendations from God, being labeled "the servant of the Lord" (Josh. 24:29). But there is one greater Servant of the Lord, Jesus of Nazareth, the suffering Servant of Isaiah 52-53. This Servant's responsibility was not to guarantee us land, but to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows. This servant would not wield the sword against his enemies, but would be pierced for the iniquities of his enemies. He would bear the punishment that would bring us peace. He would be wounded so that we might be healed. Upon this Servant, the Lord

would lay the iniquities of us all. And this Servant would become a true and better Joshua who now leads his people in a new conquest, not of land, but of disciples from among all nations. Jesus, the true and better Joshua, leads his conquest not with a sword of steel, but with the sword of the Spirit.

The book of Joshua begins with a calling for Joshua to be strong and courageous; to be brave. Likewise, the gospel accounts begin with the birth of brave little boy named Jesus who, in the words of the Andrew Peterson Christmas song, “was God, but made himself nothing / He gave up his pride / and he came here to die like a man.” Indeed, this was why he came. But the gospel accounts do not end with Jesus’ death. The book of Joshua ends with death, the death of Joshua. Likewise, Genesis ends with the death of Joseph. And Deuteronomy ends with the death of Moses. But the Gospel accounts don’t end with death—they all end with Jesus’ resurrection. And that changes everything.<sup>4</sup>



- 3. This thought is attributed to Dr. Robert Smith, Jr.*
- 4. This thought comes from a tweet by Tony Merida on October 19, 2017.*

## Jesus is the true and better Deliverer.

In many ways, Jesus is decidedly not like the deliverers we see in the book of Judges. We may initially think that Judges is a story of great heroes, but a closer look reveals some dark and ominous strains. Gideon delivered the people of Israel from the Mideonites, but he is an unlikely candidate. When the Lord summons him into action with the exalted words “O mighty man of valor” (Judg. 6:12), Gideon is actually trembling in fear and hiding in a winepress.

And much of Judges sounds the same unimpressive note. Othniel was a Kenizzite—a foreigner. Deborah was a woman in a culture where women were not always esteemed or respected. Ehud was left handed, and that oddity was often considered suspicious and in need of correction. And then there is Samson. On the surface, Samson is indeed impressive, but upon closer inspection and over time Samson proves critically and tragically flawed. No wonder the book of Judges ends in such tragedy and chaos—every one doing what is right in his own eyes and no one doing what is right in God’s eyes.

So, how does Jesus make sense of this book and of the promises of God? Well, for that you have return to the script for the book itself. Judges 2:11-23 provides it:

### *Rebellion > Judgment > A Deliver*

And that’s exactly what happened repeatedly. The people of God did evil in the sight of the Lord. God judged them by giving them over to other nations and peoples. And God in his mercy raised up a weak but anointed deliverer to save his people.

When you put it like that, Jesus isn’t far away, is He? The point of Christmas is the salvation of God’s people from great and terrifying enemy—sin (Matt. 1:21). And how does God save his people from their sins? Who is the great Deliverer of the people of God? As we know, it’s not a great king or military leader. It’s a baby in swaddling clothes!

Indeed, weakness is always the way with Jesus. He “had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him” (Isa. 53:2). Unlike the foxes that have holes and the birds of the air that have nests, the Son of man had nowhere to lay His head (Luke 9:58). And then there is the ultimate moment of deliverance—the cross upon which Jesus died.

God loves to save his people, and he loves to do it in ways that make it unmistakably clear that he alone can save. “Truly, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God” (1 Corinthians 1:28–29).

Jesus is our true and better deliverer. Let us fix our eyes on him this Advent season.

## Jesus is the true and better Boaz.

The book of Ruth is one of the shorter books of the Bible. It is only one of two named after a female. And it is the only book in the Old Testament named after a non-Jew. The setting of the book of Ruth is a relatively bleak one. It is during the period of the book of Judges, which is after the people of God have entered the promised land, but before they had kings to lead them. The theme of the book of Judges is found in the final verse of that book: “In those days [the days of the judges] there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 21:25). And in the midst of that vacuum of leadership and direction, we get this vignette that is the love story of Ruth and Boaz.

The story starts with a mother named Naomi. Her husband Elimelech had taken her and their two sons into the foreign land of Moab in the midst of a famine in the land of Israel. Then Naomi’s husband dies, leaving her with her two sons and their wives, whom they married in Moab. But then, in a painful turn of events, both of Naomi’s sons die. Now a widow who has also lost all of her children, Naomi is distraught. But Naomi’s daughter-in-law Ruth pledges herself to Naomi, and to Naomi’s God (Ruth 1:16). And so Naomi and Ruth return to the land of Israel, to the town of Bethlehem, with many bitter memories in tow, at the time of the harvest.

Once back home, Naomi sends Ruth to gather grain from a distant relative, a man named Boaz. Boaz was known to be a worthy man, kind to his workers, kind to the poor. And while Ruth gleaned and gathered food in Boaz’s fields, Boaz took note of her. Boaz gave word to his servants to protect her and to help her. Boaz invited Ruth to eat from his table, and sent her home with an abundance of grain for bread. At the end of the day, upon realizing how kindly Boaz treated her daughter-in-law, Naomi hatched a plan.

Boaz, being a distant relative of Naomi’s through her husband, actually had the ability to serve as the kinsman-redeemer for Naomi and her family. What that meant was, according to Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 25, Boaz had the right as a relative (a kinsman) to redeem—that is to buy back, to re-inherit, to purchase—the property that belonged to Naomi’s husband. That is a lifeline for Naomi and Ruth. With no land, they have no prospects for food, short of the mercy of people like Boaz. But with land, they had the prospect of food. However, being women, land without men to help work it was something like a fishing boat in the desert. But this is where, again, the kinsman redeemer steps in. According to the system built into God’s merciful law, a kinsman redeemer could marry a widowed relative to help preserve the name of the deceased family member.

Boaz could be that man for Naomi’s family. And with the way in which

he had treated Ruth, all signs pointed to his interest in being that man. So Naomi sent Ruth on a bold mission, to make a direct ask of Boaz to do just that. She meets him on his threshing floor, and makes her proposal, “Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer” (Ruth 3:9). Boaz accepts. But there’s a hitch. There is one other redeemer in line before him. If he wants the land, he has the right of first refusal. So the next day, Boaz approaches his relative and lets him know about the land. The relative indicates that he is interested. Then Boaz adds a detail: it comes with a few strings attached, namely the family of the deceased Elimelech. Upon this news, the relative balks. And Boaz sweeps in, and embraces the role of redeemer.

Boaz takes Ruth as his bride, and through their union, God grants offspring to uphold the name of Elimelech, Naomi’s husband. Ruth and her redeemer Boaz have a son, and they name him Obed. And through this far-fetched story of love and redemption, Obed would become the grandfather of the second greatest king in the history of Israel: King David. The book of Ruth ends with the birth of a son, that points us to the birth of a dynasty in Israel.

Of course, David was the greatest king, until that day that it came to pass when a young mother, great with child, and her betrothed husband were on their way to a land familiar to Ruth and Boaz—the land of Bethlehem. And there, that young mother, Mary by name, gave birth to a son, in the line of David, in the line of Boaz. And they called him Jesus, for “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32-33).

Boaz takes us to Jesus, both in lineage and in action. Boaz is a worthy man (Ruth 2:1), but Jesus is a worthier one. Jesus the true and better Boaz who risks his reputation and his inheritance out of love for his future bride. Jesus is the true and better bridegroom who goes and takes for his bride one who is from the other side of the tracks. Jesus is the true and better Boaz who provides himself as the bread of life so that the hungry may never hunger again (John 6:35). Jesus is the true and better redeemer, who restores life and joy and hope to the hopeless.

## Jesus is the true and better David.

Almost no one in the Bible has a résumé that can compare with David's. He was chosen above his brothers because "the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). He slew the giant who defied the armies of the living God. He became a warrior-king who wrote most of Israel's hymnbook. Even the Lord's faithfulness to subsequent kings was rooted in his affection for David. King David was a great king.

Yet he was not *the* King that God's people needed. A closer look at the life and times of David reveals the David was great but not great enough. Alongside David's triumphs and achievements are tragic and heartbreaking failures. Most glaring among these was David sin with Bathsheba and his subsequent murder of Uriah. That sin unleashed a torrent of sad consequences—the death of his son, division among his family, chaos in the country. Indeed, when you come to the end of David's life, what you see is not a man of unrivaled strength but a man shivering under the covers trying to keep warm.

The story of David leaves us crying out for an even greater warrior-king—one with a perfectly pure and undefiled heart. One whose end is not the end of all men (and women). One over whom even the grave has no power. And isn't this the substance and hope of Peter's sermon at Pentecost?

*Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, 31 he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. 34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, 35 until I make your enemies your footstool."'*

(Acts 2:29–35)

This Christmas, we celebrate Jesus as the true and better David, the King we need and the King God provides. "Glory to the newborn King!"

## Jesus is the true and better Solomon.

Solomon is an intriguing character in the Old Testament. On the one hand, he is a great king and a wise leader. His contributions to the Hebrew canon alone are worthy of great respect. But on the other hand, Solomon was a harbinger of all the bad kings who were to come in Israel's history. However, as complex a figure as Solomon is, he points us to Jesus, both in his successes and in his failures.

Both Solomon and Jesus enter the world through somewhat scandalous birth circumstances. Solomon is the second child born to David by Bathsheba, this wife whom he took by force. Jesus, who is miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit, is the son of the virgin Mary and her not-yet husband Joseph. Solomon's birth announcement makes your head tilt to the side just a bit; Jesus' makes your head spin.

Solomon is noted for his profound wisdom—the wisdom that stunned the queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10), the wisdom that is poured out in poetic form in the book of Proverbs, the wisdom that is revealed in the profound book of Ecclesiastes urging all to “fear God and keep his commandments” (Eccles. 12:13). But Jesus is wisdom personified, through which God created the world (Prov. 8:22-31). Jesus, even as a child, astonished those in the temple with his wisdom (Luke 2:47). Jesus did not simply possess wisdom but, according to Paul, he is the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:30). King Solomon was wise by any standard, but King Jesus is the one “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

Solomon is king David's kingly son, the one who ascends to the throne after David and continues to lead the nation to the height of its golden age. But Jesus is great David's greater Son, who after making atonement for sins sat down on his eternal throne and will lead his people into the age of eternity, a place paved with streets of gold.

Solomon, however, did not exactly finish well. It all started when he forsook the commands for kings in Deuteronomy 17. Kings were not to acquire many horses (and there be tempted to trust in military strength). Kings were not to acquire many wives (who were particularly strategic for forming political allies in those days, but who also would tempt the king to worship foreign gods). And kings were not to acquire excessive silver and gold (and there be tempted to trust in wealth more than in God). Solomon did all of these things to a T. And as a result of doing all of these forbidden things, 1 Kings 11:9 tells us that Solomon's heart had turned away from the LORD. Upon his death, Solomon is replaced by kings who divide the kingdom of Israel and send it down the long road to turmoil. His actions,

his leadership led Israel away from God.

But unlike Solomon, Jesus did finish well. He acquired no horses, and even had to borrow a donkey to ride into Jerusalem the week before he died. He acquired no wives, but gave his life for the sake of his future bride, the church. And he acquired no money: he was known for having no place to lay his head, for keeping no moneybag for himself, and relying on the fish of the sea to produce the money that he needed (Matt. 17:27). Jesus, unlike Solomon who led hearts away from God, would turn the hearts of the people back to God again through the redemption that he accomplishes.

Solomon, though great in his own right, only serves to hint at the truly great king who is to come. His strengths point to Jesus' greater ones, and his failures highlight Jesus' faithfulness. Jesus is the true and better Solomon, with greater wisdom, greater resources, greater faithfulness, and a greater throne. Just as Jesus spoke in Matthew 12:42, "something greater than Solomon is here."

## Jesus is the true and better Temple.

In the world after the Fall in Genesis 3, one of the questions that haunts the pages of Scripture is, “How shall a good God dwell with his sinful people?” Eden had been the very first temple of God in creation. God had crafted it by his own hands and set it apart, and Adam was to labor and live in this dwelling place of God. But the wreck of the Fall and the curse of sin drove Adam and Eve out from the garden-temple and thus out from God’s presence. The story of redemption is the story of God making a way to dwell among his people once again by providing a temple for them.

In the Old Testament, the most glorious moment of God’s dwelling with his people comes at the dedication of Solomon’s temple. David’s son Solomon had spent seven years building a temple for the God of Israel, sparing no expense. When he dedicates the temple to be a dwelling place of God among the people of Israel, God graciously comes in a visible display of his own glory, filling the temple and exhilarating his people with his own presence, promising to make the temple his dwelling place throughout all generations. It is the high water mark of redemptive history up to that point. But the story of the temple does not end there.

In the following generations, God’s people slip more and more into idolatry. They neglect the true worship of God in the temple built by Solomon, and instead worship Canaanite gods on the hillsides and under trees and in the many towns throughout the land. Eventually, in one of the saddest passages of the Old Testament, Ezekiel records a vision of the glory and presence of Yahweh departing first from his temple, then from Jerusalem, passing to the east over the Mount of Olives. Israel rejects her God, and so God rejects her and delivers her over to her enemies. Babylonian conquerors destroy the temple of Solomon, and though the temple is eventually rebuilt, the Bible never records the return of God’s glory to dwell there.

Jesus’ arrival changes everything. In the traditional Bible readings for Advent, Isaiah tells us that the Messiah is to be called “Immanuel”, which means “God with us.” Matthew tells us that Jesus’ birth fulfills this prophecy. Jesus, the Son of David and the Son of God, comes to dwell among his people to be a newer, more intimate, more permanent presence of God. The ancient temple was made up of stones and rooms and altars that had to be cleansed year in and year out. Jesus as the true and better temple needs no cleansing, but offers cleansing for all his people. The temple could be and would be destroyed. Jesus as the true and better temple was destroyed, but rose again in three days having triumphed over death. The ancient temple was confined to Jerusalem. Jesus’ body as the new and better temple—the Church—goes from Jerusalem into all Judea and Samaria and even to the ends of the earth to witness to his victory. In Jesus, the question “How shall a good God dwell with his sinful people?” finds its final answer.

## Jesus is the true and better Bridegroom.

Upon the first reading, it's altogether surprising that the Song of Solomon made it into the Bible. How on earth does something so fleshly and seemingly "non-spiritual" as romantic love get an entire book of the Bible dedicated to it?

It's in this short book that the Lord shows us in part the high priority he places upon the love between a husband and a wife. "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (Song 2:16). A bride and groom are meant to be beautiful in each other's eyes (Song 1:15-17). Even the strange descriptions we read throughout the book (neck like a tower? teeth like sheep?) are meant as the highest praise between two people entering into the covenant of marriage (Song 4:1-7). You cannot get through the book without being overwhelmed by the great desire and intimacy that the bride and groom have for and with each other.

While we learn the joys and pleasures of marriage here, we also get a glimpse of a theme that is woven throughout the Bible. From the very beginning, God intended marriage to be a picture of his great love for his people (Eph. 5:31-32). Even better than the love pictured in the Song of Solomon, the love that God has for his people persists far beyond what our natural love would. Think of the prophet Hosea, who married an unfaithful wife as a picture of God's relationship with faithless Israel. Despite her wanderings and broken promises, Hosea still pursues his bride. It's a sign of God's never stopping, never giving up, unbreakable, always and forever love (a phrase borrowed from Sally Lloyd-Jones's Jesus Storybook Bible). God allures his bride, Israel, giving her grace and kindness she does not deserve, betrothing her to him forever (Hos. 2:14-23).

If God's picture of love and faithful pursuit in the Old Testament is the marriage of Hosea and Gomer, it is expanded in the New Testament to every husband and wife. And it's given new content, new life as the picture of the loyal, loving husband is now seen in Jesus Christ. Our faithful bridegroom, Christ, "loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27). This was not just faithful, pursuing love. This was costly love, a bridegroom who was willing to empty himself to the point of death on a cross so that his beloved bride might have new life (Phil. 2:5-11).

One of the last scenes in the New Testament is a wedding feast, a final celebratory meal enjoyed by a bride (the church) and groom (Jesus, the Lamb).

“Let us rejoice and exult  
and give him the glory,  
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,  
and his Bride has made herself ready;  
it was granted her to clothe herself  
with fine linen, bright and pure” (Rev. 19:7-8).

The Lamb of God came the first time to purchase for himself a people with his blood (Rev. 5:9-10). But we look forward to the day when the betrothed church becomes the perfected and beloved bride, when the redemption purchased at the cross becomes the eternal life consummated in the new heavens and new earth. The last word of God’s plan is not famine, but feasting.

Brothers and sisters, this Christmas as we dine with friends or family, be reminded that this is a shadow of feasting that is to come. We are awaiting our true and better bridegroom, the one who is coming back for us. Like the beloved of the Song of Solomon, he is beautiful beyond our reckoning. Like Hosea, he has loved us even when we were unlovely. And he is a better groom than we could ever hope for; he paid for us dearly by his blood and is coming back for us. “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine!” (Song. 6:3)

## Jesus is the true and better Job.

Job is a strange book. It's not strange in its realism about suffering. In fact, far from it. Job is beloved for its practicality. But it's strange in that the suffering described is so great as to be almost incredible. Who has suffered like Job? Job lost all his possessions. Job lost all his financial security. Job lost all his children. Job lost all his health. All that Job kept was his wife, and even that was a trial at the time!

Job was a man most acquainted with suffering. Job knew suffering far more than most of us ever have known it or ever will know it. Job is the ultimate sufferer—almost. Only one character in the Bible surpasses him, and therein lies the road from Job to Jesus. For all that the Bible teaches us about Job, Job ultimately teaches us about Jesus.

Without question, we are meant to identify with Job—in his trusting God through and in his suffering. But it is the extremities of Job that we are pointed beyond Job himself. None of us are as blameless as Job; none of us have suffered to the degree of Job. None of us except the one who was to come—Jesus Christ. As Francis Anderson remarked, “Jesus entered a domain of suffering reserved for Him alone. No man can bear the sin of another, but Jesus carried the sins of all. In one life only is Job excelled, in both innocence and grief: in Jesus, who sinned not at all, but who endured the greatest agony of any man. In his perfection of obedience and of suffering the questions of Job and of all us have their final answer.”

Jesus is the true and better Job. Job suffered the loss of all his earthly possessions, but Jesus forsook heaven itself for us. Job suffered well under the hand of God, but Jesus planned his own suffering for our sake. Job suffered and did not curse God, but Jesus suffered by becoming a curse for us. Job suffered nearly to the point of death, but Jesus suffered death itself, even death on a cross.

For many, Advent is a mixed blessing. It's at the same time a reminder of God's kindness in Christ and a reminder of friends and family members no longer present. Praise God for One greater than Job! He knows the hurt and pain you're feeling because he felt it, too. In fact, he felt it so that one day you'll never feel it again.

## Jesus is the true and better Prophet.

In the Old Testament, the role of the prophet is a significant one. The prophets were historical figures who served as God's ambassadors. They were intermediaries between God and man. The prophets also served as God's heralds. The true prophets spoke for God, and never on their own authority. And as God's heralds, prophets were involved in the activities of foretelling and forthtelling. Foretelling involves speaking into the future, foretelling events that will occur in the future. But forthtelling involves speaking into the present, addressing issues of Israel's immediate past or current situation. In either case, these men were always given a message from God to deliver to the people, whether that message was a word for the present or a promise for the future.

The main message of the prophets, from Samuel to Malachi, can be boiled down to three categories: 1) Sin, 2) Punishment, and 3) Restoration. First of all, some prophets were tasked with preaching about the nation of Israel's sin problem. These prophets brought reminders to the people of God about the Law of God, how they as his covenant people were to keep it and so be distinct in the world. Though they were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5-6), Israel had failed at this in a massive way. Like us today, sin was the fundamental problem of the people of God. So God would send prophets, urging the people to turn from their sin and to be faithful to him.

But secondly, if the people refused to repent, the prophets would bring a message of punishment. Prophets brought grave warnings about the consequences of persisting in unrepentant sin. Some prophets were tasked with spelling out the impending punishment coming for unrepentant Israel—whether through famine and drought, or through other nations rising to make Israel subservient to them, or ultimately through the exile of the people of God out of their land. If the people of God did not consider the message of the prophets, then judgment and punishment would inevitably result. And it did.

But thirdly and finally, the prophets brought a message of restoration or renewal. Though God is holy and just, he is also gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love. Which, in God's economy, means that judgment never gets the last word. Punishment is never the final word. Restoration is always the final word. And so the prophets proclaim a message of restoration, whether that restoration was to come through the repentance of the people (which is always held out as an option), or whether it was to come on the far side of judgment. Either way, renewal and restoration are always held out as beacons of hope in the message of the prophets. Whether that is in Jeremiah's promise of a new covenant

in Jeremiah 31, or Isaiah's promise of death being swallowed up forever in Isaiah 25, or Micah's promise that God will cast all of our sins into the depths of the sea in Micah 7—restoration always follows the punishment that follows sin.

To be sure, the prophets had a hard job. And it was frequently a lonely job. The prophets were not necessarily loved for telling people that they were almost always doing things wrong and that they would be seriously punished for it. They weren't always the most sought after guests at parties. Indeed, it was hard and lonely work. But no prophet knew this better than the true and better prophet, Jesus Christ.

Like all the prophets before him, Jesus the true and better prophet was spurned and rejected by his people. He even said, in solidarity with his prophetic brethren, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown" (Matthew 13:57). Jesus lamented over the actions of the city of Jerusalem, saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and those sent to it!" (Matthew 23:37). And little did those who first heard Jesus know that even this statement was a self-fulfilling prophecy, for Jerusalem was not yet finished with its work of killing the prophets sent to it. Even as the true and better prophet spoke these words, he knew he was next in line. But unlike the prophets before him, this prophet would not stay dead. Moses told the people that God would raise up a prophet like him in Deuteronomy 18:15, and Peter and the rest of the apostles understood that to be a prediction of the literal raising up—the bodily resurrection—of the true and better prophet (see Acts 3:22-24).

Just like the prophets before him, Jesus' work centered around sin, punishment, and renewal. This prophet, who knew no sin, would become sin for his people, so that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). This prophet would take the punishment that his people deserved, for upon him was placed the punishment that brought us peace (Isaiah 53:5). And this prophet would bring about the restoration that his people have always longed for and desperately needed, for even now the risen Christ sits in heaven proclaiming this message of hope for his people: "Behold, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5). This Jesus, the true and better prophet, has taken the punishment for our sins upon himself and purchased for us renewal, provided we repent and place our faith in him.

So even as we cherish all of the blessed prophecies that are so special to us at Christmastime—the prophecies that proclaim the virgin birth and the hope of a Wonderful Counselor and the significance of little old Bethlehem—even as we re-examine those great prophecies, may they direct our attention to the true and better prophet, Jesus the Christ.

## Jesus is the true and better Jonah.

Jonah the son Amittai was a prophet to Israel. And Jonah was given a word from God. Though for most prophets, the difficulty of their job was in the reception that met their proclamation—the people typically did not like what they heard. But for Jonah, it was actually he who did not like the message that he received, the message he was supposed to proclaim. Surely, it was a difficult assignment that God gave Jonah. And though he didn't obey perfectly, God used Jonah greatly. Through reading the book of Jonah, we can learn much about the patience and plan of God to save sinners through His Son Jesus Christ, the new and better Jonah.

The story of Jonah is beloved one, familiar for most of us. God called the prophet Jonah to share a message of coming judgment with the Assyrian people. As we said earlier, Jonah did not like that idea. So much did he disdain that thought that he went to board a ship going to Tarshish, which would have been the city farthest in the opposite direction of Nineveh known to the world at that time. God intervened and brought a storm into the path of that ship. The sailors asked everyone to pray to their gods in an attempt to calm the storm. It was then Jonah told them that he served the one, true God. He told them if they threw him overboard the storm would relent. After they threw him overboard, the storm did exactly that and those pagan sailors began to praise God. Providentially, Jonah was swallowed by a great fish and stayed there until three days and three nights later, when God dropped him onto dry land. It was only then that Jonah finally obeyed and went to Nineveh. He preached repentance and to Jonah's surprise the people believed. God spared the city and Jonah became angry. The story concludes with God showing Jonah how misplaced his affections were when God causes a shade tree that had given Jonah relief to wilt and die. Jonah was disappointed when the tree died, but wouldn't have batted an eye if God would have destroyed a city of hundreds of thousands of sinners.

Without a doubt, the assignment that God entrusted to Jonah would have been one that would have caused fear in the hearts of most people in Jonah's day. For those of us living in twenty-first century America, it's easy to say that Jonah missed a great opportunity to be faithful to God in a difficult task. We might wonder what he was thinking and shake our heads collectively in disapproval. If we had been alive in the day and time of Jonah however, we would not have the problem knowing what led to his reluctance. The Assyrians weren't known to be the kindest or most tolerant people. Jonah had a very real fear for his life. The tension he was feeling was far from contrived.

Jonah points us to Christ, the new and better Jonah, during this Advent season in three main ways. First in Matthew 12:38-41 Jesus himself

discusses that he would show his generation the sign of Jonah: he would spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, only to be vindicated by God through the resurrection of his body. Second, Jesus like Jonah got an extremely difficult assignment from God. Jonah *feared* that accomplishing his task might cause harm or cost him his life or safety, Jesus *knew* that accomplishing his task would cause him great harm and ultimately his life. Jesus is the new and better Jonah precisely because he chose to lay his life down and to be separated from his Father so that he might be faithful in the very difficult task God entrusted to him. Finally, Jonah went to preach to people who were far from God and did not deserve his forgiveness. All of us, exactly like the wicked Assyrians and pagan sailors deserve God's punishment, and it should cause us to marvel at the beautiful plan of God that saved sinners like the Assyrians and sinners like us. God, in his grace, designed that plan to begin to unfold a new and glorious chapter with the coming of his Son as the child at Christmas. Let us glory in what Jesus our new and better Jonah did for us in this Christmas season.

## Jesus is the true and better Daniel.

After over sixty years in exile, Daniel is finally serving under a new king, Darius (Dan. 6:1-3). And as he's done previously, he quickly shows by his integrity and service that he can be trusted with running a kingdom. But when Darius sets Daniel as second in command, his former colleagues become jealous and immediately begin looking for a way to bring him down. Unfortunately for them, Daniel does not have the record of a modern politician. There are no skeletons or scandals in his closet.

So they trap him between faithfulness to God and faithfulness to the king. They convince naïve Darius to make it illegal to pray to or through anyone but the king for the next 30 days. Daniel now has a choice: prayerlessness for 30 days, or almost certain death in a pit of lions. For Daniel, there seems to be no hesitation; he would rather die talking to God than live not talking to him. He does the same thing he has done for decades. He goes up to his roof and prays (Dan. 6:10).

Darius is caught in his own trap. He scrambles to release Daniel, but his own foolish law cannot be undone. And so, distraught, he has Daniel cast into the lion's den, leaving him with one last plea: "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!" (Dan. 6:16). A stone is rolled over the pit and the king retreats to his palace.

After a fitful night sleep, Darius sprints to the mouth of the pit. "The king declared to Daniel, 'O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?'" (Dan. 6:20). And miraculously, instead of the growl of well-fed lions, the king hears Daniel's reply. "My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm" (Dan. 6:22). The living God had preserved Daniel, his faithful servant, even through what was almost certain death.

Daniel is a picture of faithfulness that we should admire and long to emulate. But more than that, he is also pointing further down the line to someone who would come and be the fully faithful one.

Jesus, like Daniel, was the victim of conspiracy and betrayal from people whose position was threatened by him. He too is arrested at his place of prayer. Jesus like Daniel is brought before a ruler who tries to release him, as

Pilate washes his hands and says that he finds no fault in him, but ultimately the ruler is powerless to save him. Jesus like Daniel is given over to death and has a stone sealing what should be his tomb.

But Jesus is not just like Daniel. No, Jesus actually dies, and when he rises he is not found unscathed. The nails that pierced his hands and his feet, the spear that pierced his side, those wounds are still there. He indeed is the new and greater Daniel because he tasted death for us. When we read ourselves into the story of Daniel, we need to recognize that apart from Christ we are the adversaries. We grasp at our own power, we rebel against the authority of God's Son Jesus over us. And we deserve death. But Jesus tastes death for us. He died the death we deserved. But thanks be to God, as those faithful women came to the tomb early on Sunday morning they found that like Daniel before Him, Jesus was alive after all.

Jesus Christ, the risen and reigning Lord, is the new and greater Daniel. We have hope this Christmas, brothers and sisters, because we can trust in him.

## Jesus is the true and better better Ezra and the true and better Nehemiah.

*“O come, O come Emmanuel  
And ransom captive Israel  
That mourns in lonely exile here”*

These, of course, are the opening lines of the familiar Christmas hymn, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.” The point of the song is to place its singers in the shoes of those old covenant believers who found themselves exiled from Jerusalem, from the promised land, from all that was culturally familiar. In exile, the people of God were being punished for years and years of perpetual disobedience of God. They were overcome and overruled by a pagan nation, by people who spoke a foreign tongue, and—worst of all—by a people who rejected and ridiculed their God. The exile, second to the Fall in Genesis 3, is the lowest point in the storyline of the Old Testament. The people of God were marched out of their beloved Jerusalem as captives, while the city that they loved was burned to the ground, and the temple in which they worshipped their God was destroyed. It was a bitterly low moment.

It is a low moment, which is why those speaking of the exile in the Bible are so often portrayed as doing so through words of intense groaning (indeed, the aforementioned hymn is a groaning song). But even in such a low moment, after some seventy years in exile (Daniel 9:2), God’s grace shines forth. After Judah’s punishment is complete, God raises up a pagan king by the name of Cyrus, of the nation of Persia, who sends the people of God back home to the promised land. Cyrus not only gives them permission to go home, but he also pays their way home (Ezra 6:4). And there were two men tasked with leading the rebuilding and re-beautification of Jerusalem: Ezra and Nehemiah.

Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries. They are the first two shafts of light that shine the way forward out of the darkness of exile and into the future of the history of redemption. We get Ezra first, who is associated with the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Early in the Old Testament book named after Ezra, we hear of all of the physical work done on the temple: the laying of the foundation (Ezra 3), the completion of the structure with great stones and timber (Ezra 6). And it’s actually after the rebuilding that we meet the man Ezra. Ezra is not merely tasked with rebuilding the building of the temple, but rebuilding the liturgical function of the temple. Ezra reinstates the priests and the sacrifices. Ezra teaches the people the law and leads them in corporate confession and repentance. Through the

leadership of Ezra, the temple is reinstated as the central piece of the life of the remnant of Judah. Through Ezra, the faithfulness of God is displayed, so that the people might again re-learn for themselves how they might be faithful to God.

The book of Ezra gives way to the book of Nehemiah, where we see God intent on protecting his people, so that they might remain faithful to worship him. Whereas Ezra is associated with the rebuilding of God's temple in Jerusalem, Nehemiah is associated the rebuilding of the walls around the city of Jerusalem. Despite threats from political enemies, Nehemiah and the remnant of God's people rebuild the walls around the city, even amidst great personal danger. The book of Nehemiah shows how Nehemiah and Ezra's work overlap, as they both seek to reinstate the people of God in the city of God, so that they might properly worship and obey God. Through Ezra and Nehemiah (and ultimately through the grace of God) the people of God climb out of the darkness of exile to rebuild their home, brick by brick and stone by stone.

The exile is one of the lowest moments in the storyline of the Bible. But there is one immensely worse: the moment in which the Son of God hung lifeless on a cross outside the walls of Jerusalem, the very walls that Nehemiah had built. It was the moment in which the Son of God, Jesus the Christ, was exiled from his Father due to the weight of the world's sin and the awfulness of the wrath of God poured out on those sins. It is unquestionably the lowest point in the Bible. But it is simultaneously the highest point of our redemption. Because in that moment, Jesus, the true and better Ezra, was laying—indeed, was becoming—the cornerstone for a true and better temple of God, the place where it would be possible for God and man to dwell together forever. It was the moment where Jesus, the true and better Nehemiah began building a true and better city that is to come (Hebrews 13:14), one with heavenly foundations (Hebrews 11:10) that could never be destroyed by sin.

Ezra and Nehemiah remind us that Psalm 127:1 is true: “Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” Indeed, it was God who built the second temple for his people. But ultimately, that temple would fall again, for it was never meant to stand forever. Jesus, the true and better temple, foretold that when the temple of his body was to be torn down, he would raise it up in three days (Matthew 27:40). And he did just as he said. And as the true and better Ezra, and the true and better Nehemiah, Jesus shows us that he is building a true and better house made up of us, the chosen and precious living stones that he has redeemed by his blood (1 Peter 2:4-5), so that we might live in his presence forever. No more songs of groaning or mourning, but of gladness and mirth.

## Jesus is the true and better Esther.

Esther didn't begin her life in a royal estate. As a foreign orphan living in the Persian capital of Susa, she was likely very vulnerable to exploitation, if it were not for the care of her cousin and caretaker, Mordecai. But in God's providential timing, Queen Vashti of Persia has displeased and embarrassed King Ahasuerus. So he goes adding beautiful women from around the country to his harem. And again in God's providential plan, Esther is raised from an exile to the Queen of Persia.

But there's something nefarious happening in the background of the story. Mordecai offends the king's chief advisor, Haman, by not bowing down or giving homage to him (Est. 3:2). As it turns out, Haman is a pretty vindictive dude. He plans not just to get back at Mordecai, but to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the entire kingdom (Est. 3:6). He goes to the king and convinces him to set a plan in motion that would result in the extermination of the Jewish people altogether (Est. 3:8-11).

Mordecai catches wind of this plot and goes into public mourning. But thankfully he has someone in a position to do something! He gets word to Esther concerning the plot, hoping that she would be able to stop the plan. However, there is a potential cost involved in going before the king. One does not simply walk up to the king unannounced. If you come before the king uninvited and he decides that he doesn't want you there, the penalty is death (Est. 4:11).

The risk of speaking to the king is death for Esther. The risk of silence is death for an entire people. But, having recognized God's providential hand all throughout the drama, Mordecai tells Esther, "who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Est. 4:14)

So Esther risks her life. She goes before the king, and in God's providential kindness, the king spares her life (Est. 5:2). A new plot is set in motion, but this time it is Esther's plot to undo the damage that Haman intended. And in God's providential reversal, the plan that was meant to destroy the Jews turns out to be Haman's own undoing. He is hanged on his own gallows and the Jewish people are spared.

Nearly 500 years after the Lord raised up Esther to save the Jewish people

from annihilation, God would raise up another obscure Jew to save His people from destruction. Born to a carpenter and a young virgin, Jesus would eventually be given a platform in front of the Jewish leadership. Like Esther before him, his people were on a path that was heading toward not mere annihilation, but eternal separation from God.

But Jesus is not simply like Esther. He didn't simply risk losing his life or leaving a palace that was not originally his. He lovingly and willingly gave up his heavenly throne that was rightfully his to be born in a lowly manger. He didn't "risk" his life; he completely laid it down to save his people. But in God's providential plan, this perfect sacrifice meant life for not only Israel, but for people from every tribe, tongue, and nation who turn to him for life. Life has come for us this Christmas because Jesus is our true and better Esther.

## Jesus is the Yes and Amen of the Bible.

“For all the promises of God find their Yes in him.”  
(2 Corinthians 1:20)

“I can’t wait.” How often do we hear or say that?

*“I can’t wait for the light to turn.”*

*“I can’t wait for this page to load.”*

*“I can’t wait for this message to send.”*

*“I can’t wait for the those words to be said.”*

In a very real sense, the story of the Old Testament is one of waiting. Just to name a few, at the end of the Old Testament the people of God are waiting for a new exodus, a new return from Exile, a new covenant, new hearts, a new land, a new temple, a new David as a shepherd king. They’re even waiting for a new creation itself (Isa. 11:1-9).

Nowhere is this idea of anticipation clearer than in Luke 2. Most of us are familiar with the first part of that chapter—the journey to Bethlehem by Mary and Joseph, the search for an inn, the songs of the angels, and the shepherds in the field. But there is more than celebration and worship in Luke 2. There is also relief, an exhale, a profound sense of peace as hope has finally dawned, for in the Temple are two relatively minor characters with major expectations: “Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, *waiting for the consolation of Israel*, and the Holy Spirit was upon him” (Luke 2:25).

“And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were *waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem*” (Luke 2:36–38).

Can you imagine how much their hearts must have burned within them? “It’s all true! God has fulfilled his Word! The One upon whom we have waited is finally here!” Or, in the words of the Apostle Paul, “All the promises of God find their Yes in him (2 Cor. 1:20).

So, as we conclude another Advent, be reminded of God’s faithfulness, a faithfulness that is bound up in the gift of God’s Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Because he has come, like Simeon we can die in peace and bless God (Luke 2:29). Because he has come, like Anna we can give thanks to God and speak of him to all who have yet heard (Luke 2:38). Because he has come, we too can “utter our Amen to God for his glory” (2 Cor. 1:20).

Merry Christmas, indeed!

