



First United Methodist Church of Hanford

Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.



Reconciling Congregation

505 N. Redington Street Hanford, CA93230

559-584-4075 (voice) 559-584-5438 (fax)

office@fumchanford.org

[www.fumchanford.org](http://www.fumchanford.org)

Facebook: @HanfordFirstUMC



### GPS GUIDE Grow, Pray, Serve Guide for Weekly Reflection

(Adapted from United Methodist Church of the Resurrection resources: sharechurch.com)

#### December 22, 2024 *The Child with Two Names*

Matthew 1:21-23

#### Jesus Saves; Emmanuel Draws Us Near

#### MONDAY 12.23.24 Matthew 1:20-23

**Don't Forget:** Resurrection offers candlelight Christmas Eve services at 8 locations plus online and on TV. [Click here](#) for detailed schedule information at all locations, and plan to join us for a light-filled service honoring Jesus' birth.

Matthew packed these verses with meaning. First, he said the angel told Joseph to name Mary's child "Jesus." "The name *Jesus* comes from the Hebrew *Yeshua*, which means "deliverance" or "salvation."

\* Matthew also stressed a symbolic name from Isaiah 7:14. "This was a remarkable connection Matthew made with the words of Isaiah, and an essential insight about the meaning of Christmas and the significance of Jesus. No other New Testament author cited these words of Isaiah." \*\* • "Strictly speaking, the term *savior* (Greek *sōtēr*) appears only twenty-four times in the New

Testament.... statistics do not reveal the entire pattern, for we find the words *salvation* (*sōtēria*) and *save* (*sōzō*) used many more times in the NT, often with Jesus as the subject.... This image is encoded in the Hebrew name Jesus, *Yēšûa'* (shortened to *Yēšû*), meaning 'Yahweh saves,' or 'May Yahweh save.'" \* From what has Jesus' sweeping salvation most delivered you?

- Why is *Immanuel* spelled with an I in Isaiah and *Emmanuel* with an E in Matthew? “That is because of a difference in how the word is spelled in Hebrew and Greek.” \*\*\*\* In either language, it meant “God with us.” Matthew was the only New Testament writer to use the name with its deep meaning. Jesus was not a mere human “savior”—he was God, present and visible in God’s world. In what situations do you most need to trust in Jesus as “Emmanuel,” God with you?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you didn’t stay safely away from this world’s brokenness. You were born to be with us, and to save us. Thank you for the hope and comfort your presence can give me. Amen.

\* Eugene Eung-Chun Park and Joel B. Green, study note on Matthew 1:21 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 6 NT.

\*\* Adam Hamilton, *Incarnation: Rediscovering the Significance of Christmas* (Kindle Locations 766-768). Abingdon. Kindle Edition.

\*\*\* *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, general editors: Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III. InterVarsity Press, 1998, p. 441.

\*\*\*\* Adam Hamilton, *Incarnation: Rediscovering the Significance of Christmas* (Kindle Locations 965-967). Abingdon. Kindle Edition.

## Foreign Seekers Find Israel's Promised King

### TUESDAY 12.24.24 Matthew 2:1-6

Matthew 2’s “Christmas” events happened **after** Jesus’ birth. Matthew used the Greek word *magoi* to identify not “kings” (the carol notwithstanding) but students of the stars. Matthew said these visitors, likely from the area of Persia (modern Iran), arrived an unspecified amount of time “after Jesus was born.” Judea was a minor Roman province. No one expected non-Hebrew scholars to travel far to see (much less to worship) even a “king of the Jews”—no one except God, who drew them by a star. •

Roman historians Suetonius and Tacitus described an ancient prophecy that led many to believe a world ruler would rise in Judea. Both Romans said the promised ruler must have been Emperor Vespasian. They missed the true king, as did the priests and legal experts who recited Micah’s words about Bethlehem. The eastern visitors, hoping that this new King would bring the world a fresh start, \* didn’t. How can you keep your mind and heart open to notice where God is at work?

- The magi may have spent as much as 18 to 24 months following the star. (After their visit, murderous Herod, based on the time he learned from the magi, ordered the death of every child 2 years old and younger—cf. [Matthew 2:16](#).) Did you need to make a lengthy journey in life to find Jesus, or was he “right there” for you as a child? How have you learned to value and worship him?

**Prayer:** Lord of the whole world, you didn’t limit the message of Jesus’ birth to only people with “correct” theology. Thank you for the inclusive love that reached far beyond any one people group to share that joy. Amen.

\* It’s quite possible that the magi had interacted with Hebrews in their part of the world and drew hope from passages like [Psalm 72](#), [Isaiah 2](#) and [Isaiah 11](#).

## True seekers found the true king

### WEDNESDAY 12.25.24 Matthew 2:9-12

We pray that God's peace and joy will fill your Christmas Day.

Herod's amoral paranoia led him to kill even family members to defend his hold on the throne. He hid his real intentions about the new king behind courteous, even religious-sounding, words. But the magi were honest seekers, maybe even inspired by [Isaiah 60:6](#). When they saw the star that had led them on their journey, they "were filled with joy." Matthew said the magi "entered the house," not the stable, another hint in the text that some time had passed since Jesus' birth in an animal shelter. • Don't miss the unexpected note. Matthew wrote that "they [wealthy foreigners who'd visited Herod's court] saw the child with Mary his mother [a poor peasant girl]. Falling to their knees, they honored him." What allowed the Persians to value the simplicity of Mary and her child more than the external glitter of Herod's court? What do you learn about the God who valued worship from Zoroastrian visitors who came to see the newborn king because of an invitation in the stars? • Bethlehem was only five miles south of Jerusalem. Fearful King Herod's fortress/palace, the Herodium, literally towered over Bethlehem ([click here](#) to see the Herodium's remains.) He would have kept a close eye on the main travel routes. It likely took effort and planning for the magi to find "another route" Herod wasn't watching. When have you needed to choose a physical or emotional "road less traveled" to be true to your values and God's direction in your life?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, the magi honored you not just with their gifts but when they paid attention to the dream warning them not to play along with Herod. Help me to honor you both by acts of worship and by avoiding foolish choices against which you warn me. Amen.

## Divine Word brings unquenchable light and unending life

### THURSDAY 12.26.24 John 1:1-5

John started his gospel by deliberately echoing the first words of Genesis: "In the beginning." The images of "light" and "life" also echoed those "beginning" stories. John meant that in coming to earth, Jesus the creator was creating anew. Talking about "the Word" drew from both Greek and Hebrew thought worlds. Many Greek thinkers used *logos* ("the Word") to identify the great Idea behind nature.

For Hebrews, meanwhile, Genesis 1 said God created by speaking, by "the Word" (cf. [Psalm 33:6](#)). • "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light" (verse 5). That's not just a theological theory; it's physically true. Light even a small candle in a dark room, and the darkness doesn't extinguish it. Have there been times when it felt as though "darkness" was trying to put out God's light in your life? What spiritual practices keep you connected to Jesus "the Word" so that his light can keep shining in and through you?

• John's prologue daringly linked Greek and Hebrew thought. Greek philosophers said "the Word" (Greek *logos*) was "divine reason that orders the universe." \* The Hebrew Bible's first three words

were “in the beginning,” and said God spoke everything into being. John chose words and ideas to draw cultures and world views closer, not pitted against each other. Do you believe that continues to be part of the mission of Christ followers, at their best, as they live in Jesus' power?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you came to earth, not just for some small subset of humanity, but aiming to restore and uplift your entire creation. Help me play my humble part in that vast, saving mission. Amen.

\* NIV, *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* (p. 9218). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

## Some Rejected Light, Others Found Transformed Life

### FRIDAY 12.27.24 John 1:6-14

Scholar N. T. Wright concisely expressed the point of John's powerful claims: “John knows perfectly well he's making language go beyond what's normally possible, but it's Jesus that makes him do it; because verse 14 says that the Word became flesh—that is, became human, became one of us. He became, in fact, the human being we know as Jesus. That's the theme of this gospel: if you want to know who the true God is, look long and hard at Jesus.” \*

- Greek thinkers like Plato said “the logos” was too pure to enter the corrupt material world.  
Hebrews usually saw God as so awesome and distant that they feared to even say the divine name. John drew on both those thought worlds, but he boldly wrote, “The Word became flesh.” How can it help you realize how much God values you to believe that he “became flesh,” like us, rather than just wishing you well from afar?
- There was tragedy in the story: “his own people didn't welcome him.” But “the brightest note in the prologue, after the coming of the eternal Word, is that some have accepted the light and become children of God.” \*\* Into this darkened world, Jesus brought inextinguishable life and light for all who trusted in him, and who trust in him today. When did your spiritual journey start? In what ways has trusting and following Jesus given you a whole new life?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you for being born, for becoming flesh, so that you could give me the authority and power to be born anew, as a child of God. Thank you for my new life. Amen.

\* Wright, N.T., *John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 5). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

\*\* John Killinger, *A Devotional Guide to John: The Gospel of Eternal Life*. Word Books, 1984, p.18.

## Invisible God Made Visible Through Jesus' Grace

### SATURDAY 12.28.24 John 1:15-18

John's gospel crystallized what the first Christians believed about Jesus. The letter to the Hebrews, likely written before John's gospel, began, "In the past, God spoke through the prophets to our ancestors in many times and many ways. In these final days, though, he spoke to us through a Son. God made his Son the heir of everything and created the world through him. The Son is the light of God's glory and the imprint of God's being. He maintains everything with his powerful message" (Hebrews 1:1-3). Scholar William Barclay wrote, "When John said that no man has ever seen God, everyone in the ancient world would fully agree with him.... But John does not stop there; he goes on to make the startling and tremendous statement that Jesus has fully revealed to men what God is like.... Here again the keynote of John's gospel sounds: 'If you want to see what God is like, look at Jesus.'" \*

- In recent decades, some Christians have waged too many hurtful, fruitless arguments over the Bible. As someone said, at times they fling Bible verses at one another like hand grenades! Those "battles" sadly miss the point. The person of Jesus, not a book, was the ultimate revelation of God. As Pastor Hamilton wrote, "I'm proposing that we hear, examine, and interpret all scripture through the lens and filter of the definitive and unmitigated Word of God, Jesus Christ.... What is the heart, character, and will of God that Jesus reveals?... We must not set aside what is inconvenient or challenging to us simply because it is difficult. We will, however, read scripture in the light of the life, ministry, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus.... it is Jesus who serves as the final Word by which other words of scripture are to be judged." \*\* How, during 2025, will you deepen your knowledge of what Jesus revealed about God's heart, character and will?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you that your love is a fixed point I can depend on in an ever-changing world. Keep me steady, stable and loving with your love every day of 2025. Amen.

\* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of John—Volume 1 Chapters 1–7 (Revised Edition)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975, pp. 73-74.

\*\* Hamilton, Adam. *Making Sense of the Bible: Rediscovering the Power of Scripture Today* (pp. 175-177). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.