

BEFORE THERE

Was Christmas



a five day

DEVOTIONAL

by shanda fulbright

Hey Friend!

Before There Was Christmas is a 5-day devotional meant to be read one day at a time. In the busyness of the holiday season, it can be easy to forget to sit at the feet of Jesus. My prayer is that this devotional helps keep you focused and connected to Him.

There are two common misconceptions about the nativity scene I want to clear-up with this devotional. First, a lot of times we are reminded of the story of Jesus each December and the manger, shepherd, Mary and Joseph can become more like decorations to the holiday season instead of looked at as part of the historical event they were. I hope we are reminded this Christmas that this event really happened over 2,000 years ago, and was planned years before it took place.

Second, we may look to the manger and think this was the beginning of Jesus' existence. In this devotional, we will take a look at many verses all throughout the Bible that tell us the manger was part of God's plan put in place before the existence of angelic beings, the universe, or the earth was put in its place.

Lots of things were considered and thought of, including you, before there was Christmas!

I hope you will take each day to read and meditate on the lesson. If you'd like to make the devotional a deeper time in the Word, I suggest looking up each passage of Scripture as you read through.

It is a privilege to be able to share these truths with you!

Merry Christmas!

Shanda

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Before There Was Christmas

Day 1: He Was

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” John 1:1

When I was growing up, I used to think Jesus was actually born on December 25th. I also had a very skewed understanding of His existence, believing His life began on Christmas morning. There were many Christmases I would see the manger scene displayed in churches, painted on windows and set up in my home and I thought to myself, “So this is where it all began?”

But do you know Christmas began long before there were stars to guide wisemen and sheep for shepherds to watch? Jesus’ birth and death were foreknown before the foundations of the earth were laid and stars were spoken into existence (Rev 22:13). So, when was Jesus’ beginning? He declares He *is* the beginning. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end (Rev 1:8).

It is very difficult for our finite minds to try and understand an infinite God. After all, we have a beginning and an end (Ecclesiastes 3:20). But Jesus declares He *IS* the beginning because He was there before time was set in motion and the earth inhabited living beings (Psalm 102:25).

While Jesus walked this earth, He did not hesitate to equate Himself with God, because He is God. Because of this, many were offended and missed His coming. How can an ordinary man equate Himself to God? They could not wrap their minds around the idea that a baby born in a manger, with such humble beginnings, could possibly be the Messiah they were waiting for.

Friend, in order to truly understand the sacrifice Jesus made for us by exchanging His heavenly glory to put on the flesh of man, we have to understand that He is God and existed long before the manger (Phil 2:7). If we do not understand that, we may do what the people in the days Jesus walked the earth did, and miss Him because we cannot see the magnitude of His sacrifice.

The Son of God took on the flesh of man for one reason only: to become the only sacrifice sufficient to deliver us from death. Many who lived before Him looked ahead to His birth and rested in the hope of His coming. Not because He didn’t yet exist, but because He did, and because He was the only One worthy enough to save us from the consequence of sin.

This Christmas, I encourage you to meditate on Jesus’ purpose: born to die. That was it. It wasn’t the beginning of His existence. It marked the countdown to the cross. His life as a man began in a manger, but His existence as God is everlasting. How can you make sure you don’t miss Jesus this Christmas?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I thank you because before the foundations of the world were spoken into existence, you chose to be born for the purpose of dying. You are the great I Am and in you I have my beginning. I pray you will help my finite mind be able to understand the magnitude of your sacrifice. This Christmas, I pray I see beyond the manger and into a deeper relationship with the Creator of the universe. Thank you for your sacrifice for me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Before There Was Christmas

Day 2: He Chose You

“For He was foreknown before the foundations of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you.” 1 Peter 1:20

The other day, my youngest son asked me why God would create evil. Why did He put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the garden if He knew all along we would eat from it? What a profound question from an eight year old! I'll share with you what I shared with him.

I believe God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit looked out over the void before them and foresaw all of creation. They foresaw all that was good decide to disobey, and the good creation would fall and reap consequences that caused death and destruction. God saw His creation choose a tree, a broken relationship with their Creator, and a life that required redemption. A decision had to be made at this point in the process: does God continue with the plan and create us, or does He decide against it because of the choice we will make once He does? After all, option number one will require a Redeemer, a Sacrifice, a Savior, a Spotless Lamb.

I'm not sure what happened next, but I believe there was a moment of quiet decision. God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit stood looking over the expanse and into what will be if they speak the words that will bring all into existence. Then Jesus broke the silence and said, "I'll go. I'll become the sacrifice." (John 10:18) And with that, God said, "Let there be light" (Gen 1:3). The Spirit hovered over the face of the deep (Gen 1:2), and the plan for Christmas was set in motion. Jesus, the Son of God, chose us (Eph 1:4) and took on the flesh of man and became the perfect sacrifice.

I went on to ask my son if he wants to force people to be his friend or if he wants them to choose to be his friend. Of course he said he would rather others choose to be his friend. Friend, if we are made in the image of God (Gen 1:27), and we want people to choose us, how much more does God want us to choose Him? (John 15:16) He put that tree in the garden to give us a choice. But do not forget, God chose us first. When He looked into the future and knew we would choose to disobey, Jesus still said yes to us ... long before there was Christmas!

This Christmas, I encourage you to reflect on the choice Jesus made. What does His yes to choosing you mean in your life? Have you chosen Him?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, You saw into the future and beyond the garden and knew I would disobey and turn away from You. You chose me anyway. Thank you for exchanging your glorious and heavenly being for a body of flesh that would be bruised and broken for me. You chose me. Help me to remember when I feel lonely or like everyone else has walked away, you said yes to me, and that is a marvelous thing! In Jesus' name, amen.

Before There Was Christmas

Day 3: He Knew You

“Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” Psalm 139:16

“Jesus is the reason for the season.” How many times will we hear that this Christmas? **But did you know Jesus is not the reason for the season? We are!** I’m sure that statement is going to ruffle some feathers, but hear me out before you stop reading.

Yesterday, we talked about God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit choosing us even though God knew we would choose to disobey and break fellowship. **But more specifically, God chose you because He knows you.**

The Psalmist, David, understood that he was thought of and known by God *before* ... Before what? If you look up the word *before* it means “during the period of time preceding a particular event, date or time.” I love this definition because God’s knowledge of us preceded everything: events, dates and before time was set in motion.

Friend, God has intimate knowledge of you and it was long before your birthday. In Jesus’ birth comes our birth. Because Jesus said He would come to earth, be born and become the sacrifice, we have an existence (Acts 17:28). But understand this ... He knew you before you were a thought in the mind of anyone else.

Do you understand what *to know* means? It means God, the creator of the universe, observes you (Psalm 139:1-4). He thinks about you and He plans your way (Jeremiah 29:11). He knows all the details of your innermost thoughts, desires, and anxieties (Psalm 139:2). He knows you!

You see, before there were calendars to mark birthdays or holidays such as Christmas, God looked out into the expanse and His eyes caught a glimpse of you. He knew who you would become if Jesus were to be born and give His life for you. (Rom 8:29). He knew you would need Him because He saw His fallen creation and you in the middle of it. (Psalm 14:2-3). You were worth it to Him. (Heb 12:2). You were worth Him laying aside His glory and taking on the flesh of His creation.

This Christmas, I encourage you to observe the manger scene with a new perspective. The perspective that you are the reason Jesus came to this earth. Before He came as a baby to die as a sacrifice, He looked into the future and saw you and declared your worth with His birth. He wrote the plans for your life and put them into a book that sealed His good thoughts toward you. All of this was ordained before there was Christmas. **Do you know Him like He knows you?**

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I thank you because you know me. There is no place I can go that you do not see me. I thank you because you saw me before I was known by any other and you came to this earth for me. You wrote plans for my life to prosper me and draw me closer to you. This Christmas, deepen my walk with you and draw me closer to you than I’ve ever been. Not only are You the reason we celebrate Christmas, but I am the reason there is Christmas. Thank you for knowing me and planning my way. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Before There Was Christmas

Day 4: He Promised

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Matthew 5:17

When I was growing up, my mom never made a promise she couldn't keep. It stemmed from her childhood experiences. Every time my grandparents would plan a day at the lake or a fun trip, without fail, they always canceled at the last minute. Her heart would sink and she vowed to never make a promise unless she could follow through.

Before Jesus came, there were years and years of promises made by God to His people. These promises were in the form of prophecies. For thousands of years, prophets spoke the promises of God that a Messiah would come (Isa 7:14), be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), and die on a cross (Isa 53:7-8a). Promises are always about what's to come in the future, so that means there's a waiting period until the promise is fulfilled.

What's worse is the period of silence that followed the last prophet, Malachi. It was about a 400 year stint. What would you think? There were over 100 prophecies in several different books of the Old Testament, but now there's silence. I know me, and I know doubt would begin to take over. Isn't that what happens when promises are made but too much time gets in between the promise and the fulfillment?

Before there was Christmas, God promised Christmas was coming. Along with the promise was a hope for redemption and peace. And although it was years in the making, God kept His promise and the Messiah was born to a virgin in a little town called Bethlehem.

My friend, there are times we equate God to a person in our lives who make promises but never keep them. I want to encourage you today that God's promises were made long ago. He has established His word in your life and not only is it established in your life, it is established in the heavens (Psalm, 119:89), meaning it is eternal. There is nothing anyone can do to change God's Word. What He has promised, He will fulfill (Rom 4:21).

God's promises are just as true today as they were when they were written. We have thousands of promises available to us today and the Word tells us God inspired every one of them (2 Timothy 3:16). I encourage you to read them, hold onto them, and walk in these truths.

One last thing before we go today: Don't mistake God's timing for unfulfilled promises. Although there were years of prophecy before the birth of Jesus, one day, at just the right time, God's timing and His promise collided. When God speaks, it will come to pass. Hold on to the promise He has made you. **This Christmas, I encourage you to reflect on the promises of God.** When we kneel beside the manger, remember we are kneeling beside the Word made flesh ... A promise fulfilled (John 1:14). **How much more will God answer your prayers and fulfill the promises He has made to you?** His Word was established before there was Christmas.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I thank you for all of the promises you have made to me. Help me to trust in Your Word and hold onto it. Establish Your Word in my heart and over my mind and help me to trust in You when I feel as though You are silent or when I don't see Your promises taking place in my life. I thank you because all of these promises are made available because of Your birth. In Jesus' name, amen.

Before There Was Christmas

Day 5: He Took Our Place

“The Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.” (Rev 13:8)

When babies are born there is hope and expectation for the start of a new life. Parents dream about their future and wonder what they'll become as they choose their own path. I don't know of any parent who looks to the death of their child as they hold them in their arms and celebrate the new addition into their family.

Christmas is not the time of year we reflect on Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, but the primary reason Jesus was born was so He could die. John wrote in Revelation that Jesus was slain from the foundations of the world. Doesn't that almost sound depressing? But, let me assure you, it is not!

We already talked about how Jesus was in the beginning with God because He is God. We discussed Jesus' choice to come because He chose us. He knew He was going to die. We reflected on the idea that Jesus had intimate knowledge of us before we were born. We saw God's promises come to pass with the birth of Jesus. But friend, in His death comes a restoration of our relationship with our Creator and so many other blessings (Rom 5:10).

When Jesus was born, He literally came to take our place (Isaiah 53:4-6). We were the ones who sinned against God, yet Jesus paid the price (1 Pet 2:24). And along with His death, we have salvation (John 3:16), and abundant life in Him (John 10:10). We have reconciliation with God the Father (Col 1:19-20). Jesus conquered death, hell and the grave (1 Cor 15:55, Rev 1:18) and we now have an eternal life because our lives are in Him.

My friend, the whole point of Jesus' birth was so He could make His way to the cross. When Revelation states He was slain from the foundations of the world, it means His decision to come and take our place was established before creation, and is the reason for all that we see, hear and experience in this life. Without Jesus' birth and death, we literally have no existence.

Do we understand the magnitude of Christmas? Christmas is truly a celebration of God the Son making Himself equal with His creation. He can understand every pain, every heartache and can identify with our weaknesses. (Heb 4:15). He was born in a manger so He could die on a cross ... all before there was Christmas.

This Christmas, I encourage you to look beyond the manger and to the cross. Jesus grew up and became a man. He walked this earth for thirty-three short years, only to die. He had no wife, no children. He was focused on His purpose and would fulfill the promise He made long before they were written in the Bible. He did it for you, my friend; so you can celebrate Christmas!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I thank you for Christmas. I thank you for Your sacrifice so that I could have an abundant life in You. You took my place, Lord. You brought me back into a right relationship with You because You were born as a man and died on a cross. Help me to live my life for You. Help my appreciation for what You've done to only deepen this Christmas as I look to the manger with a new perspective. I give You my heart and my life. Take it and make it what You knew it would become long before You created the world. In Jesus name, Amen.