



THE ADVENT INVESTIGATOR



A FACT-FINDING DEVOTIONAL FOR
STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Jamye Doerfler

I love this devotional—not because it is another self-reflective Advent devotional for students, but because it is an engaging exploration of God’s Word. I believe parents and students alike will find it to be an awesome tool for equipping them to find the truth about Christmas, challenging them to not just read the Bible, but to investigate the transformative power of God’s Word in their lives, with a critical eye, asking questions that help them not only better understand Jesus’s birth, but hopefully, to better answer hard questions their friends may ask about Jesus.

– Joseph Parker, Family Ministry Pastor, Atlanta Westside Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, GA

I appreciate the many ways preteens, teens and families can use The Advent Investigator. There are multiple levels of challenge for what are probably already familiar scripture passages. Families are provided tools to develop continued devotionals with their students, while students are provided with skills to keep digging into Scripture on their own.

– Katie Flores, PCA Committee on Discipleship Ministries, Children’s Ministry Coordinator

The Advent Investigator is a unique Advent devotional for older elementary and middle school students to really dig into the Christmas story for themselves as they investigate the who, what, where, when, why, and how of Jesus’s birth. It’s well-designed and flexible for a wide variety of contexts and even gives students and families tools to keep investigating the Bible year-round. It’s a great resource for those who are ready to go deeper in the Advent season.

– Jimmy Brock, Pastor, Resurrection Community Church, Virginia Beach, VA

Jamye Doerfler’s new Advent devotional for middle schoolers is a creative way for them to engage with the story of Advent. Using investigative questions of who? what? when? where? and why? students will study the incarnation and develop a greater knowledge of who their Savior is and why He came. This Advent season, get The Advent Investigator for your child and rejoice together that Christ has come!

– Christina Fox, counselor, retreat speaker, writer, author of the children’s books, *Tell God How You Feel and God Hears Your Heart.*

The Advent Investigator takes a refreshingly new approach to the stories behind the Advent season. Organized by topical questions, Doerfler’s writing style is engaging, accessible, and relatable to pre-teens and early teens without oversimplifying the deeper meaning of Christ’s birth. Designed to be read alone or with others, this book is the ideal resource for families and teachers seeking to encourage rich reflection and foster meaningful discussion of important spiritual truths that will impact one’s faith well beyond the Advent season.

– Dr. Susan Dreves, Education Professor, Grove City College

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Although many publishers do not capitalize terms, and particularly pronouns which refer to the Trinity, in this study CDM publications has capitalized those elements for clarity of reference.

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To My Boysenberries



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Introduction

This book is all about investigating Christmas. We're going to approach the familiar story of Jesus's birth like a journalist who wants to discover new details and correct any mistaken information. Investigative journalists dive deep, looking for credible sources with a new angle that sheds light on what was *really* going on. We'll use the investigative questions—*who, what, where, when, why & how*—to guide our research.

I hope that as you read this devotional—alone, as a family, or in another group—that you will be drawn into a deeper knowledge of the story of Jesus's birth. These readings explore the historical context of Jesus's birth, as well as the mysteries of *why* and *how* He came, and finally, what His coming means for our lives today.

The Components of Each Lesson

Each lesson contains a scripture reading and three questions. One of these questions is designed to fill out the "Investigator's Report," printed in the back of this book and available for download on my website (www.jamyedoerfler.com). Two additional questions will help you look more closely at the scripture reading and apply what you've learned to your life—these would make great discussion questions with your family.

Next is an opportunity to pray with some prompts that relate to the lesson.

Finally, each lesson comes with an opportunity to look up additional scriptures that relate to the devotional. You'll see these marked by an *asterisk in each reading.

There are two ways you can use this devotional:

1) alone or 2) together—with your family, in a classroom, or with another group.

If you are a student reading this book on your own, grab a pen and write down the answers to the questions as you

go. If you want to challenge your Bible reference skills, use the “Investigator’s Report” to give you the lesson’s Bible reference, and read it in your own Bible before reading the lesson here.

If you are a parent or teacher who will be using this book with your child or students, you may choose to give the young person(s) this book, which has the scripture passage already printed, along with the devotion. Then later, you can discuss the questions and pray together. Or, to encourage them to open the Bible on their own each day, you can give them the “Investigator’s Report,” which provides the Bible reference to look up and a comprehension question. Afterwards, you can come together and read the devotional aloud and answer the discussion questions. Ideally, this would be a daily activity together; however, if you can only manage discussion every few days, just select the most pertinent discussion questions.

You can find downloadable resources for use in a Christian classroom or homeschool setting on my website (www.jamyedoerfler.com).

The Schedule for These Lessons

Because life can be full during the Christmas season, there are only twenty lessons to complete during Advent. This gives you a little space to catch up when you need to! However, for those who want additional devotionals, there are four bonus lessons in the back which look at storylines and characters less central to the Nativity story. With these additional lessons, you can use this devotional every day from December 1-24, or the bonus lessons can be used in the week between Christmas and New Year’s.

No matter how you use this devotional, I pray that throughout this month, by considering the context for the incarnation of Christ, your hearts will respond in worship, and the significance of Christ’s birth will resound more loudly than all the earthly trappings around the holiday season.



What Do You Know about Christmas?

Think you know the Christmas story inside and out? Let's find out. Circle or check your answers to these questions now, and then come back at the end of the book and compare your answers against what you've learned over the month of December.

1. When was Jesus born?

- A. December 25, 1 AD
- B. Some other day in 1 AD
- C. December 25, 4 BC
- D. None of the above

2. How many kings visited Jesus?

- A. 0
- B. 3
- C. 7
- D. 10

3. Jesus was a descendant of Ruth:

- True False

4. Where was Jesus from? (Circle all that apply.)

- A. Jerusalem
- B. Bethlehem
- C. Nazareth
- D. Heaven

5. When the angel visited the shepherds, what clue did he give so they knew they had found the right baby?

- A. The baby would be in a stable.
- B. The baby would be in a feeding trough.
- C. There would be a star over the building.
- D. The baby would have a halo over His head.

6. Jesus was related to John the Baptist:

- True False

7. Circle all the things we know about Jesus's earthly father, Joseph, from the Bible:

- A. His birth and death
- B. His ancestry
- C. His occupation
- D. What he looked like
- E. How old he was when Jesus was born

8. King Herod was happy to learn that the Messiah had been born:

- True False

9. Which of these carols about angels directly quotes Scripture?

- A. "Angels from the Realm of Glory"
- B. "Angels We Have Heard on High"
- C. "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing"

10. Circle all possible explanations for the star over Bethlehem:

- A. God created a special star for this purpose.
- B. A supernova exploded.
- C. God made an existing star extra bright for a period of time.
- D. Planets aligned so they appeared to make one bright star.



Why Did Jesus Come? John's Account

You might know the story of Jesus's birth really well and think there's nothing left to learn. If you were asked to fill out the investigative questions, you might breeze right through them. *Who was Jesus's mom? No problem: Mary.* For young kids, that short "headline" answer is perfect. But as you get older, you can handle the more challenging stuff, so we're going to dig deep into the Christmas story like an investigative journalist.

Let's begin by investigating *why* Jesus came. Most of what we know about the Christmas story is simply *what* happened. But Jesus's coming to earth in human form wasn't a random act or spontaneous decision. Jesus gave up a lot to come here as a human baby. So, let's understand the motive (the reason behind an action) before we get into the details of the story.

I know this is an unusual place to start a Christmas devotional, but just hang in there. For the next three days, we're going to skip forward thirty years past Jesus's birth and listen to His reasons for coming to earth.

Read John 6:38-40. Circle the reason Jesus came.

³⁸"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

Right before Jesus said this, He had just miraculously fed 5,000 people with only a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. Afterwards, He went off by Himself, because He knew if He didn't get away, the crowd was going to try to make Him

king. The next day, the crowds hunted Him down, looking for more food. (Sounds like teenagers to me.) But Jesus turned the conversation from food to spiritual things. He told them why He had come to earth.

Verse 38 begins, *"For I have come down from heaven . . ."* This is a pretty wild place to start! Before Jesus was on this earth, He was in heaven. You and I didn't exist until we were formed inside our mothers' wombs. But Jesus existed eternally even before the creation of the world.*

He then added, *". . . not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me."* Sometimes we must do someone else's will, which is another way of saying we must obey. You might not want to spend your evening doing homework, but you do it anyway (hopefully!) because it's the will of the adult teaching you. Jesus was completely and joyfully motivated to do the Father's will.

Finally, Jesus explained what His Father's will is: *". . . that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life . . ."* God wants to give us eternal life. What a great gift!

When Jesus hid from the crowds, it was because He knew they didn't understand why He had come. They could only think about how Jesus could give them food today and political freedom tomorrow. But Jesus came for a much greater and longer-lasting reason. In loving obedience to the Father, Jesus came from heaven to earth to make a way possible for us to have eternal life with Him.

Why? Because God loves us. The desire to give gifts to someone you love is one of the ways we're made in God's image. When you love someone, you enjoy giving them good things. (Animals don't buy gifts for those they love—unless you count your cat bringing you a dead bird as a "gift.") The best gift God could ever give those He loves is to spend eternity in heaven with Him. Right now, that might not sound like the best gift you could ever receive, but as you grow in your relationship with the Lord, that promise will seem better and better—just ask an adult.



Questions:

1. Why did Jesus come to earth, according to this passage?
2. What does verse 39 teach us about the people whom God has saved?
3. How does knowing God loves you so much that Jesus left heaven to give you eternal life give you hope for living your daily life?

Prayer Prompts:

- ★ Praise God because He promises the best gift of all to those who believe in Jesus.
- ★ Ask God to prepare your heart to not be like the crowds who wanted more earthly stuff but to have a heart ready to worship Him for who He is rather than what He can give us.



***FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION:**

Look up and read John 1:1 and John 8:58.
What do these two verses tell you about Jesus's
life before His birth on earth?



WHY DID JESUS COME?

Luke's Account

Read Luke 5:27-32. Circle the reason Jesus came.

²⁷After this He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And He said to him, "Follow Me." ²⁸And leaving everything, he rose and followed Him.

²⁹And Levi made Him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. ³⁰And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at His disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" ³¹And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ³²I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Some schools have a reward program to motivate kids to behave well. Students seen with good behavior get their names put in a raffle. Later, a few names are drawn, and those students are rewarded with a special lunch with the teacher or principal. In our passage today, the religious leaders—who were suspiciously watching Jesus—expected Him, the Teacher, to do something similar: have lunch with the “righteous” and reject the “sinners.” Jesus did exactly the opposite, choosing to have lunch with those who “misbehaved.” Let’s dig into *why* He would do that and *what* that teaches us about His motive for coming to earth.

The “sinners” in this passage are the tax collectors. During biblical times, tax collectors were hated for two main reasons: they were collecting money for the Roman government who had invaded and occupied Israel; and many of them were cheats, charging people more than they should and keeping the extra.

When Jesus approached Levi* and welcomed him into His inner circle of disciples, Levi understood that Jesus loved

LESSON 2

him even though he was a “bad kid.” He was so excited that he threw a huge party so his friends could meet Jesus for themselves. Of course, Levi’s best friends were also tax collectors.

So, there Jesus was, surrounded by the sort of crowd that “good, religious people” wouldn’t be caught with. When the religious leaders asked Him how He could stand being with these tax collectors, Jesus told the religious leaders that these “sinners” were the very people He left heaven and came to earth to save.

Jesus was showing compassion to Levi and his friends. Compassion is a form of love someone feels for another person who is suffering.

Here, we uncover a second motive for Jesus coming to earth. As we read before, He came in obedience to the Father’s will to offer eternal life. Now we understand to whom that gift is offered: people like Levi, sinners who know they need help, just like sick people who go to the doctor because they know the doctor can help them get better. Jesus came not only out of obedience, but also out of compassion.



Questions:

1. Why did Jesus come to earth, according to this passage?
2. What does this passage show you about how Jesus treats sinners?
3. The tax collectors' sins were obvious for everyone to see. Some of our sins are like that, while other sins are hidden. What sins have you tried to keep hidden from others?

Prayer Prompts:

- ★ Ask God to forgive your sins (perhaps take a moment to silently confess) and to heal your heart.
- ★ Praise Jesus because He is compassionate to sinners.

***FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION:**

When Levi started following Jesus, his whole life changed, even his name! Levi became known as Matthew, and most scholars believe he wrote the Gospel of Matthew.

You can read his version of this same story in Matthew 9:9-13.

Note any variations you find in the accounts.





WHY DID JESUS COME?

Matthew's Account

Read Matthew 5:17. Circle the reason Jesus came.

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. (Note: "The Law or the Prophets" refers to the Old Testament.)

Though there are a number of other times* in the New Testament where Jesus gave His reasons for coming to earth, today will be the last time we answer the question: *Why?*

Think about the sorts of rules you have in your house. Maybe there are rules about chores you must do or limits on the amount of screen time you can have. Do you have any rules limiting how much asparagus you're allowed to eat? Why not? Because we need rules to keep us from following temptations, and most of us aren't tempted to eat too much asparagus.

When God gave the Ten Commandments to the Israelites, He was showing them what it looks like to love Him and to love others perfectly. Since none of us are able to do that, Jesus came to earth as both God and human to fulfill the Law perfectly.

Today's reading is taken from Jesus's "Sermon on the Mount." In that sermon, He taught that not only should His disciples obey the Ten Commandments in their actions, but also in their thoughts and emotions. Not only should you not kill, but you shouldn't even speak in anger at someone. Yikes! Impossible!

Jesus told the crowd that He hadn't come to abolish the Law—meaning He didn't come to throw it all away. Instead, He came to fulfill it. He followed the Law fully, not only in His actions, but also in His heart and mind. He's the only person who could ever do so.

Another way He fulfilled the Law was by offering Himself up as a sacrifice for our sins. You see, included in the Old Testament were instructions to offer sacrifices for forgiveness

when God's people broke the Law. Since before Moses' time, the Jews used animal sacrifices. When Jesus was crucified, He fulfilled the sacrificial requirements once and for all. Although God loves us, He is perfect and cannot tolerate our sin. So, the only way sinners can enter His presence and live eternally with Him is for a perfect, eternal sacrifice to be made on our behalf. Jesus is that sacrifice.

Now let's look at the idea of Jesus "fulfilling the prophets." Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, prophets wrote accurate predictions such as *how* and *where* Jesus would come to earth. In fact, there are over 300 prophecies from the Old Testament that were fulfilled through Jesus's life on earth! Books in the fantasy genre often borrow this idea—that someone has received a revelation beforehand and now it is coming true. Lots of stories use this idea, but the Bible did it first.

We worship and trust in a God who is *sovereign* (has authority over everything) and so powerful that He announced hundreds of years beforehand *what* He would do and then did it.

Throughout this devotional we'll see many times when God revealed a detail to His prophets hundreds of years before it happened. Starting tomorrow, we'll dig into the prophecies that Jesus's birth fulfilled.



Questions:

1. Why did Jesus come to earth, according to this passage?
2. What do Jesus's words tell us about the importance of the Old Testament?
3. Which area of obedience is most difficult for you: actions, thoughts, or emotions?

Prayer Prompts:

- ★ Praise God that He is faithful to fulfill His promises.
- ★ Ask God to help you obey not only in your actions, but also in your heart and mind.

***FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION:**

There are other places in the Gospels that explain the motive for Jesus's coming to earth. Check out the following scriptures.

After each, note the reason given.



John 3:16-17

John 12:46

John 18:37

Luke 4:16-21



WHERE DID JESUS GROW UP?

Investigative journalists don't settle for easy answers. They look for significance in every detail. Think about the simple question, *Where?* While at most times the place an event happened is an easy answer, an investigator knows that sometimes the location means something deeper. A modern example of strategic location is the 1963 Civil Rights March that gathered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. They chose that location because President Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation to abolish slavery in the United States almost 100 years earlier.

Over the next two days, we'll look at two answers to the question *Where?* That's because where Jesus was *born* and where Jesus *grew up* are two different places. Both towns, however, are in Israel, because God had promised that the Savior of the whole world would come from that nation. (But more about that in Lesson 8, when we look into the *who* of Jesus's ancestry.)

Read Luke 1:26-27:

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

Plenty of people may be able to answer the question "Where did Jesus live most of His life?" In fact, Jesus was often referred to as "Jesus of Nazareth." Easy-peasy. But we're going to dig a little deeper to learn about the significance of that town.

The town of Nazareth was located in Galilee, the northernmost region of Israel. It was quite far from the city of Jerusalem, which was the center of Jewish religious and political life, and some people from the city looked down on the rural town.*

LESSON 4

Regardless of what some Israelites thought, other countries saw Galilee as desirable. With a good climate and water supply, Galilee was great for growing things such as grains, grapes, figs, and olives. It was also located on a major trade route. This made it a target for attack. Many years before Jesus was born, Assyria had invaded and occupied Galilee sometime between 740-733 BC (as a reminder, dates in BC count down rather than up).

In Lesson 3, we learned that one of the reasons Jesus came was to “fulfill the prophets.” Here’s our first example. Isaiah 9:1 reads, *“But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time He brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time He has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.”*

In this verse, Isaiah was prophesying two things. The first was the defeat of Galilee. (Zebulun and Naphtali were the original Israelite tribes that occupied the area known as Galilee.) Saying that God would bring the area “into contempt” means He let them be conquered by Assyria because they had been unfaithful and were worshiping other gods.

But second, Isaiah prophesied that in the future, God will lift Galilee back up! That’s what it means to say, God “has made glorious” this region. He did so by making it His Son’s home on earth.

Since Joseph and Mary were from Nazareth, Jesus grew up and later ministered there. As the world recognized that Jesus was the Savior of the world, He “made glorious” a place that had previously been humbled. Because of Jesus, Nazareth is still one of the most recognized towns in the world.

God never changes; He is still sovereign over everything that happens. He orchestrates everything for our good and His glory. Not only did He choose the exact place for His Son to grow up, but He chose the place where YOU are growing up. That’s right. You are living in the place and time God has chosen for you. God has put you and your family where you are for His purposes.



Questions:

1. Where did God choose for Jesus to grow up? How do we know that God chose that place?
2. If God can tell the prophets what would happen hundreds of years later, what does that show us about what else He can do?
3. What reasons can you think of that God has put you where you live?

Prayer Prompts:

- ☆ Praise God that He is in total control of all things.
- ☆ Ask God to help you see why He put you where you are and how you can serve Him there.



***FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION:**

Read John 1:45-46. What did people think of Nazareth?



WHERE WAS JESUS BORN?

Read Luke 2:1-5:

¹In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

Every ten years, the American government takes a census. Each head of a household records who lives in the household, so the government has a somewhat accurate count of the nation's population. Our founding fathers got this idea from the Romans, who conducted censuses regularly (that's what is meant by "registration" in today's scripture). Verse 1 says the registration was for "all the world," but it means the entire Roman Empire. (The Romans kind of thought they were the center of the universe!) Romans used this information to draft men into the army as well as calculate taxes. Jews, such as Joseph, didn't have to serve in the Roman army, but they did have to pay taxes.

As we know, Mary and Joseph were living in Galilee, but we see in today's reading from Luke that the census required everyone to return to their "hometown," or where their ancestors had lived. If this were to happen today, you'd have to travel to the city where your father's father was born.

For Joseph, who was a descendant of King David, that meant a seventy-mile journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem—a long walk on foot! Mary probably rode a donkey, since she was getting close to giving birth, but Joseph would have walked beside her. Scholars estimate the trip may have taken about a week.

The Lord had perfectly orchestrated the Roman census and Mary's labor to bring about Jesus's birth in Bethlehem in order to fulfill yet another prophecy found in Micah 5:2: *"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for Me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."*

There were two towns in Israel called Bethlehem—one in the north and one in the south. The one in the south is where Jesus was born. It's referred to as Bethlehem Ephrathah to make sure readers knew which one Micah meant. This Bethlehem was tiny, so small that it wasn't even listed in the Book of Joshua where the 112 cities and villages of Judah were listed.* That's why it says the town was "too little to be among the clans of Judah."

This teaches us something about God: He's not impressed by popular, rich places and people the way we are. God didn't choose Jerusalem, the biggest city with the "most important" people and the nicest houses. He chose the countryside of Nazareth, and He chose the tiny town of Bethlehem. He lifted up places that were humbled by defeat or overlooked because of size.

In our own lives, we may feel overlooked or discouraged by other people's rejection. Take heart! When we are humbled, we are prepared to make a home for Jesus in our hearts.



Questions:

1. Where was Jesus born, and what is significant about the place?
2. Look back at Micah 5:2. What phrases in this verse confirm that Jesus existed before the creation of the world, as we learned in Lesson 1?
3. If God isn't impressed by popular, rich places and people like we are, what do you think He cares about instead?

Prayer Prompts:

- ★ Praise God for orchestrating all of the details of Jesus's birth in such a way as to reveal His greatness.
- ★ Ask God to help you respond in a godly way when you are humbled.



***FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION:**

Read the listing of the 112 Judean cities and villages in Joshua 15:20-63. Which other names do you recognize?