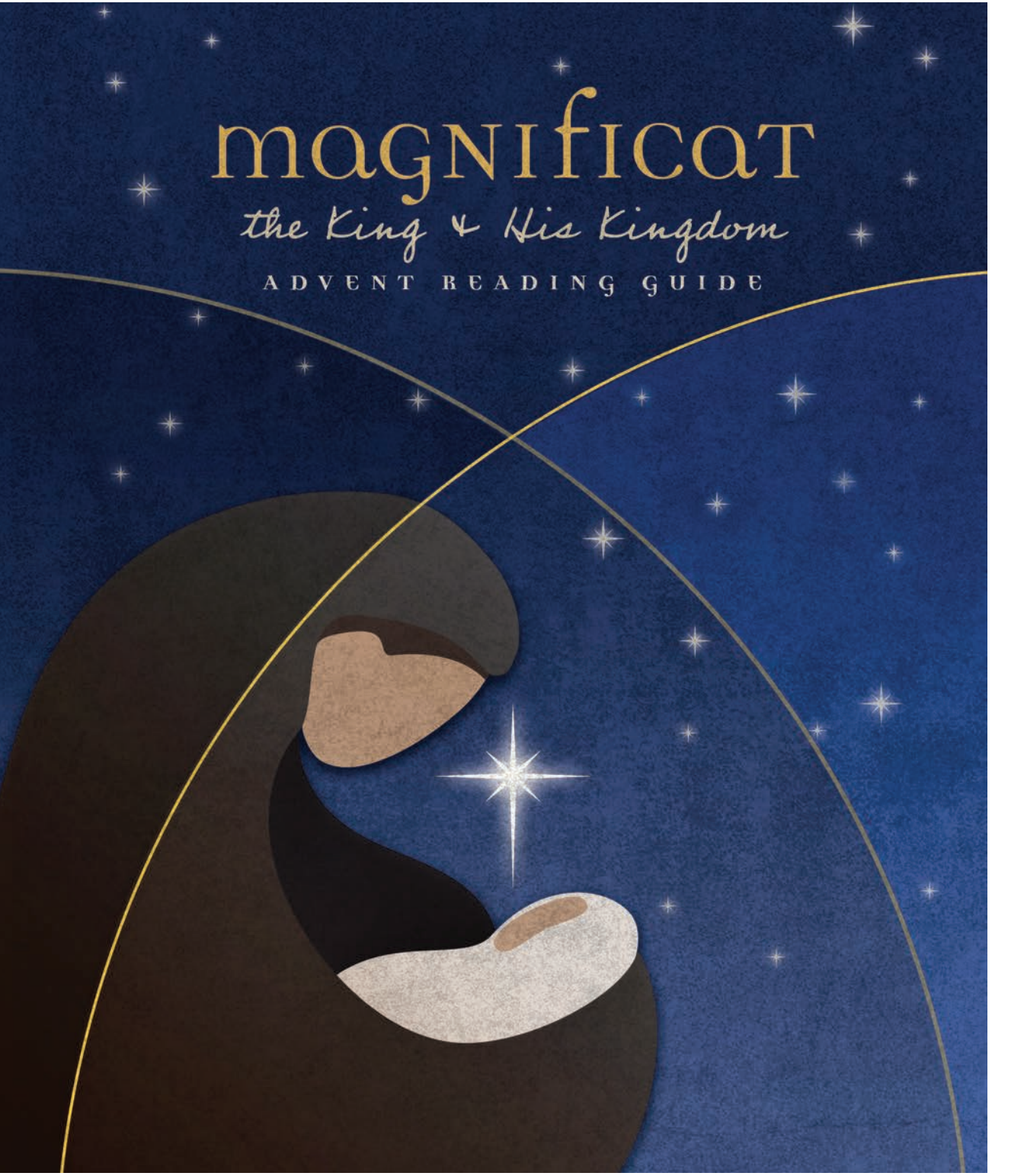
magnificat

the King & His Kingdom

ADVENT READING GUIDE



Welcome

Mary sang a song of praise before anything had changed. She was young, unmarried, and pregnant, with a hard road ahead of her. The powerful still ruled and the hungry were still hungry. Yet she sang as if God had already turned the world right side up. This Advent season, we will live inside her song, the Magnificat. It is a song filled with things Jesus would go on to preach.

Before the King said a word,
his mother sang it.

Christmas comes back around every year. It can be easy to let it happen around us rather than in us. Maybe you come into this season full of joy. Maybe you come in tired, grieving, or just busy. Wherever you are, Mary invites you to remember who God actually is: the God who comes to us as a baby, and who sees the lowly. We invite you to take up this guide as an act of daily worship. Through the cookie-baking days and the to-do lists, let it be a place you return to, an open invitation for the Lord to do his work in us this Christmas season.

Welcome to Advent.

THE WORLD IS THE MANGER

"Once we have seen God in a stable, we can never be sure where He will appear or to what lengths He will go, or to what depths He will descend in His wild pursuit of humankind. If holiness and the awful power and majesty of God were present in this least auspicious of all events—this birth of a peasant's child—then there is no place or time so lowly and earthbound but that holiness can be present there too. And this means that we are never safe, that there is no place where we can hide from God, no place where we are safe from His power to break into and recreate the human heart. The world is the manger of the Lord, and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

— Frederick Buechner, *The Magnificent Defeat*
(New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 85–86

WEEK 1

HOPE

The Hope of the Humble

Read the week prior to Sunday, November 29

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:46–55 (the Magnificat) · Luke 1:26–38 · Isaiah 11:1–10 · Psalm 125

BEATITUDE ECHO

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3)

PRAYER

God of the humble,
you looked on Mary in her ordinary life and called her blessed;
look on us the same way.
We are not owed anything, and yet we are heirs to your kingdom.
Yours is the kingdom of the empty-handed.
Give us Mary's hope. Give us Mary's yes.
Amen.

SONG

Hope for Everyone by Matt Maher

REFLECTION

When Mary says God "looked on the humble estate of his servant," she is telling us about the King. He notices the people nobody else does. Mary was not impressive by any measure her world cared about, yet God looked at her and called her blessed. That is still how He works. There is no version of your life so ordinary that this King overlooks it. So in the middle of one of the fullest weekends of the year, here is the question worth sitting with: where am I empty-handed right now, and can I believe the King sees me there?

FAMILY ACTIVITY

Plant an amaryllis or paperwhite bulb together this week. It looks like nothing: a plain brown lump in a pot of dirt. Water it every day as a family, and read Isaiah 11:1 when you plant it: "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse." By Christmas there will be a bloom on your table that started as the humblest thing in the house. Hope grows like that.

BENEDICTION

(see page 10)

WEEK 2

PEACE

The Great Reversal

Read the week prior to Sunday, December 6

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:46–55 (the Magnificat) · Isaiah 35:1–10 · Psalm 126

BEATITUDE ECHO

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." (Matthew 5:5)

PRAYER

God who brings down thrones,
we confess we do not always want the reversal you promise;
sometimes we are the ones seated comfortably.
Overturn in us whatever peace depends on staying on top,
and out of the overturning, give us the true peace that surpasses understanding.
Set the world right side up, and begin with our hearts.
Come, Lord Jesus.
Amen.

SONG

His Name Shall Be by Matt Redman

REFLECTION

"He brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the humble." There is nothing soft about that line. Mary sings about a King who turns things over. That can be uncomfortable news, because sometimes we're the ones doing well with the way things are. Yet this is where the peace of Advent actually comes from. Not from keeping everything in place, but from trusting the King who is setting the world right side up. As we get to know him this week, the question is worth the discomfort: where might he want to do some overturning in me?

FAMILY ACTIVITY

Build a block tower as tall as you can, and name it after the things that feel big and unmovable. Then let the youngest knock it down. Talk about it afterward: God's kingdom does not come by climbing; it comes down to us, gently, as a baby. Then light a candle in the middle of the mess and enjoy a quiet minute together.

BENEDICTION

(see page 10)

WEEK 3

JOY *Filled*

Read the week prior to Sunday, December 13

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:46–55 (the Magnificat) · Matthew 1:18–25 · Micah 5:2–5a · Psalm 132:8–18

BEATITUDE ECHO

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." (Matthew 5:6)

PRAYER

God who fills the hungry with good things,
we bring you our actual hunger, not the polite version.
Meet what is empty in us,
and let our joy be the joy of the fed:
not manufactured, not managed, but given.
We rejoice in you, our Savior.
Amen.

SONG

Joy to the World

REFLECTION

"He filled the hungry with good things." Mary doesn't say the King merely notices the hungry. He feeds them. Joy in this song isn't something we work up; it's what happens when God meets an empty place. December has a way of exposing our empty places. So, do not rush past this question: what am I truly hungry for, underneath the polite version I usually give?

FAMILY ACTIVITY

Bake something purely for joy: donuts, or a cake, sprinkles encouraged. Enjoy it together, and while you eat, go around the table naming the good things God has filled your lives with this year. No rushing.

BENEDICTION

(see page 10)

WEEK 4

LOVE

Mercy All the Way Down

Read the week prior to Sunday, December 20

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:46–55 (the Magnificat) · John 1:1–14 · Isaiah 9:2–7 · Psalm 131

BEATITUDE ECHO

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." (Matthew 5:7, with the peacemakers of 5:9 close behind)

PRAYER

God of mercy,
your promise to Abraham has not expired,
and neither has your mercy toward us.
From generation to generation you keep coming back,
long after it would have been fair to stop.
Make us merciful the way you are merciful:
undeserved, unhurried, all the way down.
Amen.

SONG

Noel by Lauren Daigle

REFLECTION

"His mercy is for those who fear him, from generation to generation." Mary is singing about a pattern: a King who has been keeping the same promise for centuries and will keep it again through her. His mercy is not a mood, but who He is. In each of us there is often a place where we have quietly decided mercy must have run out. This week, we ask the question: what would change in me if I let the King be as merciful as Mary says he is?

FAMILY ACTIVITY

Call someone from another generation: a grandparent, an aunt or uncle, someone from church. Ask them one question: where has God been kind to you in your life? His mercy runs from generation to generation. Let your kids hear it running.

BENEDICTION

(see page 10)

WEEK 5

CHRISTMAS EVE

The Arrival

Read the week prior to Wednesday, December 24

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:46–55 (the Magnificat) · Luke 2:1–20 · Isaiah 60:1–3 · Psalm 134

BEATITUDE ECHO

All of the Beatitudes, quietly, all at once.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
the song lands tonight.
We who waited through the dark weeks now draw near.
We who heard your mother sing now see what she was singing about.
My soul magnifies the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.
Come, Lord Jesus. Come as you promised, small and close.
Amen.

SONG

O Holy Night

REFLECTION

"My soul magnifies the Lord." Tonight it all lands. The King who topples thrones arrives with no throne at all. The King who feeds the hungry shows up hungry, in a feed trough, in the dark. Mary's song rings quietly true. After four weeks, tonight's question is the simplest: who has this King become to me, and what is my soul magnifying?

FAMILY ACTIVITY

When you are home after the service, turn off every light in the house and sit together in the dark for one quiet minute. Then light a single candle and read Isaiah 60:1 aloud: "Arise, shine, for your light has come." Sing one verse of Silent Night by that one small light before bed. That is the whole activity. He is here. (If you have a nativity, tonight is also the night to finally lay baby Jesus in the manger.)

BENEDICTION

(see page 10)

BONUS SPREAD

A CHRISTMAS *Examen*

Sunday, December 27 · No gathering this Sunday: church happens at your table.

FOR YOUR HOUSEHOLD

We will not gather this Sunday on purpose. The Sunday after Christmas, church happens at your table or in your living room. This is a simple guide for your household, to look back with God before the year turns. The old name for this kind of prayer is the examen: an unhurried review of where God has been. Mary's song has been teaching us who the King is; now, around your own table, ask where you've seen him.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 2:22–40 (Simeon and Anna, two people who spent their whole lives watching for the King and lived to see him)

THE EXAMEN

Light a candle. Read the scripture aloud. Then take Mary's song one line at a time, and let each line ask its question. Let everyone answer, including the youngest.

"He looked on the humble estate of his servant."

> Where did the King notice our family this year? Name a moment you felt seen by God.

"He brought down the mighty from their thrones."

> What throne in our house did the King lovingly take down this year? Where did we stop insisting on our own way, and it turned out to be grace?

"He filled the hungry with good things."

> Where were we fed or provided for this year? Name the good things, out loud, one by one.

"His mercy is from generation to generation."

> Where do we hope to meet his mercy in the year ahead? What do we want to be true of our home next Christmas?

Close by reading the whole song aloud together, Luke 1:46–55. It was Mary's review of who God is. Now it's yours.



FOR THE KIDS

While the household talks, give the kids paper and crayons and have them draw their answers to each question. When the year turns, let those drawings be the first thing on the fridge in January.

PRAYER

King in the manger,
before the year turns, we look back with you.
Thank you for seeing us in our ordinary days,
for bringing down the thrones we built for ourselves,
for providing for us in the hungry places,
and for mercy that met us throughout the year.
Send us into this new year still singing your praise.
Your kingdom come, your will be done.
Amen.

SONG

All Glory Be to Christ (sung to the tune of *Auld Lang Syne*, which is exactly the point)

BENEDICTION

Lord Jesus,
Master of both the light and the darkness,
send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas.
We who have so much to do and seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day,
We who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us.
We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of Your kingdom
We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of Your presence.
We are Your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light.
To You we say, "Come Lord Jesus!"
Amen.
— Henri J.M. Nouwen

COMMUNITY *Blessing*

This season we turn our attention to the King, and to the kingdom he brings down to earth with him.

Jesus taught us to pray: "*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*" (Matthew 6:10). The Community Blessing is one of the most concrete ways we get to be part of the answer to that prayer, and it runs in both directions. Use the code below to meet a need that has been shared by our community these past weeks. Receiving takes as much courage as giving, and both belong here. The first church did exactly this: they shared what they had, named what they lacked, and "gave to anyone who had need" (Acts 2:45).

That is Mary's song: the hungry, filled with good things. This Christmas, let us live it together.

FILL A NEED

NOV. 22 – DEC. 13

thedoor.org/community-blessing


Open Door