

All is Bright

A devotional journey
to color your way to Christmas

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DECEMBER 6

I Am the Lord's Servant

It's hard to imagine how frightening it must have been for teenage Mary to see an angel and hear him speaking to her. The Bible says that "Gabriel appeared to her and said, 'Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!' Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. 'Don't be afraid, Mary,' the angel told her, 'for you have found favor with God!'" (Luke 1:28-30). We can't help but wonder what the angel looked like and what he sounded like.

As frightening as it must have been to see and hear an angel speaking to her, it must have been even more frightening for Mary to process what the angel was telling her—that she was going to become pregnant, even though she had never been intimate with a man. This would be a scandal in her village. Everyone would whisper about her. She would be shunned and perhaps sent away by her fiancé, Joseph, because he would think she had been unfaithful to him. And yet, even though she probably had a million questions and concerns, Mary responded to the angel by welcoming whatever God wanted to do. She said, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true" (Luke 1:38). In a sense she said to God, "I'm yours. You can do anything you want with me," even though she must have known that this situation would be very hard for her, for Joseph, and for her whole family.

It's easy to label what we consider "good things" in our lives as gifts from God and to welcome them with gratitude. But when difficult things happen, we don't look at them as part of God's good plan for us. Mary's example shows us we can also welcome those things we would not necessarily label "good," confident that God's gifts sometimes come in perplexing and even painful packages. When we belong to God, we know he will use whatever he allows into our lives for good. Somehow, in God's hands, these things also become gifts of his grace toward us.

It takes faith—faith to rest in who God is and his love for us; faith to be confident that he is doing something good in and through our difficult circumstances—to see the hard things in our lives as gifts of God's grace.



DECEMBER 12

Bethlehem's Baby

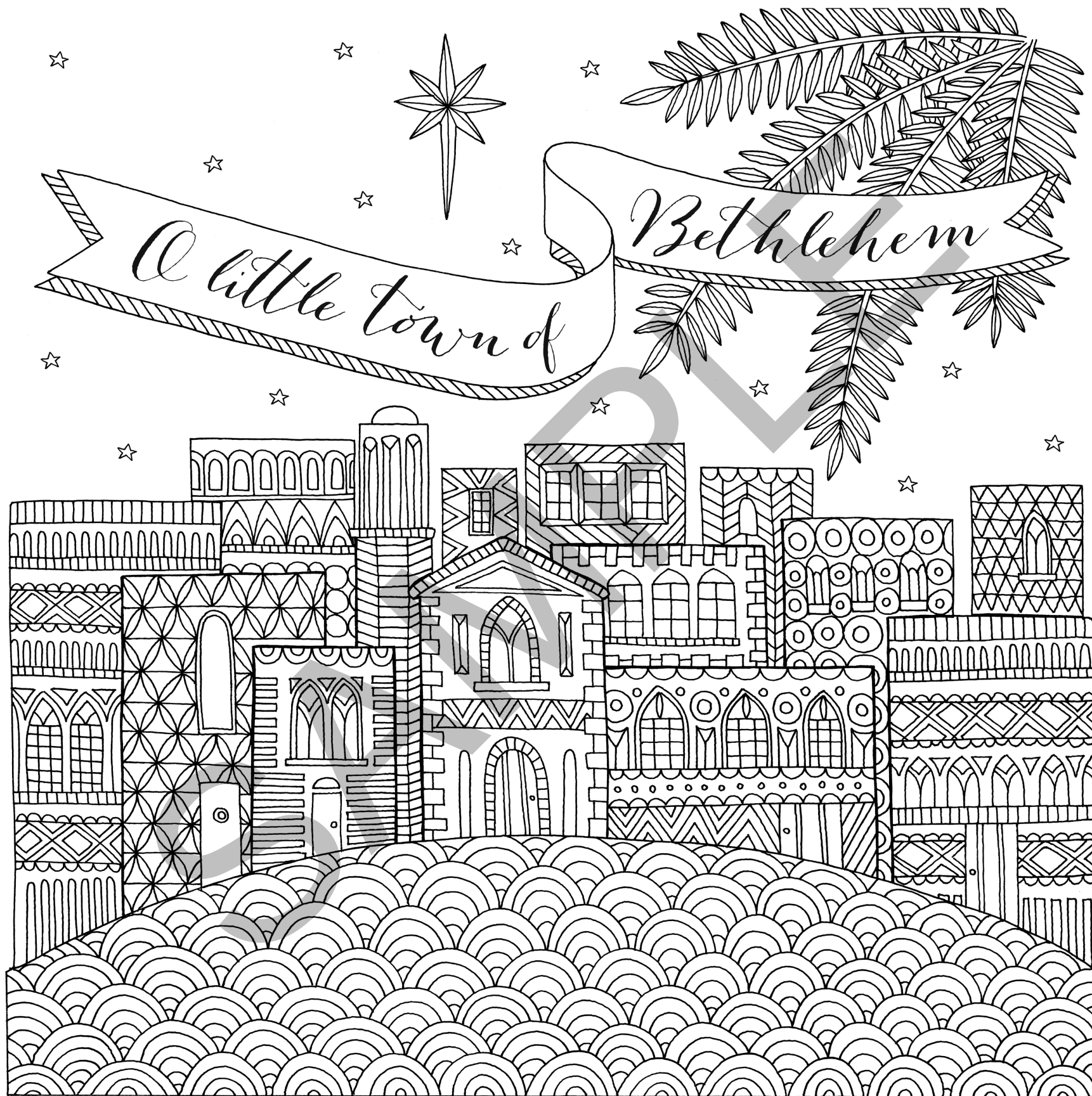
*B*ethlehem was a small and unimpressive village, but the prophet Micah had given an amazing prophecy about this little town. "You, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past. . . . And he will stand to lead his flock with the LORD's strength" (Micah 5:2, 4).

It had been over four hundred years since Micah wrote this prophecy. The Jewish people knew this prophecy, and they knew that the Messiah would be a descendant of King David, who was from Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16:1). But even so, many people of Jesus' day were surprised that their Savior would be born as a baby in such a small, unremarkable village.

For some reason, people tend to be surprised when someone from a small town accomplishes something of true greatness. We have a tendency to think that for something or someone to be significant, the idea, the business, or the person must be born and raised in a major city or a well-known place and must be from a well-known or well-off family.

When God sent Jesus, he turned upside down every expectation of what people thought would make him great. Jesus came as a baby instead of a grown man. He was born to ordinary parents, not people of prominence or power. He came as a humble teacher rather than a conquering king. And he was born in an obscure little town rather than one of the great cities of the day.

This tells us something important about how God chooses the people he will use and bless. He doesn't choose on the basis of accomplishments or reputation or worldly value. God chooses to use simple, ordinary things and people so that he is the one who gets all the glory.





DECEMBER 22

Born to Die

*W*hen a baby is born, people usually celebrate and talk about the long life ahead for that child. But from his birth—even before his birth—a cloud of death loomed over the baby Jesus. This was a baby who was born to die.

The wise men who followed the star to find Jesus seemed to know some things about the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. When they came to see Jesus, they actually fulfilled one of those prophecies. Isaiah had written about the Messiah, “Mighty kings will come to see your radiance. . . . [They] will bring gold and frankincense and will come worshiping the LORD” (Isaiah 60:3, 6). Matthew recorded that the wise men “entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and . . . they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh” (Matthew 2:11).

Gold, frankincense, and myrrh are certainly unusual gifts for a baby! Gold was a gift suited to a king. The wise men must have recognized Jesus as King and so they brought him gold and bowed down to him. Frankincense was a perfume mixed with ground wheat or barley for the grain offering. Frankincense gave off an aroma that was pleasing to God as it burned. This, too, was an appropriate gift for Jesus, who in his life, but especially in his death, would be a pleasing sacrifice to God.

The third gift the wise men brought to Jesus was especially unusual. Myrrh is a sweet-smelling substance that was used to preserve dead bodies and overcome the smell of decay. Why give myrrh to a baby? Perhaps the wise men also understood Isaiah’s prophecy that “it was the LORD’s good plan to crush him and cause him grief. Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have many descendants” (Isaiah 53:10). The Messiah came as a baby for the very purpose of dying as a sacrifice for sin.

Because Jesus was born to die, we don’t have to be afraid of death. Yes, we will all die someday. But if we belong to Jesus, he will one day resurrect our dead bodies and make them new so that we will live with him forever.



DECEMBER 23

A Real Hero

*W*hen you're really in trouble, you want someone strong to show up to save you—a real hero. And as people living in this world, we are really in trouble, really in need of someone who can save us from our slavery to sin. God sent someone to save us. The prophet Isaiah wrote about him:

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will make this happen!

ISAIAH 9:6-7

God sent us a Savior in the form of a baby. The prophet Isaiah assured us, however, that Jesus would be no ordinary baby and that he would grow up to be no ordinary man.

As the Wonderful Counselor, he has the best ideas and strategies; he's the wisest and most perfect teacher. If we listen to him, we'll know what to do.

As the Mighty God, he uses his power on our behalf, helping us overcome sin. We can find protection in him when we're tempted.

As the Everlasting Father, he cares for us lovingly, with affection that has no limits. We can entrust ourselves to him.

As the Prince of Peace, he invites us into his Kingdom of full and perfect happiness, giving us the assurance of safety and security. As we submit to him, we will live lives of blessed closeness to him.

The child born to us became our strong deliverer and our source of security and satisfaction forever. The Son given *to us* gave himself *for us*.

