
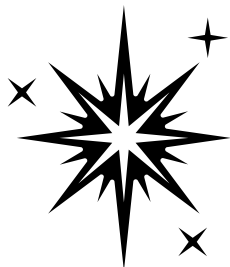


THE PEOPLES CHURCH



# BEHOLD

PRAYER GUIDE



## INTRODUCTION

Christmas is a time filled with wonder. A time when we get to behold the great joy and mystery of the Christmas story.

The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us – the Good Shepherd, King of kings.

He promises goodness in the midst of difficult times, and no matter what is going on in our world today, His faithfulness perseveres.

As we hold and revere the significance of this truth in our lives, Jesus invites us to go deeper in our encounter and experience of Him.



This guide is designed to help us set aside dedicated time to be with God – to commune with Him in reflection and practice throughout the weeks leading up to Christmas.

Each week consists of a reflection, key scripture, and five practices that will draw us closer to God in prayer and praise with our family, community, and global partners.

As we pray together, we'll be hearing stories from our partners serving in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region. They are powerful stories that will challenge and stir our hearts as we learn about what it means to follow Jesus in some of the most challenging places to live as a Christian in our world today.

We begin our four weeks of prayer with Abo Hamza's story. As you listen, consider the power of prayer and how it changes the world.

"When you pray, your words become real things that happen here in my country. When you pray, we see God's hand at work in what we do. In the midst of extreme challenges, God brings incredible blessings through your prayers."

←————→ **ABO HAMZA**

global partner serving in  
the MENA region

**Follow this QR code  
to read and listen to  
Abo Hamza's story.**








## ← WEEK ONE →

### REFLECTION


The 23rd Psalm describes a relationship with God that has captured the imagination of readers and pray-ers for millennia. This relationship between the shepherd-LORD and the sheep-psalmist is infused with an ease that, though attractive, feels highly elusive in our age of anxiety. Why does it feel elusive?

Notice how God provides, God acts, God leads, guides, protects, and is present with us. The ease that we all long for in our relationship with God will come only as we give up trying to grasp at all these things. We're anxious about provision. We're anxious about guiding our own lives. We're anxious because of the loneliness that attends to human existence.

Into those anxious spaces, the words of Psalm 23 whisper a gracious and peace-bringing word: I am not my own shepherd, the LORD is. Cultivating this ease with God does not mean life becomes easy (Psalm 23:4-7), but it does mean that we become more and more anchored in the great firmness of God's promise, power and plan, regardless of what comes our way.



### KEY SCRIPTURE



"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters. He restores  
my soul. He guides me in paths of  
righteousness for his name's sake."



Psalm 23:1-3

## PRACTICE

### PRAY

As you enter prayer now, take a moment to pause, breathe deeply and re-center yourself on God's presence.

Using the words of Psalm 23:1-3, bring before God the needs that are causing you anxiety this Christmas season. Bring before God others in your life in need of God's shepherding care.

*Father, thank you for sending Jesus, the promised Shepherd-King, who was born at Christmas time. Help me to live this day to the full, trusting in You and resting in Your protection, provision, and care. Amen.*



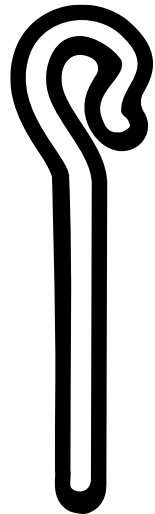
### PRAISE

Spend time in worship by reading Psalm 23 over your life. You can also listen to the song *Psalm 23* by Zach Winters. Sit with God in the immense truth of how each verse speaks to you.



### FAMILY

Together, take some time to reflect on how Jesus has provided for your family this past year. Write them on something that you can put up in your home for everyone to see and remember. You can make a poster with all the ways Jesus provided or write each provision on decorative rocks and place them in a glass jar to keep on a table.



## COMMUNITY

Consider the names and stories of those you have brought before God in your time of prayer. Write them down in the notes section of this guide. What are some ways you can step out and invite them to see and experience Christ this Christmas? Who can you invite to join us for Christmas at Peoples?



## GLOBAL

Throughout the MENA region, our partners at Bridges of Hope are living out what it means to be anchored in the firmness of God's promise, power, and plan in some of the most challenging places to live as a Christian. Everyday, they risk their safety and lives to carry out God's call to go and make disciples.

Take some time to learn about their ministry and how we are standing with them as a church, by visiting our website. Talk to God about how He might be inviting you to learn from, pray for, and share with our partners this Christmas.



**Learn more about  
Christmas at Peoples  
and our global partner,  
Bridges of Hope.**



## NOTES

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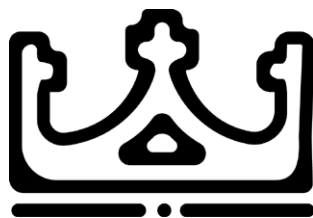
## ← WEEK TWO →

### REFLECTION →

Christmas is not often associated with struggle. It's a time where our culture seems to want to take a collective respite from things hard and heavy. "Keep it light! Keep it festive!", we say, all the while many in our city and world continue to experience lack, adversity, displacement, and worse.

A striking feature of the Christmas story in the Bible is that it is **real**. It makes no attempt to hide the struggles and tensions of first century Jewish life under Roman rule. In his gospel, Matthew takes up the words of the prophet Micah to highlight the power struggle that ensues as Magi show up in Jerusalem, the capitol city, and start asking about the birth of a **new** king, a ruler who will shepherd God's people. This news deeply troubles Herod, the current king appointed by Rome, and Herod's maneuvers eventually escalate into bloodshed and the eventual forced displacement of the Messiah and his family (Matthew 2:13-18).

As we celebrate the birth of Jesus the Shepherd-King at Christmas, we are reminded that the announcement of His reign and kingdom brings about a clash with worldly kingdoms. Sometimes it **looks** as if the kingdom of God gets stomped out by the hard-power wielded by the world. Jesus' kingdom, however, is not of this world (John 18:36). It has a different shape, a higher plane, and a wider scope than any earthly kingdom (Micah 2:5). King Jesus ushers in a resurrection power that brings life out of death and victory out of defeat. His rule is marked by the love, grace, compassion, and care that a shepherd shows his sheep. We can celebrate at Christmas precisely because His reign enters the struggle and dislocation of our world and brings the good news of His presence with us in those very places.





## KEY SCRIPTURE

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
though you are small among the clans of Judah,  
out of you will come for me  
one who will be ruler over Israel,  
whose origins are from of old,  
from ancient times.”

He will stand and shepherd his flock  
in the strength of the LORD,  
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.  
And they will live securely, for then his greatness  
will reach to the ends of the earth.

✦ Micah 5:2-4

## PRACTICE

### PRAY

As you enter prayer now, take a moment to pause, breathe deeply and re-center yourself on God's presence.

Spend time bringing petition (requests on behalf of yourself) and intercession (requests on behalf of others and the world) before God. Bring before Him areas of struggle, adversity, and turmoil. Keep our global partners in mind and follow the leading of God's Spirit as you intercede.

*Father, thank you for sending Jesus, the promised Shepherd-King, who was born at Christmas time. Help me to recognize and trust your presence and power in the midst of adversity and help me to seek Your kingdom above all else. Amen.*

## PRAISE

Acknowledge that Jesus is indeed Lord over all nations and peoples despite all the turmoil, and that His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth, from the next generation to the next. Think about the attributes of God that you resonate with below and speak them out.

**Wonderful Counsellor**

**Mighty God**

**Everlasting Father**

**Prince of Peace**

**Immanuel**

If there are more that come to mind, write them down in the notes section of this guide. Take time to stay in the peace that this brings to you.



## FAMILY

Is there someone you know who is going through a challenging time? How can you share the love, grace, and compassion of Jesus with them? Think about some ideas you can do together as a family, like:

- Making a family Christmas card.
- Baking something in the kitchen to share with them.
- Inviting them over for a meal.

## COMMUNITY

Take a walk in your neighbourhood. As you move through the various paths and streets, pay attention to your senses – what do you see, hear, smell, and feel? Write down three things that stood out to you and talk to God about them. Thank Him for the beauty of what you noticed and bring to Him the things that have felt challenging to you.



## GLOBAL

*We can celebrate at Christmas because Jesus enters the struggle and dislocation of our world and brings the good news of His presence with us in those very places.*

As we hear the stories from our partners serving throughout the MENA region, we are reminded of this truth in powerful ways. Follow the QR code to watch the weekly stories and take time to stand in the power of prayer with our partners.



**Watch and listen to the stories from our partners.**



← WEEK TWO →

NOTES

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## ← WEEK THREE →

### REFLECTION →

Who is Jesus? Who was this Child born to be the Saviour of the world? In the Gospel of John, Jesus reveals His identity through seven well-known "I AM statements." Jesus declares, "I am the bread of life" (6:35), "I am the light of the world" (8:12), "I am the gate" (10:7), "I am the good shepherd" (10:11, 14), "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25), "I am the way the truth and the life" (14:6) and "I am the true vine" (15:1). These are bold statements that Jesus made, especially to His audience, who were primarily Jews.

In the Old Testament, when God called Moses to deliver the Israelites out of the bondage of slavery in Egypt, Moses asked God what is His name. God answered, "'I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14).

Like Moses, God sent Jesus to deliver humanity out of their bondage to sin. As the Son of God, Jesus proved who He is through His death and resurrection which brought life and light to everyone who would believe and call upon His name (Romans 10:9-10). True to His Word, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who willingly laid down His life for His sheep. With whom can we share who Jesus is this Christmas?

### KEY SCRIPTURE

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

→ John 10:11





## ← WEEK THREE →

### PRACTICE →

#### PRAY

As you enter prayer now, take a moment to pause, breathe deeply and re-center yourself on God's presence.

Slowly read the seven I AM statements that Jesus made. Which of the seven statements speaks to you? Bring before God individuals who you can share this truth with today.

*Father, thank You for sending Jesus, the promised Shepherd-King, who was born at Christmas time. Help me to have boldness and courage to share who Jesus is and what He came to do on this earth with others that I encounter. Amen.*



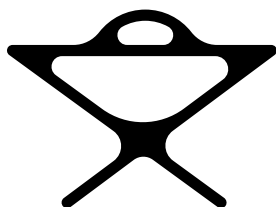
#### PRAISE

How has Jesus been the Good Shepherd to you? To your family? To your friends? To the church? To the world? Reflect on what comes to your mind and lift it up to God in praise.



#### FAMILY

As a family, think of those around you who are in need of salvation through Jesus Christ. Make a list with their names on it and put it up on the fridge. Commit to praying for their salvation during your prayer times and ask Jesus how He might use you to share the gospel with them.



## COMMUNITY

Invite a neighbour or someone you have been praying for to join you for a meal or a nature walk. Share with them about the joy and wonder of the Christmas story and the radiant hope of Jesus. You can also invite them to our:

**Outdoor Lights & Nativity Display** – A great way to enjoy the sights and sounds of Christmas as you are immersed in scenes from the Christmas story! Come by our front lawn at any time of the day throughout the holidays.

**Christmas Eve Celebration** – We'll be gathering at 2, 4 & 6 PM for our family services, and outdoor festivities including a petting zoo!

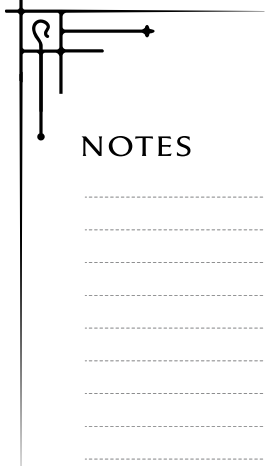
Follow the QR code to  
learn more!



## GLOBAL

Take some time to revisit and reflect on the stories we've heard so far, from our partners serving in the MENA region. As you talk to God, consider the following questions:

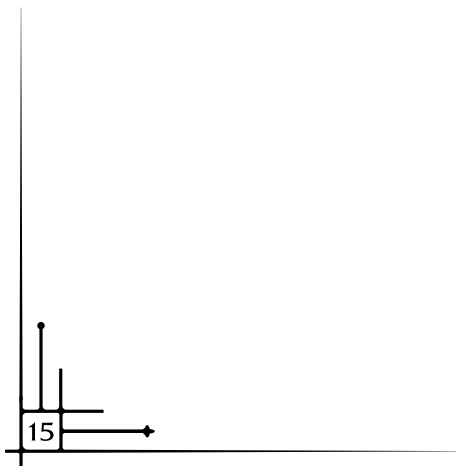
- Even in the midst of extreme difficulty, Jesus brings incredible blessing – how do I see this in my own life, and throughout the world?
- How can I go deeper in my discipleship with Christ and share His love with more people?
- Do I believe in the hidden work of God in the hearts of people before I reach them?



← WEEK THREE →

NOTES

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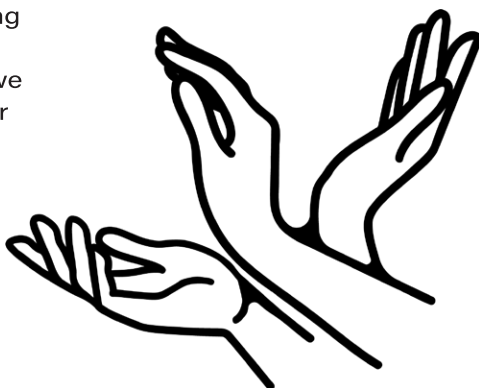
## ← WEEK FOUR →

### REFLECTION →

Do we know something that other people do not know? As much as the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, remains a mystery, who He is, and His purposes are not hidden in scripture. There are hundreds of prophecies throughout the Old Testament about the coming Messiah who will save humanity from the bondage of sin and rule the world with righteousness and justice. This is why, when King Herod heard about “the One who has been born King of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2), he consulted the chief priests and teachers of the law to inquire about the Messiah.

Although Herod’s plan was to find the Child and secretly kill Him, his thoughts were not unknown to God. When Herod’s intentions were revealed through an angel of the Lord in a dream to Joseph (Jesus’ earthly father), Joseph took Jesus and his wife and fled to Egypt, thus fulfilling the prophecy in Hosea 11:1, “Out of Egypt I called My Son.” After Herod’s death, Jesus and the family returned to Israel, staying in Nazareth, which fulfilled “what was said through the prophets, that He would be called a Nazarene” (Matthew 2:23).

These prophecies and others not only prove that Jesus is the Messiah—the Saviour of the world—they also point to the fact that He is the promised Ruler. Jesus came to be our Saviour and Lord. We cannot receive Jesus as our Saviour without recognizing His lordship over our life and we cannot receive Jesus as Lord without acknowledging His act of saving us. As we celebrate Christmas, may we behold Jesus as the Saviour and Lord of our life.



## KEY SCRIPTURE

“When King Herod had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they replied, ‘for this is what the prophet has written:

But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for out of you will come a Ruler  
who will shepherd My people Israel.’”

Matthew 2:4-6

## PRACTICE

### PRAY

As you enter prayer now, take a moment to pause, breathe deeply and re-center yourself on God’s presence.

Marvel at how Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, a humble Child born to save humanity and to rule the world. As we behold Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, may we give Him the worship due His name.

*Father, thank You for sending Jesus, the promised Shepherd-King, who was born at Christmas time. Help me to worship and behold You as my Saviour and Lord. Amen.*



### PRAISE

Reflect on the reality of the all-encompassing richness of beholding the majesty of Jesus – the Child born to be Ruler of the world and how worthy He is to be praised. Take some time to be still in His presence and open your hands in a posture of receiving what He has for you today.





## FAMILY

Set aside some time for a worship night together as a family. You can make instruments with your kids, play an instrument that you already have, or dance along to the worship music together. Some songs you can start with are *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, *Joy to the Word*, *Away in the Manger*.



## COMMUNITY

Review the list of names you have written down over past three weeks. Thank God for how He has connected you to them. As you pray over them again, think about how you can invite them to get connected in Christ-centred community. You can explore our website to learn more about our groups and connection opportunities.



## GLOBAL

*"If you are in a part of the world where you have the freedom to be yourself, to live as a Christian, I want to say that you are very blessed. It is not a normal thing. Maybe you were born in that freedom, and it feels like a normal thing – but not everyone can do that. It is a big blessing. I hope you will see that and live your life boldly as a Christian."*

– Deborah, Global Partner serving in the MENA Region

Consider what it means to live your life boldly as a Christian where you are. Talk to God about how Deborah's words challenge and encourage you.

## NOTES



## SHARING GENEROUSLY IN FAITH TOGETHER

Our partners at Bridges of Hope are committed to teaching, training, and mobilizing church leaders and local believers – like Abo Hamza, Friar Fadi, Stephen, and Deborah – throughout the Middle East North Africa region. They are manifesting the good news of Jesus in some of the most challenging places to live as a Christian in our world today.

As we stand with them in the power of prayer, we can share financially in what God is doing through their ministry across the region. Our goal is to share \$250,000 together as a church this Christmas.

To join us, you can designate your gift to our **Behold – Christmas 2023** Fund by December 31. Simply scan the QR code below or text **GIVE** to **416.222.3341**. You can also visit **[ThePeoplesChurch.ca/Give](https://ThePeoplesChurch.ca/Give)** to learn about more ways to give.



## SALVATION PRAYER

Dear God,

I'm coming to see that Jesus really is your promised King and I want to give my life to Him. I turn away from all my attempts to be my own lord and go my own way. I confess that I'm a sinner in need of forgiveness and that I need you to make me clean. I put my trust in you, Jesus, and I welcome you to be the King and Lord of my life.

Amen.

**If you have prayed this prayer today and would like to get connected in community, we invite you to explore our groups and connection opportunities!**







# BEHOLD

Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and  
bear a Son, and they shall call His name  
Immanuel, God with us.

Matthew 1:23





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