

# God's Grace at Christmas

## A 3-Day Advent Devotional

By Katie Faris

### Day 1

*"But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD." – Genesis 6:8, ESV*

There was no way back to Eden. Cherubim and a flaming sword guarded the way to the tree of life, making sure of that. Hard ground, thorns and thistles, and the sweat on their faces reminded Adam and his descendants daily of all that was lost. Suffering associated with motherhood, ranging from labor pains to the grief of one son murdering another, reminded Eve and her daughters of all that was traded for the fleeting pleasure of a desirable piece of fruit. And although Enoch "walked with God" (Gen. 5:22), most others did not, leaving the human race in a pitiable condition by Genesis 6:5-8:

"The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.'"

It is in this context of man's utter depravity that we read, "But Noah." Noah's name means *rest*, and when he was born, his father Lamech said, "Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands" (Gen. 5:29). When all hope of return was lost, and when man's wickedness moved God to the point of grief, Noah appears as a forerunner of Jesus our Savior.

There was no way for Noah to earn favor; rather, he "found favor in the eyes of the LORD." The word for *favor* in this verse is the first appearance of the Hebrew term *hēn*, or *grace* in the Old Testament, and it suggests bending in kindness toward another. God bent toward Noah, Creator toward the created, and the arrival of grace in a period of judgment brings hope and encouragement. No matter how bleak the circumstances or how far evil extends, as God showed grace to Noah, he can do the same for his people today.

The story of Noah shows how God related to his people in grace and saved a remnant on the ark; but although Noah was faithful in his generation, after his death, God's people continued to sin and fail. They looked forward to a better Savior, one who would bruise the head of the serpent and crush the power of sin once and for all (Gen. 3:15).

We too need a better agent of salvation than Noah. We need a Savior who not only rescues us from the effects of sin but defeats it. At Advent, we remember and celebrate the arrival of this Promised One, the One of whom John the Baptist cried, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

**Personal Application Questions**

1. Is there anything I'm doing that suggests I'm trying to earn God's favor?
2. Is there any situation that seems beyond hope of God's grace?

**Family Application Questions**

1. We too cannot earn God's favor. How has God shown grace to us?
2. How does Noah's story in Genesis 6-9 offer us hope?

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## Day 2

*"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people." –Titus 2:11, ESV*

Noah, along with all the other men and women of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11, died "not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar" (Heb. 11:13). As Jesus told his disciples, "many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it" (Matt. 13:17). Rather, it is "in these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. 1:2).

What a gracious Word has appeared! "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Although "all things were made through him," (John 1:1, 3) yet this Word wore flesh and walked on dusty roads. His name was Jesus.

And as God's grace appeared to Noah, and by implication to the human race when he preserved Noah and his descendants on the ark, God's grace appeared in the person of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem more than 2,000 years ago, the event we celebrate at Christmas.

Just as the sinners in Noah's day, we deserve God's judgment and wrath. As God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah, we have forsaken God, "the fountain of living waters," and "hewed out cisterns...that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13). In other words, as Paul makes abundantly clear in Romans 1, we reject God and worship lesser things.

Do you remember the phrase in the previous devotion, "but Noah"? Noah was the forerunner, one who found favor with God and was an instrument of salvation in his day. Jesus is the Promised One, bringing salvation to sinners once and for all. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved" (Eph. 2:4-5).

We see what Noah and the prophets longed to see, and what we see invites us to celebrate. It is the arrival of God's grace in Jesus, bringing salvation for all who place their faith in him.

### **Personal Application Questions**

1. Keeping Jeremiah 2:13 in mind, how do my personal sin struggles fit into these two categories of (1) rejecting God and (2) worshiping lesser things?
2. How do I respond to the truth that "the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people" (Titus 2:11)?

### **Family Application Questions**

1. How do we celebrate the gospel as a family?
2. What are some ways that we can grow in celebrating God's grace in Jesus?

## Day 3

*“And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” –Philippians 2:8-11, ESV*

There is no way back to Eden, but there is a way forward to heaven, and it is found in Jesus. The Advent season offers a rich opportunity to remember our Savior and anticipate his return.

At Christmas, we celebrate our incarnate Lord, the one who was found in human form, wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. The one who got hungry (Mark 11:12), grew weary (John 4:6), and tasted sorrow (John 11:35)—just as we do. The one who sympathizes with our weaknesses and was tempted just like us, but without sin (Heb. 4:15). Because of Jesus' obedience, even “to the point of death,” even death on an instrument of Roman torture called a cross, God “has highly exalted him” (Phil. 2:8-9).

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people” (Tit. 2:11), and the proper response to the gospel is to bow our knees before Jesus, confessing with our mouths “that Jesus is Lord” and believing in our hearts “that God raised him from the dead” (Rom. 10:9-10). But whether or not we bow today, one day, every knee will bow.

God's patience waits, just as it did in the day of Noah (1 Pet. 3:20). As Peter wrote, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed” (1 Pet. 3:9-10; cross-reference Matt. 24:36-44).

Jesus will return, and there will be a final day of judgment when all will bow to him. But like Noah who found favor and was saved on the ark in the day of destruction, we can receive God's gift of grace and be saved by faith in Jesus. We can join those who gladly bow to Jesus now, confessing him as Lord and Savior, presenting our “bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is [our] spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1).

Just as God's people eagerly anticipated Jesus' first coming, true believers long for his second coming and can say with Paul, “Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8).

At Christmas, we celebrate the One who came and is coming back, and as we do, we extend the invitation: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price...The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all” (Rev. 22:17, 21).

### Personal Application Questions

1. How does it encourage my heart to know that Jesus sympathizes with my weaknesses?

2. Have I placed faith in Jesus for salvation and bowed my heart to him? If so, what does it look like for me to offer my body as a "living sacrifice"?

**Family Application Questions**

1. When is the last time our family talked about Jesus' second coming?
2. What do we have to look forward to when Jesus returns?
3. Who are some unbelievers that we can pray for together?

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