

JUST FOR STUDENTS

WINTER 2024

Please do not send this newsletter back to Crossroads.

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’”

– **Matthew 2:1-2 (NIV)**

A Message from Crossroads’ President, Joe Pryor

Christmas is about the birth of Jesus! Amid all the distractions society throws our way, we, as believers, are called to celebrate the birth of the King of Kings. Christmas marks the beginning of the greatest act of pure love we could ever imagine. Just a few decades later, this innocent baby, born of a virgin and the only begotten Son of God, hung on a cross and paid the penalty for our sins. So, even if your circumstances keep you from being with family and friends this Christmas, remember that nothing can separate you from the love of Christ. At Crossroads, we love you and pray for you. May your Christmas be filled with the power of His presence.

Hope in Times of Trouble

Before Jesus was born, the Jewish people in Jerusalem and nearby regions were tired, discouraged, and had little hope that their lives would improve. They were oppressed by Roman military and political rulers, and their own religious leaders burdened them with laws and expectations they themselves couldn’t follow. The people felt beaten down and uncertain whether God had abandoned them. Although the Jewish people had experienced hardships before, life was particularly difficult at the time of Jesus’ birth.

Have you ever felt discouraged, tired, weighed down by sin and guilt, or abandoned by God? Most of us have at some point in our lives. Christmas is when our culture—and much of the world—celebrates God coming to our rescue. The birth of Jesus marks a major turning point in all of creation. God was making a way for His people to return to Him.

Have you ever wondered why we sing Christmas carols and hymns? As you read or sing the following familiar Christmas song, reflect on how the news of Jesus’ birth would have been celebrated by the angels in heaven, and what these words mean to you.

*Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.
Joy to the world! the Saviour reigns;
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.
No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;*

*He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as, far as, the curse is found.
He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.*

Crossroads goes digital: *Just for Students* and *Threads* on the Pando App!

In recent years, the use of tablets and smartphones has become a part of daily life. Currently, there are over a million tablets in jails and prisons. While technology is amazing, fun, and useful for many things, it has also created some unintended consequences. For Crossroads, the fact that tablets are replacing physical mail for people in jails and prisons has presented many challenges. Over the past two years, we've been working on how to make Crossroads accessible to students who can no longer receive our lessons and mentor letters through the mail. Although we're making progress, we're not there yet.

One important change in your experience as a student is that you can now access spiritually nourishing content from Crossroads through the Pando App, if you have a tablet with it installed. Just search for "Crossroads Prison Ministries" to enjoy movies, podcasts, books, and messages from Crossroads and other great ministries. Starting with this issue of *Just for Students*, many more people will be able to access it digitally. This digital version will allow thousands of men and women to learn about Crossroads and get involved in the program.

We will continue mailing *Just for Students* in print, but instead of sending it every three months, we will only mail it twice a year. A digital version will still be available every three months on the Pando App. We understand that some students who don't have a tablet with the Pando App will only receive *Just for Students* twice a year, instead of four times a year. However, as we strive to be good stewards of the donations we receive, sending *Just for Students* by mail every six months will save the ministry thousands of dollars.

If you don't have access to Crossroads on a tablet, we apologize. But if this is your first time reading *Just for Students* on a tablet, welcome to a community of men and women growing together in faith and love for God and others.

Additionally, our *Threads* booklets, where we feature artwork from our students, will now be available only on the Pando App this fall. If you don't have a tablet with the app installed, you won't be able to access them.

New Readers of *Just for Students*

If you are a new reader of Crossroads' *Just for Students* and are not yet a participant in the Crossroads mentorship program—and most importantly, if your facility can accept and deliver hard copy mail—please write to us at:

Crossroads Prison Ministries
PO Box 900
Grand Rapids, MI 49509-0900

The Word Made Flesh

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

John's Gospel tells us that the Word (Jesus) became flesh and lived among us. This verse is why Christians have celebrated Christmas for centuries: God sent His Son into the world to be born in a humble stable, a moment that holds significance for all creation. Jesus lived on Earth for 33 years, teaching, healing, and revealing the Father to us. As Paul wrote in Colossians, Jesus is "the image of the invisible God." Eventually, Jesus went to the cross to suffer and die for the sins of humanity, and we remember His death and resurrection at Easter.

This winter's prayer and reading guide focuses on John's Gospel. Of the four gospels in the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—John's is the most distinct. It was written in Koine Greek, the common

language for communication and business in the Mediterranean region. John's audience wasn't primarily Jewish, so he used language and ideas that a non-Jewish, Greek-speaking world could understand. John opens his Gospel with these words: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).*

The Greek word translated as "Word" in this passage is "logos." In Greek philosophy, dating back to Heraclitus around 500 years before Jesus, "logos" referred to the divine reason or mind of God that brought order to the universe. John connects with his Greek audience by essentially saying, "Yes, there is a divine mind that created and gives meaning to the universe, as you believe." And that divine mind is Jesus, whom we preach and testify about.

John's Gospel is a literary masterpiece, both simple and profound. It leaves no doubt about who Jesus was and is. While many have argued that Jesus was just a good teacher, a prophet, or simply someone sent by God, John makes it clear: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).*

Scripture Reading and Prayer Guide: The Book of John

Date	Passage	Reading Topic	Prayer Focus
Dec. 1	John 1:1-18	The Word became flesh	Pray that Jesus is "born" in the hearts of your neighbors
Dec. 2	John 1:19-34	John the Baptist testifies	Pray for opportunities to testify about Jesus
Dec. 3	John 1:35-5	Jesus chooses His disciples	Thank God for choosing you to know His Son
Dec. 4	John 2:1-12	Jesus' first miracle	Pray for the miracle of salvation for your loved ones
Dec. 5	John 2:13-25	Jesus clears the temple	Pray for our country, political leaders, and pastors
Dec. 6	John 3:1-15	You must be born again	Pray for spiritual understanding
Dec. 7	John 3:16-21	God so loved the world	Pray for increased faith
Dec. 8	John 3:22-36	John the Baptist testifies again	Pray that God increases in your life and you decrease
Dec. 9	John 4:1-26	The Samaritan woman	Pray for God to reveal any hidden sin in your life
Dec. 10	John 4:27-54	Jesus follows His Father's will	Pray for God's will in your life and those around you
Dec. 11	John 5:1-15	The pool at Bethesda	Pray for physical healing for your loved ones
Dec. 12	John 5:16-30	Calling His disciples	Pray for the desire to be discipled by Jesus
Dec. 13	John 5:31-47	Glory that comes from God	Pray that God is glorified and that you grow in humility
Dec. 14	John 6:1-24	Jesus feeds the 5,000	Pray for God's Word to spread in your facility
Dec. 15	John 6:25-59	Jesus is the bread of life	Pray for spiritual nourishment
Dec. 16	John 6:60-71	Many disciples desert Jesus	Pray for strength to stand firm in your faith
Dec. 17	John 7:1-24	Jesus attends festival in secret	Pray for a grateful and worshipful heart
Dec. 18	John 7:25-52	Was Jesus the Messiah?	Pray for those who are unsure about who Jesus is
Dec. 19	John 8:1-30	Go and leave your life of sin	Pray for help in overcoming sinful habits
Dec. 20	John 8:31-59	The enemies of Jesus	Pray for those who may hate you because of your faith
Dec. 21	John 9:1-34	Healing of a blind man	Pray for physical healing for those in need
Dec. 22	John 9:35-4	Spiritual blindness	Pray for increased spiritual sight
Dec. 23	John 10:1-21	Jesus, the good shepherd	Pray to follow Jesus more closely
Dec. 24	John 10:22-42	The leaders want to kill Jesus	Pray for those who reject God
Dec. 25	John 11:1-44	The death of Lazarus	Pray for spiritual renewal in your facility
Dec. 26	John 11:45-57	Plotting to have Jesus killed	Pray for the "church inside the fences" of prisons
Dec. 27	John 12:1-19	Jesus anointed at Bethany	Pray, expressing your love for God
Dec. 28	John 12:20-50	Jesus predicts His own death	Pray to hear God's voice more clearly
Dec. 29	John 13:1-17	Washing the disciples' feet	Ask God to show you someone to serve today
Dec. 30	John 13:18-38	Jesus' betrayal by a disciple	Pray that your life honors God
Jan. 1	John 14:1-14	Comfort for His disciples	Pray for peace in your heart
Jan. 2	John 14:15-31	The promise of the Holy Spirit	Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit
Jan. 3	John 15:1-16	Jesus is the vine	Pray for help to rest in Jesus, the vine
Jan. 4	John 15:17-27	The persecution of believers	Pray for spiritual protection for Christians in your facility
Jan. 5	John 16:1-15	Jesus explains His death	Pray for spiritual understanding
Jan. 6	John 16:16-32	Grief will turn to joy	Pray for God's joy in your life
Jan. 7	John 17:1-19	Jesus speaks to His Father	Pray to know the Father as Jesus asks
Jan. 8	John 17:20-26	Jesus prays for all believers	Pray for believers around the world

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Jan. 9	John 18:1-14	Jesus arrested	Pray for new commitments at your facility
Jan. 10	John 18:15-27	Questioned by the high priest	Pray for the right words when questioned about Jesus
Jan. 11	John 18:28-40	Pilate, the Roman governor	Pray for your warden and facility staff
Jan. 12	John 19:1-16	Jesus sentenced to death	Pray for strength during your remaining time in prison
Jan. 13	John 19:17-27	Jesus goes to the cross	Thank God for Jesus' obedience
Jan. 14	John 19:28-42	Jesus' body placed in the tomb	Pray, asking God where you need to make amends
Jan. 15	John 20:1-10	The empty tomb	Spend time quietly in God's presence, worshipping
Jan. 16	John 20:11-18	Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene	Pray for God's love to fill you afresh
Jan. 17	John 20:19-31	Jesus appears to the disciples	Pray for your Crossroads mentors
Jan. 18	John 21:1-14	Jesus on the Sea of Galilee	Pray for new salvations in your facility
Jan. 19	John 21:15-25	Peter, build my church	Ask God to use you to encourage others

Trivia: The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. How many of these did you know?

- Jesus was a common name among Jewish people in the 1st century and was pronounced "Yeshua."
- Jesus' last name was not Christ.
- Many scholars believe that Jesus was born in the year 4 B.C. rather than 1 A.D.
- Jesus was likely ordinary-looking, unlike the images that artists have painted of Him.
- Jesus was not a vegetarian; He ate fish and the traditional Passover meat, which was lamb.
- The 30 pieces of silver that Judas received for betraying Jesus would be worth approximately \$340 in today's silver market.
- Jesus' tomb was protected by a large stone, a guard, and a Roman seal, which warned that anyone trespassing would be breaking the law and could face crucifixion themselves.
- After His death and resurrection, the New Testament records at least twelve instances of Jesus appearing to His disciples.

From the Operations Department:

- If you move to a new facility or go home and want to continue your lessons, please let us know. To continue studying from home, wait until you are living there to send us a note with your address.
- Crossroads continues to adapt to changes in how mail is handled in correctional facilities. Starting in December, you will notice a shift from the lesson booklets you currently receive to lessons formatted on standard 8.5-by-11-inch sheets of paper. Many facilities across the country are now scanning incoming mail for distribution. However, some scanning services struggle to accurately process Crossroads' current lesson booklets, leading some facilities to stop accepting our lessons altogether. By switching to these reformatted lessons, we hope to reach more students who have faced challenges in receiving their lessons. While the new format will look a little different, the content remains unchanged. We are committed to making the reformatted lessons visually appealing, although they will now feature black and white artwork instead of color. This adjustment is necessary because scanning services typically cannot handle color artwork.
- On the back of your lessons, we write a six-digit number. This number is specific to that lesson and helps us process your submissions. You do not need to pay attention to this number. When you return your completed lessons, please do not write the lesson ID number on your return address.
- The next *Just for Students* will be available exclusively on the Pando App in March 2025. The next print version will be delivered in June 2025.

