



A Global Advent:

5 Stories of God With Us

Around the World

Many of us will not travel to every corner of the world, except through stories. Stories transport us into countries, communities, churches and homes that we may never visit in our lifetime. Stories are essential to us.

This Christmas season, we want to invite you to a global Advent. Advent, an anchor to our Christian life and faith, draws our attention to a child, a baby in a manger. This child is Emmanuel, God with us. And from that very first advent of His coming, He has been with us ever since.

In this global Advent, you are invited into the stories of children around the world who have experienced God with them. In their stories, we hope that you will see the hope, peace, joy and love of Christ are still vibrantly expressed in our world today.

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Meredith, Colombia

DAY 1 | THAILAND

- Isaiah 7:14
- Psalm 78:4

DEVOTIONAL:

When was the last time you were caught up in a really good story? A good story comes in all sorts of packages—something like the gifts we unwrap at Christmas. Some stories are small and precious, leaving a mark on us in just a few lines. Some come elaborately dressed up with vivid language and expressive delivery. Other stories take time, unfolding their impact on our lives with pristine patience.

No matter how a story is wrapped up, the truth remains that each story is a gift. Stories transport us to places we've never been. They transform us to live differently and love potently.

A shepherd and a giant. A den full of lions. Five loaves and two fish. Some shepherds, three wiseman and a baby in a manger. Take a moment to think of how a whole world can come alive in your mind when prompted to recall a story. You remember them deeply because stories become a part of us.

Up at the northwest border of Thailand, surrounded by mountains, forests and fields, is a community called Huay Nam Nak. If you were to visit this humble community, you would find children who have a voracious appetite for stories... but not just any stories.



Six-year-old Settathawut is one of these children. He hangs on every word of the Bible stories told at his Compassion centre. These stories have captivated him in a way that is leaving a mark.

“My favourite story is Samson! He is very strong and I want to be strong like him. But I will be obedient to my mother,” says Settathawut.

Each week, on activity day, the first things that Settathawut and his friends learn at the Compassion centre are worship songs and Bible stories. They learn about values such as obedience, kindness and courage through hearing these stories.

Settathawut's Compassion centre saw the hunger for Bible stories in the children they serve, and they provided each child with a precious gift that their families couldn't afford: a children's Bible.

For these children, the Bible is a book that fires the imagination, gives comfort and shows who God is. It contributes to their holistic development as the stories help shape their lives and assure them that God is with them.

Settathawut has only just begun to write the story of his life, but as he flips through the pages of his Bible and pores over the stories held inside, he says, "My mom reads stories for me every night, and I remember them all."



This Advent, you're invited to open your heart to stories that can shape you. Stories to remember.

Advent reminds us that Jesus is Emmanuel—*God with us*.

Children all over the world have stories of this God—*Emmanuel*—who has come to be with them. God is with us! And we as believers have a part to play as we embody His presence in the world around us, sharing the hope, peace, joy and love of Jesus.

We have stories to tell and stories to hear. And we all have a part to play in God's story.

Will you unwrap the gift of stories this Advent?

DAY 2 | TANZANIA

- Galatians 4:4
- Ecclesiastes 3:1
- Galatians 6:9

DEVOTIONAL:

Timing is everything. Especially during the Christmas season. We time our turkeys, our errands, our visits and even the days left until Christmas.

Maybe you've never slowed down enough to think about the timing of Christmas as you manage your timers, notifications and big red X's on your calendar. But perhaps today, there is a moment to consider that God thought about the timing of Christmas. And His timing is always perfect.

“But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son.” (Gal. 4:4)

Where we may find ourselves full of questions and worries about the timing of our lives, God is present in every moment working out His good plans.

This is the case for Mary in Tanzania. Her story begins in January 2020 when her son Michael's Compassion centre encouraged her and some other mothers to begin farming for added security. With friends, Mary rented a one-acre plot of land and planted maize and beans.

It was a decision she would thank God for when the COVID-19 pandemic hit Tanzania just two weeks later.



For Mary's family, things took a turn for the worse. “My partner lost his job, and I suddenly got very ill. He was the one doing everything for me. Because we both could not work, we had to start using the money that we had saved,” she says.

Within weeks they had spent almost all the money they had. “I felt like we were going back to the life that we used to live before Michael got registered into Compassion's program and I was afraid,” says Mary.



However, at that time, the group farming initiative began flourishing. “When we advised parents to farm, we had not foreseen the impact of COVID-19,” says project coordinator, Yonah. “But it eventually worked out perfectly, especially during a time when they are trying to get back on their feet.”

The women were able to harvest their crops at a time when the families needed the food the most. From their one-acre land, the 10 women harvested 100 kilograms of beans. Each woman took home 10 kilograms!

“I have never been able to buy more than a quarter kilogram of beans. Having 10 kilograms means that my family has food for months,” Mary says.

Take a moment to reflect on how God’s timing reveals His presence in your own story.

DAY 3 | EL SALVADOR

- John 14:1-3
- 1 Peter 1-3-9

DEVOTIONAL:

What makes your home feel like Christmas is coming?

Maybe you have already untangled the lights (good job!) and decked all of the halls. Or perhaps you simply enjoy festive hot beverages and a little fa-la-la in your music playlist!

Whatever your style, there is something about December that draws most of us to the coziness of home. And yet, our home is so much more than just the place we bring people together for the holidays, isn’t it? Homes are a part of our security, identity, our memories and our hopes.

God knows our desire to feel at home. This is why when Jesus came, He promised us a room in the family house. Jesus taught His home would be with us, and in Him, we would finally have a home nothing in this world can destroy.

For one family in El Salvador, this promise was illustrated through an extraordinary gift.

Rosa was excited to welcome her second child to the world. But walking the path home from a hospital check-up just days before giving birth to her daughter, an impending crisis would change everything. The usual sounds of singing insects in the jungle gave way to panicked shouts. Wood and metal crashing. The smell of smoke.

Standing in the ashes of her former home with her 10-year-old daughter Maritza, Rosa felt devastated. Hopeless. Alone.



Maritza sits on the remains of her home, destroyed by fire.

But she wasn't alone. As curious neighbours left, a few friends from the nearby church remained with her.

Maritza is registered at the local Compassion centre, and her family is well-known to Juanita, the centre director. After securing a temporary shelter and emergency supplies for the family, the centre applied to access Compassion's Emergency Fund.

Within days, construction began on a new home for Rosa and her family! The home was ready within weeks of the new baby arriving – a home that was stronger, safer and more beautiful than the one they had before.

They chose to paint their new home sky-blue, a reminder of our heavenly home and God's presence.

This Christmas, celebrate the hope we have in Jesus by remembering His invitation to a perfect home where we can be with Him.

How could you extend a warm place of belonging to someone else this season?



A new home for Rosa painted blue.

DAY 4 | BOLIVIA

- Philippians 4:7
- Matthew 11:28-30
- Matthew 18:20

DEVOTIONAL:

What do you do to find a moment of peace?

Many of us seek peace in solitude. A silent-night moment where all is calm or time to ourselves before the holly jolly hustle of the day. These moments are important to our souls—a little breathing room to reflect during the season.

But solitude is not always peaceful. We were created to be in relationship with others. Community is equally vital to the health of our souls. We need to feel that we are known, loved and protected in order to thrive. When this need is not met, there is no peace.

Bang! Bang! Bang! They're pounding on the door again. Lucas* hesitates to open it. Anxiety coils in his stomach.

Since Lucas* and his four younger siblings were abandoned by their father, he's been afraid to open the door. Their mother found work to provide for them, but it's far away and she rarely returns home. Barely a teenager, Lucas* must now look after his younger siblings. This is a common situation for children living in poverty in Bolivia.



The visitors keep banging. It's Lucas*'s new friends, other teenagers in a similar situation who have resorted to destructive behaviour.

Lucas* has been feeling uncomfortable with these friends, and the responsibility of assuming the role of an adult for his family burdens him.

But Lucas* attends the Compassion centre at his local church. His tutor, Evelyn, noticed when he began acting differently. She asked him what was happening, and he shared the truth. She immediately connected with his mother to help reunite and protect their family.

“We pay attention to the changes we see in the children,” says Evelyn. “We offer them a safe place with people they can trust and count on when they need it. It’s a relief to see how children tell us about the things they go through in their homes. At the centre and church, they found a place where they feel protected and loved.”



Lucas* is no longer afraid of banging on the door. He's come to experience true peace as his local church showed him that God is with him and he is known, loved and protected.

Relationship is important to peace. Use a moment of solitude to consider how you can bring peace to someone by being present for them today.

**Lucas is a pseudonym*

DAY 5 | ECUADOR

- Luke 1:26-28
- Isaiah 41:10
- Deuteronomy 31:6

DEVOTIONAL:

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was just a teenager when the angel appeared to her. The Bible tells us that she was frightened, but that she chose to courageously follow the will of God.

Lesly might understand the fear that Mary faced that very first Christmas. She was frightened when she became pregnant at 14.

“Never in my life have I felt so alone and scared,” says Lesly.

Growing up in the small town of La Troncal on Ecuador's coast, her childhood was difficult. Her alcoholic father abandoned her at a young age and her mother worked long hours to provide for her two daughters.

“I remember spending all my days alone when I was a child. Sometimes I ate just once a day because we didn't have food at home, and we had to wait for my mother to arrive at night with something to eat,” says Lesly.



When Lesly was 8 years old, she was forced to leave school because her mother couldn't afford the expense. She sold fruits and vegetables on the streets and looked for any opportunity to earn money.

At age 14, she met a young man named Leonardo.

"I had nothing when I was a little girl, I was completely alone, and at that moment, I had found some hope in a person," says Lesly. But that hope was dashed when she discovered she was pregnant, and Leonardo left town.

At five months pregnant, everything changed. She was visited by Johanna, a tutor from the local church, who invited her to be part of Compassion's Survival program. Lesly eagerly accepted.

Each week, Johanna arrives with words of encouragement, toys for her baby, Sebastian, a practical lesson and food for the week.

"I always tell the mothers I work with that we must all be brave and trust in God. He is the only one who will never leave us," says Johanna.



After playing with the baby and sharing a lesson with Lesly, the visit ends with a Bible devotion and prayer. Johanna is also teaching her to read and write.

"I don't feel lonely anymore. I know that God sent an angel to me to take care of me and help me to protect my baby," Lesly smiles.

The angel told Mary that God was with her and that gave her courage. Who can you share that message with today?

DAY 6 | BURKINA FASO

- Galatians 6:2
- Proverbs 4:13

DEVOTIONAL:

Do you have a nativity set in your house? They are wonderful visual reminders of what we celebrate at Christmas. Now, imagine a nativity that only contained the important figures. Which would you remove?

A young unwed mother, a handful of out-of-town farmers, a small-town tradesman, one fragile baby. Who would the world find important? Look at those figures positioned around the manger – not one of them important to the world, yet every one of them important to the story of God.

For pastor Daniel in a small village in Burkina Faso, every villager is important to him, especially the overlooked women and children. Over time he observed that the single schoolhouse in the village was so overcrowded that few children completed their elementary. Without that certificate, secondary school and vocational training were forever out of reach, leaving children vulnerable to poverty and even exploitation.

Pastor Daniel and his church set out to do something to show that every single person was important to God and that they were worth the investment of education.

Starting out with temporary shelters, they opened a new school to children who had stopped studying. As their ministry grew, they built multiple rooms in a sturdy schoolhouse with help from Compassion's community development funds.



In time, the church was even able to open vocational training buildings for villagers to learn to design and sew clothing, care for livestock and start their own businesses. Young women who had not been able to keep up in the crowded community school found new purpose and a future in this training along with peace about their future.



Students whose lives have been changed by the new vocational training centre.

And this idea is transforming the church, too! From only 50 people in 2002, now more than 600 are serving together in the name of Jesus, and planting churches in nearby villages.

All this happens when we choose to see the world the way God does. No one is unimportant— not just because they could someday change an entire community like Pastor Daniel did but because they are made in the image of God, beloved by Him.

God with us means Jesus seeing our need and doing what we couldn't do for ourselves. Who are the overlooked people around you that you can value with your actions today? Where can you sow seeds of peace?

DAY 7 | KENYA

- John 16:33
- James 1:17
- Lamentations 3:22-23

DEVOTIONAL:

Are you expecting a white Christmas this year?

Sometimes we wait for conditions to be just right for things to 'feel like Christmas.' Have you ever felt this way? The difficulty is, of course, things change. When our joy requires unwavering adherence to tradition and things beyond our control, we easily lose our sense of peace.

While Christmas is a time of joy for many, there is often sorrow there, too. One less plate on the table at our holiday gathering or a meal eaten alone. Disappointment with ourselves or others. Changes in health, finances and relationships all threaten to steal our peace at Christmastime in more profound ways than the wrong weather on Christmas morning.

Still, Jesus came to be with us in our sorrows as well as our joys – sorrows He knows intimately and has suffered Himself. No matter what changes in our broken world, God offers His unfailing love to us here and around the world.

Unfortunately, the effects of change are direr for some. While we might dream of a white Christmas, people in Kenya pray for rain.



Stella looks at the land changed by drought near her family home.

Things have changed in Kenya. Where seasonal rains were once predictable, in 2022 the rain has failed to come for three seasons in a row. The ground is barren, there is hunger everywhere and those who once made their living from the land have nothing.

And yet, amidst this, families like Stella's are experiencing peace. Stella's mother has three children and used to plant and harvest in season. They could feed the family and sell the rest. Now, other sources of income like wood gathering have replaced agriculture. The church in her village received help through Compassion to distribute life-saving food for families like hers, without which Stella might face malnutrition.

Looking toward the future, the church has begun training families in new agricultural practices to that rely less on rainfall. The changes in practice will be difficult for many but could allow Stella's family to thrive despite drought, which may continue for years into the future.

Whether this Christmas season is full of all your favourite traditions or full of changes beyond your control, you can be sure that God's faithful character has not changed.

Perhaps this is a good year to start a tradition. How can you remember those who are suffering and demonstrate the faithful love of God?

DAY 8 | PHILIPPINES

- 1 Peter 5:5
- Leviticus 19:32

DEVOTIONAL:

Grandparents. They're people of unseen sacrifices, valuable gems of wisdom and deep love.

So often, they are some of the first people to show us the love of Christ and bring us into His presence.

We see throughout Scripture that God with us most often happens in the unexpected places, amongst the marginalized or forgotten. Far too often, the marginalized in our society are our elders.



Lola Anabelle with her grandson, CJ, in the doorway of their home in the Philippines.

And yet, our elders are the people who raised us, paved pathways for us and gave us unshakable foundations of faith.

In her book *Abuelita Faith*, author Kat Armas writes, “Abuelitas are the functional priestesses and theologians in our familias. The theologies we have inherited from these overlooked women have given us a firm foundation to live out our faith and demonstrate love in the world.”

Lola Anabelle in the Philippines is one of these women. She is an active and pivotal part of ensuring that her grandson, CJ, has every opportunity to take hold of a future free from poverty.

“A friend told me that the church was looking for children who live in poverty to help send them to school. And so, I went there right away,” she says.

Once CJ was registered in the Compassion program at the local church, Lola Anabelle became the one to faithfully take him to the Compassion program each week.

But in June 2022, CJ’s mother Cynthia returned home from work to an alarming sight: Lola Anabelle was slumped on the bathroom floor, having suffered a mild stroke. She was taken to the hospital and ordered to rest. Her biggest concern was who would now take CJ to the Compassion centre.

Having seen her mother’s dedication, Cynthia knew what she had to do. “I will make sure to take CJ to the centre and attend all necessary caregivers’ meetings. Like my mom, I understand the importance of Compassion’s program.”

So many of us have a Lola Anabelle in our lives, whether an actual familial grandparent or a spiritual grandparent—the elders who made sacrifices to plant seeds of faith in our lives.

Do you have a grandparent or elder in your life who has embodied Christ’s presence to you? What’s something you can do to serve or encourage them today?

DAY 9 | GUATEMALA

- John 14:18
- Psalm 68:5-6
- Isaiah 1:17

DEVOTIONAL:



Meet Getzemani. She is a resilient teenager from Guatemala who was also once an orphan.

The Bible has a lot to say about orphans. Throughout Scripture, we see verse after verse commanding God’s people to care for widows and orphans. There’s no way you could read the Bible and not conclude that God’s heart is for the vulnerable: the poor, the orphan and the widow, to name a few.

When Getzamani was abandoned by her mother at 9 years old, the local church became a place of refuge for her when her aunt enrolled her in the Compassion program there.

“I loved hearing about Jesus. It was the first time I heard about Him, and I was amazed at how good He is,” Getzamani says.

For two years, Getzamani moved between foster homes and orphanages. Each time she moved, she tried to ensure she could continue attending the Compassion program. “I prayed so hard that I would find a family who would allow me to keep going to the centre,” she says.

Then one day, news reached Getzamani that she would be adopted—by a retired teacher named Maria. “We were friends since the first time I saw her. I love my mother, Maria,” Getzamani says.



Getzamani and Maria.

That was three years ago. Today, Getzamani enjoys life with Maria and continues to participate in the Compassion program. She always remembers how the local church has been a constant through the uncertainty of her life. “I love how the centre was there like my real family, supporting me.”

While the Bible has a lot to say about tangibly caring for orphans, it also has a lot to say about spiritual orphans, too. The Advent season serves as a reminder that we are no longer spiritual orphans. God has come to be with us, in the person of Jesus, who says in John 14:18, “No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you.”

Who can you invite in as spiritual family in this season?

DAY 10 | BRAZIL

- Psalm 91:1-2
- Acts 2:44-46

DEVOTIONAL:

The rain came on Wednesday, May 25th, 2022. Homes in Recife, Brazil were flooded, especially those areas of lower elevation. Families were forced to evacuate. The streets were left caked in smelly mud while families were left to pick up the pieces.

“We expected the rain would cause some flooding. We deal with this reality every year,” says Adriel, Compassion centre director.

The centre immediately began responding to the needs of their neighbours, thinking the worst had passed. But on Friday, May 27th, the rain started again—harder, heavier and sooner than expected.

The flooding made national news. At 3 a.m., Pastor Marcos of Compassion’s local church partner was leading a rescue team in a boat, getting to people stranded in their homes. “The water levels were rising faster than we had ever seen before,” he says.



Lucilene, a mother of eight, stands in her home in the aftermath of a devastating flood in her community in Recife, Brazil.

It’s times of crisis and disaster when the church should shine the brightest—when God’s people can truly reflect His image by being present and meeting needs. The church is uniquely positioned to be one of the most effective responders in times of crisis because of its proximity and presence in the community.

We saw this in action countless times this year, including in Recife, Brazil—even when disaster struck the church itself.

Unlike in previous years, when the floodwaters never passed the church’s doorstep, Pastor Marcos and the volunteers returned from their rescue efforts to find the entire place flooded.

“It’s still hard to look at it without sadness in my eyes. I’ve lost 40 per cent of my books, and we’ve lost all the furniture, computers and many documents. Some volunteers [worked on] drying things, object by object, trying to save some items, but our priority was to help people in the community,” Pastor Marcos says.



Pastor Marcos in the church building.

“Nothing has been easy. All of us are tired,” says Adriel. “However, despite it all, we know we need to be strong and help our community. We are their only support.”

“Most [families] lost everything they had,” says Roberta, a volunteer at the church. “We’ve been working tirelessly. Only God’s love keeps us strong and helps us to stand despite the challenges.”

How can you be the church and share the presence and provision of God with your community?

DAY 11 | ETHIOPIA

- Psalm 35:1-2
- John 15:11-12

DEVOTIONAL:

Today is the third Sunday of Advent, and Christians around the world will light a candle to reflect on joy.

Where can we find joy in a world of hunger, conflict and injustice?

Two mothers in northern Ethiopia, Zere and Fatuma, have faced this question, not in theory, but in their first-hand, lived experiences of this year.

Their community has been touched by violent conflict—to which Fatuma lost her 22-year-old son. On top of that, economic shocks and extreme weather have fuelled the global food crisis and thrust these women, their families and their neighbours into food insecurity unlike anything they’ve experienced before.



Fatuma and her son, Nur.

“I never imagined a day would come when I would look for scraps of food in the house,” Zere says.

“Prices of food items have soared in an unexplainable way. We are barely surviving,” Fatuma adds. “I take the little money I have to the market and come back confused and angry with what I could afford. It is a nightmare. What is money if it can’t buy anything?”

Compassion’s local church partner is working hard to respond amidst the desperate situation. Compassion centre director Solomon shares that they were able to provide families with 50-kilogram bags of teff grain and 5-litre bottles of cooking oil. “The provision of food was like manna. It came at a time we desperately needed support. When I gathered the caregivers and broke the good news to them, the church compound was filled with shouts of joy.”

Joy. It’s a simple meal shared with family. It’s God’s unexpected provision when we need it most. It’s the ability to share with your neighbours.



Zere and her two children stand in the doorway of their home.

“I sleep well at night knowing I have food to give to my children. I even share with my neighbours who are in critical need,” says Zere.

“I’m comforted, not just because of the provision of food, but because I know I have people who care for me,” says Fatuma.

What can you count as joy today? How can you multiply and share that joy with someone in need?

DAY 12 | NICARAGUA

- Luke 1:46-48
- Jeremiah 29:11
- Proverbs 22:6

DEVOTIONAL:

At a crowded bus stop in Nicaragua, a young girl reads out the bus routes to her mother. “I can’t read the signs on the bus,” the older woman says. “I’ve gotten lost before when I try to take the bus because I don’t know what the signs say.”

The young girl is Crisli. Her mother Rosario can’t read, having never had the opportunity to go to school. She is one of the 773 million adults worldwide who are illiterate.

Rosario is determined that life will be different for her daughter. But between poverty and her own illiteracy, it’s a struggle to pay for uniforms and school supplies, not to mention being able to help Crisli with her homework.



Crisli and Rosario outside their home before Crisli heads to school for the day.

Enter Marjali—a tutor at the Compassion program run by a local church in the community. She came to Crisli’s school to share about the Compassion program. This was an opportunity for Crisli to receive tutoring, uniforms and school supplies, and to learn more about God’s Word. Rosario registered her immediately.

Too often, we see poor, vulnerable women as passive characters waiting to be saved. But wasn't it the courage, action and agency of a poor, vulnerable woman through which God came to be with us that first Christmas?

Perhaps we risk missing the presence and work of God today when we overlook a poor and illiterate mother's determination to make a better life for her child.

God with us—in the struggle and joy of a single mother and the faithfulness of a local church coming alongside her.

At the Compassion centre, Crisli is invited to work on a booklet entitled, "My Plan for Tomorrow". She sets goals for her future free from poverty, thankful for her mother's love, effort and determination.

What unlikely place might you be missing the presence and work of God right now? How can you seek it out?

DAY 13 | PERU

- Psalm 139:13-16
- Psalm 16:11

DEVOTIONAL:

Have you ever received a handmade gift?

There is something beautiful that happens when our hands and hearts come together to make something. "Made with love" is more than just a label on a handknit sweater or plate of homemade cookies—It also describes how God created us!

At Christmas, we celebrate that God sent Jesus to the whole world, and yet each one of us can have a relationship with Him that is unique as a handmade gift. As we read the Bible, we can see the way Jesus invited people to follow Him was specific to who and where they were, what they had experienced in life and what they longed for most.

Jesus' life was full of love.

There is nothing mass-produced about our salvation. Jesus' gift to us was costly, personal and something only He could do.

During the cold season in the mountains of southern Peru, temperatures frequently drop to fifteen below zero. Work is scarce and crops don't grow. Livestock is easily lost to the cold. Without electric heat and sufficient clothing, children are especially vulnerable. In this frozen place, Flora worked to support her family through childcare and making creative crafts to sell, but it was a struggle. She prayed that God would see her and help.

Flora's prayers were answered the day a local church announced a new program for children in their village. At the Compassion centre, Flora's daughter Sthefany learned about God's love for her. The staff visited the family, gifting food baskets, warm winter coats, high quality blankets and—most exciting to Flora—yarn for her to knit sweaters in just the right size for her kids. Just what they needed!



Sthefany receives a warm blanket from her church.

As the church learned of Flora's abilities, they hired her to teach the women of the village to make crafts for income. Soon, this successful business allowed the women to creatively provide for their families! The church was able to respond in one-of-a-kind ways to love their neighbours, demonstrating God's one-of-a-kind love.



Stefani with handcrafts made by her mother.

Like an artist, God weaves the threads of our life together to tell a handmade story. His plan for our lives will bring joy to the world. What can you do to bring the message and joy of Jesus to others in your own unique way this Christmas season?

DAY 14 | HAITI

- Psalm 104:33
- Romans 8:6-10

DEVOTIONAL:

Do you have a favourite Christmas album?

Some songs hold special meaning for us, and others inspire wonder and worship. Music has a way of connecting like almost nothing else. Unless you're standing in a checkout listening to the same pop ballad about falling snow or jingle bells for the fiftieth time, music can bring joy!

You probably know many Christmas carols and other works of art were created by artists employed by the Church. Silent Night and the Sistine Chapel have one important thing in common – they were an offering to God meant to draw us into worship through an encounter with something beautiful rather than merely useful – that's what makes them a gift.

God's gifts create joy in us, joy in our communities and flourishing in our world. These gifts can be talents, interests, even resources and opportunities. Without exception, these gifts grow when we give them away.

For young Mackenley living in Haiti, the opportunity to learn music at his local church was a gift. In a country that has bravely faced so much suffering with so few resources, a child like Mackenley with a single mother and six siblings faced a difficult future.



Mackenley plays guitar in Haiti.

The Compassion centre at his church provided Mackenley with opportunities he never dreamed were possible. As a busy and curious child, he thrived in theatre, music and tech training. Soon, singing and guitar became his passion, and he developed his skills in audio engineering and recording. Training was helpful, but Mackenley says the true gift was support and the example of hard work that allowed him to succeed. It wasn't just an instrument that he needed—Mackenley flourished when the people of God saw his gift and encouraged him.



Mackenley working with technology he uses to mix sound and record music.

After winning singing competitions in his region, he entered a national competition and earned recognition and equipment to continue his art. He now leads worship in his local church using his creative gifts for God's glory and makes his living as a professional musician!

Jesus came to be 'God with us' and give Himself as a gift. You are also a gift to those around you.

Consider giving gifts to loved ones this year that encourage their creativity or a hobby they find joy in. How can you encourage them with your presence to pursue these with excellence? Your encouragement of a gift might just be the best gift of all!

DAY 15 | BANGLADESH

- Proverbs 31:8-9
- Isaiah 58:6
- Ephesians 6:18

DEVOTIONAL:

Chumki has one goal: to become a nurse. It's a dream shared by teens her age around the world. But for this young woman in Bangladesh, it's an incredibly provocative notion that is threatened almost daily by poverty and the related threats of child labour or child marriage.

Chumki's father, Bipul, once promised her that he would support her in becoming whatever she wanted to become. Little did he know how hard it would be to keep that promise.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, everything about the family's daily struggle became worse. Because of supply issues, Bipul couldn't run his business selling peanuts. Though many of their neighbours returned to rural villages to ride out the pandemic, Chumki's family had nowhere to go.

As the desperation grew to take care of the family, Bipul began to think about marrying off Chumki to a local suitor or seeking a job for her to help support the family. It was a decision that would be against his will—and his daughter’s—but what can a father do when a family’s survival is at stake?



It is estimated that in Bangladesh, 11,000 girls were forced to marry in the first year of the pandemic alone. Experts estimate that globally, an additional 10 million girls will be at risk of child marriage over the next decade because of the effects of the pandemic.

During this time, the local Compassion centre stood in the gap for Chumki’s family. They delivered food to ease the desperation and launched an awareness campaign amongst parents and caregivers surrounding issues of child labour and child marriage.

The Bible tells us to speak up on behalf of the destitute and to defend the rights of the poor. It can be easy to look away or feel overwhelmed. But being aware of the stories of girls like Chumki and not looking away is the first step in our pursuit of justice. Then, Scripture calls us to prayer and advocacy.

Today, Chumki is continuing her studies—her father kept his promise. She is on her way to achieving her dream of becoming a nurse.

What is an issue of injustice you can begin to learn about, pray for and speak up against?

DAY 16 | MEXICO

- Matthew 9:37-38
- Philippians 4:19

DEVOTIONAL:

For most of us, toilets might not be something that causes us to jump with joy. But for a community in Mexico, building new washrooms was a big cause for celebration.

Emmanuel Church in Yucatan, Mexico became a Compassion church partner in early 2020. The church established Pan de Vida (Bread of Life) Child Development Centre. Pastor Apolinario was delighted by the opportunity to reach out to his church's community.

Soon, the need for larger, cleaner and safer washrooms in their community emerged. Over half the world's population lack access to safely managed sanitation facilities. But when communities gain safe washrooms, improvements in health, safety and dignity are immediately evident.

This was a big need for a small church serving in a poverty-stricken community. Pastor Apolinario gathered the church members to inform them about the need and ask for their support. They agreed, and together made an action plan to raise the necessary funds and carry out the construction of these facilities.

Despite their little income, each member agreed to contribute what they could. Some gave money, some donated construction materials and others volunteered their time and energy in the construction process.

Soon after, Compassion's Partnership Facilitator heard about the project and secured funding from generous Compassion donors in order to come alongside and supplement the church's efforts.



Compassion child Victoria stands in the centre's newly constructed washrooms.

Today the children in the community have access to new and safe washrooms, improving hygiene practices and disease prevention.

“Now that I look back, at first it seemed impossible to get the resources to be able to develop this initiative. But once more I verified that God always finds ways to mobilize people's hearts when the work is for His Kingdom,” Pastor Apolinario says.

Does your community have a need that seems impossible? How can you trust God with it today?

DAY 17 | DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

- o Matthew 14:16
- o Matthew 25: 35-40

DEVOTIONAL:

Do you have a favourite Christmas meal?

Though many people may have a different answer to this question this Christmas, with the ongoing global food crisis, the question on the hearts of many families will be: will we have a meal at all?

With not enough to eat, children living in poverty are being pushed to the brink of severe malnutrition.

In countries like the Dominican Republic, malnutrition was already a growing problem that families like Maridenia's were fighting to overcome. But now, it's further exacerbated for families like hers.

For Maridenia, pregnancy was difficult. Living with sickle cell disease heightened the symptoms of fatigue, body pain and vomiting. She could barely eat the little food she could afford.

At just 37 weeks, Maridenia gave birth to baby Darlin, underweight and vulnerable.

Anxious and frustrated that she couldn't afford enough food or a balanced nutrition for her baby, she watched helplessly as his condition continued to deteriorate.

Until God stepped in.



Maridenia and her son, Darlin.

At just a few days old, Maridenia was visited by the local church and Darlin was urgently registered. The centre quickly started providing the vitamins, medicine and formula needed to save Darlin's life.

"It was amazing to see my boy recovering. It was a miracle," says Maridenia.

Darlin started to gain weight and grow after just a month of starting his treatment. When he was six months old, he became part of a three-month nutrition program, visiting the centre every morning to receive a good breakfast with all the nutrients he needed.

By the time he graduated from the Survival program to Compassion's Child Sponsorship program, Darlin was completely healthy and energetic like boys his age.



Today, Darlin is healthy, strong and thriving.

Meeting the urgent needs of children living in poverty and facing extreme hunger is one of the most powerful ways that local churches are showing the love of Christ to Darlin and thousands more children across the Dominican Republic.

How can you be Jesus' hand of provision to someone who desperately needs it today both locally and globally?

DAY 18 | GHANA

- Mark 8:24
- John 8:12
- Psalms 146:8

DEVOTIONAL:

What do you long to see this Christmas?

Maybe you're preparing to see your families in a matter of days. Or perhaps there is a particular Christmas market in your town that you're looking forward to experiencing—all the lights and glimmer and people rushing around evoking feelings of warmth and excitement. With all the colours, lights and sights around us at Christmas, it's hard to imagine what it's like to be unable to fully experience the joy of the season without our beloved sense, sight.

For a little girl in the town of Ada on the southeast coast of Ghana, the joy of even seeing her mama's face clearly wasn't always something she has enjoyed. At just a few months old, a routine check-up revealed that baby Kersiah had cataracts, a condition that causes a cloud in the lens of your eye, making your vision blurry. If left untreated, Kersiah could go completely blind.

But we have a God who is the light of the world.



Cynthia with Baby Kersiah.

Jesus came to shine light into every darkness and anywhere there may be shadows. Everywhere He went, He never saw a person without sight and left them the same. To the man in Mark 8:24, who saw men as trees, Jesus laid His hands on his eyes until his vision was fully restored. Even today, Jesus is still healing the blind through the Church. He is still doing wonders.

When Kersiah's mother Cynthia heard through her friends about the Compassion centre at her local church, she took Kersiah there to be registered in the Survival program for moms and babies. The centre immediately began to provide financial support for her medical bills.

But even from that moment, it was a long and anxious wait to get Kersiah a date for her surgery. But one Saturday in December, they received the phone call they had been waiting for—they would need to start prepping Kersiah for surgery immediately!

It's now been two months since the surgery, and Kersiah is recovering beautifully. The spots on her eyes have disappeared and she's set to have another surgery when she's two.

"Baby Kersiah is making a great recovery," says Dorcas, the Survival program leader. "She's a happy baby."

What a joy Kersiah will have seeing many things clearly for the first time. Her healing is indeed a love letter to her family from Jesus.

Baby Kersiah's miracle is a reminder that Jesus is still doing good through His Church. How can you find a way to be the answer to someone's prayers today?

DAY 19 | TOGO

- Matthew 4:16
- Luke 2:11
- Matthew 5:6

DEVOTIONAL:

What does Christmas really mean to you?

Though a global holiday, this season signifies so much more to us as believers. It's when we celebrate that our Saviour put on flesh and came into this world. While it's a wonderful time of joy and excitement, it should also be a time for reflection and thanksgiving.



Born and raised in Lome, Togo, 20-year-old Yves' early years were filled with all kinds of hardships.

Growing up in poverty with an abusive father, childhood was by no means easy for Yves and his brother, Mawuli. In search of an escape from their hardships, Yves and his brother turned to drugs. This is just one of the risks that children living in poverty face when options are few.

But God always makes a way. Love always finds a way. Just when young Yves was at the brink of malnutrition, his family was visited by their local church and immediately registered at the Compassion centre.

There, Yves began to learn about God's love. A kind of love he had never known. One not simply expressed in words, but the kind of love that gives.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

These were the powerful words that lit up young Yves' face when he first heard them at the Compassion centre. Yves gave his life to Jesus, and everything changed.



Yves and his centre director and spiritual mentor, Edem.

The more he learned about God and the Bible, the more Yves hungered for more. Soon enough, Edem, the centre director, started to spend more time discipling him through the Word of God and prayer.

“In his school, where I teach as an art professor, all his peers call him ‘Pastor’. Yves’s impact on youth is significant,” says Edem.

On Compassion Sunday and the Christmas celebration at the centre, Yves was appointed to preach and lead. Edem’s commitment to Yves’s spiritual growth continues to spur him on.

Yves’ story is a reminder that Jesus transforms our past into His message of hope for others. Take some time to reflect on His saving grace today. How can you share your story of redemption with someone?

DAY 20 | SRI LANKA

- Leviticus 26:12
- Psalm 23:4

DEVOTIONAL:

In the mountainous region of central Sri Lanka, terraced landscape sprawls as far as the eyes can see. Hill after rolling hill produces the famous Ceylon tea that is enjoyed around the world.

When you see a photo of the lush landscape, don’t you want to just walk between the beautiful rows of tea plants? If you and a friend could be dropped like a Google pin right in the middle of the photo above, who would you take with you?

What would you talk about as you walked through row after row?



Ever since the Garden of Eden, God has been walking with his people. In the cool of the day, God walked with Adam and Eve. David holds firm to the promise that even in our darkest valley, in the valley of the shadow of death, God walks with us, and we need not fear evil.

Jesus came to earth and walked everywhere with His disciples: along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, up to Jerusalem and to the Temple, into homes and, ultimately, into our hearts. And Jesus commanded His disciples to go into all the world to walk out our faith and bring good news.

On the fringes of the plantations like the one pictured above live the people who harvest the tea that is enjoyed around the world. Many of these families live in extreme poverty.

Joshua, the manager of a Compassion centre in one of these tea-steeped areas, regularly walks to visit and encourage families. These multi-generational families of grandparents, parents and children live in row after row of two-roomed structures made of mud and asbestos sheets.



Joshua, a Compassion employee, in Sri Lanka.

Joshua visits these families because after the long pandemic, they still feel the impacts of isolation. As the cost of food soars in Sri Lanka, it makes putting food on the table more difficult than ever, so Joshua visits families to make sure they have their basic needs.

He's living out Jesus' command to go. His walk of faith brings hope to others.

Where we put our feet matters and, like Joshua, wherever we go we bring the presence of God.

Who's someone that, like Joshua, you can walk alongside to bring spiritual hope or to meet a practical need?

DAY 21 | INDONESIA

o Psalm 73:26

DEVOTIONAL:

Press your hand against your heart right now so that you can feel it's quiet rhythm.

This year, your own heart will beat more than 35 million times. What a wonder!

Did you know that the average 11-year-old child's heart beats up to 120 times each minute? Of every day. That's over 150,000 heart beats in one day.



For Aren in Indonesia, every heartbeat was one more measure of hardship and disappointment. Born with a heart condition that sidelined him from his beloved sport soccer, each day was yet another day he couldn't run with his friends.

For two years—more than 70 million heart beats—Aren couldn't run and play. He was sidelined and could only sit, watch and wonder if he'd ever live life to the fullest again.

Maybe you can relate. Perhaps you don't have a physical condition in your heart that stops you from living life to the full, but there's a big question or concern that isn't easy to resolve.

Conflict and betrayal. Disappointment and tragedy. Stress, struggle and challenge.

These very real human experiences lead to so many questions. Will I ever experience life to the fullest again? Will this deep concern always on my heart and mind ever be resolved?

How many heartbeats before the answer comes, if ever?

Aren needed a timely and critical intervention to ensure his young heart could heal. The wonderful news is that through the care and support of his local church and Compassion's team, he was connected to life-changing surgery that healed the condition completely. Today, Aren runs again.

How much more able is our Heavenly Father to heal our hearts, meet our needs and answer our desperate prayers. The psalmist reminds us that even when our flesh and our hearts fail, God is our strength!

What a joy to consider this truth today. Advent is a time to focus on the truth that Jesus came to earth to minister to us in the flesh and restore our hearts to God. A reminder that God is with us, for every heartbeat.

What critical need, physical or spiritual, can you bring to Him today?

DAY 22 | RWANDA

• John 7:38

DEVOTIONAL:

How early do you wake up in the morning and what's the first thing you do?

Tea, coffee, breakfast, Bible App. Do you scroll social media in the early hours?

For 13-year-old Patrick, every day started with a 5:30 a.m. wake up. He'd grab the empty 20 litre jerry can and start his long walk to the well.

After filling the jug, he'd haul that full can of water, the family's supply for the morning, back to his home in the early morning hours just in time to leave for school at 7:30 a.m.

Two kilometres there, two kilometres back. Every morning.

After school, he'd repeat the trek. Four more kilometres! His daily chore an act of service to ensure his grandmother had the water the small household needed for drinking, cooking food and bathing.



Patrick on his daily trek to get water, 2 kilometres from his house.

Like many other Rwandans, Patrick's family didn't have access to safe drinking water. The water source near their home carried diseases like dysentery and typhoid, so the daily trek to a well was the most certain way to keep his grandma healthy.

Children throughout the community had to make this daily journey for water. Day after day. Until, that is, the local Compassion centre installed water tanks and a system of pipes to deliver water straight to the community. Now, Patrick and more than 2,000 people in his community enjoy safe water.

It's incredible how access to clean water, something so many of us take for granted, can dramatically change the quality of life in a community!

Today, the plastic water tanks help to harvest rainwater that can be used during the dry season when water levels tend to drop. And children like Patrick arrive at school refreshed and ready to learn, rather than tired and sore after hauling water in the early morning hours.



Patrick enjoying safe, clean water in his own community.

This beautiful story of being the hands and feet of Jesus to provide practical needs also points to a spiritual picture: the transformational nature of the living water Christ provides.

Enjoy the miracle of Jesus' living water in your life today. He came as the Living Water to transform our lives and our communities. Who in your life can you direct this life-giving blessing to today?

DAY 23 | COLOMBIA

- o Matthew 5:14-16
- o John 8:12

DEVOTIONAL:

It's hard to imagine Christmas without thinking of lights. Glimmering from Christmas trees or greenery, displayed on rooftops or solitary candles, lights bring beauty to the world and are central to our celebrations during Advent.

Have you ever been to a candlelight service at a church during the Christmas season? It's a beautiful sight to see!

The dark sanctuary throbs with the orange glow of that first candle when it's lit. Then, as the small flame of the single candle ignites the next dry wick, the light increases. Shadows of the congregation dance against the walls as wick by newly lit wick, the sanctuary becomes ablaze with light. Soon, each person in the church holds a burning candle in their hands. The entire space transforms.

Light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. (John 1:5).

Shining our light as believers is a natural outworking of our faith. In fact, as God's love transforms our hearts, it's difficult to hide the change.



Meredith holds her Bible on the way to church.

9-year-old Meredith in Colombia encountered God's love when she started to attend a Compassion centre, and later attend church. As she learned about Jesus and the Bible, there was a spillover effect in the lives of those around her. The light that changed her was impossible to hide, and it set her family spiritually ablaze!

Her brother and single mom started to notice her joy when she returned from the centre. Soon, they were attending church with Meredith and seeing changes in their lives as God's love transformed them too.

In the same way that a single candle illuminates a room and commands attention, Meredith's faith and infectious love for God changed her family.



Meredith prays with friends at her Compassion centre in Colombia.

Stories of faith ignited and shared, like Meredith's, remind us that Jesus came as the light of the world and that His light breaks through the darkness and brings us life.

What a beautiful, comforting truth: His light is for all people. No matter where they live, no matter their history and no matter their age.

Today, find a moment to light a candle. As it burns and flickers, remember that Jesus is present with you and that He came to give the light of life. Let the burning candle remind and encourage you that your life is a light to others.

DAY 24 | HONDURAS

o Matthew 25:35

DEVOTIONAL:

Do you have a favourite meal or food-related tradition when you celebrate Christmas with family and friends?

In Honduras, a common Christmas meal is nacatamales: seasoned meat wrapped in dough and steamed in banana leaves.

Families spend Christmas Eve preparing this traditional dish together and serve the meal on Christmas with a variety of fruit like apples and grapes. If the family can afford it, the feast will feature roasted pig or chicken.

As a global food crisis begins to unfold around the world, however, in countries like Honduras, Christmas traditions will be disrupted. Many families face continued food shortages and food prices that are at record highs. Beyond Christmas celebrations, the health and wellbeing of whole communities are at risk.



Dana eating at her home in Honduras.

In the lead up to the Christmas season, 8-year-old Dana was one of the more than 2.6 million people in Honduras facing a food crisis. Since 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the country, food prices have spiked. As a result, children face malnutrition along with a life-threatening condition known as wasting, which leaves kids too thin and dangerously weakens their immune systems.

When Compassion's local church partners learned that Dana was diagnosed with wasting, they moved quickly to help. They ensured Dana received the medical care she needed, including nutritious food and supplements of vitamins and zinc that helped to save her life.



Dana smiling with friends after receiving a lifesaving “nutritional rescue.”

A story of potential tragedy was transformed into a story of hope and joy.

The act of kindness and generosity that saved Dana’s life serves as a striking reminder of how important it is to minister to the practical needs of the people around us. As we do so, we minister to Christ himself.

As the global food crisis continues to impact areas of poverty, so many kids and families need help and hope. How can you bring practical, life-giving help to someone in need and be the “hands and feet of Jesus” in their life today?

DAY 25 | UGANDA

- Luke 2:10-14
- John 1:14
- Isaiah 7:14

DEVOTIONAL:

You’ve spent this Advent season immersed in stories. Stories that transported you across a globe that is full of evidence that God is with us. He is with children, families and communities in real, life-changing ways.

The story of God with us is the essence of the gospel. In fact, the root of the word “gospel” is the Anglo-Saxon word god-spell meaning “good story.” God’s good story brings hope, peace, joy and love into the world one life at a time. It’s a story that is worked out in us and through us.

And today, on Christmas Day, we remember the good story of God coming to be with us. It comes alive in a new way when we look back over this Advent and see how that story is still in motion all around the world.

There is a Compassion centre in a local church nestled in the rolling hills, banana trees and red earth of Uganda’s countryside. This Compassion centre is bustling with energy and buzzing with anticipation as they prepare for their Christmas celebration.



The children have been rehearsing, reflecting and readying themselves to step into the Christmas story. Costumes have been pulled together, the stage is set, the music selected and dance moves practiced.

For these children, God’s good story has been so real to them, and today is the day they have prepared to celebrate that God is with us.

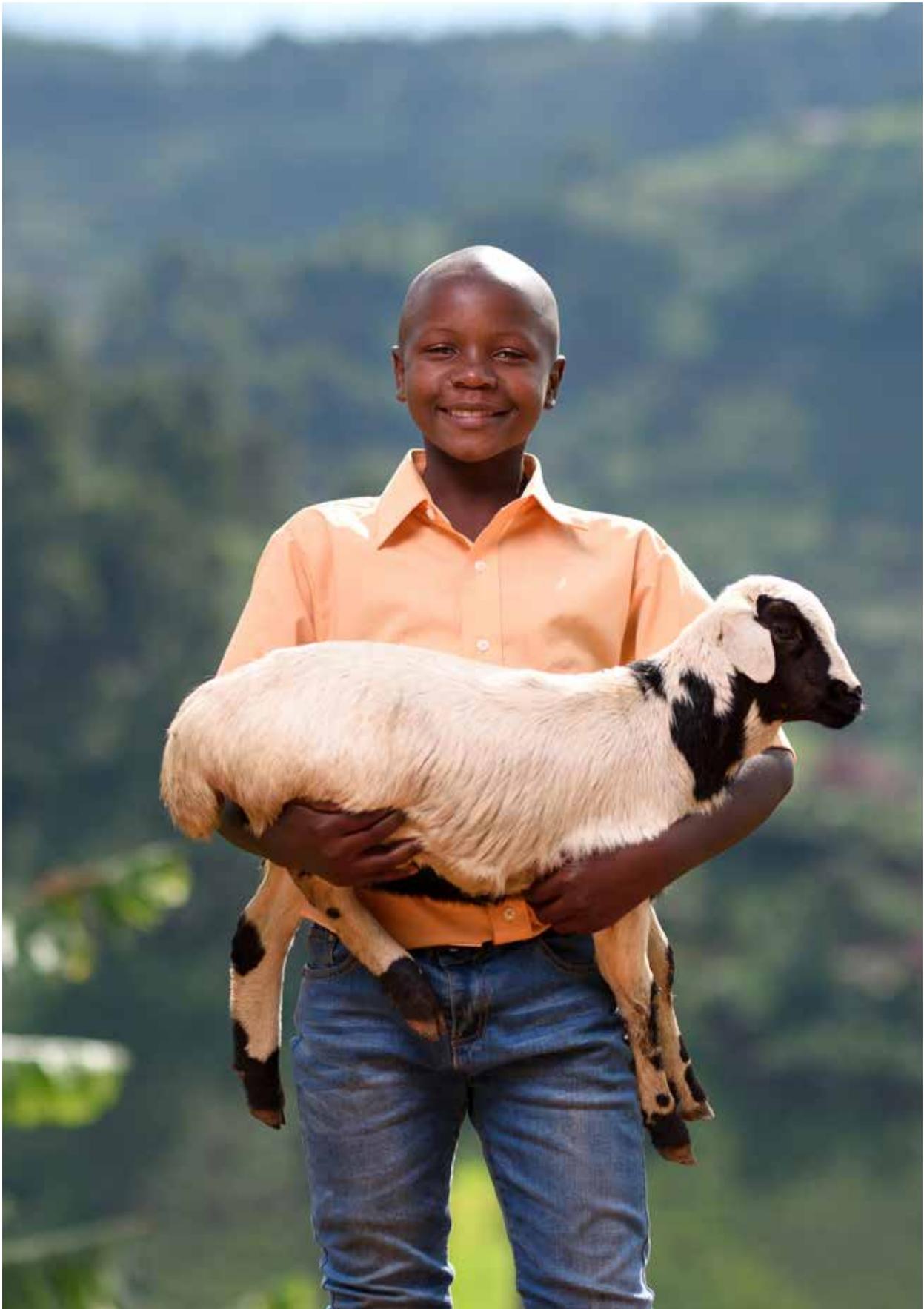
It will be a day that Talent, a young girl from the centre, will wear the costume of Mary and bring the nativity story to life with her friends.

“The special thing I did was that I participated in the role-play of Jesus Christ’s birth where I acted as Mary,” says Talent.

Children like Darius, Susan, Macbeth, Abel and Leticia will dance the Kikiga traditional dance before their congregation at church. The Kikiga dance is famous in Uganda and is a special dance that people dance at happy times like Christmas Day.

Later, there will be squeals of joy as the kids open their Christmas gifts—for Blessing, a new toy truck, and for Shinah, a baby doll in a pink dress. The chatter of children gathered around the table will be the resounding note of the celebration as they receive a special Christmas meal.

And once the festivities at the church are done, the kids will go home with decorations to put up with their families, like the balloons that Akayesu got to put up with her father. Families will be given life-changing gifts such as the goats, like the ones that Stuart and Markbase’s families received.



Stuart holds his family's new goat.

Celebrating Christmas for these children is celebrating God's good story that changed everything for them. It is a story of God with them—in their hearts and their full bellies, in the joy of receiving special gifts, in their communities and in their homes.

PRAYER:

Dear God, the story of Christmas reminds me that You came to be with us. As I have leaned into the stories of children and families across the globe, I have been reminded that You show up in our lives in miraculous and unexpected ways. I've been reminded that there are everyday ways that I can step into Your good story to bring the hope, peace, joy and love to a world that needs Your presence. Help me to celebrate and step into Your story today and every day. Amen.



WHAT IS COMPASSION?

As one of the world's leading child development organizations, Compassion partners with the local church around the world to end poverty in the lives of children and their families.

Today, more than two million children and their families are discovering lives full of promise and purpose as they develop in all aspects of their lives—minds, bodies and relationships—while discovering God's love for them in the gospel of Jesus Christ.



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