

# *I Am a* **WITNESS**

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# So Much More

Revelation 1:8

If I were to ask you the question, Do you know Jesus? your answer would probably be yes. I'm also assuming that if I were to ask you to describe Jesus, you would use words such as *kind, loving, humble, and compassionate*. I agree with all of those adjectives. Jesus was very kind to those He met, and He certainly was the epitome of love—the perfect representation of God the Father and His infinite love for us.

However, Jesus was way more than a nice guy. I mean, what do you do with the story of the Canaanite woman whom Jesus called a “dog” (Matthew 15:21–28)? And how about when Jesus lambasted the Pharisees and called them, among other things, “Snakes! Sons of vipers!” (Matthew 23:1–36)?

Don't get me wrong. Jesus was kind, loving, humble, and compassionate, but He was also bold, radical, outspoken, and controversial. He pushed back against societal norms and made people think. He wasn't content to leave people the way they were. He challenged His listeners, oftentimes shoving them out of their comfort zone and into a whole new realm of thinking.

So back to my original question. Do you know Jesus? You may have grown up singing “Jesus Loves Me” and saying “Dear Jesus . . .” before meals and bedtime, but singing about Jesus or saying standard prayers is not the same as knowing Him. Do you truly know the Man who walked on water, healed the sick, interacted with outcasts, called people out for sinning, proclaimed the gospel with boldness, prayed all night, touched the untouchable, and offended people He came to save? Or maybe a better question is, Do you want to know Jesus? Do you want to learn more about this intense Man who was both fierce and gentle?

I know this isn't a new concept. I'm sure you've heard it all your life. But if you want to know Jesus—the One who is, who always was, and who is still to come (Revelation 1:8)—you need to spend time with Him. So that's exactly what we are going to do this year. We are going to explore the Gospels in an effort to get to know Jesus better. We are going to pay attention to what He did and said and whom He interacted with. In the process, I not only hope that you grow deeper in your friendship with Jesus but that you will also learn more about yourself and who you are as a child of God.

—Chaplain Kalie

JANUARY 2

## Spread the Word

John 1:1–18

**G**od gives every Christian gifts we can use for His glory. We all have talents that we can use for Him. Personally, I am a pianist and have been playing music in the church for as long as I can remember. I love playing the piano for Jesus, and it has been my method of witnessing throughout my life.

I think about many things before leading in worship. Our praise band has to work on dynamics, timing, and verbal and musical transitions in order to be prepared for the worship service. In the end, when I get up on stage, I am not the one doing the work. Instead, God is working through me. He is the One who makes the difference.

The light that shines on us and inspires us is the same light—His light—that radiates out of us, His vessels, when we use our talents for Him. This is what drives us to share our God-given gifts in the church.

I believe this is a real-world example of what John is talking about in the beginning of John 1. Using our gifts for God is one way that the light of Christ can shine through us. “In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:4, 5, NIV).

John introduces Jesus as the Creator, Sustainer, and Author of everything. John compares Him to light, which is an essential component of life. We cannot live without light. John recognized that he was nothing compared to Jesus, and he took seriously his role of spreading the knowledge of God, the One who is above everything, to the world.

Just like John, any of us can spread God’s Word by using the gifts God has given us. God wants us, like John, to take the Word, which comes to us through Jesus, and give it to other people. Yes, you may not be recognized or you might go through trials, but those who recognize Jesus will be changed.

—Nathan Begley, junior

# A Living Testimony

Matthew 1:1–17; Luke 3:23–38

At some point every year, I begin to read through the book of Matthew, telling myself I will study and explore God’s Word in a new way. However, the first seventeen verses of Matthew are not what I consider particularly interesting reading material. After reading through the first few names on the list of who was whose father, I skim or entirely skip the genealogy that seems to plague the beginning of the New Testament. Yet the inspired Word of God says this in 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (ESV). This causes me to stop and ask myself, How are the genealogies in Matthew and Luke “breathed out by God”? What significance is found in these long genealogical lists?

Historically, the Jews were very good at tracing their lineage. By knowing who one’s ancestors were, one could claim property and an elevated status. Family trees were extremely important back then because they established the identity of a Jew. Today, not many people can trace their ancestry back more than four or five generations, if that. In Jesus’ time, everyone could trace their ancestry back hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Because one’s ancestry established their validity, it makes sense that Matthew and Luke would include genealogies in their writings.

If we take a look at some of the names in the genealogy of Christ, we find that Abraham is mentioned. God promised Abraham that through his offspring all nations would be blessed (Genesis 22:18). The crazy thing about that promise is that it is still being fulfilled today. Jesus Christ is blessing millions of lives this very day, and that is a direct fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham. Rahab, a prostitute, is listed in the ancestry of Jesus Christ, showing that God can use those who submit to Him, regardless of background. Ruth, a Moabite, is also listed, demonstrating that God uses those who step out in faith, regardless of nationality or heritage. The genealogies in Matthew and Luke reveal God’s faithfulness to His people and show that God keeps His promises. They are a testimony of the saving grace of God, seen in His Son, Christ Jesus.

—Andrew Boyd, senior

JANUARY 4

## The Silent Promise

Luke 1:5–25

**T**he thought of instantly gaining millions of dollars through a game of chance seems exciting to most people. Many buy lottery tickets, hoping they will be the lucky one who gains instant wealth. However, the chances of winning the lottery jackpot are extremely low, with only a 1-in-a-175-million chance. You are more likely to be crushed by a meteor, struck by lightning, or hit by pieces of a falling plane. Sometimes things seem impossible, like a one-in-a-million chance, and yet with God all things are possible.

Zechariah was righteous in the eyes of God, but he and his wife, Elizabeth, were very old and had never been blessed with a child. In fact, they had given up on the idea of raising a little bundle of joy. The odds seemed to be against them, just as they are for whoever thinks they can win the lottery. Having a child seemed so improbable at their advanced ages that even as Gabriel stood before Zechariah explaining the coming blessing, the priest doubted God's word.

Many times in our lives, we face mountains or obstacles that seem enormous. Beating the odds feels impossible. However, in the face of insurmountable odds, we cannot let the devil cloud our judgment and convince us that God's power is insufficient. Once we doubt God's power, we are putting Him on our human, sinful level. Yet God is so much more than we can ever imagine. He is powerful and gracious. He turns impossible situations into realities.

Of course, there are times when we question God and wonder how impossible things can become possible. As soon as those thoughts cloud our minds, we need to push aside the lie and rely on the truth of God's Word that all things are possible with Him (Matthew 19:26). Give it all to God; He promises that He wants only what is best for us. In this life we will face struggles, but we must hold strong to the promise that God makes all things new (Revelation 21:5) and takes our challenges and turns them into joy (Isaiah 61:3).

—Javiera Alquinta, senior

# Taking a Step Back

Matthew 14:22–36

**W**e live in a fast-paced world that pushes us to juggle more and more things, leaving us stressed and overwhelmed by the weight of the responsibilities we shoulder. In addition to the responsibilities of school, and maybe work, we have extracurricular activities to keep up with, such as sports teams, music groups, church, Pathfinders, and exercise (not to mention keeping up with the hundreds of friends we have on social media). The list goes on and on.

Don't get me wrong; many of the things that occupy our time are valuable. But if we don't take time to connect with the One who made us and sustains us, we have the potential of burning out or heading down a path that leads to nowhere.

So what do we do about it? Taking a cue from Jesus, we need to step back and, in the quietness, ask Him to speak into our lives. Jesus often retreated from the crowds and the busyness of ministry to spend time with His Father (Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35; 6:46; Luke 5:16; 6:12). He knew that in the stillness He would be rejuvenated and revived, ready to take on whatever God had in store for Him, whether it was meeting the needs of the people who clamored for healing, dealing with those who hated Him, or teaching the multitudes who flocked to hear His every word.

That's why we will often hit the pause button on our devotional readings and spend time talking to Jesus in a creative way that involves your imagination. We're calling this moment of reflection "Meeting With Jesus." It may take some practice to slow down and talk and listen because we are so used to the constant buzzes, chirps, and dings from our phones and the world around us, but I encourage you to set aside a bit of quiet time to talk with the One who truly cares about you. Just as Jesus was transformed by spending time in God's presence, may we walk away changed because of the time we spend with Him.

—Chaplain Kalie

JANUARY 6

## Right There With Us

Luke 1:26–38

I enjoy sports, so when girls' soccer tryouts came around in the fall, I decided to give it a shot. Even though I didn't know how to play soccer, I figured I would just do it for fun. Well, I tried out—and was shocked when I discovered that I made the team as goalie. I was excited but also really scared—I didn't know all the rules for soccer, so I felt a bit overwhelmed! I finally prayed about it and asked God to send someone who could help me figure things out. I thanked Him for giving me the opportunity to play another team sport, and I left things in His hands. A few days later, as I was talking with my friends, some of them said they would teach me all I needed to know about soccer. I immediately felt more confident knowing that I had the support of my friends. I thanked God for answering my prayers and sending me people who would teach me what I needed to know.

It must have been a great honor for Mary to have an angel come and tell her that she would be the mother of the Son of God, but it must have also been terrifying. Mary must have felt a great amount of pressure as the magnitude of the news settled in. She was very young and was engaged to be married to Joseph. What was she going to tell him and their families? She knew there could be dire consequences once the story got out, but she surrendered to God's plan and trusted that He would work everything out. She said, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true" (Luke 1:38). God knew Mary would need support, and that's why He told her about her relative Elizabeth's pregnancy.

The nervousness I felt at learning a new sport pales in comparison to Mary's experience, but we each face things every day that scare or intimidate us. The question is, What do we do when we aren't sure what tomorrow brings, and to whom do we turn?

God gives us many opportunities in life, many of which seem daunting. But when He gives us these gifts, He places people—and the Holy Spirit—in our lives to help guide us through the unknown.

—Faith Bispham, sophomore

# Ultimatums and Surrender

Luke 1:39–56

**L**ast summer I worked as a colporteur selling Christian literature in California. One day I had only sold three books in six hours, and I was starting to get frustrated. It was well above one hundred degrees, and I was hot and tired. I knew I had to keep going, so I sat down on the side of the road, unloaded my irritation on God, and asked Him to reveal His purpose for me. I was so worn out that I bargained with God, telling Him that if He didn't help me to sell at least one book on the next street, I was going to quit and fly home the next day.

I finished my prayer and headed to the next street. God made His plan for me to stay in California clear. I sold a cooking set at my first door and a set of children's books two houses down. Then someone signed up for Bible studies! In that moment, I saw my prayers answered, and it cemented in my mind that He will never leave us or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6). After these three successes, I stopped before going to the next house and thanked God for His blessings. I surrendered myself to Him and asked Him to use me to bring light to the rest of the people I would meet that summer.

God is faithful and worthy to be praised, which we see in the story of Mary and Elizabeth. After being barren her entire adult life, Elizabeth became pregnant as an old woman. Her prayers were answered! When Mary showed up at Elizabeth's house, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and, without Mary saying a word about her own unusual pregnancy, Elizabeth prophesied about the baby that Mary was carrying. Then Mary began to sing a song of praise for God's majesty and faithfulness.

Elizabeth gave birth to a baby boy who grew up to be known as John the Baptist, a man of God's Word who brought many people to Jesus' feet. Elizabeth had gone through a tough season when she thought she couldn't have a baby, but she kept holding on to God. In the end, He worked a miracle through her, because she remained connected to Him. Elizabeth was no different from any one of us. God can use people like you and me. He doesn't take into account our social status, race, or background. He accepts us as we are, and if we surrender ourselves to Him, He will use us in ways we can't imagine.

—Genesis Arteta, senior

JANUARY 8

# Everyone Has a Story

Acts 1:8

I have always loved reading true stories. Don't get me wrong; I enjoy a good fictional book from time to time, but I'm drawn to stories that have actually happened, where you know the blood, sweat, and tears are real.

I've heard it said that everyone has a story to tell, and it's true. If you take the time to ask someone about the high and low points of his or her life, you'll learn a lot about that person. Of course, some people clam up and don't want to talk about themselves because they feel like they don't have anything interesting to say, but we all have something to share about the events that have shaped our lives.

Right before Jesus returned to heaven, He told His disciples to share with the whole world what they had observed and all the things He had taught them (Acts 1:8). We have favorite stories from our lives that we tell again and again; I wonder what stories Peter, James, and John repeatedly told. What was their favorite bit of truth to share with new believers?

As followers of Jesus, we are called to share our testimony with other people. This testimony includes stories of God's providence, protection, and provision. It also includes truths that God reveals to us in His Word. If we don't, who will tell others about Jesus' presence and influence in our lives, and how will they get to know Him?

Once a week, you will read stories that celebrate God's faithfulness and love. Each story will end with a four-word sentence: I am a witness. These simple words carry such power because without each of us attesting to God's goodness today, He remains a legend or a fable. The disciples started rolling the ball, and we get to keep pushing it forward until Jesus returns. Just as God lived and moved while Jesus walked the earth, He still works in the lives of His people today through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the weeks to come, you will read a variety of stories that end with a common theme: I am a witness.

—Chaplain Kalie