

Come & See

Reflections on the Life of Jesus

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Reflections on the Life of Jesus

Forward Day by Day **Meditations**

Curated by Sanford Smith

Forward Movement
Cincinnati, Ohio

Preface

Every morning since 1985, Sanford Smith has read *Forward Day by Day*. When he found a particularly stirring reflection on the life of Jesus, he carefully tore out the page and tucked it into a folder for safekeeping. Over the years, his collection grew. He occasionally pulled out the folder to read through the various clippings. Eventually an idea emerged to arrange the meditations in chronological order of the life of Jesus. His work at culling and cultivating reflections form the foundation for *Come & See: Reflections on the Life of Jesus*.

“*Forward Day by Day* has inspired my devotion to Jesus over the years,” says Sanford. “I thought this might be a different way for people to connect with his life. When you read the reflections individually day by day, they don’t follow the calendar of Jesus’ life, but when they’re arranged in this way, you get an introduction to his life and his teachings.”

Sanford’s work builds upon the grand experiment of *Forward Day by Day*, which began in 1935. As a small group of devoted leaders sought to revitalize the church, they wondered whether a daily devotional could be the spark. After hundreds of thousands of people ordered the first issue, the answer was clear: A weary world was hungry for the Word of God.

For more than eight decades, *Forward Day by Day* has been in continuous publication. The methods of delivery have changed considerably: Today, we offer *Forward Day by Day* in English, Spanish, and Braille, and through print,

email, social media, smartphone application, and a podcast. But the format and content has remained remarkably unchanged. The focus of *Forward Day by Day* is the Word of God and the experience of writers and readers as they seek to follow Jesus more closely.

Publishing daily devotions for eighty-five years translates into more than 30,000 reflections. Whenever we dig around in our archives, we find that meditations written throughout the decades strike a chord today. While the contexts have changed, the challenges and joys of everyday discipleship are constant.

Building upon Sanford's collection, we sought to include reflections for all of the main events of Jesus' life, from the angel Gabriel's visit with Mary to the resurrection of Jesus and the disciples making their way around the world to proclaim the Good News. With the help of New Testament scholar Dr. David Creech, we did our best to put them in chronological order, generally following the Gospel of Mark.

The reflections span thirty-five years, a time that saw great changes. Imagine: the Berlin Wall hadn't crumbled, iPhones were science fiction, and 9/11 was just a date on the calendar. Not only were these reflections written in vastly different contexts but also by many different authors: male, female, clergy, lay, young, old, black, white, Latino, straight, gay. Yet what emerged is not a disparate set of individual meditations but a tapestry of reflections on the life of Jesus,

some poignant, others pointed, but all committed to a way of love.

Sanford was around in 1935—but he wasn't reading *Forward Day by Day* yet. Only ten years old then, he had a few other things on his mind besides the daily devotional. After he retired from hospital administration in the 1980s, he became a volunteer chaplain at a hospital where he discovered *Forward Day by Day*. Although he's a Baptist minister, he says the Episcopal devotional resonates with—and challenges—him more than any other he has read.

Some reflections are better than others, he says. But “I can honestly say that I've never found an issue that I didn't like. It's amazing to me that the quality is so high over such a long period of time.”

Sanford and his wife, Patricia, have been married for sixty-two years, and they have four children and five great-grandchildren. Today, at age ninety-five, Sanford still volunteers four days a week at a hospital in Omaha, Nebraska. But every morning, he puts first things first and opens *Forward Day by Day* to read and pray.

We are grateful to Sanford for his work in curating these reflections and to our faithful readers over the decades. May all of us ever seek to grow in the knowledge and love of Christ.

Richelle Thompson
Managing Editor
Forward Movement

March 25, 1999

Luke 1:38. Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Why did God choose Mary? Was she simply in the right place at the right time? Was the plan to select her long in the making? What did God see in Mary?

There must be something about Mary that made her the perfect choice. No matter how long the list may be of considerations that weighed in her favor, there is one of Mary's characteristics that seem certain to have played a major part in her selection: She was willing to say "yes."

The fact that Mary said yes to God is not to be taken lightly. It was an outrageous idea that God would choose her to bring the Messiah into the world. The implications of Mary's doing so would cause her pain, embarrassment, and rejections, and yet, Mary said yes to God. Years may be spent evaluating and discussing the perfect religious person—someone who speaks well, someone who cares for others, etc.—but ultimately, all that matters is the ability and willingness to say yes. God chose Mary—the one who said yes.

August 15, 2012

Luke 1:46. My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

Jesus' mother was his first disciple, the one who opened her heart to him from the beginning. A young girl without wealth, power, or education in a patriarchal culture, Mary was not an obvious candidate for prominent service. But when the angel explained to her that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and her child would be holy, she responded, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord" (Luke 1:38).

In her, we recognize God's practice of inviting ordinary people to step out in faith and become part of turning the world upside down. Through Mary, God entered into human life in an extraordinary way and created a new relationship with us.

Her motherhood can help us comprehend our new kinship; we can identify with Mary, who lived as we do, and who presented her child to the Lord and to the world and watched him grow into his destiny. Because she knew the same joys and sorrows that we know, Mary is accessible to us—and that strengthens and comforts us. But her relationship with Jesus and her faith in him also give her a special place in the communion of saints.

December 25, 1986

Luke 2:7. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Recently I was in the small barn of a friend who raises sheep. It was cold and bleak outside but the warmth of the sheep made it seem very pleasant inside. They were pulling down delicate wisps of sweet-smelling clover and timothy hay from mangers built out of poplar boards along one side of the barn. A row of windows on the south side let in what sunshine there was on this short December day. Cakes of beet pulp were laid out for the sheep, and clean straw was underfoot. A jersey cow that gives milk for the family was tied at one side of the barn and quietly mooed as we petted her.

Here in the stable with the gentle herdsman always attentive to the needs of her animals, I thought of the birth of Jesus. It would have been hard to love a Savior born in a palace of a fine inn, but we love the Jesus who was born in a stable. A stable can be a wonderful place indeed. Especially at this time of year, it is a welcome refuge from the storms and cold of the outdoors, a place where new life comes into being and where new hope is stirred up for the farm person.

Our heavenly Father, help us to make Christmas a time of simple joy and love and hope centered on the birth of Jesus in the stable at Bethlehem. *Amen.*

February 27, 2017

John 1:14. *And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*

We lose sight of the fact that Jesus' entrance into our world went largely unnoticed by anyone. He fit into the contemporary scenery, hanging out with strangers and sinners and habitually offending good, religious people. Jesus would never have been made chief rabbi. He does not live an upwardly mobile life. Yet John claims that in Jesus, we have seen glory—the awesome glory of the Most High God. Sometimes that glory—and the knowledge of it—is hard to take.

The challenge for me is to stop admiring Jesus from a safe distance. If I want to embrace that glory, I have to get up close and personal to it—to Jesus. But this Word made flesh is dangerous. John's odd understanding of glory shocks me and maybe scares me a little bit too. Yet Jesus himself is what a person—fully alive, entirely human—looks like. We aren't fully alive yet. We seem to prefer being half-human, not loving God with our whole hearts, not loving our neighbors as ourselves. Saint Irenaeus reminds us that, "The glory of God is a person fully alive." Imagine being fully alive—just like Jesus.