



Prophecies of Grace:

31 days of Advent
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Prophecies of Grace



Jesus is more than a baby in a manger, wrapped in cloth. This tiny little babe marks the fulfillment of prophecies told hundreds of years before his arrival.

Jesus' birth heralds the moment that the Creator of the Universe wrapped himself in flesh to walk among us: and in doing so - unveil His long awaited plan to redeem humanity.

As we look to Advent, meditating on these small prophecies foretold of Jesus, is there something fresh to understand about who this God is?

“For unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given: and
the government shall be
upon his shoulder: and his
name shall be called
Wonderful, Counsellor, The
mighty God, The
everlasting Father, The
Prince of Peace.”

Isaiah 9:6

Prepare for the coming Messiah



DAILY PLAN OVERVIEW

25th

Genesis 3:15 + Matthew 1:20, Galatians 4:4 (Born to a woman)
Micah 5:2 + Matthew 2:1, Luke 2:4-6
(Born in Bethlehem: a town of no importance)

26th

Isaiah 7:14 + Matthew 1:22-23, Luke 1:26-31 (Born to a virgin)
Genesis 12:3, 22:18 + Matthew 1:1, Romans 9:5
(From the line of Abraham)

27th

Genesis 17:19, 21:12 + Luke 3:34 (Descendant of Isaac)
Numbers 24:17 + Matthew 1:2 (Descendant of Jacob)

28th

Genesis 49:10 + Luke 3:33, Hebrews 7:14 (From the tribe of Judah)
2 Samuel 7:12-13, Isaiah 9:7 + Luke 1:32-33, Romans 1:3
(Heir to David's throne)

29th

Psalms 45:6-7, Daniel 2:44 + Luke 1:33, Hebrews 1:8-12
(An eternal and anointed throne)
Isaiah 7:14 + Matthew 1:23 (Called Emmanuel)

30th

Hosea 11:1 + Matthew 2:14-15 (Would spend a season in Egypt)
Jeremiah 31:15 + Matthew 2:16-18
(An infanticide would occur in his place of birth)

Prepare for the coming Messiah



DAILY PLAN OVERVIEW

1st

Isaiah 40:3-5 + Luke 3:3-6 (A messenger would prepare the way)
Malachi 3:1 + Matthew 11:10 (He would be preceded by a forerunner)

2nd

Psalms 69:8, Isaiah 53:3 + John 1:11, 7:5
(He would be rejected by His own people)

3rd

Malachi 4:5-6 + Matthew 11:13-14 (He would be preceded by Elijah)
Psalms 2:7 + Matthew 3:16-17 (Declared the Son of God)

4th

Isaiah 11:1 + Matthew 2:23 (Called a Nazarene)
Isaiah 9:1-2 + Matthew 4:13-16 (Bring light to Galilee)

5th

Psalms 78: 2-4, Isaiah 6:9-10 + Matthew 13:10-15, 34-35
(He would speak in parables)

6th

Isaiah 61:1-2 + Luke 4:18-19 (Sent to heal the broken hearted)
Psalms 110:4 + Hebrews 5:5-6 (A Messiah from the line of Melchizedek)

7th

Psalms 2:6, Zechariah 9:9 + Matthew 27:37, Mark 11:7-11
(Called a King)

Prepare for the coming Messiah



DAILY PLAN OVERVIEW

8th

Zechariah 11:12+ Matthew 21:4-5 (Enter Jerusalem on a donkey)
Psalm 8:2 + Matthew 21:16 (Praised by children)

9th

Psalm 41:9, Zechariah 11:12-13 + Luke 22:47-48,
Matthew 26:14-16
(He would be betrayed)

10th

Zechariah 11:12-13 + Matthew 27:9-10
(His guilt money would buy a potters field)
Psalm 35:11 + Mark 14:57-58 (He would be falsely accused)

11th

Isaiah 50:6 + Matthew 26:67 (He would be spat upon and struck)
Isaiah 53:12 + Matthew 27:38 (Crucified with criminals)

12th

Psalm 35:19, 69:4 + John 15:24-25
(He would be hated without cause)

13th

Psalm 69:21 + Matthew 27:34
(Be given vinegar to drink)

14th

Psalm 22:16, Zechariah 12:10 + John 20:25-27
(His hands and feet would be pierced)

Prepare for the coming Messiah



DAILY PLAN OVERVIEW

15th

Psalm 22:7-8 + Luke 23:35 (He would be mocked and ridiculed)
Psalm 22:18 + Luke 23:34 (Soldiers would gamble for His clothes)

16th

Exodus 12:46, Psalm 34:20 + John 19:33-36
(His bones would not be broken)

17th

Psalm 22:1 + Matthew 27:46 (He would be forsaken by God)
Psalm 109:4 + Luke 23:34 (He would pray for His enemies)

18th

Zechariah 12:10 + John 19:34
(Soldiers would pierce His side)

19th

Isaiah 53:9 + Matthew 27:57-60 (He would be buried with the rich)
Isaiah 53:5-12 + Romans 5:6-8 (A sacrifice for sin)

20th

Psalm 16:10, 49:15 + Matthew 28:2-7, Acts 2:22-32
(He would resurrect from the dead)

21st

Psalm 24:7-10 + Mark 16:19, Luke 24:51
(He would ascend to Heaven)

Prepare for the coming Messiah



DAILY PLAN OVERVIEW

22nd

Psalm 68:18, 110:1 + Mark 16:19, Matthew 22:44
(Seated at the right hand of the Father)

23rd

Daniel 7:13-14 + Revelation 19
(He will return a second time)

24th

Luke 1:26 - 45
(Jesus' birth is foretold)

25th

Matthew 1:18-24, Luke 2:1-18
(The birth of Jesus)

All daily readings taken from Bible Gateway,
<https://www.biblegateway.com/> New Living Translation

Preparing your heart

“He came into the very world he created, but the world didn’t recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God...So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father’s one and only Son.”

John 1:10-14

Be still.

Read the scripture slowly and notice the words the Spirit is highlighting for you today.

How is God drawing you to encounter God through His Word as you meditate on these verses?

Is there an application for you today?

How does the revelation of God’s plan for redemption move you to devotion during this Advent season?

Unto us a Child is Born

November
25th

Genesis 3:15

And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.

Matthew 1:20

As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit.”

Galatians 4:4

But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law.

Micah 5:2

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel, whose origins are in the distant past, will come from you on my behalf.

Matthew 2:1

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod.

Luke 2:4-6

And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David’s ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child. And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born.



An unexpected thing happened yesterday.

Sitting in the middle of my favourite café with my unbelieving friend; surrounded by hungry customers, and noisy blenders, we opened the first three chapters of Genesis. It may seem like a strange place to direct a conversation about Jesus: who he was and what he came to do. And yet – it was perfectly simple. Sin entered the world. Through the selfish, ungrateful choices of Adam and Eve, archetypes of humanity, sin arrived.

Eve, convinced by the deception of her enemy, chose sin. And in that wretched moment, she, and we, and all people were separated from God.

Her offspring, and my offspring, each living in hostility.

But the audacious and extravagant love of our Father, the same Father who dressed Adam and Eve's naked bodies in animal hides to minimize their shame, enacted a plan. A plan that redeemed not just women – but all of humanity. What once was broken by selfishness and ingratitude is exchanged for grace in the messy act of childbirth. He whispered His plan into the hearts of women and men who boldly prophesied of the coming Saviour for hundreds of years.

A plan to restore. Repair. Redeem.

We start Advent in anticipation of a tiny babe. A babe who is prophesied to break our curse for eternity.

A Virgin Birth?

November
26th

Isaiah 7:14

All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us').

Matthew 1:22-23

All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

"Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,
which means 'God is with us.'"

Luke 1:26-31

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean.

"Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus.

Genesis 12:3

I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."

Genesis 22:18

And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed—all because you have obeyed me."

Matthew 1:1

This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham

Romans 9:5

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are their ancestors, and Christ himself was an Israelite as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God, the one who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen.



I have children, so I understand how fairytales capture our imaginations. Fairytales captivate us! As I ponder the reading today – I am struck with wonder considering the miracle that is the virgin birth. And honestly, it truly seems the stuff of fairytales. Mary. Just a girl. In a town of no importance. Informed by an angel that she has been chosen to carry the Saviour of humanity. The unbelievers among us could be forgiven for considering this the piece that pushes the story too far. Could it be?

Could you let your imagination go there with me today? What did that moment feel like? The God of the Universe, who had delivered messages to only a handful of people throughout the Old Testament, chose to wrap himself in flesh. Fully God. Fully human.

Before we discount the Bible's account as beyond possibility, let's consider a few things.

The prophecy in Isaiah comes 700 years before the birth of Jesus. A strangely specific requirement for God to fulfil. Outrageous. In the exchange facilitated between the prophet and the King in Isaiah 7:11 we read, "Ask me for a sign, Ahaz, to prove that I will crush your enemies as I have promised. Ask for anything you like, and make it as difficult as you want."



Objective accomplished. A virgin birth.

I can't think of anything Mary stood to gain by courageously announcing the virgin birth. She is either lying and deeply shamed by her community for conceiving before she is married in an ingrained patriarchal culture; or she is crazy because she believes she carries the Son of God within her womb.

Or...it is true. The virgin birth stands outside of everything we know and understand about the created order of people and yet millions of Christians dare to believe in just that miracle. And why not? If the God who created the world can't show up to us in supernatural ways – what kind of God is that?

Have you ever heard people make statements such as, “If God is truly real – why doesn't He do something miraculous to prove His existence?” The virgin birth, while challenging to reconcile, is just that miracle.

I am overwhelmed with wonder and awe.

Hope for a Nation

November
27th

Genesis 17:19

But God replied, “No—Sarah, your wife, will give birth to a son for you. You will name him Isaac, and I will confirm my covenant with him and his descendants as an everlasting covenant.

Genesis 21:12

But God told Abraham, Do not be upset over the boy and your servant. Do whatever Sarah tells you, for Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted.

Luke 3:34

Judah was the son of Jacob.
Jacob was the son of Isaac.
Isaac was the son of Abraham.
Abraham was the son of Terah. Terah was the son of Nahor.

Numbers 24:17

I see him, but not here and now.
I perceive him, but far in the distant future.
A star will rise from Jacob;
a scepter will emerge from Israel.
It will crush the heads of Moab’s people, cracking the skulls of the people of Sheth.

Matthew 1:2

Abraham was the father of Isaac.
Isaac was the father of Jacob.
Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.



Today's reading centres around the prophesied promise to restore humanity through the genealogical line of Isaac and Jacob. Yet the character who strikes me as I ponder the scriptures is Sarah.

Sarah is more than a vacant womb for the male patriarch she will carry.

We learn in this ancient book of history that she is seen by God.

Renamed. Sarai changed to Sarah. Sarah, 'Princess,' is named and included in this genealogy of grace. She is old. Ninety years of age. Living in a culture where failure to supply an heir is shameful and deeply painful.

How could it be? Could the disappointment of cycle after cycle, year after year, decade upon decade really be restored for this woman? Surrounded by the children and grandchildren of her servants, could Sarah possibly imagine she might carry life?

What a promise God delivers her!

"You will bear a child", and that child's lineage will one day restore more than the years her sadness has stolen. He will restore all. Sarah's long-awaited hope is fulfilled in Isaac. And the world's long-awaited hope is fulfilled in Jesus.

It is a reminder that the Hope of Christmas is a hope that has carried God's people for millennia and continues to carry us today.

Committed to the chaos

November
28th

Genesis 49:10

The scepter will not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from his descendants,
until the coming of the one to whom it belongs,
the one whom all nations will honor.

Luke 3:33

Nahshon was the son of Amminadab.
Amminadab was the son of Admin.
Admin was the son of Arni.
Arni was the son of Hezron.
Hezron was the son of Perez.
Perez was the son of Judah.

Hebrews 7:14

What I mean is, our Lord came from the tribe of Judah, and Moses never mentioned priests coming from that tribe.

2 Samuel 7:12–13

For when you die and are buried with your ancestors, I will raise up one of your descendants, your own offspring, and I will make his kingdom strong. He is the one who will build a house—a temple—for my name. And I will secure his royal throne forever.

Isaiah 9:7

His government and its peace will never end.
He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity.
The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's Armies will make this happen!

Luke 1:32–33

He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!”

Romans 1:3

The Good News is about his Son. In his earthly life he was born into King David's family line



“The passionate commitment of the Lord God Almighty will guarantee it.” (Isaiah 9:7)

Think about that sentence for a moment. Passionate. God’s power and focus wholly directed to this eternal mission. Commitment. God upholds His promise, ruthlessly dedicated to its end. But He doesn’t pick the perfect. His promise to redeem is paved by a rabble of broken, selfish, and unworthy participants.

Participants like David. King David reveals the kindness of our God in the most spectacular of ways. A murderer. Adulterer. Deceiver. A worshiper. Poet and Leader. In David we see the wrestle we identify perhaps in ourselves. A man who courageously and zealously seeks after God’s Holy presence. Simultaneously a man who has seen and felt and grappled with the depth of his depravity. This man – God includes.

David isn’t alone either, the lineage of Jesus is littered with examples of men and women deeply rooted in sin. A prostitute. A human trafficker. Liars and brutes. Yet into this chaos – into this human condition – God promises to arrive. And arrive He does!

God saw their need for Him, saw the emptiness and destruction and despair they experienced and He waded in. That kind of passionate commitment is a Christmas gift to us all.

God dwells with Us

November
29th

Psalm 45:6-7

Your throne, O God, endures forever
and ever.
You rule with a scepter of justice.
You love justice and hate evil.
Therefore God, your God, has
anointed you,
pouring out the oil of joy on you more
than on anyone else.

Daniel 2:44

“During the reigns of those kings, the
God of heaven will set up a kingdom
that will never be destroyed or
conquered. It will crush all these
kingdoms into nothingness, and it
will stand forever.

Luke 1:33

And he will reign over Israel forever;
his Kingdom will never end!”

Hebrews 1:8-12

But to the Son he says,
“Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever.
You rule with a scepter of justice.
You love justice and hate evil.
Therefore, O God, your God has anointed you,
pouring out the oil of joy on you more than on
anyone else.”
He also says to the Son,
“In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundation of
the earth
and made the heavens with your hands.
They will perish, but you remain forever.
They will wear out like old clothing.
You will fold them up like a cloak
and discard them like old clothing.
But you are always the same;
you will live forever.”

Isaiah 7:14

All right then, the Lord himself will give you the
sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She
will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel
(which means ‘God is with us’).

Matthew 1:23

“Look! The virgin will conceive a child!
She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,
which means ‘God is with us.’”



If we read the paper, check our social platforms, or tune in to the conversations around us, it can feel like our world is in a state of melt down. Systems are anxious. People are tired. Our coping strategies are worn and fatigued. War. Famine. Disease. Mandates. Neighbour in conflict with neighbour. Whole countries shaken by corrupt, selfish, evil governments. The kingdoms of the world promise much- but deliver little.

But this is not a new predicament, it is the witness of the world. A fallen system, full of broken, hurting and discontent people. King David declares in poetry written approximately 1000 B.C that “the nations are in an uproar...kingdoms crumble!” (Psalm 46:6 +7) This was our mess. The consequence of our sin. God had no obligation to fix what humanity broke. Yet He did. It is the extravagant story of Christmas. A God like no other. Not a god who plays with humans from a distance. It is not like the stories of Zeus or Apollo or Poseidon - gods who used men for their sport. The God of the Jews, seeing our crumbling kingdoms, puts on flesh and enters the mess. Immanuel. God with us. “The Almighty is here.” (Psalm 46:7)

It is staggering. He doesn't come as a King. Powerful and protected. But in the most humble of ways. Laying down all his authority to become a babe. Baby Jesus is more than a character in a Christmas song, He is our hope! He is the promise of a new Kingdom. A new King. He is eternal and He is with us.

A God like no other

November
30th

Hosea 11:1

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and I called my son out of Egypt.

Matthew 2:14–15

That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, and they stayed there until Herod's death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: "I called my Son out of Egypt."

Jeremiah 31:15

This is what the Lord says: "A cry is heard in Ramah— deep anguish and bitter weeping. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted— for her children are gone."

Matthew 2:16–18

Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men's report of the star's first appearance. Herod's brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: "A cry was heard in Ramah— weeping and great mourning. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are dead."



Christmas is a time of joy, of excitement and gift giving. It fills our hearts with anticipation. Yet the arrival of Jesus was tarnished by great sorrow.

Thinking about the reading today is overwhelming. Consider the picture. Jewish Mothers, all through Bethlehem, gripping their baby. Their one-year-old learning his first words. Their nearly two-year-old, old enough to whisper the cry....“no mummy!”

Anguished weeping heard in the silence of the night as soldiers tear through the town removing children from their families. “Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are dead.”

This is the grim story of this ancient people. How could a God of love allow this to happen you might ask? The reality of suffering is one of our biggest struggles as we approach the possibility of the existence of God. It is a question that deserves to be asked. A question which deserves to be wrestled through. But it is complex. Challenging to reconcile.



We recognize in the prophecy of Jeremiah that God knew what was coming. He testified of this infanticide hundreds of years prior. The mother in me wants a simple answer to a complex problem. Just step in God. Just stop it from happening. Deal with Herod. Remove him from the story!

But deep down I know that one King Herod would be replaced by another. And another. And another. Just like the Pharaohs of the past who had ordered the elimination of this Israelite nation. Because, the depravity of sin is endless. And so God did step in! His response to the complexity of sin is simple enough that I can understand but so complex that I never will.

His response is Jesus. A baby that dodges Herod – but doesn't dodge death. This God, Emmanuel, is a God like no other.

“Dear God, today my heart is heavy as I grapple with the weight of these scriptures. I know I can't yet see the whole story. The fulfillment of time, when all of the injustices of the world will be counted and weighed. But I see that your heart too is moved by the depravity of our human condition and that you stepped in then and continue to step in today. You intervene in ways we might never understand this side of eternity. Thank you for sending us Jesus.”

A voice in the wilderness

December
1st

Isaiah 40:3-5

Listen! It's the voice of someone shouting,

“Clear the way through the wilderness for the Lord!

Make a straight highway through the wasteland for our God!

Fill in the valleys, and level the mountains and hills.

Straighten the curves, and smooth out the rough places.

Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed,

and all people will see it together.

The Lord has spoken!”

Luke 3:3-6

Then John went from place to place on both sides of the Jordan River, preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. Isaiah had spoken of John when he said,

“He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,

‘Prepare the way for the Lord’s coming! Clear the road for him!

The valleys will be filled, and the mountains and hills made level.

The curves will be straightened, and the rough places made smooth.

And then all people will see the salvation sent from God.”

Malachi 3:1

“Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.

Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.

Matthew 11:10

John is the man to whom the Scriptures refer when they say,

‘Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,

and he will prepare your way before you.’



Over the past few days we have considered some of the ways that God has reached out to humanity to reveal His presence. A supernatural virgin birth. A nation miraculously established through the womb of Sarah. A God who whispers his arrival to dozens of prophets over hundreds of years.

Today I ponder the very nature of these prophetic words, because the existence of these prophecies tells me something about the character of God. God is Sovereign and creative and capable of fulfilling any claim made about His coming Son. But why would He impose such restrictive requirements on his birth, life and death? Why did God inspire these men and women to pen the terms of his existence?

The Jewish prophets foretold how Jesus would be born and how he would engage with people throughout his ministry. They prophesied of his death and resurrection and how his life would shape the future Church. They are obscure and amazingly specific. It is conceivable that understanding our human condition, revealed in the garden, God knew we would encounter and wrestle with hearts that might be blinded by deception. The prophecies combine to create a web of conditions, mounting evidence, that the trickiest deceiver could not disguise.

But the prophecies reveal something more intimate about the heart of God. He wants us to find Him! Each prophetic word reminds His people ‘help is on the way’. He hasn’t abandoned us. God left a trail of clues in order that the Israelites might be prepared. At every moment God attempts to capture our attention, that we might see Him. Find Him.

If you have never seen Jesus, never fully understood the story, consider this moment your voice in the wilderness. Here and now, today, God is calling to you!

“He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord’s coming!
And then all people will see the salvation sent from God.’”

God despised

December
2nd

Psalm 69:8

Even my own brothers pretend they don't know me; they treat me like a stranger.

Isaiah 53:3

He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief.

We turned our backs on him and looked the other way.

He was despised, and we did not care.

John 1:11

He came to his own people, and even they rejected him.

John 7:5

For even his brothers didn't believe in him.



The word ‘despise’ is harshly descriptive. Scorned. Disdained. Loathed. The words conjure dark and heavy imagery. It seems absurd that the very people Jesus came to love and heal and help, might respond with such bitterness. Ugliness.

As we meditate on these readings, we’re invited to revisit the complexity of Jesus’ task. If Jesus is so good – why did his own people crucify him? If Jesus’ own people did not crucify him, would he be so good?

Jesus came to be our Saviour, a gift that required laying down his life. A task that required someone despise him, in order to fulfil his mission. Hate, disdain and loathing however, are not characteristics of God. They are attributes of a fallen world. Markers of sin. They are evil responses governed by greed and power and self-gratification. A faulty kingdom.

God, is Love. Jesus incarnates Love. It is not then his people who hate, loath and reject him, it is their brokenness. It is my brokenness. Despite the grief, Jesus willingly accepts the hideous hate of his people, knowing it is the only way to break the curse of their ugly sin. Of our ugly sin.

For me it is a breath-taking truth that Jesus endured rejection, that I might experience Love.

This is my Son...

December
3rd

Malachi 4:5-6

“Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord arrives. His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

Matthew 11:13-14

For before John came, all the prophets and the law of Moses looked forward to this present time. And if you are willing to accept what I say, he is Elijah, the one the prophets said would come.

Psalms 2:7

The king proclaims the Lord's decree:

“The Lord said to me, ‘You are my son. Today I have become your Father.’”

Matthew 3:16-17

After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.”



Child sacrifice is a horrific concept! Especially to the people of a developed world; a time and culture in which we hold the rights and needs of children as paramount to how we function as a civilized society! The rightful value we endow upon children, however, hasn't been echoed throughout history. There are countless stories B.C. of cultures who believed their ancient gods demanded the highest sacrifice.

Moloch. Baal. Ashtoreth. Supplicants were convinced the more important the object of sacrifice, the more devout they appeared to their god. This practice was wide spread throughout ancient middle eastern culture.

It is why the story of Abraham and Isaac both shocks us and assures us. A god that expects the sacrifice of a child is astonishingly accepted by Abraham as he straps his son to an altar. But Yahweh is different. He is a God of love. Of provision. He quickly intervenes before Abraham strikes his child – providing another way. It is an unwavering precedent established early for the Hebrew people. Our God does not require this kind of sacrifice.

But He sent his own Son.

It's a prophecy that is challenging to reconcile. Partially I am astounded by a God who would balance the scales of injustice, reconciling the depravity of all mankind, through the judgement of His own. That our God, in His desire to restore with us, would go to such lengths.



Partially I am horrified. Is child sacrifice less disturbing because Jesus is divine? The tension cannot be easily resolved.

As I ponder today, I am struck by two threads which help me to hold the tension of this dilemma. First is the theology of the Trinity. That God and Jesus are in fact one. Grappling with this notion (as mind warping as it may be) helps me to remember that God didn't sadistically sacrifice his Son, instead, that he lay Himself down in our place. Second, is the knowledge that the crucifixion of Jesus was never the finished plan. We are redeemed by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – a task that only the divine could complete in our place. Jesus rose again.

As I consider this audacious act of love, I am reminded of the lyrics:

“How deep the Father’s love for us
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure”

There is much about God’s choice to send His Son I may never fully comprehend, but I do understand that when He made that choice, He made it for me. And He made it for you.

(Lyrics by Stuart Townend, 1995)

The flicker of Hope

December
4th

Isaiah 11:1

Out of the stump of David's family will grow a shoot— yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root.

Matthew 2:23

So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said: "He will be called a Nazarene."

Isaiah 9:1-2

Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory.

The people who walk in darkness will see a great light.

For those who live in a land of deep darkness,
a light will shine.

Matthew 4:13-16

He went first to Nazareth, then left there and moved to Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. This fulfilled what God said through the prophet Isaiah:

"In the land of Zebulun and of Naphtali,
beside the sea, beyond the Jordan River,

in Galilee where so many Gentiles live,

the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light.

And for those who lived in the land where death casts its shadow,
a light has shined."



The imagery of a light in darkness is captivating. When I was little, my Mum would tell me :

“nothing changes in the dark, everything is just as it was when the lights were on.”

It’s true. But something about darkness haunts us. Casts a shadow of doubt. Causes us to forget what exists in the light. Darkness is oppressive.

The Israelite people had long lived through darkness. We have read of the brokenness and depravity casting its dark shadow on the world through the introduction of sin. The weight of bitterness. The destruction of anger. The pain of the atrocities experienced by God’s people. Yet in the midst of the darkness, these prophecies act as a flickering light. A promise that the darkness will not consume them. The prophet Isaiah passionately declares, **“that time of darkness will not go on forever.”**

The disciple John, in his beautifully poetic introduction to his own eye witness account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah wrote:

“The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:5)

I am encouraged as I remember this truth. Nothing changed in the darkness – God was still present. Watching, speaking, orchestrating His plan. Sparking hope in the hearts of many. At times, it continues to feel as though the darkness might overwhelm us – but we can take great courage this Advent season as we anchor our hope in the truth. The Light has shined! It continues to shine. And the darkness shall not overcome it.

Once Upon a Time...

December
5th

Psalm 78:2-4

for I will speak to you in a parable.
I will teach you hidden lessons from our past—
stories we have heard and known,
stories our ancestors handed down to us.
We will not hide these truths from our children;
we will tell the next generation
about the glorious deeds of the Lord,
about his power and his mighty wonders.

Isaiah 6:9-10

And he said, “Yes, go, and say to this people,
‘Listen carefully, but do not understand.
Watch closely, but learn nothing.’
Harden the hearts of these people.
Plug their ears and shut their eyes.
That way, they will not see with their eyes,
nor hear with their ears,
nor understand with their hearts
and turn to me for healing.”

Matthew 13:10-15

His disciples came and asked him, “Why do you use parables when you talk to the people?”
He replied, “You are permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others are not. To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them. That is why I use these parables,
For they look, but they don’t really see.

They hear, but they don’t really listen or understand.
This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah that says,
‘When you hear what I say,
you will not understand.
When you see what I do,
you will not comprehend.
For the hearts of these people are hardened,
and their ears cannot hear,
and they have closed their eyes—
so their eyes cannot see,
and their ears cannot hear,
and their hearts cannot understand,
and they cannot turn to me
and let me heal them.’

Matthew 13:34-35

Jesus always used stories and illustrations like these when speaking to the crowds. In fact, he never spoke to them without using such parables. This fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet:
“I will speak to you in parables.
I will explain things hidden since the creation of the world.”



Telling stories is a quintessential feature of being human. The need to hear stories and tell stories is deeply integrated in our DNA. We love to read great tales of love and war. We are thrilled by suspense and intrigue. We watch films which allow us to suspend disbelief as we are transported to another time and place. We are captivated by documentaries which highlight the plight or curiosity of the human condition. We teach our children through fables; stories which subtly introduce them to notions of identity, citizenship, or character. Stories are weaved into the cultural tradition of all nations and their people.

They can be hard to hear. Troubling to reconcile. Or joyful. Hopeful. Inspiring. Stories help us to order and make sense of our world. But stories aren't innately fiction. Stories are the framework we use to scaffold the hearer into tangible concepts and truths.

It is no surprise then, that Creator God, in whose image we are made, chooses to engage in stories as a way to communicate with us. He uses stories to reveal to us His tangible concepts and truths. God values stories. The stories of the prophets. The stories of the disciples. The stories of women and men who encounter Him, captured throughout the pages of this collection of books we call the Bible.

The Christmas Story is the greatest story ever told, because in this story, each one of us are written in as characters. My story mercifully collides with God's story, through the arrival of Jesus, and transforms my future.

It makes the Christmas story worth considering. Worth sharing. Will you share this story today?

Loved to Liberate

December
6th

Isaiah 61:1-2

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me,
for the Lord has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to comfort the
brokenhearted
and to proclaim that captives will
be released
and prisoners will be freed.
He has sent me to tell those who
mourn
that the time of the Lord's favor
has come,
and with it, the day of God's
anger against their enemies.

Luke 4:18-19

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
for he has anointed me to bring
Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim that
captives will be released,
that the blind will see,
that the oppressed will be set
free,
and that the time of the Lord's
favor has come."

Psalms 110:4

The Lord has taken an oath and will not
break his vow:
"You are a priest forever in the order of
Melchizedek."

Hebrews 5:5-6

That is why Christ did not honor himself
by assuming he could become High
Priest. No, he was chosen by God, who
said to him,

"You are my Son.
Today I have become your Father."

And in another passage God said to
him,

"You are a priest forever in the order of
Melchizedek."



For some, Christmas is not the ‘season to be jolly’. In fact, around the world, Christmas represents a season of deep and anguished sadness. Painful memories resurface. Loss and grief reappear. Disappointments emerge. As we witness materialism and consumer driven behaviours in ourselves and our community. We are confronted with the stark reality that privilege is not an even playing field.

In places and spaces globally, millions suffer under the plight of poverty. Children are hungry. Women enslaved. Cultures burdened by inequity. As I ponder the reading today I consider the words of Isaiah, repeated by Jesus: “...the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the broken-hearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed. He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the Lord’s favour has come...”

The combined philanthropic efforts of the global Church have made an enormous impact on social injustices. Financial aid and support to the poor. Programs and assistance for the broken hearted. Advocacy for captives, prisoners and the oppressed. Counsel for those who mourn. Grievously, the institution of the Church, represented by broken and flawed people, has also enacted indisputable harm throughout its history. That is not, however, the fulfilment of its mission. Jesus came as the incarnate representative of God. Jesus came to declare hope for the poor and oppressed.

Authentic fellowship of Jesus ought to cause our hearts to grieve at injustice and move us to respond. Isaiah’s prophetic promise reminds us that Christmas is not about materialism – but instead, Jesus’ mission, to mend broken-heartedness.

A Better King

December
7th

Psalm 2:6

For the Lord declares, “I have placed my chosen king on the throne in Jerusalem, on my holy mountain.”

Matthew 27:37

A sign was fastened above Jesus’ head, announcing the charge against him. It read: “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.”

Zechariah 9:9

Rejoice, O people of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem!

Look, your king is coming to you.

He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey— riding on a donkey’s colt.

Mark 11:7-11

Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it, and he sat on it.

Many in the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others spread leafy branches they had cut in the fields. Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting,

“Praise God!

Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessings on the coming Kingdom of our ancestor David!

Praise God in highest heaven!”

So Jesus came to Jerusalem and went into the Temple. After looking around carefully at everything, he left because it was late in the afternoon. Then he returned to Bethany with the twelve disciples.



If you are familiar with the Old Testament, you would know that the Israelite people had a tumultuous experience of kings. Decade after decade the kings appointed to bring rule and reign to the Jews were corrupt, self-indulgent and evil.

The Jewish kings are ultimately responsible for the demise of Jerusalem and the Israelite people. It is a story marked by tragedy, suffering and oppression under the Babylonian rule. It is a story which points to the insufficiency of men to maintain authority over men. Humans are innately flawed, as we have learnt. Their flaws colour their ability to govern with justice, mercy, fairness and consistency.

The kingdoms of our time are disappointingly similar. Corruption. Self-indulgent governments. Evil practices. In our own systems we see failures of leadership. We long for a better King. A better Kingdom.

A Kingdom in which injustice is balanced. Equity is restored. Oppression ends. Mercy rules.

The promise of a coming Messiah was the hope of the Israelite people. This Jewish remnant quietly and expectantly clung to his anticipated arrival. One who would come and enact his justice; judging and prosecuting the Romans for their relentlessly cruel and crushing rule. They expected a king, riding on a horse, sword in hand. Come to establish God's Kingdom over the Nations.

And a king they got. King Jesus. But King Jesus comes in the most unexpected of ways. Laying down his power and authority to make himself humble. Serving instead of sentencing. Healing instead of hurting. He is a new King. His is a new Kingdom. The King we needed. For He is divine! He is righteous, and royal and His rule will never end.

Let them come!

December
8th

Zechariah 11:12

And I said to them, “If you like, give me my wages, whatever I am worth; but only if you want to.” So they counted out for my wages thirty pieces of silver.”

Matthew 21:4-5

This took place to fulfill the prophecy that said,

“Tell the people of Jerusalem, ‘Look, your King is coming to you. He is humble, riding on a donkey— riding on a donkey’s colt.’”

Psalms 8:2

You have taught children and infants to tell of your strength, silencing your enemies and all who oppose you.

Matthew 21:16

They asked Jesus, “Do you hear what these children are saying?” “Yes,” Jesus replied. “Haven’t you ever read the Scriptures? For they say, ‘You have taught children and infants to give you praise.’”



The connection between today's prophecies may seem vague at best. King Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey. He welcomes, even teaches, children. Yesterday we pondered King Jesus, a better King. Today I am again struck by the nature of this King who ushers in a heavenly Kingdom. He is humble. Gentle. Counter-cultural. King Jesus turns the expected upside down and heralds a different way. A way which gives place and value to the most defenseless in our communities. Could there be a better example than a King who is willing to sit with children? A King who humbles himself to engage with the powerless. Consider the standing of children in a culture like ancient Israel. Children, not dissimilar to children in our own culture, were vulnerable. Powerless. Meek.

We read stories in the Gospels of interactions between children and the disciples, a clue to us that children were dismissed as irrelevant, inconvenient, and invisible. Yet this King announces blessings for the helpless:

“Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the Earth.”

Perhaps it is no revelation to us that children develop into adults who inherit the rules and responsibilities of the world in which they live. In Jesus, we see a God who engages with children, inviting them to imagine a new future. A future in which the poor are empowered. The hungry are fed. Widows are seen. Women included. A sword is substituted. The war horse is exchanged for a humble donkey. If the meek inherit the earth – what kind of world are they likely to shape? His Kingdom is utterly and undeniably unexpected. And it still is today!

Abandoned by a friend

December
9th

Psalm 41:9

Even my best friend, the one I
trusted completely,
the one who shared my food,
has turned against me.

Zechariah 11:12-13

And I said to them, “If you like,
give me my wages, whatever I
am worth; but only if you want
to.” So they counted out for
my wages thirty pieces of
silver.

And the Lord said to me,
“Throw it to the potter”—this
magnificent sum at which
they valued me! So I took the
thirty coins and threw them to
the potter in the Temple of the
Lord.

Luke 22:47-48

But even as Jesus said this, a crowd
approached, led by Judas, one of
the twelve disciples. Judas walked
over to Jesus to greet him with a
kiss. But Jesus said, “Judas, would
you betray the Son of Man with a
kiss?”

Matthew 26:14-16

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the
twelve disciples, went to the
leading priests and asked, “How
much will you pay me to betray
Jesus to you?” And they gave him
thirty pieces of silver. From that
time on, Judas began looking for an
opportunity to betray Jesus.



Betrayal is deeply painful. In the act of betrayal, an innocent party is exposed to danger and trust is irreparably broken. The impact of betrayal is particularly destructive because true betrayal involves the disclosure of information to an enemy. With friends we are vulnerable. We let down our defenses and share the deepest parts of ourselves. Our tears and sorrows and joys. Our enemies though, despise us. They want to see us experience harm. Hurt. Hardship. Could there be any behaviour more heart breaking than experiencing a friend intentionally and deceptively seek out our enemy?

Betrayal seems deeply human. A shared experience. The prophet Isaiah foreshadows Jesus' anguish, telling us: "He was despised and rejected – a man of sorrows, acquainted with bitterest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way when he went by. He was despised, and we did not care." It is a profoundly sobering thought. We are not alone in the experience of betrayal. This God, God of the Created order, encountered betrayal. He is a God who understands our grief.

Is it possible, however, that I could be implicated in the sorrow of his betrayal? Is it possible that seeing my friend, the God I love rejected, I have responded with silence? Looked the other way? Whilst the betrayal of Jesus is a dark moment we typically ascribe to the Easter story, it is a thread which remains anchored in our understanding of Christmas. Because it was with full knowledge God sent his Son to Earth. Seeing the betrayal to come. Embracing our failure. Orchestrating His plan. Our betrayal then, becomes His beauty!

The guilty walk free

December
10th

Zechariah 11:12-13

And I said to them, “If you like, give me my wages, whatever I am worth; but only if you want to.” So they counted out for my wages thirty pieces of silver.

And the Lord said to me, “Throw it to the potter” –this magnificent sum at which they valued me! So I took the thirty coins and threw them to the potter in the Temple of the Lord.

Matthew 27:9-10

This fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah that says, “They took the thirty pieces of silver– the price at which he was valued by the people of Israel, and purchased the potter’s field, as the Lord directed.”

Psalms 35:11

Malicious witnesses testify against me. They accuse me of crimes I know nothing about.

Mark 14:57-58

Finally, some men stood up and gave this false testimony:

“We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this Temple made with human hands, and in three days I will build another, made without human hands.’”



Each of us harbor a deep longing to see justice. When wrongs are incurred we cling to the belief that the guilty ought be tried and convicted; held to account for the actions which have caused grievous damage. Our need to witness judgement and compensation for wrong is a universal urge. Equally, when punishment is served unjustly, our sense of unfairness is provoked. To see an innocent person punished, accused falsely, strikes at our very core. It is the wrestle of this prophecy.

“Malicious witnesses testify against me. They accuse me of crimes I know nothing about.”

Jesus is an innocent man, convicted: it is unjust! That Jesus’ innocence is necessary for our restitution: unfathomable! The relationship between mercy and justice is complicated and confusing. I want to see justice served and to see penalties issued for heinous crimes. I want to know that evil does not go unnoticed or unpunished. And yet, equally, I want to be forgiven for the pain, cruelty, and unkindness that I have been responsible for. Rivers of justice. Oceans of mercy. I need both.

So Jesus steps in. For a bag of silver his innocent life is offered up. My mercy comes at the expense of his willingness to serve a sentence for a crime he didn’t commit. It is another mind-bending revelation that God Divine, chose to wrap himself in humanity and stand before the court of popular opinion. A Sovereign God slaughtered by salacious lies. All that he might reconcile us. The illegitimacy of Jesus’ trial and verdict is wholly unfair, but a sign of his unconditional love. It is, the scandal of grace.

Away in a Manger

December
11th

Isaiah 50:6

I offered my back to those who
beat me
and my cheeks to those who
pulled out my beard.
I did not hide my face
from mockery and spitting.

Matthew 26:67

Then they began to spit in
Jesus' face and beat him with
their fists. And some slapped
him...

Isaiah 53:12

I will give him the honors of a
victorious soldier,
because he exposed himself to
death.
He was counted among the rebels.
He bore the sins of many and
interceded for rebels.

Matthew 27:38

Two revolutionaries were crucified
with him, one on his right and one
on his left.



At Christmas we celebrate the arrival of baby Jesus – God in flesh come to rescue the world. As we read the scriptures, it is impossible to separate the story of Christmas, Christ’s birth, from the story of Easter, Christ’s death. The prophecies of King Jesus relentlessly point us to the sobering reality of his existence. We sing:

“Away in a manger
No crib for a bed
The little Lord Jesus
Lay down his sweet head...
Be near me Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay
Close by me forever
And love me I pray...”

I wonder, has our approach to Christmas been subtly shaped by a theology of popularized Christmas carols? When I consider the readings today, I am confronted by the harsh reality of Jesus’ time on Earth. He is not simply a meek and mild baby, gently sleeping in a manger. That ‘sweet head’ is anointed with a crown of thorns. That baby grows up to become a man who is struck, spat upon and crucified with criminals.

I love Christmas! I love the celebrations and gifts and good cheer. But I don’t want to forget the inseparable nature of Christ’s birth and death. The gravity of the weight this baby came to carry. As we celebrate, may we be reminded of both the baby Jesus and the beaten Jesus. The baby in a manger and a God no longer in the tomb. May our approach to Advent and our celebration of Christmas continue to be shaped by Jesus’ whole life. His birth, death and resurrection. Jesus the Messiah.

Can you see?

December
12th

Psalm 35:19

Don't let my treacherous enemies rejoice over my defeat. Don't let those who hate me without cause gloat over my sorrow.

Psalm 69:4

Those who hate me without cause outnumber the hairs on my head.

Many enemies try to destroy me with lies, demanding that I give back what I didn't steal.

John 15:24-25

If I hadn't done such miraculous signs among them that no one else could do, they would not be guilty. But as it is, they have seen everything I did, yet they still hate me and my Father. This fulfills what is written in their Scriptures: 'They hated me without cause.'



The story of Christmas is truly miraculous. Let's pause and consider all the incredible prophecies we have read. Born of a Virgin. Creator God crafted into human form. Generations promised their family lineage should expect to one day birth the Saviour. Born into a specific time and place – heralded by a wild prophet ministering in the wilderness. At each step, the plan of redemption enacted by God is paved by miraculous and unlikely signs. Signs of hope. Echoes of promise. God has revealed Himself to us in a myriad of ways. It is why the words of John in today's reading are deeply troubling: **'If I hadn't done such miraculous signs among them that no one else could do, they would not be guilty. But as it is, they have seen everything I did, yet they still hate me and my Father. This fulfills what is written in their Scriptures: 'They hated me without cause.'**

The story of Christ's arrival is both delightful and astounding. Divine. Yet, despite the dozens of predictions and miraculously fulfilled stipulations – it is still possible to be blind to him. To miss him. To hate Him. It is a challenging revelation. It seems there is a force, an enemy, a tricky deceiver casting a shadow over this world and over the eyes and hearts of mankind. It's the painful irony of the false promise made to Eve in the story of sin: **“You won't die!” the serpent replied to the woman. “God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.” (Genesis 3:4-5)** Sin blinded humanity to God. It kept us in bondage. We crafted ourselves as gods; seeking fulfilment in our own selfish and empty desires, but missed his beautiful, merciful and miraculous goodness. God's committed response to our broken humanity continues to captivate and stagger me. The story of Christmas is truly miraculous! Can you see the miracle?

An aged wine

December
13th

Psalm 69:21

But instead, they give
me poison for food;
they offer me sour
wine for my thirst.

Matthew 27:34

The soldiers gave Jesus
wine mixed with bitter
gall, but when he had
tasted it, he refused to
drink it.



This prophecy is undeniably obscure. That the Son of God would be offered vinegary wine. What are we to make of it? In reflection there are two ideas worth considering as we ponder the purpose of such a specific prophecy. One idea is anchored in Christmas, the other anchored in Easter.

At Jesus' birth, he is presented with gifts from wise men. The disciples in their historical recounts of this moment highlight: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Each of these gifts is deeply symbolic. The gold is a representation of earthly royalty, the type of King they were expecting Jesus to be. Wealthy, powerful and typical. Jesus does in fact display power and authority as he ministers, but he is not the King the Israelite people envision.

Frankincense was a perfume associated with divinity. Frankincense was most frequently used in the temple for offerings made to God. This gift then, like the other gifts, was its own prophetic statement. Confirming the baby Jesus they admired, was in very nature Divine.

Myrrh was a spice best associated with embalming oil, used for the preparation of dead bodies. This unexpected present, offered to a baby, foreshadowed the primary purpose of Jesus' arrival.



At Jesus' death, the soldiers offered him sour wine mixed with myrrh. The myrrh acted as a sedative given to criminals as they endured their excruciating crucifixion.

“They offered him wine drugged with myrrh, but he refused it.”
(Mark 15:23)

The spice stood as the only obstacle that could minimize the pain of Jesus' experience. But Jesus rejects the drink. Instead, he willingly embraces all the pain of the rugged, splintered cross. His back bloodied and torn. In this moment Jesus chooses to feel the full weight of the sin of man poured upon Him in our place.

The myrrh will later be carried by Mary to a tomb at dawn, a grieving friend steeling herself to prepare his body. A body she will not find. A body once dead – now miraculously raised! The presence of myrrh at Jesus' birth and at his death reminds us that his life was divinely planned, start to finish. He came as a royal king. Fully man and fully God. Importantly, he was born in order that he may ultimately die. That objective, fully embraced on our behalf, is the unchanging and glorious reality of Christmas.

Take My hand

December
14th

Psalm 22:16

My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs;
an evil gang closes in on me.
They have pierced my hands
and feet.

Zechariah 12:10

“Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the family of David and on the people of Jerusalem. They will look on me whom they have pierced and mourn for him as for an only son. They will grieve bitterly for him as for a firstborn son who has died.

John 20:25–27

They told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he replied, “I won’t believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side.”

Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don’t be faithless any longer. Believe!”



Every time I have the privilege of holding a newborn baby, I marvel at their tiny nails. They are miraculous to me. Perfectly crafted, these tiny little inclusions on a baby's fingers and toes remind me that we have been marvelously made. Knit together by a process that is both scientifically quantifiable – and yet practically, unfathomable. The tiny hands of baby Jesus matured into Divine hands. Hands that touched the diseased; women and men living lives of rejection and social isolation. Hands that healed the blind; gently and mercifully extending intimate touch that transformed their futures. Hands that welcomed children; counter-culturally acknowledging their value and contribution to their community. Hands that released a woman from a torturous death by stoning, by extending grace and kindness. Hands that humbly washed feet, caked-on mud and blood and animal waste; modelling servanthood in the most practical of ways. Hands that blessed food, and then miraculously broke basket after basket of heavenly manna to care for men, women and children's physical needs. His hands brought restoration to brokenness. Traded law for Love. Offered inclusion to the lonely. But these hands were pierced. Crushed. Crucified. After everything Jesus' hands endured, it overwhelms me to think of the way he gently offers his wounded hands as a tangible touchpoint for our enduring doubt. His scarred, marred hands tell us a story. They demonstrate the pain and suffering of the human condition, endured by Jesus on that dark Passover Friday. The story of a God who understands our experience and continues to offer himself in such a gentle and intimate way. These hands are captivating. Kind. Consistent. They are the hands of Jesus, extended to us that we might know the Father this Christmas.

A compelling case

December
15th

Psalm 22:7-8

Everyone who sees me mocks me.

They sneer and shake their heads, saying,

“Is this the one who relies on the Lord?

Then let the Lord save him!

If the Lord loves him so much, let the Lord rescue him!”

Luke 23:35

The crowd watched and the leaders scoffed. “He saved others,” they said, “let him save himself if he is really God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”

Psalm 22:18

They divide my garments among themselves and throw dice for my clothing.

Luke 23:34

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.



That soldiers would throw dice for the garments of Jesus is an impressively specific and obscure prophetic utterance. It is one of the many pre-meditated actions that exists wholly outside of Jesus' control. Perhaps it is possible that Jesus of Nazareth was aware of the dozens of criteria laid out for the anticipated Messiah. Perhaps, educated in Jewish Law as a child, and recognizing the connection to his own birthplace and circumstances which forced his refuge in Egypt, Jesus and Mary fabricated the story of his miraculous virgin birth. Perhaps it is possible that Jesus intentionally set about attempting to fulfill each of the prophecies as he audaciously travelled from city to city, proclaiming himself as the long-awaited Saviour. Perhaps.

But the fulfillment of this prophecy, Roman soldiers flippantly bartering over the clothes of another Jewish criminal, seems highly improbable. What did the Roman soldiers possibly have to gain if they were simply playing a part in the elaborately plotted master plan of Jesus of Nazareth?

Unless. Unless it is true. Unless in the shockingly selfish behaviours of a rabble of soldiers, uninterested in the man they are punishing, we witness yet another prophetic requirement fulfilled. The comparison between Jesus and the soldiers is poignant. The soldiers are single minded in their pursuit of self. Gambling over the clothes of a dying man that they might gain a little extra for themselves. Jesus, in contrast, is willing to sacrificially lay down his life for humanity. Captivating. Kind. Consistent. This evidence is compelling!

It is finished

December
16th

Exodus 12:46

Each Passover lamb must be eaten in one house. Do not carry any of its meat outside, and do not break any of its bones.

Psalms 34:20

For the Lord protects the bones of the righteous;
not one of them is broken!

John 19:33-36

But when they came to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead, so they didn't break his legs. One of the soldiers, however, pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water flowed out. (This report is from an eyewitness giving an accurate account. He speaks the truth so that you also may continue to believe.) These things happened in fulfillment of the Scriptures that say, "Not one of his bones will be broken..."



Having spent weeks considering the Old Testament prophecies pointing to the coming Messiah, it seems right to today ponder ‘why was blood the necessary atonement for sin?’ It is a big theological and philosophical question that we couldn’t possibly unpack and resolve in a swift daily devotional. It is, never-the-less, a thread worth contemplating. On November 25th in the reading, “Unto us a child is Born” I wrote:

“But the audacious and extravagant love of our Father, the same Father who dressed Adam and Eve’s naked bodies in animal hides to minimize their shame, enacts a plan.”

Here lies a clue. The act of God to cover Adam and Eve’s nakedness, to mercifully choose to minimise their shame comes at a cost. The cost is the sacrifice of the first animals. Their death momentarily allows Adam and Eve to feel sinless. And so begins a long history of sacrificial atonement which endeavours to repair, through the innocent life of another, what has been ruptured. In the Levitical Law the Israelite people are instructed:

“...for the life of the body is in its blood. I have given you the blood on the altar to purify you, making you right with the Lord. It is the blood, given in exchange for a life, that makes purification possible...”



It is, ultimately, an incomplete and insufficient system. Because whilst this atonement may act as restitution, it doesn't permanently recalibrate our flawed DNA. Painting ourselves with the blood of another doesn't transform us into that thing. The death of one innocent life doesn't remove my selfish desires, it simply masks what lives under the surface. Eventually the blood fades and my sinful heart is again exposed.

In the Exodus 12 reference we see a prophecy immediately embedded into the practice of atonement. God knew animal sacrifice was an inadequate solution. A temporary response. The ritual of Passover was a prophetic act, adopting a tradition which would one day make sense in the redemptive plan of God. Through Jesus' act of sacrifice we are no longer clothed in an animal hide, our shame partially covered. Instead, Isaiah declares:

“I am overwhelmed with joy in the Lord my God! For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation and draped me in a robe of righteousness. I am like a bridegroom dressed for his wedding or a bride with her jewels.”
(Isaiah 61:10)

By the work of the Spirit we are continually renewed. Our struggle is no longer against flesh and blood because we have been recalibrated in Christ. We are clothed in righteousness, salvation, peace and truth. No more blood. No more sacrifice.

“It is finished.” (John 19:30)

Eli Eli lema sabachthani

December
17th

Psalm 22:1

My God, my God, why
have you abandoned
me?

Why are you so far
away when I groan for
help?

Matthew 27:46

At about three
o'clock, Jesus called
out with a loud voice,
“Eli, Eli, lema
sabachthani?” which
means “My God, my
God, why have you
abandoned me?”

Psalm 109:4

I love them, but they try
to destroy me with
accusations even as I am
praying for them!

Luke 23:34

Jesus said, “Father,
forgive them, for they
don't know what they are
doing.” And the soldiers
gambled for his clothes
by throwing dice.



It's incredibly difficult to understand how God the Father could possibly abandon his own Son. Heartbreaking if we visualize the moment that Jesus calls out from the cross – “My God, why have you abandoned me?” In this prophesied moment God turns his face from Jesus as he carries the full weight of the judgement for sin.

“It's your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore.” (Isaiah 59:2) The justice we so desperately long for is brutally enacted. God will not step in and protect Jesus from this burden. Jesus is abandoned but God is not silent. Isaiah declares:

“The Lord looked and was displeased to find there was no justice. He was amazed to see that no one intervened to help the oppressed. So he himself stepped in to save them with his strong arm, and his justice sustained him. He put on righteousness as his body armour and placed the helmet of salvation on his head. He clothed himself with a robe of vengeance and wrapped himself in a cloak of divine passion.”

This is not the action of a dismissive or unkind God, ruthlessly rejecting His own. Yahweh is Love. He is wholly good, enduring and generous. Sin in its very nature stands in polar opposition to everything that God is. Sin is hate. Pride. Self-gratification. God is Love. Humility. Sacrifice. God's choice to turn his face from the sin being shouldered by Jesus is a heartbreaking representation of an experience we will never have to endure. Because He abandoned Christ, He will never abandon us!

Eden Restored

December
18th

Zechariah 12:10

“Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the family of David and on the people of Jerusalem. They will look on me whom they have pierced and mourn for him as for an only son. They will grieve bitterly for him as for a firstborn son who has died.

John 19:34

One of the soldiers, however, pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water flowed out.



At Christmas we recognize that Heaven came down to Earth. Up until the moment that Jesus incarnates a baby and enters into humanity, clothed in flesh and blood, the closest taste of heaven man has known is the Garden of Eden. The story of Creation laid out in Genesis provokes a picture of the Heaven we long for. Women and men walking intimately with God. Engaged in relationship that is personal. Tangible. Real. A garden which is laden with good things, made by God, for people to experience and enjoy.

From the moment humanity ruptures this precious archetype of heaven, Yahweh continues to create thin spaces for humanity to encounter our splendid and Sovereign God. Tents, tabernacles and temples decorated with angelic imagery (cherubim), garden imagery (fruit and trees) and lashings of jewels and gold. These heavenly spaces, for the limited priesthood fortunate to enter, are Holy. They are the place God dwells. But they are exclusive. It is the blood of atonement alone that makes it possible for any to walk on such holy ground. And then, Jesus comes to dwell. The Kingdom of Heaven draws near.



Unlike the tents, tabernacles and temples, Jesus doesn't require ritualistic atonement to experience God's presence. Jesus astonishingly carries the Kingdom of Heaven into places and spaces full of the unclean, the uninvited, and the invisible. Lepers. Menstruating women. Roman soldiers.

Suddenly encounters with God were no longer restricted. Jesus is both the High Priest and the Living Temple. At the moment of Christ's death, the bible tells us the veil in the sanctuary, which has contained the presence of God, is torn in two. The cherubim weaved into this holy curtain, like the angels posted at the gates of Eden, are relieved of their duties, as Heaven is released and unleashed for all. Heaven draws near to us.

John's account of Jesus' death doesn't just reveal a physiological truth: water separated from blood proving his body was indeed dead. John is reminding us that Jesus is the sacrificial lamb and the well spring of life. He points us back to the river, sustaining all of life in Eden's Garden. All who drink this water will never be thirsty again. John is poetically and empathically declaring a restoration of all things through the life and death of Jesus.

Heaven draws near.

A Prayer

December
19th

Isaiah 53:9

He had done no wrong
and had never deceived
anyone.

But he was buried like a
criminal;
he was put in a rich man's
grave.

Matthew 27:57-60

As evening approached,
Joseph, a rich man from
Arimathea who had become a
follower of Jesus, went to
Pilate and asked for Jesus'
body. And Pilate issued an
order to release it to him.
Joseph took the body and
wrapped it in a long sheet of
clean linen cloth. He placed it
in his own new tomb, which
had been carved out of the
rock. Then he rolled a great
stone across the entrance and
left.

Isaiah 53:5-12

But he was pierced for our rebellion,
crushed for our sins.

He was beaten so we could be
whole.

He was whipped so we could be
healed.

All of us, like sheep, have strayed
away.

We have left God's paths to follow
our own.

Yet the Lord laid on him
the sins of us all.

He was oppressed and treated
harshly,

yet he never said a word.

He was led like a lamb to the
slaughter.

And as a sheep is silent before the
shearers,

he did not open his mouth.

A Prayer

December
19th

Isaiah 53:5-12

Unjustly condemned,
he was led away.
No one cared that he died without
descendants,
that his life was cut short in
midstream.
But he was struck down
for the rebellion of my people.
He had done no wrong
and had never deceived anyone.
But he was buried like a criminal;
he was put in a rich man's grave.
But it was the Lord's good plan to
crush him
and cause him grief.
Yet when his life is made an
offering for sin,
he will have many descendants.
He will enjoy a long life,
and the Lord's good plan will
prosper in his hands.
When he sees all that is
accomplished by his anguish,
he will be satisfied.

And because of his experience,
my righteous servant will make it
possible
for many to be counted righteous,
for he will bear all their sins.
I will give him the honors of a
victorious soldier,
because he exposed himself to
death.
He was counted among the
rebels.
He bore the sins of many and
interceded for rebels.

Romans 5:6-8

When we were utterly helpless,
Christ came at just the right time
and died for us sinners. Now,
most people would not be willing
to die for an upright person,
though someone might perhaps
be willing to die for a person who
is especially good. But God
showed his great love for us by
sending Christ to die for us while
we were still sinners.



King Jesus,

As I consider today the work done for me on the cross, I am overwhelmed with gratitude.

Gratitude that you had a plan! Grateful that all the way back in that Garden, when Adam and Eve chose a counterfeit life, dictated by self – you still chose me. Grateful that you have been quietly and not so quietly weaving your plan of redemptive grace into hearts, and families and whole nations for thousands of years.

Grateful that even when we were lured by false gods, again and again, and still are today, you saw my brokenness and you came to be my Saviour.

I am undone when I consider that you willingly, kindly and ever so compassionately carried the punishment for my depravity, to balance the scales of mercy and justice. Thank you for it all. Thank you that in all the moments today when I will forget your goodness to me, never-the-less, you will remain good.

Thank you for your life, death and resurrection – the greatest and most unfathomable Christmas gift I could ever receive. I gratefully accept the gift and Kingship of Jesus today.

Amen.

The Good News of Christmas

December
20th

Psalm 16:10

For you will not leave my soul among
the dead
or allow your holy one to rot in the
grave.

Psalm 49:15

But as for me, God will redeem my life.
He will snatch me from the power of the
grave.

Matthew 28:2-7

Suddenly there was a great earthquake!
For an angel of the Lord came down
from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and
sat on it. His face shone like lightning,
and his clothing was as white as snow.
The guards shook with fear when they
saw him, and they fell into a dead faint.
Then the angel spoke to the women.
“Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I know you
are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.
He isn’t here! He is risen from the dead,
just as he said would happen. Come,
see where his body was lying. And now,
go quickly and tell his disciples that he
has risen from the dead, and he is going
ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him
there. Remember what I have told you.”

Acts 2:22-32

“People of Israel, listen! God publicly
endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing
powerful miracles, wonders, and signs
through him, as you well know. But God
knew what would happen, and his
prearranged plan was carried out when
Jesus was betrayed. With the help of
lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross
and killed him. But God released him from
the horrors of death and raised him back to
life, for death could not keep him in its grip.
King David said this about him:
‘I see that the Lord is always with me. I will
not be shaken, for he is right beside me. No
wonder my heart is glad, and my tongue
shouts his praises! My body rests in hope.
For you will not leave my soul among the
dead or allow your Holy One to rot in the
grave. You have shown me the way of life,
and you will fill me with the joy of your
presence.’
“Dear brothers, think about this! You can be
sure that the patriarch David wasn’t
referring to himself, for he died and was
buried, and his tomb is still here among us.
But he was a prophet, and he knew God had
promised with an oath that one of David’s
own descendants would sit on his throne.
David was looking into the future and
speaking of the Messiah’s resurrection. He
was saying that God would not leave him
among the dead or allow his body to rot in
the grave. “God raised Jesus from the dead,
and we are all witnesses of this.”



Perhaps you have read each of these prophecies and can today acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth was certainly a historically intriguing character. Perhaps you recognize and can accept that His life and death are well documented, amongst believers and unbelievers alike.

However, believing Jesus was an interesting prophet, with socially radical ideas, who lived and died, cannot be where this story ends. If Jesus was simply a man, what changes for us? If he was simply a man, what do we do with his claims that he is the Son of God? Was he a moral agitator or a mad man? It is the reason why the resurrection is pivotal in our understanding of Jesus as divine. If Jesus stayed dead – ‘rot in the grave’, he would be fragile and feeble and finite. It is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus which prove he is the fulfillment of the long-prophesied Messiah. The One heaven and Earth waited expectantly for.

The Saviour. King Jesus. Because if Jesus rose from the grave, if he is who he says he is, then it follows that everything he said is true. Divine Jesus can heal us, forgive us, and reconcile us. Divine Jesus can transform us, renew us, and redeem us. Divine Jesus can wash us clean, press the reset button on all our failures and invite us in as followers. His Divinity is the good news of Christmas.

“Hail, the heav’n-born Prince of
peace

Hail! the Sun of Righteousness
Light and life to all he brings
Risen with healing in his wings
Mild he lays his glory by,

Born that man no more may
die

Born to raise the sons of earth
Born to give them second birth
Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King.”

Hail the Conquering King

December
21st

Psalm 24:7-10

Open up, ancient gates!
Open up, ancient doors,
and let the King of glory
enter.

Who is the King of glory?

The Lord, strong and
mighty;
the Lord, invincible in
battle.

Open up, ancient gates!
Open up, ancient doors,
and let the King of glory
enter.

Who is the King of glory?

The Lord of Heaven's
Armies—
he is the King of glory.

Mark 16:19

When the Lord Jesus had
finished talking with them, he
was taken up into heaven and
sat down in the place of
honor at God's right hand.

Luke 24:51

While he was blessing them,
he left them and was taken
up to heaven.



Jesus' ascension to Heaven is a story of victory!

Cue the sweeping orchestra and rumbling drums. Cast your eyes to the Heavens to see fireworks and pageantry. All of Heaven captivated by the final blow. God's redemptive plan has been masterfully outworked.

This is the moment which now marks the victorious life that we can experience in King Jesus. His ascension into Glory demonstrates the Power belonging to our conquering King alone.

Jesus passed through the grave, rose triumphant to control the curse of sin and death established at the garden, and now He lives! This is a God like no other. Our God is not a god of stone or clay.
Silent.
Dead.
Powerless.

Our God is not merely a man with interesting ideas, on his own journey of spiritual enlightenment. He is the Living God.

And He reigns!

Seated in Glory

December
22nd

Psalm 68:18

When you ascended to the heights,
you led a crowd of captives.
You received gifts from the people,
even from those who rebelled against you.
Now the Lord God will live among us there.

Psalm 110:1

The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit in the place of honor at my right hand
until I humble your enemies,
making them a footstool under your feet.”

Mark 16:19

When the Lord Jesus had finished talking with them, he was taken up into heaven and sat down in the place of honor at God’s right hand.

Matthew 22:44

‘The Lord said to my Lord,
Sit in the place of honor at my right hand
until I humble your enemies
beneath your feet.’



He came. He lived. He died. But that's not the end of this ancient Christmas story. Because our God put his power on display when He rose and ascended in Glory. And now, that tiny baby laid in a manger sits at the Father's right hand and reigns.

If we pause here, we could end this season of Advent disappointed. Initially captivated by a God who chose here to dwell. A God who drew near to step into our chaos; but now sits atop a Royal throne, dictating from a distance. That conclusion would rightfully generate sighs and stooped shoulders. The reality of His distance heavy upon us.

But there is more. A sequel worth celebrating. A promise of peace, hope and Light to every person, in every place. Unadulterated access to God's transcendent, generous grace. The Spirit which hovered over unformed waters, pregnant with creativity, drew Simeon to the Temple to declare Jesus' divinity and partnered with our Saviour in acts of miraculous hospitality. The Spirit which embodied a dove, a symbol of new hope for Noah as the flood waters dissolved, and new life in the temple when its blood was spilled.

This same Spirit was poured out on women and men in equal measure. The same Spirit which raised Jesus from the dead has become our undeserved treasure! And now Jesus will live for all of Eternity and has been given all authority to minister reconciliation to all of humanity. It is a mysterious and unfathomable and wonderful gift. Jesus, our advocate. Jesus our King.

A Finale

December
23rd

Daniel 7:13–14

As my vision continued that night, I saw someone like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence. He was given authority, honor, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed.

Revelation 19

After this, I heard what sounded like a vast crowd in heaven shouting, “Praise the Lord!

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.
His judgments are true and just.

He has punished the great prostitute
who corrupted the earth with her immorality.

He has avenged the murder of his servants.”

And again their voices rang out:

“Praise the Lord!

The smoke from that city ascends forever and ever!”

Then the twenty-four elders and the four living beings fell down and worshiped God, who was sitting on the throne. They cried out, “Amen! Praise the Lord!”

And from the throne came a voice that said,

“Praise our God,

all his servants,

all who fear him,

from the least to the greatest.”

Then I heard again what sounded like the shout of a vast crowd or the roar of mighty ocean waves or the crash of loud thunder:

“Praise the Lord!

For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

Let us be glad and rejoice,

and let us give honor to him.

For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb,

and his bride has prepared herself.

She has been given the finest of pure white linen to wear.”

For the fine linen represents the good deeds of God’s holy people.

And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.” And he added, “These are true words that come from God.”

Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said, “No, don’t worship me. I am a servant of God, just like you and your brothers and sisters who testify about their faith in Jesus. Worship only God. For the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus.”

Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. Its rider was named Faithful and True, for he judges fairly and wages a righteous war. His eyes were like flames of fire, and on his head were many crowns. A name was written on him that no one understood except himself. He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his title was the Word of God. The armies of heaven, dressed in the finest of pure white linen, followed him on white horses. From his mouth came a sharp sword to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will release the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty, like juice flowing from a winepress. On his robe at his thigh was written this title: King of all kings and Lord of all lords.

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, shouting to the vultures flying high in the sky: “Come! Gather together for the great banquet God has prepared. Come and eat the flesh of kings, generals, and strong warriors; of horses and their riders; and of all humanity, both free and slave, small and great.”

Then I saw the beast and the kings of the world and their armies gathered together to fight against the one sitting on the horse and his army. And the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who did mighty miracles on behalf of the beast—miracles that deceived all who had accepted the mark of the beast and who worshiped his statue. Both the beast and his false prophet were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. Their entire army was killed by the sharp sword that came from the mouth of the one riding the white horse. And the vultures all gorged themselves on the dead bodies.



We have meditated on all the victorious ways God has fulfilled his promise to restore Creation back to unhindered relationship with Him eternally. Yet it is fair and reasonable to cast our attention on a world still chaotic, still trapped in suffering and inequity and to ask, “where is this Glorious victory?” Heaven was unleashed in Jesus’ act on the cross; pockets of His grace, mercy and peace seep into places and spaces in every nation and tribe. Yet simultaneously we continue to experience heavy darkness in a fallen world. We are painfully aware of the cracks and crevices where His penetrating Light has yet to shine. How do we resolve this disparity?

There is great joy in recognizing that we are yet to experience the fullness of time! It is true that King Jesus has won the battle and holds the victory. But a final judgement is yet to come. This last prophecy reminds us that we wait with eager anticipation for a time when Jesus will balance the scales of darkness and evil once and for all. Sorrow will be traded for celebration. Anguish traded for gladness. Confusion will dissipate and contentment dwell in its place. Every tear will be lovingly wiped and we will know joy everlasting. King Jesus promises to come and establish a new Kingdom – with new priorities. It is a prophecy filled with hope and promise. A prophecy that invites us, the non-Jew, into the sacred Hope of the people of God. A Hope which was ignited in the garden and will burn on until the establishment of New Heaven and New Earth. We hope with longing and expectation, for the restoration of all things, eternally.

The final prophecy embraces us! Here. Now. It reimagines all the prophecies we have read to date: because as we recognize our place in the final promise, we realize this is our story. It has always been our story. Every ancient word. Every marvelous whisper. Every sign pointing to Jesus. Thousands of years after Jesus’ birth the promises belong to us, too. We are weaved into a plan that grafts us to believers throughout Millenia. God’s magnificent, captivating, unchangeable redemptive plan. The Christ.

New Eyes

December
24th

Today, on Christmas Eve, I invite you to read this ancient tale through new eyes.

May your attention and imagination be captivated as you see every intentionally considered thread. May you marvel at each person masterfully crafted into God's redemptive plan and may you hear every whisper of the Hope that is to come.

May this story feel fresh as you see your own place intertwined in the extended narrative.

May you know the Peace, Joy and Love interlaced in the account of Christ's arrival; as you consider once again this magnificent Christmas Story.



Luke 1:26 - 45

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin." The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. For the word of God will never fail."

Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.

A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."

The Birth of Jesus:

Rachael Foster

December
25th

Matthew 1:18-24

This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet:

“Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,
which means ‘God is with us.’”

When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife.

Luke 2:1-18

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in highest heaven,

and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished.



The King has arrived! God's great plan to bring all things to right. The King, Jesus, the fulfilment of prophecy and God's promises is finally here. The accounts we read in Matthew and Luke's gospels are striking in their simplicity.

In Luke's account we read of an angel appearing to shepherds. The angel proclaims that this is the good news of great joy for all people! Centuries of waiting has been fulfilled in the understated arrival of a baby who has been born, wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. God is setting all things to right. This baby is God's son, Jesus. He is to be called Immanuel, 'God with us.' The king of kings has come as a small, vulnerable baby, to be with us.

One of my favourite Christmas carols is 'O Holy Night'. One line in particular always stands out, 'a thrill of hope'. It resonates with the simplicity of the accounts in the gospels. Jesus has arrived in a way that isn't immediately obvious to everyone, but he is the hope for the world. Hope for all.

Whatever your Christmas looks like this year, whether it comes with joy, chaos, grief, busyness, peace or anxiety, or a complicated mix of emotions, we have this hope as an anchor for our souls. The next line in the carol states that 'the weary world rejoices'. In the midst of our weariness, the world can rejoice because God is with us. The kingdom of God is God coming to us. Just as the plan is presented in its simplicity, so is our response. God has come to us, the simplicity of the gospel message is that Jesus simply calls us to follow him. Just like the shepherds heard the news of the angels and went to see Jesus, we too are invited to come.

It is the simple, inexplicable gift of Christmas.

A Note from the author



When I set out to write this devotional my hope was to better understand the many prophecies of the coming Messiah weaved into the writings of an ancient people, hundreds of years before Jesus' arrival.

In the process of writing however, it became clear to me that much of our reluctance to see Jesus: doubt about God's divinity and character, the problem of suffering, sin and the human condition, can be wrestled through and reconciled as we engage with these prophecies.

In the prophetic writings I realised that God did more than whisper his arrival to women and men, a miraculous and supernatural plan of redemption.

He uses these prophecies to reveal Himself. His kindness, grace, mercy. His desire to know us and be known by us.

If you don't know King Jesus, the risen and conquering Son of God, you are welcomed. You are included in the story laid out on the pages of this devotional. God came near that we might have Life. Would you choose to follow Him, today.

Erin Spavin

"Say the welcoming word to God - "Jesus is my Master" - embracing, body and soul, God's work of doing in us what he did in raising Jesus from the dead. That's it. You're not "doing" anything; you're simply calling out to God, trusting him to do it for you. That's salvation."

Romans 10:9



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<https://www.enfieldbaptist.com.au/>

<https://www.dowryofdiscipleship.com/advent-reflections>