

# THE REASON FOR THE SEASON



CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL

# MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Whatever December looks like for you, wherever you are, whoever you are with or not with, my hope is that you would set aside time over the next few weeks to spend time in the Word pondering the wonder of Christmas.

This Monday through Friday devotional will help you reflect on the real REASON FOR THE SEASON amid all the commercialization of Christmas and the frantic activity that takes place at this time of year.

Our prayer is that you would see Jesus in a new light this Christmas. Each devotional will focus on one reason why Jesus was born in Bethlehem more than 2000 years ago. The birth of Jesus changed everything. It's a story people have heard again and again, but this season I invite you to understand what Jesus' coming means for YOU!

**Jesus came at Christmas with YOU in mind!**

We can't wait to journey through the Word of God with you this Christmas season!



# DECEMBER 2, 2024

## To Bring Light to a World in Darkness

Shadows follow us everywhere. Literally. We can also become accustomed to the shadows in our lives too. That feeling that something bad is about to happen. Maybe it's an impending illness, a loss of control, or just that knot in your stomach that is all too familiar. We've all been in the shadows, the places where we wonder if God is even there. There are times when darkness is all-consuming. These experiences remind us that we live in a fallen and broken world.

When Isaiah prophesied to Israel, they lived in the Assyrian empire's shadow. How did they feel when he told them, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light" (Isaiah 9:2). Did they know they were in darkness? Did they even know they needed light? When he continued, "a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness," did they realise he was talking about them?

John said something similar. Having actually walked alongside the Light of the World, he described Jesus this way, "In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:5) Have you ever felt overcome by the darkness before? The good news is that the True Light has already come into the world—just as John testified. Just as Isaiah promised. Because of that baby born in Bethlehem, we no longer have to live in darkness.

The Apostle Paul encourages us, that we are called to "live as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8). Today, if you feel overwhelmed by despair, dread or pain, or maybe there are a few shadows that have followed you for some time, take a moment right now to invite Jesus, the True Light, into those areas. Allow Him to meet you right in your point of need.

## PRAYER

God, thank you that you are the light in my world today. I invite you into the dark places of my life - my fears, disappointments, pain, and insecurity. Shine Your light into those places and help me to walk as a child of light today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS NOTES:

Isaiah 9:1-7  
Isaiah 60:1-3  
John 1:1-9

# DECEMBER 3, 2024

## To Do What Adam Could Not

December is crazy. The Christmas carols, decorations, traditions, gifts, and family gatherings. There's no denying it: This season is special - I love it... but it can be A LOT. Many of us hope to create the perfect Christmas experience for our loved ones. But why does Christmas bring us so much hope?

Let's start at the beginning - Adam and Eve. God gave them complete freedom - with one exception. He warned Adam, "You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die" (Genesis 2:17). Satan, in the form of a snake, planted doubt about God's goodness and love. We all know the story. They ignored God's warning and ate the fruit.

With that poor decision came a world of shame, guilt, pain, and death. "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves" (Genesis 3:7). They hid from each other's gaze and hid from God too. They tried to cover their shame and regret, but nothing could reverse their decision.

We all know the feeling too well. Just like Adam and Eve, every human effort we have to "make good" our broken promises falls short. We try to put on a brave face and cover everything up like it's fine - but it's not. There's Good News, though - we have a gift of hope. As Paul reminded the believers in Rome, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

This is the hope that we can hold onto. The highest hope is during December and every day of the year. We can't earn it, and we definitely don't deserve it. The gift of righteousness is being right with God and each other once again. Whether we recognise it or not, we're searching for this restoration, even amidst the twinkling lights and carols.

Because of Jesus's birth, life, and death, our death sentence can be reversed. Only Jesus covers our nakedness, silences our shame, and delivers us from death to eternal life. "Through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19). Now, we can fully join the party, knowing Jesus has already delivered the gift we need the most—Himself!

## PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for being the greatest gift of this season. Thank You for doing what only You could - taking my shame, guilt, and pain on the cross and giving me true freedom. Help me walk in the beauty of this gift every day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS NOTES:

Genesis 3:1-10

Matthew 4:1-11

Romans 5:12-21



# DECEMBER 4, 2024

## To Fulfil the Law

There are two types of people in the world. Those who live by the rules, and those who like to push the boundaries a little bit. I'm a stickler for the rules - a slight Type A personality. However, sometimes in trying to abide by one rule, I can create a million smaller rules to try to do my best.

"If men will not be governed by the Ten Commandments, they shall be governed by the ten thousand commandments" - GK Chesterton.

The simplicity of the ten commandments guides our hearts. When we ignore God's statutes, we amass endless and inane rules, missing the point of the law entirely.

The Old Testament law doesn't stand in contrast to the God of the New Testament. Jesus was clear: "Don't think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17). In His Sermon on the Mount, He raises the bar of the Ten Commandments, showing the reason He was born for us that Christmas night. Jesus breaks the lie that the law is only a thing of the past and that we can ignore it today. He reminds us that the law is good and should be observed and kept. He sets the bar so high that no one can attain it, and that would be quite unsettling had Christmas night never happened.

We can think of the law as rules and regulations, an external standard to keep ourselves in line, but God did not give the law to create people who are righteous just for show, but rather to teach us what a transformed heart looks like. If we love Him, we will keep His commands (John 14:15). Scripture calls us, heart and soul, to love what God loves and to meditate on His law day and night (Psalm 1:2).

Jesus came to fulfil the law. We cannot keep the law, but He can, He does, and He did. Jesus is the one whose righteousness far surpassed that of the Pharisees. He is the one who keeps every letter and stroke of the law on our behalf. Rather than pursuing obedience and instruction only outwardly, our hearts are transformed so that we now love to keep His commandments.

## PRAYER

Jesus, thank you that you fulfil the law like we never could. Transform my heart today to love what You love and walk how You walked. Teach me how to behold You more and more in my everyday life rather than just pursuing obedience. May I pursue you. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS NOTES:

Exodus 20:1-17

Matthew 5:17-48

Romans 8:1-4

# DECEMBER 5, 2024

## To Be Our High Priest

Christmas time can be a funny thing for Christians. Even though many people celebrate the birth of Jesus by making wreaths, singing carols, spending time with family, and baking Christmas treats, there isn't much about the Messianic prophecies, covenant rituals, or the Christmas story itself that feels especially "Christmassy" through our modern lens. As we sit here in a hot (hopefully not wet) Summer December, my present life and the setting in today's reading couldn't be more different.

In the book of Leviticus, we read about animal sacrifices administered by the Levite priests as sin offerings (Leviticus 9:1-7). We read about Sabbath rest and self-denial as necessary parts of this cleansing act (16:29-34). We see people guided by laws and regulations desperately in need of atonement and intercession, even beyond what an earthly priest could provide.

We also see our faithful Jesus, weary from the cost of obedience yet fixed on His calling. Hebrews tells us, "During his earthly life, he offered prayers and appeals with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was the Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered" (Hebrews 5:7-8). This portrait may not put us in the traditional Christmas spirit, but it puts life in its rightful perspective.

Jesus is a different priest from what you may think of when you hear the word priest. Instead of being clothed in fancy tassels, collars, or icons to display status and authority, He was clothed in humility. "He was declared by God a high priest" (Hebrews 5:10) because His role was to reconcile our sins, becoming a bridge-builder and peace-maker between the Father and us. Jesus is God's hand outstretched to us.

During Christmas time, we celebrate the practice of generosity. While exchanging gifts among family and friends is beautiful, it's important to remember God's incredible gift to us that motivates our own generosity. Keep celebrating the Advent season in all the ways that make your heart sing. Make wreaths, go to the beach, and eat until your stomachs are content. When you're tempted to forget the greatest gift in the midst of all this, remember to meditate on why Jesus came and what His humble priesthood accomplished for us.

## PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for being our High Priest. Thank You for guiding me in humility every day. In the craziness and busyness of Christmas, remind me of Your goodness afresh today. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS NOTES:

Leviticus 9:1-7  
Hebrews 4:14-16  
Hebrews 5:1-10



# DECEMBER 6, 2024

## To Give Us Hope

Imagine the feeling of waiting for a job offer when you really need a job. Then imagine the feelings you might have when losing a loved one. Those experiences are very different, yet they share the desire for a better life, a better situation than the present one. This is where many people turn to optimism.

But what if optimism distorts the way we hope for a new future?

Optimism is often impersonal and a stranger to our emotions, so it relies on circumstances as a compass. Biblical hope is different because it is a choice to rely on a person (Jesus), not our circumstances. The biblical authors talk a lot about hope, and while they hope for the same things we all hope for—peace, safety, healing, love—to them, “hope” is not focused on the things or the stuff. Instead it’s focused on the promise and power of God. So they write things like, “My hope is in you, God!” (Ps. 39:7).

Unlike optimism, which only measures the surface, biblical hope goes deep to ask that Jesus would meet us in our sadness or anticipation. Jesus often reminds his friends that they cannot understand how everything works—why people harm one another, why sickness continues, or when evil will finally end. But he does promise to set the world right, and he invites us to join him in repairing the world.

So we find hope in every Jesus-like act of love, forgiveness, and generosity. His life, death, and resurrection are the anchor for our highest hopes that one day Jesus will come again to make all wrong things right

## PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for bringing me hope in a world filled with division, strife, and fear. Help me to keep my eyes focused on you and your Word which brings hope.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS NOTES:

Psalms 39

Romans 15:13

Hebrews 10:23

# DECEMBER 9, 2024

## To Seek and Save the Lost

You either loved or hated gym class in high school. I personally loved it. I was pretty athletic and good at sports and just enjoyed not being stuck in a classroom, but one thing I know most people hated about gym class was picking teams. The team captains would either pick those who were athletic, the popular students or maybe the guy or girl they had a crush on. One thing was for sure, though, no one wanted to be picked last.

As humans, I don't know if there's a better feeling than knowing you've been chosen. Because being chosen means you're awesome, right? It means something about you warrants the love and attention of other people. Now, imagine being chosen, but not for who you are or something you've achieved. Imagine being shown love and compassion even though you mess up. Or being chosen even though you're unliked, unpopular, unattractive, or weak. Imagine being loved and chosen anyway, despite your faults and imperfections. That's what we are offered in Christ. It may not make sense to us, but that doesn't matter—He pursues us anyway. "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). And if that's not good news, I don't know what is.

Over and over throughout Scripture, we see God choose the weak and despised. He has compassion for the ones who have been cast aside by other people, the afflicted ones (Isaiah 49:13). When Jesus called Matthew to be His disciple, he wasn't a normal guy; he was a tax collector, despised by people. Still, Jesus said, "Follow me" (Matthew 9:9). Jesus was not in any way afraid to be associated with outsiders and sinners (v.10). Zacchaeus was also a tax collector. He wasn't popular or well-liked. People loathed him and pointed fingers at his sin. Nothing about him made him worthy of Jesus's love, yet Jesus called him too (Luke 19:2–6).

This is the message of Christmas. We bask in hope and expectation because God brings what is in darkness into the light (Isaiah 49:9). He offers grace to everyone: the proud and the poor, the cast out and neglected. Jesus didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners, which is to say, all of us (Matthew 9:13). So God sent His Son for everyone, even those the world fails to see and wouldn't necessarily choose, but He does because He loves us.

Know this: God is faithful. Know that you are sought after, you are pursued, and through Him, you can be saved—not because of anything you've done to deserve Him, but because of who He is.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Isaiah 49:8-13  
Matthew 9:9-13  
Luke 4:16-30

## PRAYER

God, thank You for choosing me. Thank You for loving me unconditionally, just as I am, despite my weakness & flaws. Thank You for pursuing me every day. Reveal this truth to me afresh today. In Jesus' Name, Amen.



# DECEMBER 10, 2024

## To Reign as King Forever

Perhaps it's a byproduct of ageing, but Christmas seems to be getting shorter. Don't get me wrong - it starts in the shops earlier and earlier, but the things that are the true essence of Christmas - the minutes spent singing by candlelight on Christmas Eve, the special family moments, the really good parts - seem to go by at an accelerated pace.

That may be true on the human level; life has a way of speeding up as the years go on, but that is not the case in the heavenly realm. The truest realities of Christmas are never diminished, no matter how many years we celebrate them.

In the midst of many phrases that you'll hear this Christmas, let me place two more words in your heart: He remains. They are found in Psalm 146:6: "He remains faithful forever." Hebrews tells us that "because he remains forever, he holds his priesthood permanently" (Hebrews 7:24).

These may seem like simple words, but if we allow them, they point to a simple truth that lifts our eyes from the manger straight up to the throne of God. God delivered the revelation through the prophet Nathan: "'Your house and kingdom will endure before me forever, and your throne will be established forever'" (2 Samuel 7:16). King David's rule was not eternal. It came and went, just like Christmas morning, so the forever throne Nathan spoke of belongs to Christ alone.

Presents are opened and then forgotten—yet He remains.  
Meals are prepared and then scooped into containers as leftovers—yet He remains.  
Christmas cards make their way from our mailboxes to our recycling bins—yet He remains.  
Years come and go—yet He remains.

The trimmings of Christmas can only ever be temporary, but the heart of Christmas, that Jesus entered the world as a baby and would one day rule and reign in righteousness, goes on forever and ever and ever. So, enjoy every Christmas meal, and hold your loved ones close. Savour every moment, but grieve not when the wrapping paper is in the dumpster, and the decorations are put away again. For He remains!

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

2 Samuel 7:8-16

Isaiah 11:1-5

Matthew  
22:41-46

## PRAYER

God, thank you that you remain. In every season, You always have, and You always will remain. Show me how to savour the moments and not get so lost in the busyness of the season that I miss the point of it all. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

# DECEMBER 11, 2024

## To Bring God's Kingdom to Earth

Today's reading paints an image of multiple kingdoms in Daniel's prophecy to King Nebuchadnezzar. He tells the king that there will be four earthly kingdoms characterized by inadequacy and division but that God would raise up a heavenly kingdom that could never be destroyed. In chapter 7, Daniel had a vision of the Saviour coming to consummate the heavenly kingdom: "His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:14).

As Christians, we live in a tale of two kingdoms - our earthly kingdom - fraught with injustice, disease, fear, greed & broken humanity - and our heavenly kingdom - where He shall reign forever with peace, justice, love and mercy (John 18:36). And here we live in the tension between our two kingdoms: the one we physically inhabit now, and the one that is coming. Both matter. We cannot live our lives as if the earthly kingdom will completely vanish, nor can we ignore the coming kingdom of God (Revelation 11:15).

As believers, we are to partner with Christ as He ushers in more and more of heaven here on earth. We should live as if we are citizens of that heavenly kingdom now, even as we inhabit the earth.

Come, Lord Jesus; until You do, let it be on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

## PRAYER

God, come and invade our earthly kingdom today. We pray Your Kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Show me how to outwork your Kingdom on earth in my everyday. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS NOTES:

Daniel 2:27-45  
Daniel 7:13-14  
John 18:36



# DECEMBER 12, 2024

## To Defeat the Enemy

Some days it feels like the enemy is out to get us, probably because he is. The devil hovers in our lives, looking to steal, kill, and destroy us and anything good in our lives (John 10:10). He wants us to doubt God's power and diminish the truth Jesus brought to us through His life, death, and resurrection. The devil wants us to stay focused on our present worries, temporal struggles, and the crippling fears that distract us from God's kingdom instead of taking "every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

From the first moment His creation succumbed to the devil's deception, God made a promise to defeat the enemy. He would crush whatever and whoever got in the way of His relationship between Him and His creation (Genesis 3:14-15). As God's people waited for the one who would once and for all defeat the enemy and death itself (1 Corinthians 15:23-28), they trusted and hoped in God. But inevitably, they would fail God: doubting Him and turning to other gods, then repenting of their sin, and just as quickly, falling into the enemy's trap over and over again.

Enter Jesus.

"The Son of God was revealed for this purpose: to destroy the devil's works" (1 John 3:8). The enemy is intent on keeping us focused on him rather than God. We walk around with shackles on our hands, all the while believing we are "free" because we can create a false sense of security, autonomy, and control. It is through Christ that we are actually free. Jesus was given power and authority and was "made lower than the angels for a short time so that by God's grace he might taste death for everyone" (Hebrews 2:9). This is God's promise now and in the future.

In the meantime, we practice what all Christians before us have practised: waiting. We know that our help is near. Our Saviour has come. Our enemy is conquered by "the blood of the Lamb," and we have the daily opportunity to conquer the enemy by the power of testimony in Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:11).

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

1 Corinthians  
15:24-26

Hebrews 2:5-18

1 John 3:7-10

## PRAYER

Jesus, thank You that You brought us true freedom. Reveal to me what it looks like to walk in Your freedom today. Show me the areas of my life where I am still bound. I hand over the chains of my life to you, and I pick up your freedom today and every day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

# DECEMBER 13, 2024

## To Be Our King

Since I grew up in a non-Christian family, I didn't celebrate Christmas as a child. But once when I was young, my siblings and I, together with a few neighborhood kids, decided to have a Christmas gift exchange. I don't know where we got the idea, maybe from all the TV shows we'd been watching. We put our names into a bag, and each of us picked the name of someone to buy a present for. We decided we liked this tradition.

We didn't yet realize the perfect gift had been given to us 2,000 years ago by God our Creator. Charles Wesley captured this in his hymn "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing." In that song he declared, "Glory to the newborn King" and wrote about Jesus, "Light and life to all He brings, Risen with healing in His wings."

The Bible tells us, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16 NKJV). Why did God give us his Son? And what does His Kingship mean for us? Wesley wrote, "Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth."

As a teenager, I heard about Jesus—the one born to give us "second birth"—and believed in Him as my Savior. Christmas is special to me now because I understand its meaning—it's a celebration of God's perfect gift, Jesus Christ. God isn't a mystical force out there; He's a personal God who extends His love to people of all nations and socioeconomic classes. And this personal God expressed His love for me by dying for me.

Wesley also wrote "Glory to the Newborn King!" It's the reminder to us that although many do not recognize it or understand it yet, Jesus is the King and one day every knee will bow before Him. What his Kingship means for us is that one day this world will pass away and He will rule and reign in peace and righteousness. His Kingship means that our allegiance is only to one person...Jesus, who is the King of the Kingdom we are citizens of and He has promised to return and make all things right one day. His Kingship gives us hope!

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Isaiah 9:6-7  
John 3:16-21

## PRAYER

Dear God, thank You for showing us that to love is to give. Thank you for coming to give your life for me. And thank you for being a King that can be trusted, one who rules and reigns in peace and righteousness and who has the best interests of his children at heart.



# DECEMBER 16, 2024

## To Show us Perfect Love

We all want to love and be loved perfectly, but we're also human - messy, broken people who fall short even on our best days. We have mixed motives and short fuses. We don't listen and then project our own assumptions onto others. God is the only one worthy and capable of fulfilling our love-hungry hearts.

Scripture tells us that "perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18). Unlike our love for one another, God's love is untainted. His perfect love leads us towards wholeness. Love mingled with anxiety, comparison, and insecurity is imperfect and incomplete, and the exact reason God came to earth is to make us complete in His love (v.17).

On the day our tradition celebrates Christmas morning, God showed us perfect love by sending us His Son, Jesus (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10). And it's out of this abundance that we are called to love others (John 15:12). The Bible says, "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19), and when we can feel in our bones that we're deeply loved, it changes us. We're able to love others in a way that is less hindered by our own insecurities. This is the true joy of the Christmas season.

## PRAYER

God, thank You for your perfect love, despite all the ways I fall short. Help me love those in my world as You love me. In the craziness of Christmas and my life, may I love people through it all. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS NOTES:

John 3:16  
John 15:9-17  
Romans 5:6-11

# DECEMBER 17, 2024

## To Be the Healer

In Luke 5:17–25, we see some men lowering a paralyzed friend into the room where Jesus was teaching because they couldn't get to Him through the crowds. They carried their friend to Jesus because they knew Jesus could heal him. And He did heal the man's body. But first, He did an even greater miracle and forgave the man's sins, proving He wasn't just a powerful healer, but God Himself. Jesus can heal our hurt because Jesus is God. Jesus can restore our souls because He is God.

Sometimes we are the sick man on the mat. Sometimes we're one of the helpful friends on the roof. But at all times, we are the needy and the broken—and Jesus is always the answer. We are broken people helping broken people to the feet of the Healer. And as the prophet Isaiah said, "We are healed by His wounds" (Isaiah 53:5).

We have hope for healing because Jesus, God in the flesh, allowed Himself to be wounded. While we are still limping through this life, we've also been made new by His Spirit. This means we can help others with their limp and wounds find the only one who can truly help them. Isn't that beautiful?

Also beautiful is the truth that one day, our souls will be safe, and our bodies will be healed forever—God is that powerful, gracious, and loving. We have, in our future, a day that will rival the first Christmas morning itself, when we will be completely healed, both physically and emotionally. Eden will be restored. Hurting, helping, and hoping will end because God's family will be healed and whole—"healed by His wounds." Let heaven and nature sing.

## PRAYER

God, thank You for being my Healer in every circumstance. I bring the areas where I need Your restoration to Your feet and pray that You would continue to use me to bring healing to those in my world. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS NOTES:

Isaiah 53:1-12

Matthew 15:29-30

Luke 5:17-25



# DECEMBER 18, 2024

## To Be the Lamb of God

I'm fascinated by the traditional Jewish Seder meal, the ceremonial dinner that takes place on the first night of Passover. This meal is the product of God's command thousands of years ago. He instructed the Israelites (through Moses) to continue the Passover year after year to remember their slavery and the redemption that followed because of God's love for His people (Exodus 12:14,24).

Roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread—every item holds both a physical and a symbolic position on the table, reminders of the difficult experience of leaving their life of bondage in Egypt. This was a meal that had to be eaten quickly. It was a meal that required a sacrificial lamb to provide sustenance for a long journey. And the blood of that lamb would mark those God would save from death (Exodus 12:23).

It is no coincidence that Jesus's death and crucifixion occurred during Passover week; God is always right on time, despite what I may sometimes think. Jesus is the full embodiment of the Passover Lamb. For thousands of years, Israelites had been practising the story, remembering. A lamb without defect would need to be sacrificed. People, oppressed and in bondage to slavery, would need God to act in a mighty way to lose their chains and set them free. Over and over again, the story was told year after year so that even the children would ask their parents, "What does this ceremony mean to you?" (Exodus 12:26).

We are no different from the Israelites. We are oppressed and, in bondage, slaves to sin. We need God to act in a mighty way to set us free from the world and the sin that can so easily entangle us. But this can't happen without the precious blood of Jesus, the "unblemished and spotless lamb," who laid down His life so that we might be free (1 Peter 1:19). Just as the lambs of the Passover shielded the Israelites from physical death, Jesus, our eternal Lamb of God, "takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) and spares us from spiritual death.

We are free! Like the Israelites, who walked out of Egypt without chains, you and I are absolutely free from the sin that leads to death. And as we prepare to celebrate Christmas, I wonder what our children think. I wonder what we will answer when they ask about Christmas: "What does this ceremony mean to you?"

## PRAYER

Jesus, today I thank You for being the perfect lamb. Unblemished. Spotless. Who laid down His life so that we may be free. I pray I will remember the significance of that moment today and every day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS NOTES:

Exodus 12:1-14  
Exodus 12:21-28  
John 1:29

# DECEMBER 19, 2024

## To Be the Firstfruits of the Resurrection

How many times today have you gotten annoyed at a webpage that took more than five seconds to download? Do you know someone who gets annoyed when a fast food drive-through takes more than two minutes to get through, complaining of slow service? I mean, not you; you're too spiritual for that. In a society that demands instant gratification, patience does not come naturally to us. And then we are posed with the timeline of Jesus - from the promise to his birth, death, resurrection and His promised return. It's really anything but instant.

Life can be painful. We send our loved ones back to the dust. We grieve and weep with others in mourning (Romans 12:15). We fight against death with everything we have because death wasn't supposed to be. Death can be bittersweet for the Christian because it reminds us of the mercy that awaits every believer: resurrection.

Jesus stood by the weeping sisters of Lazarus and told them so. "I am the resurrection and the life," He said. "The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26). Martha confessed that she did believe (v.27), and Jesus then raised her brother from death, though not as a result of Martha's faith.

Not long after that, Jesus died too, but three days later, He rose again, the first fruits of the promised resurrection of all believers (1 Corinthians 15:20). To be honest, sometimes this can be a hard concept to wrap our heads around. However, the resurrection of Jesus is a pinnacle event that our faith hinges on. It is the thing that gives us hope and life. Jesus didn't just die. The story didn't end in the grave. Jesus' story kept on going, and, therefore, so does your story and mine. Because it is true, my hope in Christ is for this life and the one to come. Because of Jesus and His perfect life, death, and resurrection, I will also die and rise again.

Just as we wait for pages to load, traffic to clear, and fast food to be delivered, we also long for resurrection. (Same same, right?) Christmas is an active waiting. It requires not that we sit quietly or idly but that we fight back against death by proclaiming the real end of the story: life everlasting.

## PRAYER

Jesus, I thank You for the power of Your resurrection. Thank You that Your story didn't end in the grave and that mine doesn't either. Show me how I can hold onto the promise of the resurrection in my every day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS NOTES:

John 11:17-27

John 20:1-8

Romans 8:34-39



# DECEMBER 20, 2024

## To Make All Things New

Look, I am making everything new! (Revelation 21:5)

In 1861, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's wife died tragically in a fire. That first Christmas without her, he wrote in his diary, "How inexpressibly sad are the holidays." The next year was no better, as he recorded, "'A merry Christmas,' say the children, but that is no more for me."

The Civil War dragged on. Longfellow's son was badly wounded. As church bells announced the arrival of another painful Christmas, Longfellow picked up his pen to write "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day."

The poem begins pleasantly, lyrically, but soon takes a dark turn. The violence of the pivotal fourth verse seems ill-suited for a Christmas carol. "Accursed" cannons "thundered," mocking the message of peace. By the fifth and sixth verses, Longfellow's desolation is nearly complete. "It was as if an earthquake rent the hearthstones of a continent," he wrote. The poet nearly gave up. "And in despair I bowed my head; 'There is no peace on earth,' I said."

But from the depths of that bleak Christmas, Longfellow heard the irrepressible sound of hope. And he wrote this seventh stanza. Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: "God is not dead, nor doth He sleep; The Wrong shall fail, The Right prevail, With peace on earth, good-will to men."

The war raged on, but it couldn't stop Christmas. The Messiah is born! He promises, "I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:5). Take heart, change is in the air!

**When have you faced despair? How does the promise of Revelation 21 give you hope?**

## PRAYER

Dear God, I long for the day when You will make all things new. I believe you're at work making things new in my life even though I may not be able to see it or recognize it right now. I put my unwavering trust in you

## SCRIPTURE READINGS NOTES:

Revelation 21:1-5

Isaiah 43:19

2 Corinthians 5:17

# DECEMBER 23, 2024

## To Make All Things New

There are few things I love more than a good renovation show. I love seeing untapped potential being unlocked. I love seeing a home that is in despair and ruin find new life and purpose again. The process always takes a while. It starts with frustration, doubt, and apprehension. A little fear of the unknown. There are always hiccups along the way that makes you wonder if it will work out, but the last five minutes of every episode are gold because you get to see the end result; the before and after are revealed, and in the end, the hard work was worth it. What once was not now is. It's more beautiful than they had planned in the first place.

As humans, we're drawn to makeovers, renovations, and transformation stories. We want to know that broken things can be restored. Old things can be made new, and dead, dry things can come back to life. This is why the coming of Christ is so incredibly powerful.

As God's fallen creation, we were separated from Him by sin. As a result, our world has experienced groans and pains ever since as we long for things to be made right again (Romans 8:21–22). In the same way, any suffering and pain we experience is never the end of the story—Jesus is. Our ultimate restoration comes through God's power and what He has promised to do in our hearts and in our world: to make everything new (Revelation 21:5).

In this Christmas season, in this time of waiting, we have to remember that the way things are right now is not the way they will always be. God is in the business of making things new. There is nothing beyond His power and ability to restore. There is nothing too broken for Him, and no one is too far gone for His love. There is no relationship beyond His repair, no permanent heartbreak, no scar beyond His ability to heal. He is with you and walks beside you in your pain and grief. He promises to make everything new in us and around us. In Christ, it is already done.

## PRAYER

God, thank You for making all things new. I thank You that in my life, You make beauty from ashes. You take my despair and turn it into a garment of praise. Thank You that you are continuing to make me new in the process. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS NOTES:

Romans 8:18-30

2 Corinthians  
5:11-21

Revelation 21:1-7



# DECEMBER 24, 2024

## To Be God With Us

I love suspenseful stories. I love the build-up, the tension, the thrill. However, I have a confession to make. I actually get the most enjoyment out of a suspenseful story when I know how it ends. I have been known, more than a couple of times, to skip ahead to the last couple of pages of a book to read the ending before reading it from the start again. It gives me hope and a certainty that I can rest in because I know how the story ends.

One of the things I love about reading these scriptures is seeing that God knew the end from the beginning. He wrote the perfect storyline that no one could have predicted, with twists and turns to the birth of a King from a virgin in a manger. A plot twist no one saw coming. A story that communicated unconditional love for everyone - despite their status, skin colour, and financial situation.

As we rapidly draw near to Christmas day, let's remember, reflect, and rest in the truth we are celebrating—that Christ has drawn near to us. He is closer than we can imagine. He is as intimate as our own breath. Jesus is our Immanuel, our God with us (Matthew 1:23). From Genesis to Revelation, God has been leading His people back into a relationship with Him. God has been pursuing us, even in the midst of our defiance and sin (Romans 5:8). He was there in the garden, and He was there to bring us out of slavery in Egypt. He dwelt with us in the tabernacle and the temple and then sent and sacrificed His Son for us before sending His Spirit to be with us. Even now, He always prepares an eternal destination to be with us, but He is also in your today.

Whatever your day looks like today, God isn't only with us, but God is with you. He is in your joyous mountaintop moments and your hopelessness, walking through the valley seasons. In the midst of all the activity of Christmas, our prayer is that you know and feel God is with you this Advent.

## PRAYER

God, I thank You that you knew the end from the beginning. I thank You that You planned the perfect entrance into the world to communicate that You are with us. In the midst of my mess and my joy - You are there. Reveal Yourself again to me today. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS NOTES:

Jeremiah 23:5-8  
Matthew 1  
Revelation 22:16

# DECEMBER 25, 2024

## Jesus Christ Is Born!!!

There is nothing like the anticipation of Christmas morning. I remember being a kid and waking up to full stockings hung on the door and presents under the tree. My sister and I always compared our gifts to see what the other one got. My mum and dad always put so much effort into our gifts and ensured we had the same number and equal value. It was a small sign that they loved us. They knew what we'd love and what would bring us joy. They wanted to create the best Christmas for us every year.

The whole ritual is just one small symbol to celebrate the greatest gift the world will ever know—the baby in the manger. The Word made flesh. The God of the universe entered into His creation to show us His love. Our presents to each other still leave us longing for something more, something deeper, but this one doesn't. Reading the story in Matthew 2 of the wise men travelling to visit the Christ child—to give their all only to worship Him—puts my gifts in perspective. The ones I give, sure, but especially the ones I have: people to love, creation to enjoy, work to do, air to breathe. It is all given by Him, held together by Him, and made for Him (Colossians 1:15–17).

I want to follow the wise men's lead this Christmas. I want to gather the things I treasure most, and I want to lay them at His feet, look into His eyes, and say, "You are worth so much more. You are everything."

And He is! Jesus is our perfect prophet, who speaks only truth (John 17:17). He is the perfect priest who knows our weakness and understands it (Hebrews 4:15–16). He is the eternal King, who will not only reign in the new heavens and the new earth but who reigns even now. Today, Jesus is sitting on the throne, not standing, because His work is done (Hebrews 8:1–2)! And yet, He is active in this very moment. He is rescuing, redeeming, and restoring even now. And one day—oh, glorious day—the thief named Death will be destroyed forever. There will be no more sorrow and no more tears.

Merry Christmas, friends. Jesus Christ is born!

## PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for being the perfect gift in every moment. Today I behold You and am in awe of who You are. You are worth so much more than any temporary gift I get today. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS NOTES:

Isaiah 2:2-3  
Matthew 2:1-12  
Ephesians 4:4-6



# DECEMBER 26, 2024

## To Exalt the Humble

I love writing a good list. Every year for my family, I write down a present list, so they know what I want (and sometimes what I don't want). I don't know what was on Mary's present list, but I highly doubt it was an "immaculate conception of the Son of God." This turned out to be a really good surprise: Mary sang her gratitude, and we haven't stopped echoing that song since. Still, when the angel encouraged her not to be afraid because she had "found favour with God" (Luke 1:30), she could've responded in many different ways.

She could have said to the angel, "Thanks so much for the offer, but this is a really inconvenient time for me," or "Ummm...what is Joseph going to say? No thanks." But that wasn't Mary's response, though she was, of course, pretty surprised. Instead, she said, "See, I am the Lord's servant...May it happen to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38).

Like Mary, we can be caught off guard when we first encounter this message of favour. The Almighty God comes to us and offers us blessing, honour, and salvation. We wonder, How can this be? Immediately, we want to sort out how we came to deserve this, or worse, we assume that we actually DO deserve such favour. We rush to pull together our own contribution to the deal, some way to even things out a bit so we don't feel indebted.

The proud cannot receive a gift. Only the humble receive with empty, open hands. The proud cannot simply say, "Thank you," but must pay you back or prove their merit. Only the humble can say, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, because he has looked with favour on the humble condition of his servant" (Luke 1:46-48). Attempting to add ANYTHING to grace is a failure to understand the nature of grace. God simply gives. And we are simply to receive, recognising that we don't bring anything to the table.

This is the great joy of Christmas. It is not a season of gift exchanges but a season of gift giving. It isn't about us or how we can impress. Christmas is the season of unfettered, no-strings-attached giving. But even more shocking, it is the season of unfettered, no-strings-attached receiving. God gives, and we receive. That's it. This is the reason for every Christmas carol. Christmas is the celebration of grace itself, given extravagantly to people who can't pay it back.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Luke 1:26-56  
James 4:6-10

## PRAYER

God, we thank You for giving us Your grace and your unearned, unmerited favour. Teach me how to receive it with a heart of gratitude and thanksgiving every day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

# DECEMBER 27, 2024

## To Offer Us His Peace

They were your everyday men, working their day jobs in the field. Perhaps they joked as they took turns napping, watching out for wild animals. Maybe they passed the time with stories of the good old days as they settled in for another long, dark night.

But then...the light! A glorious, blinding light splits the curtain of stars.

Men who would take on a lion to protect their flock shook with terror until they heard the voice: "Don't be afraid...Today in the City of David a Saviour was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). Now, imagine the light multiplied, stars blotted out by a host of burning beings, their voices echoing in the hills:

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
And peace on earth to people he favours!" (Luke 2:14).

From the fall in the garden of Eden to now, peace is hard to come by on this earth. To many, peace feels like a distant dream, a childish hope. But that is the beauty of Christmas, isn't it? On this day, we feel the build-up of the Advent season, and we remember the centuries of waiting, reliving ancient stories of how the sky blazed on an ordinary night, proclaiming the wonder of a boundless God with a beating infant heart. But the peace the angels proclaim here is offered, not forced. It is a visionary peace reflecting God's creative approach to healing a hurting world.

Just over thirty years later, the holy child, now a grown man, would echo the angel's words of comfort: "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Don't let your heart be troubled or fearful" (John 14:27). And because of Him, peace truly is possible: in our hearts, in our homes, and even in our world. Christmas comes into our darkness, lighting up our hearts with joy.

All too often, peace can feel like a distant, unreachable dream, but just like the shepherds all those years ago, our lives can be interrupted in a moment as we are reminded of the peace that was brought into the world that night.

## PRAYER

Jesus, we thank You that You brought peace into our broken world 2000 years ago. I take time to rest in Your peace today. Help me not get lost in the craziness of the world. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS NOTES:

Matthew 5:9  
Luke 2:8-20  
Luke 2:25-40



# DECEMBER 30, 2024

## To Bring Mercy

We all have times in our lives when we doubt God's faithfulness. Maybe you're still waiting to land a job, receive your healing, and fall pregnant. We all have promises from God that we are waiting for. We wonder when God will answer our prayers, and the longer we wait, the louder the voice of doubt can grow.

Zechariah could hardly believe it when the angel Gabriel announced the birth of a son. "How can I know this?" he questioned (Luke 1:18). Because of his doubtful response, he was muted for Elizabeth's pregnancy. But, the story didn't end with his unbelief. John was born, and Zechariah praised God for His faithfulness. The Lord had shown abundant mercy to Elizabeth in answering her prayer and giving her the strength to deliver a baby in her old age. And with the baby's arrival came a great time of celebration, and her whole community rejoiced with her (v.58).

John's birth involved more than an answered prayer for Elizabeth and Zechariah. It signalled a greater reason to celebrate: the long-awaited advent of the Messiah. It had been prophesied for hundreds of years that one would come before the Messiah, declaring the arrival of the King. Centuries later, the one who would precede the King had arrived. By proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, John would turn the hearts of many in Israel to the Lord (Luke 1:16).

That good news proclaimed in the first century has reached us in the 21st century. In His mercy, God has granted us salvation because of the one who has turned our hearts to God (Ephesians 2:4-5). Like Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Israel, we can rejoice because the long-awaited King has appeared, bringing the gifts of salvation and an invitation into the family of God.

John's birth story reminds us that God keeps His promises, even when dreams seem to have reached their expiration date. Like Zechariah and Elizabeth, we wait. In all of our seasons in life, we can wait confidently because we trust in the God who is faithful.

## PRAYER

God, thank You that You are faithful to Your promises. Silence the doubt in my life and show me how to hold onto faith in the waiting. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS NOTES:

Luke 1:5-25  
Luke 1:57-66  
Ephesians 2:4-9

# DECEMBER 31, 2024

## To Give Us A Future

Whenever we get ready to enter a new year, it causes people to think about the future. What will this new year hold? Will it be better than the previous year? What challenges will I face this year? What's going to happen in our nation and world this year?

While thinking about the future can produce a sense of excitement in our hearts. Because of its uncertainty, thinking about the future can also produce feelings of anxiety and fear in our hearts. In Jeremiah 29:11 God told his people "I have come to give you a future and a hope!"

And that's exactly why Jesus left heaven to come down to earth to become one of us and die for us...to give us a future and a hope! Think about what you're outlook on our nation, world, and your life would be right now if Jesus had never come? Where would you get your hope from that things could change and be different?

Many people have put their hope in themselves or in the intellect and advancement of humanity to provide a better future. But history has proven that even with all our technological advances the world has become a darker and more dangerous place to live.

As you get ready to ring in the New Year, I've got good news for you. You can face 2025 with confidence and hope because Immanuel "God with Us" has promised that He would be by your side each day to help you and guide you no matter what comes your way.

Because of Jesus our future is filled with Promise. Philippians 1:6 tells us that "He who started a good work in you, will carry it to completion." Christmas is the season that reminds us that Jesus came to this earth to give those of us who had no hope and no future because of our sin...hope for today and bright future tomorrow!

## PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for leaving the glory of heaven to come to this earth in order to give me hope and a future. May I walk into this New Year with confident expectation that you will never leave me or forsake me and that you who started a good work in me, will complete it.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS NOTES:

Jeremiah 29:4-14  
Romans 8:18-25  
Isaiah 9:1-7