



*Advent  
Reflections*



**Comfort**  
and Joy



## **Welcome to Advent Reflections!**

During this time of Advent, we thought we at St Andrew's Church could journey together as a church family, looking at what the Bible has to say about the coming of Jesus at Christmas. We found a lovely resource for our families and children called 'ADVENTure' and so have produced this 'Advent Reflections' resource, using the same readings but slightly different reflections, which we can use each day of Advent.

Each day as we get nearer to Christmas, we will look at a short passage of the Bible that helps us understand God's amazing plan to send Jesus - from hundreds of years before Jesus was born, right up to his first cry as a new born baby in Bethlehem.

So as we journey together through Advent, please take time to think about the daily reading and its context, what God might be trying to say to you each day about that passage, and how you might be able to share that with someone else. Just as each day of Advent will bring us closer to Christmas, God wants to bring us closer to Him each day, and for us to try and bring others closer to Him each day.

## MONDAY 30<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER: IN THE BEGINNING

**Reading:** Genesis 3: 8-15

**Verse of the Day:** *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.*

### A Reflection from David Lear

Our readings this week are like a series of scenes which demonstrate through time the working out of God's purpose to redeem a fallen humanity from the consequences of their disobedience, by promising a Saviour who would rescue them. Our first scene tells of man's fall from grace and the eternal consequences of that fall.

First God had to deal with their inability to obey his command not to eat the fruit of one of the trees in the garden he had given them to care for and to enjoy. So he drove them out and told them that henceforth they would have to work to live. He also punished the serpent by condemning it to be at enmity with human beings from that time on

We should note how Adam attempted to blame Eve and Eve the serpent, just like much of society today. Few are prepared to accept responsibility for their mistakes and failures instead making excuses and covering up their incompetence by "passing the buck".

Sadly, the failure of Adam and Eve has been followed by every other living person since. We are all guilty of disobeying God's command to love Him and to love our neighbours as we love ourselves and we all need to be rescued from the consequences of that failure.

**Prayer:** Thank You God, that in the person and work of your only son Jesus Christ, we have just such a rescuer, one who is wholly reliable and who will never let us down. So, even when our circumstances are difficult and the future is unclear, let us put our trust in Him and rejoice in the knowledge that we are forgiven.

## TUESDAY 1<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER: PROMISED BLESSING

**Reading:** Genesis 22: 1-19

**Verse of the Day:** *Genesis 22:18 – “And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed - all because you obeyed me.”*

### A Reflection from David Lear

Our second scene is set some hundreds of years later at a time when Abraham’s faith is put to a severe test. For many years Abraham and his wife Sarah had longed for a son and eventually God fulfilled his promise to them, and they were blessed by the birth of Isaac. Then God called Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. We can only imagine Abraham’s feelings at this command, but he obeyed and set out for Mt. Moriah, which later became the site of Jerusalem, and prepared to sacrifice his only son. Our reading relates how God provided a substitute just in the nick of time and Isaac was spared. Furthermore, God promised Abraham that because he had not spared his only son, through his descendants all the nations of the world would be blessed

As I read these verses I was reminded of God’s own sacrifice, he also did not spare his only son but gave him up to be our substitute and to pay the price of our failure to keep his commandments. Isaac was saved but God’s only Son Jesus, who did not “count equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness ,he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross”.

**Prayer:** In these difficult times, when we are experiencing a second time of lockdown, when our ability to see friends and family members who do not live with us has been curtailed, when perhaps our faith too has been tested, help us Lord to remember that you have promised that we will not be tested more than we can bear. So, let us continue to give thanks and praise and to look forward to complete freedom to see our loved ones once again. (As I wrote this note, news has broken that a vaccine giving 90% freedom from infection has been successfully tested and the hope is that it will be made widely available later in the year. Something more to lift our spirits and to give thanks for! Hallelujah!)

## WEDNESDAY 2<sup>ND</sup> DECEMBER – A THRONE FOREVER

**Reading:** 2 Samuel 7: 12-17

**Verse of the Day:** *He is the one who will build a house - a temple – for my name. And I will secure his royal throne forever.”*

### **A Reflection from David Lear**

Time has moved on by the best part of a thousand years and this scene is set during the reign of King David, Israel’s greatest king. He had achieved peace from all his enemies and had built a palace for himself and his family. He wished to build a suitable dwelling place for God and his tabernacle, which until then had been accommodated in a tent. Initial advice from Nathan the prophet was that this was an excellent idea and that he should proceed. That night God spoke to Nathan to tell him that he had spoken in haste. It was not David who would build the temple, but his son, Solomon. I wonder how Nathan felt when he realised that he had spoken hastily and needed to tell David of this change of plan. Was his life in danger? Was the office of the prophet to be subject to ridicule? I suspect these thoughts caused him some anxious moments but nevertheless he returned to David. It was not all bad news however there was also the good news for David, that not only should his son be the one to build the temple, but that a dynasty would be established in his name and would last forever. That his earthly kingdom did not endure is one of sadness, but God’s plans are not so easily thwarted and, as we shall see, an alternative was to be delivered.

Do we have times when our plans, which seemed to be right when we conceived them, later turn out to be unworkable, perhaps because we didn’t consult others who were able to form a more considered view. Maybe we did a Nathan and neglected to ask God if our plan chimed with his.

**Prayer:** We pray that we may never act without seeking the guidance of God’s Holy Spirit.

## THURSDAY 3<sup>RD</sup> DECEMBER – A SIGN OF THE TIMES

**Reading:** Isaiah 7: 13-14

**Verse of the Day:** *“The Lord Himself will give you a sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call Him “Immanuel” which means “God with us.”*

### **A Reflection from David Lear**

Once again time has moved on and we are now in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century before Christ and the kingdom of Judah is threatened by invasion. King Ahaz is alarmed, but Isaiah the prophet assures him that the invasion will not, in fact, happen and that the enemies will be routed. Ahaz is far from convinced and even refuses to ask God for a sign, instead offering up the reason that he would not put the Lord to the test, an echo of the injunction in the book of Deuteronomy.

Isaiah’s response is that God himself would provide the sign, one laden with hope, not just for Ahaz, but for everyone else at that time and since then. A virgin would conceive and bring forth a son and he would be called Immanuel, or God with us. A reminder that God would come to rescue his people, not only at the time of Ahaz, but at some future time when they most needed rescuing. As Christians we recognise Mary as the Virgin foretold by Isaiah and acknowledge her son Jesus as the fulfilment of the name Immanuel. God is indeed with us, knows all our joys, understands our sorrows and gives assurance that he will be with us through thick and thin. Let’s not be like Ahaz who did not trust God enough to ask him for a sign. Instead as the words of the old hymn has it “judge the Lord by feeble sense but trust him for his power”.

**Prayer:** Dear God, Thank you for this amazing promise 700 years before Jesus was born that “Immanuel” was coming. Thank you for being with us. Help me to see and to know your presence today. Amen

## FRIDAY 4<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER – NAME CALLING

**Reading:** Isaiah 9: 2-7

**Verse of the Day:** *“And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed - all because you obeyed me.”*

### A Reflection from David Lear

This scene is set at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century before Christ and tells of the coming of a royal son, a descendent of David will ascend the throne and will rule with justice and righteousness. Four groups of title are given to this king:-

First-**Wonderful Counsellor**. He will carry out a royal programme that will cause the whole world to marvel.

Second-**Mighty God**. His divine power as a warrior is stressed.

Third-**Everlasting Father**. He will be an enduring compassionate provider and protector of his people.

Fourth-**Prince of Peace**. His rule will bring wholeness and well-being to individuals and to society.

Take some time today to consider how Jesus fulfilled these descriptions and thank and praise him that he is gloriously alive and active today, calling, equipping, empowering and sustaining his people and ruling over a kingdom cannot fail. So, in the words of the hymn: -

All shall be well in his kingdom of peace,  
Freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase,  
Justice and truth from his sceptre shall spring,  
Wrong shall be righted when Jesus is King.

**Prayer:** Dear God, as we work for the fulfilment of Christ’s rule let us rejoice that He has chosen us to be the bearers of his name, CHRISTIAN, and to remember that it is a name which is above all other names.

## SATURDAY 5<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER – A SHOOT FROM A ROOT

**Reading:** Isaiah 11: 1-9

**Verse of the Day:** *“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a branch will bear fruit”*

### **A Reflection from David Lear**

This scene is also set at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century and continues the theme of yesterday but speaks of a time when a new king has begun to rule. He is a direct descendant of Jesse, King David’s father and the kingdom he rules over is one where justice and righteousness hold sway, because the spirit of the Lord rests upon him.

As the details of his rule are unfolded all sorts of marvels are paraded before us. We see wolves and leopards lying down with lambs and goats, bears feeding with cows and lions eating straw like oxen and children playing near the nests of venomous snakes without coming to harm.

In Judah at that time the rulers of Isaiah’s day lacked the qualities of righteousness and justice, but in the new kingdom the King would demonstrate these qualities and society would benefit accordingly.

As Christians we recognise the attributes ascribed to the Shoot of Jesse by Isaiah as being demonstrated in the life of Jesus. We do not yet see this kingdom as fully established, it is still a work in progress and we as members of that kingdom are needed to contribute to that work.

**Prayer:** Dear God, we don’t want to miss a green shoot of your goodness today. Help us to see where you are doing small things and help us to celebrate, say thank you and join in. Amen.

## SUNDAY 6<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER – GET READY!

**Reading:** Isaiah 40:3-5

**Verse of the Day:** *“A voice of one calling: “In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord”.*

### **A Reflection from David Lear**

The words of Isaiah 40 were possibly written at a time when Jerusalem had been captured by Nebuchadnezzar and many of the people had been deported to Babylon. Many would have given up hope of being able to ever return, so the words of the prophet provided comfort for them and confirmed that the full punishment for their sins had been paid. Furthermore, they are to prepare to return from exile because God had redeemed them. The way must be cleared of obstacles and all the nations will see their deliverance. Ultimately the glory of the redeeming God would be seen in Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist used the words of this passage to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah, the one who bring good news of sins forgiven and peace with heaven.

This is the Advent season when we too will be preparing to celebrate the coming to earth of Jesus as a baby, and it is right that we should do. No doubt we will be giving and receiving presents, eating a festive meal and, if the lockdown is relaxed celebrating with family and friends. Yet we should also be preparing for his coming again, not as a baby, but with power and glory to finally bring about his kingdom, one without end. May God help us to prepare for both these events, the first as we look back with thanks and praise for that redeeming work that Jesus did for us on the cross, and the second as “we look forward with eager anticipation for the whole of creation to be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought to the glorious freedom of the children of God”.

**Prayer:** Thank you God for your plan to send Jesus. Thank you for the clues we are finding all through the Bible that show us just how many people were involved in getting things ready. Help us to get ready for you too. Amen.

## MONDAY 7<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER – A LIGHT FOR ALL!

**Reading:** Isaiah 42:5-9

**Verse of the Day:** *“I will take you by the hand and guard you, and I will give you to my people Israel, as a symbol of my covenant with them. And you will be a light to guide the nations. (Isaiah 42:6)”*

### **A Reflection from Hilary Sutton**

Our verse of the day includes yet another of those incredibly tender messages from God – “I will take you by the hand and guard you”. This is even more moving because the gentle, parenting character of God is contrasted in the previous verse with reference to God’s almighty, creative power. God who made the universe stoops down to hold our hand, as if we were a little child! And so we are to Him.

Though these words were given to Isaiah for the people of Israel, we know that they are for us too because God tells Israel “I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations” (NRSV). God’s intention was that in making Israel his special people, they should make his love known to everyone. It didn’t quite work like that, of course, because the people of Israel had every human flaw that we still see in the world around us (and of course in ourselves!) today.

Not until Jesus came into the world did God’s plan begin to move to fruition – wholly God but wholly man too, so that the people he dealt with on a day to day basis would never forget him, so that when he died and yet conquered death by rising again, the Holy Spirit could come and empower those followers of his. Through them, the Good News about Jesus spread through the world, and continues to spread today. A challenge for us this Advent is to think what we are doing to spread that Good News a little further in our own part of the world – how are we being a light to our nation?

One of the things about prophecies is that they nearly always have multi-layered applications. Isaiah had a message for the people of Israel in his own time – a message of hope for them. But the last verses of our reading today speak of the future: “See, the former things have come to pass and the new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.” Earlier in Isaiah, we read about the shoot that will spring forth from the root stock of Jesse – a prophecy we now know refers to Jesus.

In our reading for today, Isaiah is again looking forward to Jesus – God is telling him then of things he, Isaiah, will never see but there they are, recorded in the Jewish scriptures which now make up a part of our Bible. If we ever feel that God is not in control, that the “big plan” we often hear of doesn’t exist, it is heartening to remember the startling accuracy of these and other prophecies. God has us by the hand, and he will protect us – we don’t know the way, but he does and he will lead us.

**Extra activity** - If you are someone who understands things much better through action than through words, you might like to try this - Get a candle and some tea lights. Place the candle in the centre and light it. Now, using the light from the candle, light the tea lights. Notice that the candle can “give” light without losing any. This light for all, coming from God is Jesus. This light guides not just nations, but you and me. Nothing can ever put this light out!

**Prayer:** Thank you God that Jesus, the light of the world is coming! Thank you for being our light and hope in our family and in our lives. Would your light shine on us today! Amen.

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## **TUESDAY 8<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER – A SUFFERING KING**

**Reading:** Isaiah 53

**Verse of the Day:** *“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 forever.” (Isaiah 53:10)*

### **A Reflection from Hilary Sutton**

This is another startling example of Jesus fulfilling Old Testament prophecies. Christians now read it with Jesus in their minds – and it is not an easy read if you do so. “No form or majesty that we should look at him” – No majesty? But this was the son of God, who left his home in heaven at God’s right hand to live a human life. “He was despised and rejected by others” – well, yes, of course he was because he was happy to spend time with others who were also despised and rejected and there he found his natural audience, his mission field. If we ever doubt that God understands our suffering, we need to remember this – that Jesus experienced human

life and chose to work with those who had very little, those who were suffering and dying, those who had been pushed aside by the society of the day as unclean and unworthy. However low we are feeling, we can know that Jesus reaches out to us and comes alongside us in our suffering.

There is more to bear in this passage – the stark statement that it is only because Jesus was willing to suffer and die that we are reconciled with God. “All we like sheep have gone astray” – well, we know that to be true, don’t we? And we know from the long story of the Bible that given endless chances, the people of Israel just couldn’t breach the gap between them and God which human transgressions had created – and no more could any human nation.

Verses 7 – 9 are so accurate about the last days of Jesus’ life that it is quite stunning. “He did not open his mouth” says Isaiah of this Suffering Servant. We know that Jesus before Pilate would not speak in his own defence. “By a perversion of justice, he was taken away” – the whole process of Jesus’ arrest and eventual death was deeply flawed – the Jewish authorities had no real charge against him, which Pilate could see. When Pilate offered, according to the time-honoured practice of the Jews, to save the prisoner Jesus, the crowd roared instead to save Barabbas. “They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich” – Jesus hung on a cross between two bandits but the tomb where he was laid belonged to the wealthy Joseph of Aramathea. Hundreds of years before it happened, God revealed to Isaiah in detail the incredible steps he would take to draw his people back to himself.

In the gospels, there comes a point when Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem and starts to explain to his disciples that he is going to die. The last part of our reading today maybe says something of his motivation for bearing the suffering that he knew lay ahead. “Through him the will of the Lord shall prosper”, “Out of his anguish, he shall see light”. Such was the unbreakable bond between Jesus and his heavenly Father that, whilst knowing that he must suffer, Jesus believed that the prize was worth it – not a prize for himself but for the people that he and his Father loved.

We all get things wrong! Maybe there are things weighing on you heavily at the moment – and maybe having to read this chapter today about how Jesus suffered for our sins has hurt even more! We must not feel like this though – we can sincerely regret our sins, ask for forgiveness and make amends where we can. We should do all this though, with the knowledge

that God knew, and Jesus accepted that, without help, the weight of our sins would be desperate and we would never find our way to God. That was not what either of them wanted. “He shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous.” We need to acknowledge Jesus’ sacrifice, certainly, but we need to allow it to work for us – we need to believe that, as the last verse of the chapter says, Jesus makes intercession for us transgressors. And we need to believe that, when God looks at us, he sees not our sins but Jesus’ sacrifice and so we can draw close to God again.

**Prayer:** Lord help me when I feel rejected and left out. Help me when I feel awful about things I have done. Help me to say sorry and know that because Jesus died for me I can be your friend and know I am forgiven. Thank you for your wonderful love. Amen.

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## **WEDNESDAY 9<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER –BRANCHING OUT**

**Reading:** Zechariah 6:12-13

**Verse of the Day:** *“Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from this place and build the temple of the Lord . . . and he will be clothed with Majesty and will sit on the throne. (Zechariah 6:12)*

### **A Reflection from Hilary Sutton**

What a strange name for someone but this name, like all names in ancient times, had significant power. He (whoever “he” is!) is going to branch out and build the temple of the Lord.

At the time when Zechariah was writing, Jewish exiles had been allowed to return to Jerusalem and begin to restore it which, of course, included rebuilding the temple that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. This had to be a priority for the Jews as the Temple was, in their minds, where God resided. This, if you like, is the immediate application of the prophecy which Zechariah is making – maybe Joshua, who is to be named High Priest, is the one whose name is Branch? But hang on a minute – as we read a little further, we see that Branch is one who “shall bear royal honour and shall sit and rule on his throne.” So, are we talking about a priest or a king? The next sentence suggests we are not talking about one but two people,

“There shall be a priest by his throne, with peaceful understanding between the two of them.”

Though Zechariah could not have known it, we now see the King as Jesus – a branch from the root of Jesse that we hear about in Isaiah. By the time Jesus was visiting Jerusalem, the temple had been rebuilt and was the centre of worship for the Jews, once again, the place where God resided. When Jesus saw the temple being used as a marketplace and haunt of money changers, he was so incensed that he drove out all the animals and turned over the money changers’ tables. The authorities asked him what miracle he could do to show he had the right to do this and he answered, ““Tear down this Temple, and in three days I will build it again.”

“Are you going to build it again in three days?” they asked him. “It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple!” John comments, “But the temple Jesus was speaking about was his body”. (John 2:19 – 21)

The radical point Jesus was making was that through his death and resurrection, people who believed in him and what he had done, could be close to God wherever they were, that God would live in their hearts and not in a building (this was just as well, as the Romans destroyed the Temple again after a Jewish uprising.) Many of us have found it so hard to see our church building closed yet again, not to be able to come together physically as a church family within its walls. It is worth remembering though that God is with us – Emmanuel! He is with us as we sit at our dining room table and watch the You Tube service; he is with us as we plod round the muddy fields and pray; he is with us as we watch and worry for our loved ones; he is with us as we phone someone who might be lonely or shop for someone who must stay at home – he is always with us and will never leave us.

**Extra activity** – another visual prompt. If you are out for a walk today and there is a pond or a river, drop a pebble in and watch the ripples. (This works in a bowl of water at home too!) Just contemplate how far the ripples move from that one small action. Then think about how one small act of kindness today could send ripples out to the world around you – you can branch out too!

**Prayer:** Thank you Jesus that you are our Priest and King. Help us to live today in a way that pleases you and in the different ways that we branch out, to be good news to those around us. Amen.

## THURSDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER – NOT TOO SMALL

**Reading:** Micah 5: 1-5

**Verse of the Day:** *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will rule over Israel, whose origins are old, from ancient times.” (Micah 5:2)*

### **A Reflection from Hilary Sutton**

God has a habit of using people and things that others might consider “small”. We had a great Messy Church session recently finding out all about the choice of David as Saul’s successor – the youngest and smallest of all his brothers but God only cared about what he was like on the inside. Then there was Gideon, asking for proof after proof that God really would support him in the work he was called for; Naaman’s slave girl persuading her master to bathe in the river and be healed of his leprosy. And now – a tiny baby coming from a small clan! A small clan maybe but Jesus claims his ancestry from David and this is why Joseph and his heavily pregnant wife make the arduous journey from Galilee as Luke tells us in his gospel “to the city of David called Bethlehem”. A Roman census ensures that Jesus is born just where (700 years before the event) Micah prophesies he will be. The manner of his birth is “small” too – no decent room but the place where animals were kept.

As we continue with our reading, we see one of the very many references to Jesus as a shepherd, “He shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord.” The humble carpenter’s son does just that – he physically feeds a crowd of 5,000 but he also feeds those who flock to him with teaching that changes their ideas about who they are and what God thinks about them. Jesus goes to the “small” people – spending much more time with them than the chief priests and scribes. Jesus shows us God’s heart for us “small” ones. No one is too insignificant to escape his notice or warrant his love.

This must be a motivation for us, too, who are Jesus’ hands and feet. The world still has a way of making certain types of people “small”. Those who have little material wealth, or lack education or come from a different ethnic or religious background – all these have become reasons to consider our fellow human beings as “small” or less than us. We must never feel that we cannot change injustice because we have too little power or influence –

that might be true of us as mere humans but we have the power of the Holy Spirit to guide and to break through barriers that we may encounter.

Pray today that God will show us this Advent where he wants us to act and for whom he wants us to be an advocate – and pray that we will know the assurance of his saving power with us.

**Prayer:** Thank you that you are the God of small things and small places and small people - like us. Help us to know just how BIG you are as our God. Thank you for loving us and giving all of us a place in your family. Amen.

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## **FRIDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER – SUDDENLY**

**Reading:** Malachi 3

**Verse of the Day:** *“See, I will send my messenger who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly, the Lord you are seeking will come. .” (Malachi 3:1)*

### **A Reflection from Hilary Sutton**

Suddenly ..... Things we wait for and even expect, can still make us jump when they happen! We know we are expecting visitors (think pre-lock down!!) but we still jump when the doorbell rings.

Our reading today does say that “I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me”. Christian tradition slots John the Baptist into this role – also mentioned in Isaiah 40. The worry is that, given what we know of how the Jewish scholars received the news that the Messiah had come in the unprepossessing form of Jesus, human beings are very bad at paying attention to messengers who are preparing the way. Over 2,000 years have passed since Jesus was born in Bethlehem, so perhaps we should be more alert to that ring at the doorbell. Do we believe that Jesus will come again? I guess we would all say “Yes!” But will we all jump when “suddenly” the Lord whom we seek will come to his temple. I’m guessing that we will – but will it be a “oh yes, he’s here earlier than we thought! Hurrah!” or will it be an “Oh no! He’s here earlier than we thought?”

Maybe we have reason to fear – I love the song “Refiner’s fire, my heart’s one desire is to be holy” but what might that mean for us personally? Going

through the refiner's fire sounds scary and possibly painful! As we read on, however, we get a real sense of how much God loves the people he made – even when they turn aside from him, even when they speak harsh words against him. Despite all this, God says, “see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing”.

Those of us who are parents know just how much our children can enrage us! In the heat of the moment, we might think we will jolly well teach them a lesson and ..... But when it comes to it, though we want them to see the error of their ways, we also long just to show them how much we love them. I believe that we feel these impulses because it is the way God parents us. We let him down and he is saddened but it doesn't eventually impact the love he feels for us.

It is worth taking this time of Advent, of waiting for the time when Jesus will come again, to weigh these things up – the things we have done and regret against the overwhelming balance of God's love for us. How big is that love? Have you forgotten? So huge that he sent his only Son to die for us! Let's bring to mind our sins and repent of them – but let's do so without cowering and without pretence because God's love and forgiveness is greater! Greater than what? Greater than everything!

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us not to be so desperate for Christmas to be here that we miss the fun of getting ready and preparing for it. When you suddenly come - fill us with joy and excitement. Amen.

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## SATURDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER – WAIT FOR IT

**Reading:** Malachi 4

**Verse of the Day:** *“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.”*

### **A Reflection from Hilary Sutton**

Our verse of the day is taken from the last verse of the Old Testament. Malachi 4 is full of threats against the wicked and promise for “you who

revere my name". And then ..... nothing! For 400 years! Nothing but a longing for the promised Messiah!

Do you like waiting? I don't! I don't like waiting in queues! I don't like waiting to find out whether (as I am writing) the current lockdown will have decreased the rate of numbers of infection by Covid and whether I might yet get to spend Christmas with a few (a very few!) of my nearest and dearest. But if I get real for a minute, my waiting will not have to go on too long! The promise of an effective vaccine means that we can realistically hope that, at some point next year, we might at least hope for some more normal social interaction, even if we can't be quite sure what the world will look like.

Imagine being Malachi and those who heard his prophecies! Imagine waiting .... and waiting ..... and your children waiting ..... and your grandchildren and their children and grandchildren just waiting .....! And then imagine the one you had been waiting for coming – and you really don't think this is what you have been waiting for at all!

We are very blessed as Christians because Advent is a time which we know will be blessed with a certain outcome – we will celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. We will once again rejoice that God loved us so much that he sent his only Son to save us.

And yet there is that continued wait - the wait for his Second Coming. Much of Christianity has this tension in it – the now, and not yet. We have the presence of the Holy Spirit with us now and we can call on him when the waiting seems long, when what we most desire or long for, or even dread, seems slow to appear. Pray today that we will be faithful in our waiting and alert to what our Heavenly Father would have us do while we wait.

**Prayer:** Dear God, we can't imagine waiting for 400 years when we struggle with a couple of minutes! Help us to be patient and keep trusting. Knowing that Jesus came at just the right time, as you planned it. Help us to trust you in the same way when we have to wait for things. Amen

## SUNDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER - GOD WITH US

**Reading:** Matthew 1:18-24

**Verse of the Day:** *“They will call Him Immanuel (which means God with us)”*

### **A Reflection from Hilary Sutton**

Now – our reading today starts **after** the long genealogy of Jesus – but actually, I encourage you to go back and to read it anyway because it is so important in following God’s good plan for his people and how he gently and patiently leads us to understand that, if we are to find our way back to a place in heaven, which is what he wants for us, we simply cannot do it by ourselves.

So read through the genealogy and, when you come to a name that doesn’t mean much, or you don’t remember that person featuring in a part of the Bible you have read, Google them and find the Bible reference and read up about them. God thought they were important, every one of them. Jacob – the deceiver who did his brother out of his inheritance; Rahab the prostitute; Solomon – the son of an adulterous (not to say murderous) relationship; Uzziah – struck with leprosy for defying God ..... but I’m not going to go on! There were some good guys in there but there were some flawed human beings and God didn’t disdain them as Jesus’ forbears – he made the human race, and he understands our regular habit of getting things wrong.

When we think of the word Immanuel – God with us – and then we look back at Jesus’ genealogy, it is as if God is saying - I understand you! I understand how you get things wrong. When I send my son, his earthly forbears will include people who made mistakes so that you will know that he is truly human. But when you know him, you will see that he is the only one who resists sin, the only one who will do my will, no matter what it costs him and you will understand that he is wholly God.

This Sunday, spend some time contemplating the fact that God is indeed with us and give thanks for this extraordinary blessing.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for the promise of Immanuel, thank you that God is with us. Help us to keep you right at the centre of our family.  
Amen

## MONDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER – IMPOSSIBLE

**Reading:** Luke 1: 26-38

**Verse of the Day:** *“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.”*

### A Reflection from Hanna Rosser

Here we have the words the angel Gabriel said to Mary, foretelling the birth of Jesus. Mary thinks that this must be impossible, that she can't have a baby yet, for she and Joseph have not yet consummated their marriage. But God is God of the Impossible – as we're told later in verse 37: *For nothing is impossible with God'.*

But perhaps Mary isn't just thinking about the practical 'impossibility' (that she & Joseph hadn't consummated their marriage), but the fact that God is going to be BORN – just like us! Is it really possible that Jesus can be both fully God AND fully human?

But we worship a God of the Impossible – from creating everything out of nothing to the parting of the Red Sea, to a boy defeating a giant, to a young virgin girl conceiving and giving birth to a son and now to God becoming human. This 'impossible' stuff was all part of God's plan to rescue us. God HAD to become one of us and experience life as we do - in order to save us.

The message the angel gave to Mary was in fact a quote from Isaiah 7:14 but Gabriel inserts a different name – instead of 'Immanuel' (as we looked at yesterday), he tells Mary the name that God's Son would normally be called: JESUS, which means "Saviour." So appropriate, because it is only God who can save! So God the Creator was becoming like his Creation – just so that he could save us.

**Prayer:** Dear God, this all sounds so incredible, so impossible! Thank you God for becoming one of us, for being a baby and growing up to experience life as we do. Help us to know that you are always with us and that you are the God of the Impossible. Amen.

## TUESDAY 15<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER – INCREDIBLE FAITH

**Reading:** Luke 1:38-45

**Verse of the Day:** *“Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true. And the angel left her.” (Luke 1:38)*

### A Reflection from Hanna Rosser

WOW! What a wonderful way to respond to God – ‘I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.’ What incredible faith Mary had! She was only a young girl, visited by an angel, told something amazing (seemingly impossible) would happen and just seemed to say ‘OK then’. She truly believed and trusted what God had got planned for her.

Who or what do you put your trust in? I know that this year there have been several times when I have struggled to ‘trust’ some of what some of our politicians have said with regard to the handling of the Coronavirus. I also admit that I don’t ‘trust’ that everything will be ready for Brexit at the end of the year. I know I’m not the only one who struggles to ‘trust’ our politicians.

So who do I trust? Is there anyone worth trusting? Well of course there are! My family and friends and work-colleagues for a start. Then there’s my GP – that she will be honest in giving me a diagnosis if I’m unwell; the police – that they will do their best to protect me; judges – that they will be wise and just in making their judgements. But I also know that we are all fallible, that there may be times when perhaps we’ve promised something, and then not kept that promise – but that’s because we’re human and we all ‘have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (Romans 3:23).

Mary give us an excellent example of trusting in God but also a challenge: to remember that with God anything could happen, so let’s trust him!

**Prayer:** Dear God, Thank you that you are the God of the impossible! Help me to trust you and have the kind of faith that Mary did. Help me to remember that you are ‘Immanuel’ - ‘God with us’ and that we can always trust you! Amen.

## WEDNESDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER – A SONG OF PRAISE

**Reading:** Luke 1:45-55

**Verse of the Day:** *““You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said. Mary responded, “Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour!” (Luke 1:45-46)*

### **A Reflection from Hanna Rosser**

Today’s verses – Mary’s Song of Praise is also known as ‘The Magnificat’ and has also been turned into a great worship song by Chris Tomlin: ‘My Soul Magnifies the Lord’. Mary’s song is full of praise to God, acknowledging not only just how much God has blessed her (*For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me*), but remembering God’s faithfulness through the generations, for keeping his promises and remembering his people (*He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful. For he made this promise to our ancestors and to Abraham and his children forever*).

Just as God blessed Mary, and the generations before her, He continues to bless us today. Take some time today to think of the different ways God has blessed you ; then think of the ways he has blessed your family; then think of the ways he has blessed his chosen people – the Israelites; then think of the ways that he has blessed the whole of mankind.

Then praise God for all these things. Tell him how amazing He is! Think of the words used by Isaiah from one or earlier readings: ‘Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace’. Our praise should not just be for what God has done for us and our families, but for who he is and for what he has done for the whole of mankind throughout history! God’s love and grace and mercy has been poured out for everyone!

**Prayer:** Thank you God for your faithfulness - not just to us and our family.

Thank you for your faithfulness through all of history! Thank you for your promises in the past, thank you for your presence today, thank you for being with us as we face tomorrow. Amen.

## THURSDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER – THE MORNING LIGHT

**Reading:** Luke 1:62-80

**Verse of the Day:** *“Because of God’s tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break on us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace.” (Luke 1:78)*

### **A Reflection from Hanna Rosser**

These are amongst the first words Zechariah says after months of being made ‘dumb’, of not being able to talk. Whilst on duty in the temple, he had been told by an angel that his wife, Elizabeth, would have a baby, even though she had been unable to conceive and they were both very old. He had been told that his son would prepare the way for the Saviour of the World. Unlike Mary’s faith we saw earlier this week, Zechariah couldn’t believe the message the angel was giving him, so God made him dumb! When the baby is born and he and Elizabeth have taken the baby for the circumcision ceremony, it is only when he confirms (in writing) that the baby’s name is to be John, and not Zechariah, (as was the custom), that his speech returned. But he now knows that the Saviour of the world – the ‘morning light from heaven’ is also about to arrive in the world and tells all those present at the ceremony.

In John’s gospel (a different John), John writes *‘The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world’ (John 1:9)*. Later, Jesus himself says: *‘I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life’*.

When you cannot see, you need a light. So often we take light for granted – our electric lights at home, the street lights, our torches, the ‘lights’ on our mobile phones. But Jesus is the one true light that shines in the darkness – a light that guides us to the path of peace. He shows us who God is and how much God loves us.

**Prayer:** Dear God, Thank you for sending Jesus – the Light of the World. Thank you that Jesus was able to show us you and how much you love us. Thank you for guiding us to the path of peace. Help us to walk in that good place where your light shows us the way. Amen.

## FRIDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER – NO V.I.P.

**Reading:** Luke 2: 1-7

**Verse of the Day:** *“She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.” (Luke 2:7)*

### **A Reflection from Hanna Rosser**

Most parents-to-be have approximately 9 months to prepare for the arrival of their new baby. They often newly decorate a room, get a cot and loads of other baby-bits for their new arrival. They want everything to be ready in time. But God had more than 9 months to prepare for the arrival of Jesus – He had centuries to get ready! Yet when Jesus was born, it might look like that God had not prepared enough for the ‘big day’ of his arrival. There had been no lodging available for his parents to stay, so Mary had ended up giving birth in a stable, or the area where the animals were kept. She then placed Jesus in an animal feeding trough because there was nowhere else for Him. There was nowhere else for the King of Kings, the Saviour of the World, the Prince of Peace, Mighty God, Wonderful Counsellor. Nowhere for Jesus!

But, it was in fact all part of God’s plan. Jesus was born into a poor family, in a small town. He did not appear mighty and great and He was not rich and famous. He did not come to be some distant King in a remote palace. Jesus came to BE one of us. To know life as an ordinary human being. To know what it is like to be you or me.

So if God was willing to become human, to be one of us, to experience life as we experience it, surely we should be willing to make room for Jesus and make time for Jesus. So often at Christmas we get so busy with getting our homes decorated, buying and wrapping presents, preparing food and for family visits, that these things take over and we forget to make time for Jesus. The lodging wasn’t available. Will we be available?

**Prayer:** Lord, help us to remember that you are the reason we HAVE Christmas! May we remember your coming, celebrate your incredible gift of life to us and put you right at the heart of our Christmas celebrations. Amen

## SATURDAY 19<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER – DON'T BE AFRAID

**Reading: Luke 2: 8-11**

**Verse of the Day:** *“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.” (Luke 2:9)*

### **A Reflection from Hanna Rosser**

Some people think the Bible is just a list of ‘Do’s & Don’ts’, of rules or commands to be kept, but here we have a very reassuring ‘Don’t’ – ‘Don’t be afraid!’ I have to admit that if a whole bunch of angels woke me up in the middle of the night singing outside my bedroom window, I might be terrified too, just as those shepherds were!

Shepherds at that time were regarded as ‘nobodies’ – in fact the sheep they looked after were regarded as more important than the shepherds themselves. But God chose them to be the first ones to receive the greatest news of all time! They didn’t know it was the first Christmas, that the Saviour of the world had been born. And so they receive these comforting words – ‘Don’t be afraid!’ – the most-often given command in the Bible.

I guess most of us have times when we’re afraid, or at least ‘worried’, when we’re uncertain or confused, times when we can’t sleep and are lying awake trying to make sense of things going on in our lives. But be reassured that God promises to be with us and to never leave us - as it says in Joshua 1:9 ***“Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”***

**Prayer:** Lord, help us when we are afraid, whether it is suddenly - like the shepherds, or when we have times when those thoughts and fears that are never far away. Help us to know that you are with us and will never let us go! Amen.

## SUNDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER – LET’S GO!

**Reading:** Luke 2: 12-15

**Verse of the Day:** *“Let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” (Luke 2:15)*

### A Reflection from Hanna Rosser

The shepherds have received the Good News, they’ve been amazed by the sight and singing of ‘a vast host of others – the armies of heaven - praising God’. Once the angels had gone to heaven, they were desperate to see ‘this thing that has happened’ for themselves. They didn’t just sit on the hillside and say ‘That was nice, let’s just stay here and talk about it amongst ourselves’. No, they said ‘Let’s Go!’ – they were determined to find out as soon as possible for themselves whether what they had been told was true.

Sometimes when we hear that an incident has happened nearby, we might rush out to see what’s happened or check social media on our phones for updates. This happened to us earlier this year when a helicopter kept circling around just as we had gone to bed. We couldn’t get to sleep because of the noise of the helicopter, so we looked outside to see what was happening. We saw the helicopter circling; then we saw the arrival of the police. We then checked social media on our phones – to find out that the police (and police helicopter) were looking for an elderly resident who had gone missing. Eventually he was found – the news came through on social media - and the police and police helicopter left, and we were finally able to go to sleep!

So, as we look at the Christmas story once again, do we just think: ‘yes, I know this story, I know all **about** the birth of Jesus because someone’s told me and I’ve heard it before’ or do we think: ‘Let’s go and find Jesus ourselves – let’s go and find him and get to **know him**, not just ‘about’ him.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help me to seek and to see you and Jesus this Christmas time. Help me to come to know you more personally, so that I don’t just know ‘about’ you, but so that I know you more personally as my friend and Saviour. Help me to show you to others. Amen

## MONDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER – FOLLOW THAT STAR!

**Reading:** Matthew 2: 1-6

**Verse of the Day:** *“Where is the newborn King of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.” (Matthew 2:2)*

### **A Reflection from Bryan Knapp**

Our two sons used to own a book entitled ‘Where’s Wally’? It was a book that contained very detailed illustrations of familiar Bible stories, the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem. In these illustrations was drawn a young man with a bobble hat and a striped t-shirt called Wally. The idea of the book was to hunt for Wally in the crowd whilst taking in the detail of the story.

In the commercialism and family traditions of decorating trees, hanging decorations, wrapping presents, and stocking the cupboard for every eventuality, it is easy to forget the reason for the season. To ask the question “where is Jesus?”

The wisemen had embarked on a journey of discovery. They had responded to the sighting of an unfamiliar star in the sky, and they decided to follow it. They knew it meant something special, but when they left home, I don’t think they knew what, or where, it was going to lead. It was only as they embarked on the journey that the jigsaw puzzle pieces fell into place.

The writer of the Hebrews put it like this: *“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” (Hebrews 11:1).*

How will you show your faith this Christmas time to those around you? What steps will you take not knowing how it will work out? Have confidence that when we step out for God it never returns empty?

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us not to just watch from side-lines or be so familiar with the story that we don’t pay attention, we don’t follow the star and we don’t worship. Help us to follow and worship you this Christmas time and share our faith with others. Amen

## TUESDAY 22<sup>ND</sup> DECEMBER – NOT TOO LATE!

**Reading:** Matthew 2: 7-12

**Verse of the Day:** *“They entered the house and saw the child with his mother.” (Matthew 2:11a)*

### **A Reflection from Bryan Knapp**

I am sure this year you have received many Christmas cards with pictures of Mary tending the baby Jesus in a stable surrounded by animals and halos. But look at the verse “they entered the **house**...” Hang on I hear you say I thought Jesus was born in a stable, because there was no room in the inn? Now we are in a house – confusing!

Timelines in the Bible are hard to display, other than by the annual ceremonies in the Jewish calendar that are sometimes mentioned. The situation here is that Jesus may well have been born within a home setting that contained provision for livestock, common in 1<sup>st</sup> C Palestine. And /or the visit of the Magi happened much later to the visitation of the shepherds on the night of Jesus’ birth.

This year we have all missed entering or welcoming other people into our homes, whether family or friends. These times of lockdown and isolation have put an invisible barrier between us all. A barrier that has conjured fear, uncertainty, and hesitation.

This verse for me offers a snapshot of the intimacy of mother and child, similar to Mary ‘pondering her thoughts’. It suggests a time of quiet intimacy, alone, just mother and child. In the quietness of our homes this Christmas, let us remember that we celebrate the coming of Immanuel - ‘God with Us’. Find the time and space this season to be intimate with God.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us to be patient when we have to wait for things. Help us not to waste the good things you have given us. Help us to find the time and space to be quiet and intimate with you and help us to worship you – God with Us! Amen.

## WEDNESDAY 23<sup>RD</sup> DECEMBER - STRANGE GIFTS

**Reading:** Matthew 2: 7-12

**Verse of the Day:** *"Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh." (Matthew 2: 11b)*

### **A Reflection from Bryan Knapp**

Back in November we asked our sons what would you like for Christmas? Due now to maturity of age they didn't come out with a long list of this and that gadget as seen on the TV. Instead they asked for time to think about what they might like, and their suggestions eventually came with thoughts of enriching their lives!

When those wisemen turned up in Bethlehem with gifts for the infant Jesus, they seemed to know instinctively what to offer. Knowing the star was something special they packed gifts with meaning for whoever or whatever they found at the end of their journey. **Gold** – for a King who would usher in the reality of God's Kingdom of love. **Frankincense** - a resin commonly found in the middle east and used by priests in worship and to signify our prayers. **Myrrh** - a resin used for medicinal purpose with healing properties and for the anointing of the dead.

In her poem 'In the bleak mid-winter' Christine Rossetti asks the question "What can I give Him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb; If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part; Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart." This Christmas reflect on what it means to give God our heart. Maybe it's in the words Jesus used when he said "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and your neighbour as yourself.'" This Christmas look for a gift that truly enriches your life.

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, help us to offer ourselves as a gift to you. Help us to give you our thoughts, words and actions. May the gift of our lives be like a star that points others to the light of your love. Amen.

## THURSDAY 24<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER – WORD MADE FLESH

**Reading:** John 1: 14-18

**Verse of the Day:** *“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 1:14)*

### **A Reflection from Bryan Knapp**

The other day whilst visiting my mother I bumped into someone I had known since childhood. When I had taken my mask off and at a social distance the person said to me ‘you’re looking more and more like your father’. Well I wasn’t sure how to take that. After all my dad was old, had been losing his hair for many years and .... Oh yes, I see. The person of course meant it as a compliment, and I do hope that something of my father’s character, wisdom and outlook on life is also mine.

When St John put pen to paper to share with his readership his own first-hand experience of Jesus, he used the Greek term, *logos* or **Word** in English. In our modern age it is said that we have become consumers of information, rather than knowledge. So for instance information tells us that that sea levels are rising, whereas knowledge tells us what might be the causes, and how we can reduce it.

John describes Jesus as God’s Word made flesh. In the story of creation God speaks, and from his spoken word brings forth life. In other words, it makes things happen. The Christian life is not just a set of teachings to be believed, or a set of practices to be developed in church on a Sunday. Our words are to bring life to others, and make things happen, as we allow God’s Word to be living and active in our lives.

**Prayer:** Thank you Jesus for become one of us – word made flesh. We thank you for your unfailing love and faithfulness and for dying for us on the cross. As we celebrate Christmas and your coming, help us to remember Easter too and the gift of your life that brings us home to a place of goodness with God. Amen.

## FRIDAY 25<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER – PASS IT ON!

**Reading:** Luke 2: 15-18

**Verse of the Day:** *“After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child.”*

### **A Reflection from Bryan Knapp**

Last year Matthew our son trained hard for the Bristol half marathon. Having come in at a reasonable time (it was after all his first run) the following day he decided that would be his first and last ever run.

Today we have reached our goal of Christmas Day and I hope that you manage to have a very blessed Christmas with or without friends and family. But I hope that the journey we have been on, the training we have offered over the season of Advent will encourage you to carry on developing your faith into the New Year and beyond.

The story of the shepherds is a story of those on the margins of society being offered front row seats in the new work of God. God invited those who were not trained orators, theologians, counsellors, evangelists, strategists or church planters to share with others what they had experienced. They just told their story, of what they had experienced.

Let me encourage you to think about what you have experienced of God in this Advent season and in this past year. I hope it is a story of faithfulness, of love, of a sense of God’s presence at times of loneliness and uncertainty. Like so many, people are looking for faith to work and if we can share our story and our experience, those are as powerful and meaningful as any other words. Do not let your experiences go to waste and keep on shaping your story of faith as you go deeper into God each day.

**Prayer:** Dear God thank you for the amazing gift of Jesus! Help us not to keep Him to ourselves - but be so excited that everyone around us knows that Jesus is born, Jesus is here, Jesus has come! Amen.



*We Wish  
you a very  
Merry  
Christmas  
and a  
Happy New Year*