FAITH FOR DAILY LIVING

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The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.
Isaiah 7:14



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Between ourselves

Dear Friends,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the power and ministry of His indwelling Holy Spirit.

When Jesus was born it was a long awaited and much anticipated event. However, most of the people had no idea what was going on! The same is happening today, our Lord is doing great things, magnificent things, miraculous things and most people are clueless. Our Lord is working out His eternal plan, and people are completely clueless as to what is going on. Every day, every moment, our Lord is fulfilling time. The fullness of time means that at exactly the right moment, at the most precise time and place, His purpose and plan is unfolded and revealed. *Galatians 4:4*, tells us that what happened in a moment, that what could seem like an isolated and insignificant event, was something that was planned from eternity. We have seen this in the life of Abraham. Now we see it in the Christmas story! Jesus was born in a manger. Shepherds and wise men came to worship him. The fullness of times goes beyond the little town of Bethlehem, goes beyond the manger, and the silent night. It reaches back to eternity past, and stretches to eternity future, and arrests us now in this moment, and lets us know that God has something for you and right now! Are we open to it?

From our family to yours, be blessed this Advent season with a renewed expectation that our Lord has something fresh for us this Christmas.

Shalom.

Jonothan Christie

(Jonothan Christie)

Christmas – A Personal Promise

by Dr Charles F. Stanley

What do you consider most significant about Christmas?

Many people would say visiting with relatives, attending parties, or giving and receiving gifts.

For believers, Christmas is far more than a December holiday with time off from work. It is a personal promise from God to mankind.

The significance of this special day is embodied in two scriptural names.

In the first chapter of Matthew, an angel of the Lord told Joseph that Mary, his fiancée, would bear a son conceived of the Holy Spirit. He instructed Joseph to name the child "Jesus" (*verse 21*). He also announced that the birth would fulfill Isaiah's prophecy: "They shall call His name 'Immanuel', which translated means 'God with us'" (*verse 23*, referring to I*saiah 7:14*).

Let's examine the two names in this passage – Jesus and Immanuel.

The name "Jesus" is a transliteration of the Old Testament Hebrew word Joshua, meaning "the Lord is salvation." When the angel said, "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (*verse 21*), he was pointing to the significance of that original Christmas: God provided a solution for your sin and mine, as well as for the sin of the entire world – past, present, and future.

Seven hundred years before Christ's birth, Isaiah's prophecy was a word of hope and encouragement to Judah as it faced a great crisis. The prophet's message was an indication of what God was about to do then as well as what would ultimately be fulfilled in the Messiah's advent.

Immanuel, a name full of promise, was God's way of assuring the Old Testament saints that He was with them. Taken together, these two names encompass what we need for our entire life: Jesus, the pardoner of our sins, and Immanuel, the divine presence within us to help and guide every moment of every day. The names and the promises in them are the foundation for every facet of Christian life.

So how did God engineer that first Christmas to fulfil the promises of Jesus and Immanuel?

His method was the incarnation. On the night Christ was born, the eternal God – motivated by love – entered the human family. He was supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit and physically born of a virgin. Jesus never ceased to be God, and He remained perfectly sinless in His being.

If the incarnation hadn't taken place exactly as it did, then we would still be living in our sin. According to Scripture, the punishment for sin is death (*Romans 6:23*). The Bible also says that God rejects any imperfect sacrifice (*Deuteronomy 17:1*). Jesus, because of His absolute sinlessness, is the only one who could save us by offering Himself as a payment for our sin debt. Apart from the birth of God in human flesh, every one of us would have to stand before God with all of our sin resting upon us, and our sins would separate us from Him (*Isaiah 59:2*).

So the incarnation is the promise of Jesus – "the Lord is salvation" – for every person in the world.

But that was not the full extent of God's awesome plan. He also promised us His presence, which was fulfilled in the birth of Immanuel. Jesus was "God with us," the incarnate Deity, who physically lived and walked among men to show us what the heavenly Father is like.

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FROM THE TRUSTEES

Dear Faith Readers,

It is a cooler day here in Durban, after the relentless heat of the past three months – perhaps a reminder of the effects of global warming.

In 2006, Mr Neville Parathyras offered his services to Faith for Daily Living, assisting in the compilation of eBooks in various formats. Neville had a deep passion for serving his Lord, and over the years he faithfully prepared these eBooks for our readers. It is remarkable how God equips His servants long before we recognize the need. With the decline of the postal service in South Africa and an increasing number of readers across the world engaging with our devotions, this ministry has grown exponentially. The format of "the little book" has also developed over time to meet these changing needs. Neville was called home on 16 March 2026. We give thanks to God for the life of Neville, and for his commitment and dedication as a faithful disciple of Christ.

We are deeply grateful for all the donations and bequests we have received. Through your generosity, we are able to continue distributing "the little book." As you reflect on how it has blessed you over the years, we invite you to consider supporting Faith for Daily Living with a donation.

May you be filled with the wonder of Mary,
the obedience of Joseph,
the joy of the angels,
the eagerness of the shepherds,
the determination of the Magi,
and the peace of the Christ Child.
Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – bless you now and forever.
Amen.

A blessed Christmas and New Year to you and your family.
Ingrid
Trustee and Administrator

Sunday 1st November

PRAYER AND DEPENDENCE

"Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the Lord had made his journey successful."

Genesis 24:21 NIV

The servant's prayer is a key element of *Genesis 24*. From the beginning of his mission, he acknowledges that success depends entirely on the Lord's guidance. His prayer at the well reflects his trust in the Lord's ability to lead him to the right person, and his response of worship after the Lord answers his prayer underscores the importance of giving thanks to the Lord for His guidance: "Then the man bowed down and worshiped the LORD, saying, 'Praise be to the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the LORD has led me on the journey to the house of my master's relatives'" (*Genesis 24:26-27*). These verses teach us so much about the importance of prayer, particularly in seeking the Lord's will in major life decisions. The servant's attitude of dependence on the Lord serves as an example of how we are called to trust God fully and to seek His guidance in all things. *Proverbs 3:5-6*, reminds us, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight". What is our response after seeing our Lord's hand at work in our lives and situations? Do we take time in giving thanks and acknowledging the Lord's faithfulness? For our Lord is faithful and He does answer our prayers in ways we could never think of or imagine.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with thanksgiving for Your faithfulness.

Monday 2nd November

WILLINGNESS AND OBEDIENCE

So they called Rebekah and asked her, "Will you go with this man?" "I will go," she said. *Genesis 24:58 NIV*

Rebekah's willingness to marry Isaac is a significant aspect of the story. After hearing the servant's explanation of his mission and the divine guidance he received, Rebekah and her family agree that this is the Lord's will: "Laban and Bethuel answered, 'This is from the Lord; we can say nothing to you one way or the other. Here is Rebekah; take her and go and let her become the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has directed.'" (*Genesis 24:50-51*). Rebekah's readiness to leave her home and travel to a distant land reflects her faith and obedience to the Lord's plan. Like Abraham, she steps out in faith, trusting that the Lord's will is best. This willingness to obey the Lord's leading, even when it involves sacrifice or uncertainty, is a powerful example of faith in action. Rebekah's example calls us to be open to our Lord's leading, willing to step out in faith when He calls us to new places or roles. We are called to trust in the Lord's plan, even when it involves sacrifice or uncertainty. The Lord's orchestration of events in *Genesis 24* reminds us that He is in control of all circumstances. We are called to trust in God's providence and recognize His hand at work in our lives, especially in moments of uncertainty or challenge. We are reminded again and again of our Lord's love and care for His people, as He provides for our needs and directs our paths. Ultimately, His love is fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ, the descendant of Isaac and Rebekah, who brings salvation to the world.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Holy Spirit, give us willing and obedient hearts to trust our Lord.

Tuesday 3rd November

THE END OF A PILGRIMAGE

"Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people."

Genesis 25:7,8 NIV

Genesis 25:1-18, deals with the end of Abraham's life. Abraham's pilgrimage has come to an end. Death comes to us all. We all end our pilgrimage upon this earth. When that day comes only one thing matters, the same thing that mattered to Abraham: What kind of life have we lived? A life that believed the Lord? Or a life that ignored Him? A life that trusted in God's promise, the promise of the promised seed, the Saviour of the world, Jesus Christ? Or a life that rejected the promised Seed and Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ? A life that followed after the promised land, for Abraham, and for us the hope of heaven. Or a life that followed the world and its possessions, bright lights, and pleasures? A life that obeyed the Lord's Word? Or a life that disobeyed His Word? Abraham's life was a difficult and hard life. Abraham had faced trial after trial. He sometimes stood tall and conquered the trials, bearing a strong testimony for the Lord and His promises. However, Abraham sometimes crumbled under the weight of some terrible trial and failed the Lord. But he always confessed his failure and repented. He always turned back to the Lord, following Him more diligently and closely than ever. He had a long and difficult pilgrimage to travel throughout life, but he believed the Lord and followed Him, and the Lord blessed him for it. This filled Abraham with a deep sense of fulfilment and satisfaction in life. May it be true of us.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord let our lives be lived with a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction.

Wednesday 4th November

GROWING IN SPIRITUAL MATURITY

"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ." *Ephesians 4:15 NIV*

Our pilgrimage with Abraham has reminded us that our Christian life is a journey, in which we can identify several milestones, or stages of growth we need to reach on route to spiritual maturity. The first two are salvation and service. We all begin our journey in the same place, spiritually dead and uninterested in what matters to the Lord. There's only one way to receive spiritual life and that's through faith in Jesus Christ. He took our place and bore God's judgment for our sins. He died so that we might become spiritually alive. At salvation, we receive the Holy Spirit, who creates in us a desire to know the Father and His Son Jesus. As we learn more about Him, our faith will deepen and our hearts will swell with thanksgiving. Gratitude will lead us to the next step on our journey, serving Him. We'll desire to give something back to our Lord in appreciation for His generosity. We now ask the Lord what His plans are, as did Abraham's servant. How we can join Him. As His children, we're to listen attentively for His call and focus our minds and hearts on obeying. Growth is a key principle in our lives. Today's verse speaks of growth. Spiritual maturity begins with salvation and followed by a lifelong commitment to being God's servant, as with the life of Abraham. Have you dedicated yourself to serving Him?

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, we dedicate ourselves in growing in spiritual maturity.

Thursday 5th November

GROWING IN STAGES

"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." *Colossians 3:1 NIV*

Just as Abraham went through stages of spiritual growth, so do we. The Holy Spirit will lead us through stages that promote Christian maturity. Beginning with salvation, leading to service, dependence, and the exchanged life. While spiritual growth takes place at different rates and in different ways, all of us are on the same journey with one goal, transformation into Christ's image. Dependence on the Lord, is an important part of spiritual maturity, is learned as we serve Him. As we serve our Lord, our own inadequacies will frustrate us, and we will be tempted to give up. Or we may find ourselves falling back into ungodly habits, even though we don't want that to happen (*Romans 7:19*). A key lesson in this stage is to relinquish control and allow the Holy Spirit to direct and help us, in other words, to live by faith and not by sight (*2 Corinthians 5:7*). Whenever we struggle, we're to turn toward the Lord in dependence upon Him. At the same time, when we study His Word, our minds will be redirected to think biblically. Then we can accept God's truth and leave behind messages we've taken in from our upbringing and culture that do not match His perspective. The final stage is what's known as the exchanged life. We embrace the truth that the only way to live the Christian life is to let the Holy Spirit live Christ's life through us. Spiritual growth requires our cooperation. How willing are we to grow?

PRAYER THOUGHT

Holy Spirit, work within us a willing spirit to grow in Christ.

Friday 6th November

MATURITY ISN'T AUTOMATIC

"See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction." *Isaiah 48:10 NIV*

The world's way is to choose the strongest, most talented individuals to accomplish tasks. In contrast, the Lord often selects the weakest, who have nothing to offer except total reliance upon Him. And this dependency is what characterizes the mature in faith. Such maturity isn't automatic. Our Father patiently meets us where we are but lovingly refuses to let us stagnate. Instead, He helps us to grow more like His Son (*2 Corinthians 3:18*). As followers of Christ, we must let go of old ways, ideas, and motivations. The Holy Spirit illuminates our understanding and lets us see from God's perspective. Then, the Lord can build in us a dependence on Himself and a submission to His Spirit. Transformation is often gradual, but God sometimes will allow difficulty and pain to develop our reliance upon Him. We have studied Sarah and Abraham, who dealt with infertility for many years prior to receiving the promised child (*Genesis 21:1-2*). Joseph was sold into slavery and wrongly imprisoned before he spared his nation from the effects of famine (*Genesis 45:5*). In her new role as Jesus' mother, Mary, who had been falsely regarded as an adulteress, followed the Lord's inconvenient command to flee areas of danger (*Matthew 2:13, 22*). These people all faced hardship and brokenness, which allowed them to recognize both their own inability and God's ability. What's standing in your way of full submission to the Lord? His desire is to grow us into maturity so that in our weakness, He will be strong.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, thank you for Your desire for us to grow into maturity.

Saturday 7th November

CALLED TO SERVE

"Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – ." *Matthew 20:26,27 NIV*

As Christians, we are identified by a variety of names in the Bible, such as believers, and saints, but one title we seldom call ourselves is "servants of Christ." However, that is exactly what the Lord tells us to be. After His disciples wrestled about who was the greatest, Jesus turned their worldly thinking upside down with a call to become great in the kingdom by being a servant of all. Jesus is not just our Saviour but also our Lord and Master, and we have a responsibility to follow His example. Just as He served His Father by caring for people, so we serve our Lord by lovingly meeting the temporal and spiritual needs of those around us. Service is essential for spiritual growth. Our Lord is continually at work in our lives, transforming our characters into the image of Jesus. A major hindrance in this process is self-centeredness. Serving others is one of the tools that the Lord uses to set us free from the slavery of selfishness. Service is required to achieve His purpose for our lives. He has designed specific works for each of us to accomplish in our lifetime (*Ephesians 2:10*). If we only take in and never give out, we will miss much of what He has planned for us. Let us never forget that we have a high calling which is realized only by lowering ourselves to the level of a servant. Let us look for the opportunities that our Lord will give us today to serve someone. Let us take our place alongside Jesus, who was the ultimate servant of all.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord Jesus, we take our place alongside You, the ultimate Servant.

Sunday 8th November

EQUIPPED TO SERVE

"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." *1 Peter 4:10 NIV*

Our Lord has given an amazing responsibility to those whom He has saved. He has called us to be His servants and accomplish His work here on earth. Just think about how remarkable this is: Almighty God, who needs nothing and can do all things, invites us to share in all that He is doing to draw people to Himself, to bring His children to spiritual maturity, and to care for those in need. Being a servant of the Lord requires that we put ourselves under His authority, listen to His instructions, and carry out His commands. In our own strength, this task is beyond our abilities, but when we are walking obediently with Him, He supplies all that we need. The Father never gives assignments for which He will not equip His children. He begins by developing Christlike character within us. Then, as we cooperate with His Spirit, God transforms a self-centred heart into the heart of a servant who delights in meeting the needs of others. To further enable us to do His work, He gives us spiritual gifts which are to be used for the benefit of others. The Holy Spirit gives each of us the exact gift needed for serving in the specific work our Lord has appointed for us. The invitation is issued; the strength and ability are provided. All that is needed are willing servants to participate in the most exciting adventure on earth. Join with the Lord in His work, use your spiritual gifts, and make an impact for Christ in this world.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord Jesus, we accept Your invitation in touching the world.

Monday 9th November

HIS PROMISES

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful." *Hebrews 10:23 NIV*

It's sad to say, the world we live in frequently places little value on words. We've seen politicians retract campaign commitments once they take office. People swear to tell the truth in court, but nonetheless, some resort to falsehoods for self-preservation. It's difficult to know whom we can trust. Thankfully, there is One who keeps His word and never changes. As today's verse tells us, "HE who promised is faithful." Since we can be confident that the Lord will do what He says, we should familiarize ourselves with His promises. Scripture is filled with them. For instance, Jesus gave His disciples this assurance: "In my Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you" (*John 14:2*). *Hebrews 13:5* guarantees, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you." Why does the Lord make promises? One reason is that they reveal His character. For example, His assurance to stay with us shows His love. And He carries out every commitment He makes, His power and sovereignty become evident. Second, His fulfilled promises bring Him glory by letting others see His goodness and dependability. Finally, His clear promises offer us hope and comfort during hardship. In a changing world where vows are often broken, it's reassuring that we serve a Living Lord who keeps His word. Think about the hope His promises provide and praise Him for the way they reveal His character.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, we thank You for Your promises that provide us with Hope.

Tuesday 10th November

CLAIMING HIS PROMISES

"We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised."
Hebrews 6:12 NIV

Sarah was 90 years old when the Lord told her husband, "I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her" (*Genesis 17:16*). Abraham considered this so unlikely that he laughed! But God was faithful to His word. Yet some people become discouraged because they fail to see results after asking for His assurance. We can avoid frustration by understanding how Scripture teaches us to claim His promises. First, be aware that some promises are limited to a certain situation. The Lord told Abraham he would have a son. *Genesis 17:16* is not a promise we can claim for ourselves, as it was meant specifically for the Jewish patriarch. Second, many promises are intended for all believers, such as God's assurance that He'll never leave us (*Hebrews 13:5*). Third, some promises are conditional. For example, the guarantee of *Psalm 37:4* requires obedience: "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." When evaluating a biblical promise, we should ask ourselves: Am I asking for this promise with a spirit of submission to the will of the Lord? Might an answer to my petition harm another person or interfere with His will for their life? Does the Holy Spirit bear witness to my spirit that the Lord is pleased by my request? Does it contradict the Word of God? Will my desire further my spiritual growth if we claim the Lord's promises with a right spirit and pure motives, we will honour Him, receive what we ask, and grow in intimacy with our loving Father.

PRAYER THOUGHT
Holy Spirit, guide us as we claim the promises of our Lord.

Wednesday 11th November

THREE ANSWERS

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." *Matthew 7:7-8 NIV*

Too often, we can view the Lord as a great cosmic Santa Claus in the sky: we think of our prayers not as petitions, but as demands. If He does not grant our request, we're thrown into a faith crisis, believing He no longer answers us. The real problem, however, is that we misunderstand the Lord's three answers to prayer. **Yes.** We love this response! There's nothing more exhilarating or faith-inspiring than watching the Lord move mountains to provide what we once saw as impossible. **No**. Here is where the problems begin for us. But we must accept the fact that God says "**no**" to some of our requests. This is certainly not because He's uncaring, on the contrary, He is generous, loving, and concerned about us. **No**, means that He doesn't agree to things He knows are wrong for us. **Wait**. This answer can be even harder than a flat-out "**no**." Yet some things that are good and right and godly may still be wrong for us today. Remember, He is eternal; He sees all time at the same time. If He regards tomorrow's blessing as a curse today, He'll withhold it for a season until we're ready to receive it. Let us not be misled if His response is not what we expected. Let us praise the Lord for answering our requests the way He knows they should be answered!

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, we praise You for answering our requests in the best way You know.

Thursday 12th November

GROW!

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen."

2 Peter 3:18 NIV

Just like us, the early church faced many trials and heartaches. Persecution of Christians was ever on the increase. In writing to the churches, Peter admonished believers to be diligent in their faith and secure in the peace of God. But how can we be peaceful in restless times? How can we remain hopeful when injustice is increasing? The answer is found by looking at the object of our affection. What gets most of our attention? If our mental focus is set on the difficulty of our circumstances, then more than likely we will struggle with maintaining a good attitude and an awareness of God's presence. But if our attention is centred on Christ and the promises He provides in His Word, then we will experience a residing peace that lingers deep inside. Perhaps your life has gotten off course. You find yourself complaining to the Lord and wishing you were in a different set of circumstances. The Lord has a plan for you right where you are. The Christian life is a process. We learn as we grow through life's difficulties, and the Lord uses each one to teach us more about His faithful love and care. If you have drifted in your devotion toward Him, go to Him in prayer and confess your wayward attitude. Then ask Him to restore the sweetness and joy of the fellowship you once shared with Him.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, teach us to focus on You in our difficulties, and grow in our faith.

Friday 13th November

DON'T GIVE UP!

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." *Hebrews 12:1 NIV*

Sometimes our life seems like a long, dark tunnel. Perhaps we are unable to discover a solution for a problem, or we cannot find relief from pain. Regardless of the direction we turn, we find no hope for anything better than our present circumstances. Thankfully, we serve a wonderful Lord who feels our pain and knows our limitations first-hand. Jesus Christ walked through the valley of the shadow of death and cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (*Mark 15:34*). This means that when our faith is stretched to the breaking point, our strength is exhausted, and our dreams are broken like shattered glass, Jesus understands. He asks us to hold out when everything in us screams to give up. Giving up means abandoning the Lord's help for our own puny strength. We try to manipulate a situation or simply avoid pain. In essence, we're choosing to believe that Satan in his worldly power is stronger than Christ within us, which is the exact opposite of what the Bible says is true (*1 John 4:4*). Of course, the Devil is not more powerful, but we let him win a battle if we give up on the assurance that the Lord will see us through the difficulty. Even when we cannot detect His involvement, He is working every moment on our problem. Our Father knows our hurt, and He will bring us through that dark tunnel. Do not give up before reaching His blessing.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, we will not give up before reaching Your blessing.

Saturday 14th November

RESIST THE URGE!

"By faith he [Moses] left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw Him who is invisible."

Hebrews 11:27 NIV

Winston Churchill, the United Kingdom's Prime Minister during World War II, included a now-famous quote in a speech to students of his former school: "Never give in - never, never, never, never, in nothing great or small, large or petty... Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the *enemy*." As followers of Jesus, we are called to wait on God until He acts on our behalf. To resist the urge to give up, we must not focus on our circumstances. *Hebrews 11:27* says that Moses endured his trials "he saw Him who is invisible." He consistently looked to the Lord and His will. Standing on the shore of the Red Sea while the Egyptians prepared an attack, Moses clung to the Lord's promise of protection and called out, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD" (*Exodus 14:13*). The sea parted and the Israelites escaped what seemed to be an impossible situation. Moses triumphed over many dangerous and difficult situations because he was committed to doing the Lord's work. Too often we are devoted to pleasure, comfort, or our "rights." When the Lord's will interferes with those priorities, we falter. But a genuine commitment to God with no exceptions means nothing can induce us to give up. Our unchanging Lord never deserts His children; He encourages us to cast our cares on Him (*Hebrews 13:5, 8; 1 Peter 5:7*). These beautiful assurances are ours to claim when we are tempted to quit. Put your faith in Him, cling to His promises, and commit to His way. Never give up!

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, we cling to Your promises and commit our ways to You.

Sunday 15th November

DON'T BE SURPRISED!

"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you." *1 Peter 4:12 NIV*

Some days we feel as if our faith is on trial and Satan is running a cross-examination that challenges our confidence in our Lord. But the only important question is this: Are We going to believe what the Lord says, no matter what He allows into our lives? The heavenly Father always has a purpose for testing believers' faith. He stretches us so that we will have a greater capacity to serve Him. Though we may sometimes feel we are at our limit, the process occurs gently, like stretching a new rubber band a little at a time. With each extension, we can accomplish more for His glory. It is often easy to trust God for certain things more than others, but He desires our complete dependence, regardless of the situation. That is why He will test us in the same area repeatedly until we can successfully bear up under the pressure. Afterward, we will be able to testify to non-Christians about what the Bible says and about our own experience of divine help in dark valleys. We will taste both success and failure as our faith is in the process of growing. The disciple Peter had a share of both. But each time the Lord stretched him, his capacity for service became greater. In the book of Acts, it is Peter who fearlessly preaches at Pentecost and heals a lame man without a shred of doubt. (*Acts 2:14-36; 3:1-7*) Our faith will be put on trial. If we are wise believers, we will respond by trusting God to stretch and develop our conviction until we are the men and women, He desires us to be.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, we trust You even in the stretching of our faith.

Monday 16th November

QUESTIONS?

"And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."

1 Peter 5:10 NIV

A good reporter asks six basic questions when investigating a story: Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How? About growing faith, we already know the answer to some of those questions. Our Lord builds our trust anywhere and anytime. Faith trials draw our attention to Him. Sometimes worldly pursuits coax us to drift away from Jesus. If we encounter a situation for which we have no solution, our wandering focus snaps back to Him as we begin to pray and look for a way out of the trial. Faith trials, also teach endurance. We develop the stamina to bear up under heavy loads without discouragement because we trust that our Lord will see us through. He increases our capacity by applying slight pressure. When we prove we can handle a little, He adds more, constantly working on our witness till we shine like gold. This trains us for higher service. We must endure and keep our attention on Him so that we are prepared to work anywhere in His kingdom. He designs opportunities for every believer, shifting us to greater areas of service as we grow in faith. Our faith trials glorify the Lord. The greatest praise we can give to our heavenly Father is to walk hopefully through a dark valley. We are a living example of His faithfulness and trustworthiness for everyone to see. As our faith increases, others witness the reality of Jesus in our lives. We also benefit personally by having greater confidence and anticipation of His blessing.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, let our faith in You, through our valleys lead others to You.

Tuesday 17th November

REFINED!

"These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed." *1 Peter 1:7 NIV*

Our tested faith is more precious than perishable gold. People are often impoverished by the quest for gold, but faith can only enrich a person. While money may temporarily appease one's greed, trust in Jesus forever satisfies the soul. Gold doesn't begin its life as the pure, shiny material we see in jewellery. Instead, miners drag out hunks of dirty metal with bits of black running throughout. Before a piece of gold can become a beautiful necklace or a perfectly shaped coin, it must be refined by fire and crafted with tools. In the same way, our Lord allows trials into our lives to shape us. His goal is to transform us into the likeness of Jesus Christ. He uses many tools in His transforming work - disappointment, broken relationships, illness, and financial problems are a few. He always chooses the device that will build our faith in the area He is focused upon. Unlike inanimate gold, we have a choice to accept or reject His work. We can whine, resist, and give up without making any changes. But let this be fair warning: He will return repeatedly to a faith area that needs His attention until we finally submit. He loves us too much to leave us in our imperfect condition. Our faith is precious to our Lord. Though His work is sometimes painful, He will never challenge us beyond what we can stand. (*1 Corinthians 10:13*) Through the refining fire and shaping process, the Master Craftsman holds us closely.

PRAYER THOUGHT
Lord, thank You for holding us closely even in the refining process.

Wednesday 18th November

FIRM FEET!

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" *Isaiah 52:7 NIV*

When was the last time that you had a Bible study on the topic of feet? Maybe, you haven't ever had such a lesson. In fact, you might even be squeamish at the thought of focusing on feet! The apostle Paul, however, was not. He made feet a focal point of one of his most powerful messages. The discussion in *Ephesians 6:10-18* about the armour of God. Four times in four verses in *Ephesians 6*, (*verses 11-14 NIV*), Paul declares the purpose of the armour. The value in putting it on piece by piece-lies in its ability to help us "stand," "stand against the devil's schemes," "stand [our] ground," and "stand firm." Paul's list of armour would not be complete without the sandals of peace mentioned in *verse 15*. Clearly, he was concerned with our feet! The Roman soldier's sandals had an often-overlooked feature: a long spike at the heel of the shoe. Its purpose was to allow the warrior to plant his feet firmly in the ground when an opponent approached. With his feet secured in this way, the soldier had an obvious advantage: he would be able to stand his ground. This part of his uniform enabled him to keep his footing even as he faced the danger. That is precisely what the heavenly Father wants for every one of His children: the ability to stand firm in the face of troubles. This is possible, however, only when we plant our feet on a firm foundation, the foundation of faith in Jesus Christ. Is your faith well grounded?

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord Jesus may our feet be firmly grounded in You alone.

Thursday 19th November

FAITH GIVES FEET ....

"By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son." *Hebrews 11:17 NIV*

People put their trust in different things. Some place faith in the Lord, others trust in themselves or another person. Faith can even be placed in relationships, money, or politics. Anytime we put absolute trust in something, we demonstrate faith. So, the question isn't, do we have any faith? but rather, in what have we placed our faith? Looking at that question honestly will shake up our assumptions about our spiritual life. An old saying explains, "Faith gives feet to belief." Simply put, this means that faith is the active expression of what we believe about the Lord. If we have the idea that He sits in some far-off place called "heaven" and only half-heartedly listens to our prayers, then that will reveal itself in our day-to-day walk of faith. Our Lord will seem small, powerless, and disinterested. The result will be a string of seemingly unanswered prayers and a general sense of defeat. If, on the other hand, we believe that He is right beside us, whispering in our ear, pouring out His Holy Spirit upon us, that He is intimately familiar and concerned with the minute detail of our lives, then such a belief will impact our faith walk. Prayer will be a joyful exchange between cherished friends, and the evidence of our heavenly Father's miraculous power will become commonplace in our daily lives. Weak faith says, "The Lord can." Great faith says, "The Lord will." But perfect faith, godly faith, says, "It's done." Our faith is our testimony. What does our faith say about the Lord?

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, let my faith in You testify that You are wonderful and great.

Friday 20th November

SANDCASTLES

"Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock." *Matthew 7:24 NIV*

Did you ever see an elaborate, masterfully crafted sandcastle? That's one of the most delightful experiences of a trip to the beach; you get to see some beautiful works of art in an unusual form. The best builders are painstaking in every little detail. The results are often stunning. There's a catch, however. For all its splendour, a sandcastle's hours are numbered. From the moment the first grain of sand is set in place, you can be sure that the miniature building is on its way to oblivion. Within hours, the details are destroyed. Wind, rain, the tide, and overanxious spectators can wreck in seconds what took hours to create. There is simply no future for a house of sand. Sometimes our faith is like a sandcastle. Even though everything looks perfect on the outside, the slightest nudge from the elements can bring the whole thing crashing down. An unexpected hardship, an unkind word from a friend, a health or financial crisis and faith turns to rubble. How can that be possible? Weak foundations produce weak faith. If our life of faith is centred around church attendance, ministry work, discipleship programs, and other seemingly "good" things, then our sandcastle is on its way down. Only a faith built on the rock-solid foundation of Jesus Christ and Christ alone, can withstand the winds of adversity.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, we build our faith on the solid Rock of who You are.

Saturday 21st November

RIGHT FOUNDATION STONES

"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail." *Lamentations 3:22 NIV*

Building a strong faith means having the right foundation stones. Stone 1 – Faith must be built around the simple confession that the Lord is real - that He exists and is indeed the Lord. Stone 2 – Not only is He real, but He is intimately concerned with our lives and wants to engage in a relationship with us. Stone 3 – We never have to wonder whether He will treat us fairly. His justice is perfect - even when He pours out His loving discipline. Stone 4 – He knows our heart, our pain, and our questions. We cannot shock or surprise Him. Stone 5 – We never have to wonder where He is; in truth, we cannot escape Him. Wherever we are, whatever we're doing, He is right by our side. Stone 6 – There is nothing greater than our Lord. No matter how enormous the challenges and heartaches in our lives seem to be, we can overcome them in His power. Stone 6 – He is utterly and completely dependable. Stone 7 – This last stone is as His children we know that we can always count on Him for the others. No matter how far we stray, He remains at our side. Regardless of what we have done, He will always welcome us home. Let these stones be our prayer guide, laying a solid foundation in our faith in our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, thank You for giving us amazing foundation stones for our faith.

Sunday 22nd November

PRAYING IN FAITH

"Have faith in God," Jesus answered. *Mark 11:22 NIV*

Have you ever, even subconsciously, accused the Lord of not answering your prayers? When we face a troubling time in which He doesn't seem to respond to our petitions, the first thing we should do is take a good look at the message of our prayer. Are we truly praying in faith, trusting our heavenly Father to work a miracle, or are we simply complaining to Him about everything that has gone wrong? Think about whether you have prayed like this: "Oh Lord, the situation at my workplace is just terrible. My co-worker shouldn't treat me in this manner. I go out of my way to help him, but he just walks all over me. I never get any appreciation. I never get any recognition for what I do. I never get what I deserve. I, I, I. . . me, me." Sound familiar? We've most likely prayed such a prayer at some point. When we have, we no doubt found that this kind of praying does not bring about miraculous, sweeping change. Why is that? The answer is in the focus, which in this case is "self." So, what would be the object of faith in this prayer? "Self." That's not the prayer of faith that the Lord Jesus told us about. Praying in faith means earnestly seeking the Lord's wisdom and power for our lives. It means laying down any claims we have, any personal motivations and complaints, and surrendering ourselves fully to whatever He has for us. When we move ourselves out of the way, we give the Lord room to manoeuvre. That's when we'll see His power displayed.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, as I pray in faith, teach me to keep my focus on who You are.

Monday 23rd November

INCREASED FAITH

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

Luke 17:5 NIV

The context of today's verse gives a wonderful exchange between Jesus and His disciples. The Lord made two statements that completely shocked His disciples. In response, they offered only one exclamation: "Increase our faith!" What were the two things that demanded a greater level of personal faithfulness? First, Jesus warned them that hardships would surely come. In this life, there is no escape from the sorrows of the world. Many Christians are shocked to discover that faith in Christ does not eradicate all adversity in their lives. Jesus never guaranteed a trouble-free life; in fact, He promised just the opposite. (*John 16:33*) It is a reality that we are to experience heartaches and disappointments at various times. Second, Jesus commands total willingness to forgive others: "If your brother . . . repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him" (*Luke 17:3-4*). The "seven times a day" language is an illustration of persistent forgiveness. It is the model by which we are called to live our lives. Christ's forgiveness is limitless. As His followers, who are indwelt by His Spirit, we should strive for that same level of grace in our interactions with others. Hearing these high ideals, the disciples could make no other comment than "Increase our faith!" They knew the Christian life was beyond their own power; therefore, they asked Jesus to empower them to meet His standard. Are you prepared to make that same request to the Lord today?

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, strengthen our faith in You to live out all You have taught us.

Tuesday 24th November

INCREASING OUR FAITH

"We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing."

2 Thessalonians 1:3 NIV

What are some practical steps we can take to increase our level of faith? Read the Bible. *Romans 10:17* explains, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." Feeding our faith with a steady diet of God's Word. Exercise your faith. An aspiring bodybuilder doesn't begin by lifting huge weights on the first day. Rather, they exercise daily, gradually increasing their strength. Regularly exercising faith can bring about similar growth spiritually. Embrace trials. *1 Peter 1:3-9* reveals a shocking truth that adversity, addressed in God's power, creates greater faith. Just as a fire purifies precious metals, hardship strips away all but the pure core of faith. Examine the testimonies of others. An individual's testimony is their own account of God's activity in their lives. When we hear of God's mighty deeds in someone else's life, our own faith in Him grows. Pray. We get to know someone by talking to him. That's just what prayer is: our personal communication with the Lord. Don't just talk; be sure to spend time listening. He wants to speak to us. Practice obedience. We will never grow in our faith if we consistently disobey what the Lord tells us to do. Perfect faith is a byproduct of obedience. As we put ourselves in a position to see the Lord's best for our lives, our faith will soar. Faith does not increase by accident. Growth takes time, dedication, and intentionality. Ask the Lord to help you exercise your faith today.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Holy Spirit, thank You for helping us to grow in our faith.

Wednesday 25th November

HIS WILL

"You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised."

Hebrews 10:36 NIV

Before Creation, the Lord ordained Jesus' coming to earth, His death on the cross, and our redemption. He also planned work for each of us to do, which is for our good and His glory. (*Ephesians 2:10*) To accomplish His plans, He equips us with different spiritual gifts. He also provides the Holy Spirit to help us understand and follow His moral and personal will for us. Through His moral will, which applies to all of us, He gives us clear requirements for living life that honours Him. These include proper sexual behaviour (*1 Thessalonians 4:3*), a thankful attitude (*1 Thessalonians 5:18*), a forgiving mindset (*Ephesians 4:32*), a servant's heart (*Galatians 5:13*), and involvement in a local church. (*Hebrews 10:25*) We need to pay attention to the commands and warnings of Scripture to know and obey the Lord's moral will. The Lord has also designed a personal will for every one of us that begins at birth. Our personality, abilities, vocation, marital status, and even lifespan are built into His plan. He sees each of us as having great value and willingly invests Himself in our lives through the indwelling Holy Spirit. He calls us to fulfil His personal will and commits Himself to working for our very best. His plan isn't derailed by difficult circumstances or even by our sinful behaviour. He is sovereign and weaves all factors together to accomplish what He has ordained. (*Romans 8:28*) He wants to direct our path each step of the way. (*Proverbs 3:5-6*) The question is: Are we seeking His guidance daily?

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, thank You that Your will for our lives is good, pleasing and perfect.

Thursday 26th November

THE COMING OF CHRIST

"But when the set time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship."

Galatians 4:4-5 NIV

Since creation, the Lord was orchestrating world affairs to set the stage for the arrival of His Son. In the meantime, He used prophecy to keep alive people's hope for a fresh beginning and a new relationship with Him. So many Messianic predictions are recorded in the Old Testament that the likelihood of one man fulfilling them all was slim. However, Jesus Christ's birth, life, and death happened exactly as the prophets foretold. Isaiah proclaimed, "Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name [God with us]" (*Isaiah 7:14*). Micah told the Jewish people their leader would come from the tiny town of Bethlehem. (*Micah 5:2*) The timing of Messiah's arrival was revealed to Daniel, who recorded the timeline in his writings. The Lord Himself gave a direct prophecy in *Genesis 3:15*. A careful comparison of Jesus' life with the prophecies of Scripture leads to only one conclusion: Jesus is the promised Messiah, who brings every willing person into a new covenant relationship with the Father. The hope of a coming Messiah sustained the Israelites through centuries of chaos and captivity. That messianic hope is still available in our day through the One who came, died, rose again, ascended to the right hand of the Father, for us. Those of us who have received Jesus Christ as Saviour have an unbreakable covenant relationship with His Father and the promise of eternity with Him. Do you have such a relationship with Jesus?

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, thank You for offering us an unbreakable covenant relationship.

Friday 27th November

THE LORD'S PLAN

"But when the set time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman." *Galatians 4:4 NIV*

With these simple words of today's text, the apostle Paul sums up much of the Old Testament. The fullness of time refers to all of God's preparations for sending Jesus Christ into the world to die for our sins. The Father's hand was organizing world events to bring about the most powerful incident ever. The story of Christ's coming is the story of human history. Pleased by Noah's faithfulness, God saved his family from the worldwide flood. That preserved the Messianic line through Shem. (*Genesis 7:13; Luke 3:23-38*) Later, after the Israelites made it to the Promised Land, they ended up losing it. Eventually the Persian king Cyrus defeated their Babylonian captors and allowed the Jewish people to rebuild Jerusalem. With Alexander the Great's conquest of the known world, the Greek language spread, giving people a common tongue. More time passed, and the Roman conquests ushered in a new era of peace. Traveling became easier as good roads were built, and the seas were safe to sail. Then, when the time was right, Jesus Christ was born. He would be crucified and resurrected. His Gospel could be shared in a common language and carried to faraway countries. Now, many centuries later, we can learn about a heavenly Father who loves us so much that He sent His precious Son to redeem us from our sins. God guided human history so we could be saved! This is the Good News we all need to be reminded of in the times in which we find ourselves.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, thank You for guiding human history so we can be saved by grace.

Saturday 28th November

THE PURPOSE OF JESUS

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them."
Matthew 5:*17* NIV

If we are living under grace, why is the Old Testament – the Law in particular – still part of our Bible? The reason is that the life and death of Jesus Christ fulfilled God's Law. Jesus was personally obedient. The Pharisees accused Christ of disobeying some of their man-made additions to the legal code. But He flawlessly followed Mosaic Law as given by His Father. This is an important distinction since Jesus cannot be called a holy and blameless sacrifice unless He was totally submissive to the Father. He died on the cross as a sacrifice. The Law clearly stated that death is the penalty for sin. (*Genesis 2:17*) But One who was perfect in keeping the Law could receive the punishment in place of one who sinned. That is exactly what Jesus Christ did for every believer. Through His death, He fulfilled the Law. Jesus also amplified His Father's moral law. Through His example and teachings, Jesus explained that the moral law was more than just a set of rules to follow. His Father's commands are guiding principles for a successful life. For example, the Israelites avoided adulterous acts to keep the seventh commandment. But in *Matthew 5:28*, the Lord said that someone who lusts after another person has already committed adultery in the heart. The life principle here is purity. Old Testament reading is essential for all believers today. We cannot truly understand the story of Jesus Christ until we become familiar with the Law He came to fulfil.

PRAYER THOUGHT
Lord Jesus, thank You for fulfilling Your Father's commands perfectly.

Sunday 29th November

THE REASON JESUS CAME

"I have revealed You to those whom You gave Me out of the world. They were Yours; You gave them to Me and they have obeyed Your word." *John 17:6 NIV*

Ask a churchgoer why Jesus came, and you will probably hear something based on *Luke 19:10*: "To seek and to save that which was lost." That's true. Jesus came like a shepherd to draw lost sheep into the fold. He renewed the relationship between His Father and those who believe in Him. But Jesus says His time on earth was meant to do even more: He came to reveal the true nature of His Father to humanity. We need to understand that revelation is progressive. Back in the Garden of Eden, knowledge of the Lord was like a little trickle. Later, Moses explained the Law so the Israelites would know what was expected of them. The trickle became a stream. When the prophets revealed more about the Lord, the stream widened into a river. Then came Jesus, the very embodiment of His Father. It was as if a dam broke on the sea of knowledge. Now, people were able to drink in full understanding of the Father. The New Testament is dedicated to teaching us about Jesus because He is our revelation of His Father. We do ourselves a terrible disservice when we neglect Bible reading. God, the Father's character is recorded for us so we can build a relationship with Him based on mutual love and commitment. Using the knowledge we glean from the Scriptures, we should honour our Lord, by growing in our faith and obeying His command to seek the lost.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, may we never stop growing in our faith and obeying You.

Monday 30th November

JESUS IN THE FATHER'S PLAN

"Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord." *Luke 2:11 NIV*

Jesus' genealogy may not seem like exciting reading, but the context of His lineage is important (*Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38*). The Bible delineates His family tree to reveal the Father's handiwork throughout history. Everything He had done from Eden to Bethlehem to Golgotha and beyond was planned. In the garden of Eden, disobedience ushered sin into the world, corrupting humanity's nature. The Father provided immediate as well as long-term solutions. He shed an animal's blood so that its skin might cover Adam and Eve's nakedness. In addition, He set into motion events that would culminate in His Son becoming the sacrificial Lamb of God. As part of His plan, the heavenly Father promised to bless humanity through Abraham's descendants (*Genesis 26:4*), a people whom He set apart to serve Him. Despite periods of enslavement, wandering, and exile, the Israelites grew into a prominent community with a radical belief in one God. Later, the Macedonian Empire's mandatory language (Greek) gave far-flung peoples a common tongue. Jews long separated from their homeland once again had access to Scripture, thanks to translation efforts. In another development, the Romans built 80,000 kms of highway, facilitating the gospel's distribution throughout the world. The timing of Jesus' birth was no accident. His ancestors' lives were woven into the redemption plan that culminated in Christ's triumph over death. His Father used both good and bad events to create the perfect environment for maximum impact. How has the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus impacted your life?

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord Jesus, thank You for having a life changing impact on my life.

Continued from page 7

Before His crucifixion, Jesus encouraged His disciples with the promise of God's indwelling presence. Christ said that when He went away, He would ask the Father to send the Spirit of truth, who "abides with you and will be in you" to teach, remind, comfort, and guide every step of the way (*John 14:17, 26*).

Far better than God simply being "with me" is God within me, for me, and through me! And that is His promise to every generation of believers – the incomparable, supernatural, immeasurable God will take up residence inside us and be everything we need. Once He lives within you, there will never be a time you have to walk without Him (*Hebrews 13:5*).

In light of the wonderful promise of God's redemption and presence, believers should be confident and courageous. We don't have a single need He can't satisfy.

How can we worry when the sovereign, almighty God is with us?

So this year, as you gather on Christmas morning, I encourage you and your family to kneel and give thanks to almighty God. The incarnation is the very essence of Christmas. There's nothing wrong with the gifts or festivities, as long as they don't crowd out what belongs in first place: Christmas is about God breaking into humanity, shattering time, and becoming life and hope and help to all mankind.



From the Hymnal

Hark! the herald-angels sing,
Glory to the new-born King,
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.
Joyful, all ye nations rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With the angelic host proclaim,
Christ is born in Bethlehem!

Refrain
Hark! the herald-angels sing,
Glory to the new-born King.

Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold Him come,
Offspring of a virgin's womb!
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail the incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with man to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel. **[Refrain]**

Mild he lays his glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give us second birth.
Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Risen with healing in His wings. **[Refrain]**

Charles Wesley 1707-1788

Methodist Hymn Book No 117

Tuesday 1st December

CHILDREN OF THE DAY

"But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness." *1 Thessalonians 5:4,5 NIV*

It is difficult to be an encourager and look outside our private world when the integrity of society is breaking apart before our very eyes. The challenge to stay positive when faced with tragedy, illness, and loss is overwhelming especially during Advent, when peace and goodwill are heralded from the mountaintops while so many are hopelessly struggling through the darkness of their valleys. Our quick fix is to insulate our minds from the distress and to blame others for our condition. We can deep-dive into our work, serving, or pleasure-seeking, but the pain is still present when we come up for air. These kinds of solutions only drive us farther away from Jesus who can give us His Light in this complicated puzzle we call life! Jesus entered our world of pain and sorrow to give His life for all to become His Father's children, "who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God" (*John 1:13*), giving us the power and clarity to encourage and strengthen one another. The birth, life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ empowers us and entitles us to put on the breastplate of righteousness, along with the helmet of salvation! By the grace of our Lord we are given new life and light to navigate through the darkness, confusion, and pain that blinds humanity!

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, we pray Your light will guide our steps filling our hearts with hope.

Wednesday 2nd December

OUR HELP AND DELIVERER

"But as for me, I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; You are my God, do not delay." *Psalm 40:17 NIV*

As much as I love Christmas music, the nostalgia of perfect Christmases past or images of a clean, sweet-smelling stable with fluffy sheep and silent nights, contrasts with the messy world into which Jesus came. Real life has many of us stuck in loneliness, stress, or the same old, same old and this is not healthy. We battle evils of apathy, entitlement, and pervading human meanness. We are constantly confronted with those who want to snatch away our lives with their expectations of perfection, or of all we "should" be, think, and do. We are also confronted with our own expectations of ourselves and others. Emmanuel, God-with-us, became flesh in Jesus to move into our messy lives, right where we are and with us as who we are. Jesus came to lead us out of those places where we find ourselves, to fight evil with His strength of love, and deliver us from all those who seek to steal life from us. Our Lord is present with us, right now, in this moment of living, whether we're in a muddy pit or standing on solid rock. The Incarnation didn't begin and end 2000+ years ago, nor is it only the means of gaining a seat in heaven someday. Jesus is with us now, in our neighbourhoods, neighbours, family, friends, even our enemies. With thanksgiving we sing songs to tell this world of our Lord's enduring, unconditional love and faithfulness. May we not restrain our lips or hide from proclaiming what we've learned about Jesus.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord Jesus, may we walk with You every ordinary day.

Thursday 3rd December

LIFT YOUR EYES

"You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins." *Psalm 85:2 NIV*

Psalm 85 begins where many hymns and prayers begin. The psalmist lists the many favours our Lord has poured on His people. We, in our own prayers, can easily identify with the psalmist's thankful heart. He speaks of the Lord's favour in the granting of the promised land and the establishment of a people who have been blessed despite their shortcomings and failures. This Lord is filled with forgiveness, so the psalmist acknowledges the many times in the past when the Lord has forgiven His people, and He is still willing to grant forgiveness. In view of the Lord's many past mercies, the psalmist pleads that the people of his day will hear the story of their failures and turn to their loving, forgiving Lord. I wonder whether, amid all that is happening in these days, anyone can "lift their eyes" to where we, as a people, have come from. When we have failed in being the Salt and Light that Jesus has called us to be, in our homes and communities. We need to be reminded that the call is greater than our failures. The call is to follow humbly in the steps of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Trusting that serving the needs of our communities and seeking for justice will lead to the path of peace rather than building walls of division and hatred. Is this a vain hope? NO! Advent reminds us, we have a living hope. Our Lord is among us, dwelling in our midst, through His indwelling Holy Spirit in our lives, for we are His temples, as individuals and as His Church. Today, will we allow the living hope of Advent to be a vain hope?

PRAYER THOUGHT

Instruct us, Lord, to proclaim the power of Your word of hope.

Friday 4th December

THANKSGIVING

"Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfil your vows to the Most High, and call on Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honour Me." *Psalm 50:14,15 NIV*

In *Psalm 50*, the Temple is the Lord's beacon of light shining for all to see. The Temple is high and therefore receives the light of the sun in the morning, as well as the evening's setting sun. Day and night, the Lord is a welcoming beacon of hope for all who go up to worship Him. For His presence is in His Temple. Like the ancient Hebrews, today the Lord judges His people, but not like the Gentiles, who do not know Him because they are not in a covenantal relationship with Him. He judges his people. He judges us, but we do not take kindly to His discipline. Judgment comes upon us who have ignored His teaching and whose lives do not glorify Him. The psalmist specifically mentions that it is our mouths which condemn us. It is our own dishonesty and slander that diminishes our Lord who calls for single-minded obedience to Him and a heart filled with thanksgiving. A rebuke is given because we have forgotten what it means to be filled with Thanksgiving toward the Lord. At this time of Advent, we are called to choose the way of thanksgiving. We are to call out to the Lord in these times in which we find ourselves. In each one of our own hearts, we are to turn away from disobedience and trust our Lord to deliver us to His goodness. We are to walk His pathway to give all glory to Him, not to humans, not to institutions, but only to Him, who alone is worthy of praise.

PRAYER THOUGHT

O Lord Jesus, as we celebrate Your birth remove all falsehood from us.

Saturday 5th December

PREPARATIONS

"Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place."

Matthew 21:33 NIV

Matthew 21:33-46 is a difficult reading for the first week of Advent! But let's stay with this text for a while! Some interesting similarities come into focus. Today we are the present caretakers of the Lord's vineyard. We are also planning for the annual celebration of the arrival of the Owner's most holy Son. While not planning to do Him harm, we busy ourselves with baking and shopping and decorating and, yes, even attending extra worship services. The question is: In our busyness, do we neglect to provide the proper welcome? This seemingly terrible parable provides an opportunity to pause during this Advent Season and consider the best ways in which we can prepare for the arrival of the Owner's Son. Perhaps a large dose of repentance should be added to the "to do" list this year. I wonder, do our preparations really provide the best welcome possible? How prepared are we to be stewards of all that our Lord has entrusted to us? How many times do we undermine our Lord's plan for the vineyard? Let us allow the Holy Spirit to guide our preparations during this Advent season that we may truly be prepared to celebrate the arrival of Jesus Christ, the Owner's Son.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Guide our preparations, Lord, in welcoming your Son.

Sunday 6th December

PRAISE

"Praise the Lord. Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty heavens. Praise Him for His acts of power; praise Him for His surpassing greatness." *Psalm 150:1,2 NIV*

We all come from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and need not think there is only one way to "praise the Lord in His holy temple." Some will praise the Lord dancing and clapping. Others will praise the Lord singing hymns from the 1500s. Some will praise the Lord with organ and choir, while others will praise with guitars and tambourines. The call of the psalmist is for everything that has breath to praise the LORD! While we spoke yesterday about Advent being a time of preparation, today we are reminded that it ought, also, to be a season of praise. Why do we sometimes forget to thank and praise the Lord? We are occupied and sometimes overwhelmed by the burdens of the day. We take our focus off Jesus Christ and turn our hearts toward Santa Claus, gift-giving and holiday socializing. We become distracted by the many things, ignoring the one thing: Our Lord and his mighty acts, and all that He has done for us, through the Birth, Life, Death, Resurrection, Ascension of His Son, our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ, and the outpouring of His empowering Holy Spirit on our lives. Let us not just praise the Lord only in His holy temple but let our whole lives be filled with praise and thanksgiving this Advent season, whenever and wherever we are. Let our every breath be praise to our Lord, who loves us and gave his only begotten Son for us! Let us begin each day with praise to our Lord!

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, You are worthy of our thanks and praise – all day, every day!

Monday 7th December

THE DAY OF THE LORD

"Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light." *Amos 5:18 NIV*

A worn-out old saying is, "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence." One may still find "Looking over the fence" is a form of escapism, and the belief that we should be able to find a "back door" away from our challenges and problems, without "finishing the race" set before us. For some, this "back door" becomes their relationship with the Lord. How many Facebook memes have you seen that promise that the Lord will miraculously fix your problems, answer all your prayers, or bring "deserved" wealth your way if you just "re-post this"? The prophet Amos says "No." When we choose a relationship with the living Lord, we accept His call along with His promises. This call is not to the latest in worship fads, contemporary, traditional, "laughing in the Spirit," contemplative, Pentecostal, or to hyper-generosity to sway the Lord's favour in our direction. The prophet warns that if we think following our Lord is a cure for everything we don't like, then we're in danger of, in the words of another old saying, leaping "from the frying pan into the fire." So where is the good news? First, we are called to lives that reveal the Lord's righteousness and justice in our daily living. Amos reminds us that we will find both God's presence and God's enabling power when we pursue His righteousness and justice. Jesus' birth brought together shepherds and kings. In this Advent season, may we shoulder afresh, with passion the call of the Lord to bring His rule and reign to our neighbour, our world, and even ourselves.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord of the call, open our eyes to see what You want us to do.

Tuesday 8th December

JOHN!

He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." *Luke 1:63 NIV*

Luke tells us that when Elizabeth gave birth, the villagers, family and neighbours alike, rejoiced. A delivery safe for both mother and child was not guaranteed, so a celebration was indeed warranted. Elizabeth and Zechariah were each well beyond the time in life when babies are usually conceived. This miraculous child was special cause for joy. The people assumed that this baby boy would be named "Zechariah," like his father. Take a moment to be a little surprised at that assumption: of course, "Zechariah" was the name of the infant's father. It is a name with deep Hebrew roots, it means "the LORD has remembered." But "Zechariah" is a name that casts its eyes backward, toward what has been. The LORD, however, was looking forward. Listen again to Gabriel's announcement to this baby's father inside the incense-filled Holy of Holies: "You will have a son," "he will be great," "he will be filled with the Holy Spirit," "he will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God," "he will . . . ," "he will . . . ." Would these villagers who gathered to celebrate fully recognize and eagerly embrace the new thing that the Lord was doing (see *Isaiah 43:18-19*)? Do we? "John" is the name that was pre-selected for this child. "John" is a name that lives in the present, looking forward into the future. It means, "the LORD is gracious." It is this John, himself a product of a miracle, who would proclaim the wonder of the LORD's new, loving act of salvation as he points us to Jesus, Emmanuel, the LORD is with us.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, grant us the grace to see the new ways in which You are working.

Wednesday 9th December

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord." *Psalm 122:1 NIV*

For the Old Testament Jew, worshiping with the Lord's people meant going to the temple. For us it means going to church. In our context this psalm begins with an invitation to church. Don't be shy about inviting someone to church. Many a church invitation has resulted in salvation and a life changed for all of eternity. Perhaps the person you invite will someday say, "I am so glad someone said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'" But this verse is not just about inviting someone else to come to church. It's about inviting each other! It's about mutual encouragement, encouraging each other to gather for worship, whether you do that by a phone call, a conversation or posting on Facebook. It's about looking forward to worshiping with the Lord's people. We could even translate verse one: "I rejoice whenever they say to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'" How do you respond when someone says it's time for church? Do you get excited? Or are you unmotivated? We get out of bed for other things that are important to us. Church is one of those things of first importance. Advent calls us to actively remember as we prepare to enter the presence of our Lord, who was before us, is now with us, and will be with us forever. May we share that remembrance often with others as we gladly go to the house of the Lord in this Advent season. Remember home is where your heart is!

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, we come to You, in anticipation of receiving You in our hearts.

Thursday 10th December

THE LORD'S JOURNEY TO US

"Righteousness goes before Him and prepares the way for His steps." *Psalm 85:13 NIV*

The entire *Psalm 85* reminds us that our Lord, throughout history, continues to provide us with great gifts: "steadfast love," "peace," "restoration," "The Lord will give what is good." Recently, I read a story about a missionary who was serving as a teacher in Africa. During one lesson, he took some time to share about the significance of Christmas. Later in the year, one of the students presented the missionary with an incredibly beautiful seashell before Christmas break. The missionary recognized that this shell could only be found a considerable distance from the school. When he was presented with the gift, he said, "What a beautiful shell. Thank you for traveling so far to get me such a lovely gift." The student replied, "The long journey was part of the gift." As we walk through Advent, let us remember and reflect on our Lord's journey to us in Jesus Christ, the One who brings us "what is good." For the Lord's journey in Jesus isn't just an ordinary journey or an ordinary gift. Remember the message of the angels as they journeyed to the shepherds: "I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord" (*Luke 2:10-11*). This is the epitome of "what is good." During our individual walks through Advent 2026, may each one of us reflect on the ways in which we can share with others Jesus' gifts of "steadfast love," "peace," "restoration", and "great joy."

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, let this Advent remind us of Your journey to us and this world.

Friday 11th December

REPEATING THE JOURNEY

"You have persevered and have endured hardships for My name, and have not grown weary." *Revelation 2:3 NIV*

When last did you change your Christmas decorations? Is everything the same as last year, this Advent season? The same old same old! Is this Advent season just a repeat of last year? On fast forward, getting through all the end of year Christmas functions, Carol Services etc., and missing out completely on the wonderful anticipation of Advent. Today's New Testament text, reminds us of those whose lives are lived with the assurance of the promise "Unto you a child is born, unto you a Son is given." Each day, whatever their hardship, pain or struggles they give to others, a word of encouragement to those they meet and greet. The assured certainty of the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ does not relieve us of the need to live each day of Advent 2026 with faithful anticipation. Wherever we are, we are called to be an example of "faith in action" to others, persevering patiently, enduring for the name that is above every other name, the name of Jesus. As we continue today on our journey to the manger of Bethlehem, may we recall the words of the 17th century hymn by Paul Gerhardt (1653), which I discovered recently: *"O Lord, how shall I meet You, How welcome You aright? Your people long to greet You, My hope, my heart's delight! O kindle, Lord most holy, A lamp within my breast, To do in spirit lowly All that may please You best."* Let us repeat the Advent journey with a fresh anticipation and not miss out on all our Lord has in store for us, this Advent season.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, we rejoice that we can repeat the journey of anticipation.

Saturday 12th December

ARE YOU A FIXER?

"Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from Him." *Psalm 62:1 NIV*

Some folks are fixers by nature. There is an intense desire to help others, to make sure they are secure spiritually, emotionally, and financially. The need to fix things or others often gets ahead of what the Lord is doing. One of the great lessons we are all to learn is it is better to wait on the Lord. Our ability to wait on the Lord and lean not to our own understanding is difficult, especially when there are so many issues in the world that we are moved to address, try to mitigate, or hope to fix. Yet the psalmist reminds us to wait in silence and assurance, for the Lord is our rock, salvation, and refuge. Waiting on the Lord is not a passive act, but a peaceful stillness that manifests when we yield our fears, anxieties, and insecurities to Him out of faithful trust and hope-filled living. In the letter to the Philippians Paul writes: "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (*Philippians 4:7*). During this season of Advent, may our minds, hearts, and spirits be at peace as we wait with assurance for Jesus Christ, the ultimate "fixer" of all things, and thankful that our Lord has not relinquished control of this world, but is working everything out for our ultimate good and His glory. As the psalmist concludes, so shall we: "One thing God has spoken, two things I have heard: 'Power belongs to You, God, and with You, Lord, is unfailing love'; and, 'You reward everyone according to what they have done.'" (*Psalm 62:11,12*)

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, although the world seems out of control, teach us to wait on You.

Sunday 13th December

ARE YOU LISTENING?

"I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken." *Psalm 16:8 NIV*

The writer of *Psalm 16* reminds us of the Lord's desire and longing for this world: "You make known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand" (*Psalm 16:11*). Let us choose this desire for ourselves, others and this world. So, turn off your electronic devices for a while. CAN YOU? Fast, from the continual doomsday, fear-mongering news. This is Advent. Seek the Lord. His name is Jesus, Emmanual – God is with us. You and me, at this very moment as you read this Devotion. Realise the presence of His Holy Spirit with you, the Wonderful Counsellor, Comforter, present with you now, no matter how you feel or your circumstances. This is what advent is all about. There is more! Stop! Take time to hold a baby or the hand of a dying one. Spend time giving thanks for everything! Turn on some great advent hymns and let their words fill your soul. Offer a small gesture of kindness and support to a stranger. Open your heart to receive all the blessings the Lord has in store for you at this moment and through this Advent Season. Be silent. Listen to His Voice, through the leading of His Holy Spirit, as you read the Good News of Advent with fresh eyes, ears and heart. Let the truths of the Scriptures give fresh insight in what our Lord has done in Jesus Christ, the Saviour of this world. Our Saviour and Lord!

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, we often wander away from the true path of life You have for us.

Monday 14th December

A SHEPHERD

"Hear us, Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock."
Psalm 80:1 NIV

Within this Psalm we find imagery that provides theological depth for our Christian faith. From the psalm's opening with the image of a shepherd and its calling on the Lord for the restoration of Israel – not only the restoration of a people but also of a "vine" out of Egypt – we clearly see contained herein messianic imagery associated with Jesus. The great Shepherd, Redeemer, and Restorer of life in this passage understands the trials of the day-to-day living we face. During the season of Advent, each loss, each pain, and each sorrow we experience feels weightier. An unexpected illness, death, betrayal, or financial struggles introduces that much more unease to our souls. The Lord described in *Psalm 80* has seen it all before – on both a personal and a national scale. When the vine from Egypt was "broken down," "plucked," and "ravaged," the psalmist turned for revival to the Lord of hope. This passage does not end in defeat, but instead in new life, as the Lord of hosts restores His people. *Psalm 80* reassures us that whatever "scorn" we face, "tears" we shed, and "rebuke" we bear, our Lord has gone with us through all of it. Listen to these words, "Restore us, Lord God Almighty; make Your face shine on us, that we may be saved." (*Psalm 80:19*). Advent reminds us that our Lord is shining upon us at this very time, with Grace and Truth through His One and Only Son, Jesus Christ, whose Birth we once again celebrate. Our Good Shepherd!

PRAYER THOUGHT
Lord, thank You for being our Shepherd through our trials and pains.

Tuesday 15th December

POWER!

"By Myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and My judgment is just, for I seek not to please Myself but Him who sent Me." *John 5:30 NIV*

Isaiah 9, verses 6 and *7* speak of the government being on His, Jesus', shoulders. He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. But we live in a time when leaders, wherever they are, seek to have power, even absolute power. There is this hungering after power. This way is so very different from Jesus'. He never argued for authority for Himself. In fact, He said that if He had to assert His own authority, He should not be trusted. To those who challenged His authority to judge life and death, He simply pointed to two measurements of authority. First, what do His actions show, as declared in the testimony of those who can be trusted as messengers of truth? Here Jesus was referring to what John the Baptist said about Him and to the testimony of people such as the paralytic whom He healed. Second, what is the testimony of the Scriptures? We should always be cautious of those who come beating their own drums and claiming power and truth for themselves. Power is given only by the Lord Almighty, who has entrusted it to His only Son as both Saviour, Lord and Judge. It is only in Jesus that we have eternal life. No other leader can offer that to us. This is the reason for this Advent Season. He is not only our Shepherd, but Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Lord of Lords, King of Kings. There is no other. The Magi of the East clearly show us this.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, bring all people to bow before Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

Wednesday 16th December

GOOD AND GREAT!

"Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; His greatness no one can fathom." *Psalm 145:3 NIV*

"God is good, God is great." How many times did one pray that prayer as a child? Did you ever ponder what it means to say that the Lord is both good and great? Or, like most of us, did you just repeat it as part of table grace, never really thinking about what the words meant? These six simple words in a childhood prayer tell us a great deal about the nature of the God who came to dwell among us as Jesus of Nazareth. The writer of *Psalm 145* paints a picture of both the greatness and goodness of the Lord, our Lord. He has done mighty acts and awesome works. His mighty deeds are known to all people. But for some of us the image of a mighty and powerful God instils fear – fear of a vengeful and judging God. The psalmist, however, sees a God whose greatness and goodness are completely intertwined. This God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in love. He is good to all His creation, and "His compassion is over all He has made." This powerful God who created the universe manifests that power in gracious and compassionate love toward that creation. The psalmist reminds us that the Lord gives us our food, satisfies our desires, and is just in all His ways. God is near to all who call on Him. God is great and God is good! God's very nature is love. In that knowledge we can have no greater joy. This advent let us celebrate that "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised." He is Great and He is Good!

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, with the psalmist, we praise You for Your greatness and goodness.

Thursday 17th December

LEARN THE LESSON

"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near." *Matthew 24:32 NIV*

What do fig trees, Noah and the ark, two working in a field, two women grinding meal, and Christmas have in common? In every case, there is the anticipation of something very important and good that is about to happen, but we don't know when. So we watch and wait the way children wait anxiously for Christmas to come. The people of God had been waiting for centuries for the Messiah, and then He appeared in surprising ways that no one expected. He arrived in a manger instead of a gilded cradle. He rode a donkey instead of a warrior's horse. He mounted a cross instead of a chariot. He beat the grave to save. That's what we waited for, and it was worth the wait – well worth it! It's what we wait for every Advent, but we need to stay awake because He keeps appearing every day when we least expect it. Here is Jesus in a person we've never listened to before whose story moves us to tears because this time, we actually paid attention to what she was saying. Here is Jesus in an unexpected kindness that came out of the blue. Here is Jesus helping us overcome temptations we've never been able to withstand before. Here is Jesus reminding us that we don't have to try so hard because we really are loved and need to remember this truth. Unlike a thief, however, Jesus arrives in the night positively. What Jesus steals away are our fears and our worries, and in so doing he gives us new life. Be prepared to be surprised yet again by the glorious gift of Christmas!

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, surprise us again with unanticipated wonder.

Friday 18th December

A GREAT SIGN

"She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads." *Revelation 12:2,3 NIV*

The birth of a child is a great moment. It is also time of uncertainty. There is potential for rejoicing, but also great anxiety. A woman so strong to carry a child to term is vulnerable at the moment of birth. To her the enemy is the unknown. What will happen? Will she and the child be safe, and what kind of help will be needed for herself and the babe? On the other hand, dragons are dreadful creatures no matter how friendly as stuffed animals. This dragon in Revelation seeks to kill the child to be born, destroys part of creation, and wages war against heaven. Life can be seen as a fight against opposing forces, thus leaving us very little choice but to live in fear and anxiety. But the Revelation to John offers more than a vision of the end times. It is another perspective about the struggles of life. The broader view of this conflict between the woman and the dragon reveals the saving love of the Lord beyond and despite the battles. Not only is the dragon driven out of heaven by the angels, but also the woman and her child remain safe within the Lord's care, and the future is secured for eternity. We can choose to live in distress and fear during life's struggles, or we can take on the perspective in John's vision of a present comfort and great expectations. In this season of Advent, be still and seek the Lord who dwells in us in the power of His Holy Spirit and find your own place of safety and well-being.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, encourage us to spend time this Advent seeking the Messiah.

Saturday 19th December

RESTORED

"When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy." *Psalm 126:1,2 NIV*

The psalmist refers to the restoration of a "faithful remnant" of Israelites to their homeland from exile in Babylon, around 528 B.C. When first freed and enabled to return home, they were in shock, in a dream world, as is the common human experience when something wonderful or terrible happens to us. When the reality of their freedom sank in, their exuberant joy could not be contained. For us, Christians, it is interesting to note the phrase used by the psalmist, "restored the fortunes." It means "general restitution or liberation, a passing from the shadow of death into a full and happy life." Jesus indicated this kind of restoration was a purpose of his ministry. "I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly." "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in Me, though he dies, yet shall he live." Jesus made it possible for us to pass from the power of sin and death into a full and blessed life, beginning now and for eternity. *Psalm 126* reflects the message of the Bible from front to back. The psalmist remembers the Lord's grace in the past, ponders the Lord's help in the present, and relies on the Lord's blessing in the future, all resulting in joy. For us the ultimate embodiment of these certainties is Jesus Christ, the celebration of whose birth we anticipate in Advent. Let our mouths be filled with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy!

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord of hope and joy, let no sorrow hinder those who seek You.

Sunday 20th December

NOT FORSAKEN

"But You, Lord, sit enthroned forever; Your renown endures through all generations." *Psalm 102:12 NIV*

What does *Psalm 102* have to do with Advent? It is a prayer of lament that reflects intense personal and community suffering. Something that many experience at this time of the year. The psalmist acknowledges this suffering but remembers the Lord's greatness and mercy. While circumstances are difficult, the Lord remains steadfast and unchanging. In this Psalm we are taught about both the reality of suffering and the unshakable hope found in the character and promises of the Lord. Advent is a season of expectation filled with hopeful signs and joy-filled anticipation. It is at the same time a season of Divine Revelation. The Lord, to whom the Psalmist prays most fervently, emerges in the most unexpected way as a baby, born to a virgin by the miracle of the Nativity. His promise is fulfilled in ways that far surpass our wildest imaginations. Emmanuel, "God with Us!" He has never forsaken us. He accompanies us through all our darkest nights. This is seen in what is often brushed over in the celebration of the Birth of Jesus, the account of the massacre of the innocent baby boys by Herod, seeking to remove any threat to his throne and his power. It is into this world Jesus came, revealing that we are not alone in this Advent season, but He is present, with us in our joys and our suffering. We are not forsaken nor forgotten! His name forever is "Emmanuel!" Take time, no matter how you feel or your circumstances to acknowledge the TRUTH. He is with you at this very moment.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, thank You for the opportunities to present our needs to You.

Monday 21st December

RESTORATION

"Restore us, Lord God Almighty; make Your face shine on us, that we may be saved." *Psalm 80:19 NIV*

As one ponders on *Psalm 80* again, one notices the repeated use of the word "restore" suggesting that the search for restoration involved waiting. Restoration is never a quick process, whether it has involved buildings, paintings, or people. Restoration looks like, and often is, a painfully slow process. Slowness is not something I am good at. What about you? Slowness usually involves being thoughtful and paying attention. But paying attention to what? To whom? Learning to slow down one's mind is quite a challenge. In this psalm we have a pleading, "Restore us Lord, make Your face shine on us that we may be saved!" Three times in this psalm they make this cry to the Lord. Waiting and yearning. Waiting and yearning. The struggle is real! Mary was waiting and yearning for her baby boy to be born. The Messiah! What one realizes is that pregnancy is not only the perfect metaphor for Advent but even for our lives. As followers of Jesus Christ, we live in the "already-but-not-yet" space till He returns a second time, when all things will be made new. But like me, most of us are not good at waiting. The slow work of restoration does not come quickly or easily. Just ask any child who has long awaited Christmas morning and tried to stay awake all night on Christmas Eve to watch and wait. Will we wait and yearn for His coming with great joy and anticipation? Realizing that He has begun a good work in our lives and He will complete that good and gracious work on the day of our Lord.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, may we never forget that You are at work in our lives.

Tuesday 22nd December

EXPECTATIONS

But his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John." They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name." *Luke 1:60,61 NIV*

Not unlike parents naming a baby today, Elizabeth and Zechariah were being pressured to name their eight-day-old son by the convention of the time, preferably by using Zechariah as the child's name. When Elizabeth used the name "John," there was immediate resistance – so much so that others were confused and turned to the mute father, who scribbled out the name "John" on a tablet and who regained his speech. No one in the family was named John – this just wasn't done! But both Elizabeth and Zechariah knew the reason for naming the child "John": they were honouring what the angel Gabriel had declared (*Luke 1:13*). In fact, Elizabeth and Zechariah honoured the will of the Lord, and clearly the aged couple were blessed. It was others who were filled with fear at what had happened, while still more were talking about what had occurred that day. We are but a few days from the day we celebrate the birth of Jesus, once again. How much of our preparation for Christmas is about what the world expects? Parties, gifts, and even preparation for Christmas Eve worship can be all-encompassing in our lives. What is our Lord calling us to do that goes against conventional wisdom? What can we learn from the example of Elizabeth and Zechariah? How are our actions giving others reasons to talk about the miracles of our Lord this Advent season?

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, help us to see how You are breaking conventional wisdom.

Wednesday 23rd December

EXILE!

"Hear the word of the Lord, you nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: 'He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over His flock like a shepherd.'" *Jeremiah 31:10 NIV*

Exile, an interesting word for this second day before Christmas Day. Exile means a forced period of absence from one's country or home. It is dislocation, a yanking out of the socket of home, identity, security, and hope. Exile is despair and desperation, pain and hopelessness. There are many, many people in this world who have experienced and are experiencing an exile at this moment in whatever form. Restoration puts all back in place. Jeremiah offers a vision of what will be when the time of exile is over, and the long journey home is complete. Jesus of Bethlehem offers Himself to share with us our time of exile, of dislocation. For He Himself experienced this after His birth with the journey to Egypt, with Joseph and Mary. But Jesus offers Himself as the restoration of our wholeness and hope. At the same time, that restoration is yet to come. The long journey home is not yet finished. We continue to live with brokenness and despair in this world. But exile does not have the last word. The Lord who has come to be born in us, with us, and for us will bring us to our ultimate home, where joy breaks out in a dance, and songs cannot be silenced, and tears are no more. Jesus' birth looks beyond dislocation as the Lord brings hope in the midst of exile of many. Exile does not have the last word. Ever. Jesus has the final Word, as we celebrate His Birth!

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, You come to us when we hurt in our exile.

Thursday 24th December

THIS IS THE TIME

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and His glory appears over you." *Isaiah 60:1,2 NIV*

After the prophet Isaiah has reviewed the tale of national wickedness in his time, he proclaims to the people that their light has arrived, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon them. As God's Word is timeless, Isaiah is speaking to us today, for we are in similar need. As a society, we are a people in need of something beyond our selfishness, hate, deceptions, duplicities, and other divisions. We need the glory of the Lord to rise upon us in a fresh way. Think of all the "-isms" in this world today. "isms" that separate us from the Lord and each other. These "isms" need to be cleansed by the "glory of the Lord." On our own we are helpless and hopeless before the evil of our time. We need something new to come into our lives. We need Jesus, who not only saves us from our SIN, but whose name is Emmanuel, "God with us." This is the time. The season is ripe for a new way that is older than time itself. God's glory is for now. It is here. This is your time, to move from your exile and into the place of becoming a new creation in Christ Jesus. Restored. Even though we have journeyed this road of Advent many times. Let us receive it by God's grace. He's offering it to us right now at this moment on the eve of the celebration of Jesus' Birth. Will you accept His offer?

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, show us today, Your people, Your new way.

Friday 25th December

HE LOVES US

"This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

1 John 4:9,10 NIV

A very blessed Christmas to you and all those close to you. John tells us in his first letter that we love because God first loved us. God pours love into us through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and in time we learn to respond to that love. "This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him." (*verse 9*). Today, we celebrate the expression of our Lord's steadfast love in that He poured His love into our world and into our lives through the birth of His one and only Son, Jesus. This is His love in human form, expressed firstly in a helpless baby, still to grow and develop fully into the man we know as our Saviour and Lord – Jesus Christ. John reminds us that we did not love the Lord first. He takes the imitative. He always takes the imitative. He expresses His love first, and the reason is not because we are good or in any way deserving of His love. But to deal with the sin in our lives and this world that separates us from His love. What a gift! It's free! The price has been paid in full, through the finished work of Jesus Christ, through His life, death, resurrection, ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Have you received His gift? If you have, will you pass it on to others with His love?

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord of all grace, thank you for loving us through Your Son, Jesus.

Saturday 26th December

LIGHT OF THE WORLD

"In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." *John 1:4,5 NIV*

The prophet Amos foretold a time of spiritual "famine," when there would be no prophet in Israel and the people would be cut off from the Lord's voice (*Amos 8:11*). Centuries later Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, broke the 400-year silence when he prophesied that " . . . the Sunrise from on high will visit us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death" (*Luke 1:78-79*). Zachariah was announcing the birth of Jesus into a spiritually dark world. Here is how Paul described the condition of humanity without Christ: "For even though they knew God, they did not honour Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (*Romans 1:21*). The state of this world today is the same as it has always been. Darkness plagues the earth because people live with a sense of frustration and futility as they attempt to please human appetites that are never satisfied. The light of Jesus Christ lets us see ourselves as we really are, sinners in need of a Saviour. When His hope is allowed to penetrate our hearts, darkness is chased away. Receiving Him as Saviour means that sins are forgiven and the death sentence lifted. The Son's light has a second purpose for us. Jesus illuminates the right path for our life so that we need not give in to temptation. Whoever chooses to walk in the light, obeying His commands and seeking to live by His principles, we cannot walk in darkness, but in His light.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, thank You for illuminating the right path for us.

Sunday 27th December

LIGHT FOR YOUR WORLD

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house." *Matthew 5:14,15 NIV*

Then Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world," (*John 8:12*). He also said of His followers, which includes us, "You are the light of the world" (*Matthew 5:14*). Both statements are true because we act as lamps for Christ. While we ourselves are not the Light, we are holders of Light. People who are stumbling in the darkness of sin and despair can look at us and see hope. From within us glows the truth of Jesus Christ, the gospel message of salvation through forgiveness of sins. We allow Him to shine forth when we model His ways in our conversation, conduct, and character. A righteous lifestyle gets attention because it is so different from the selfish, unsatisfying ways typical of the world. Many who see our light will want Jesus for themselves. Reflecting Him to the world is the calling our Lord has given us, so we must keep our flame bright. That means protecting our relationship with the Lord by spending time praying and reading His Word. Otherwise, we'll make unwise decisions, our passion for Jesus will begin to lessen, and others won't be able to see contentment or joy in us. We must also keep our lamps spotless by resisting temptation. Sin spoils our testimony. However, when we do sin, our "slate" is wiped clean through confession and repentance. Someone in your sphere of influence needs your "lamp" to guide them toward the true Light of the world.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, let our lamps burn brightly for You in our everyday living.

Monday 28th December

THE HIGHEST HONOUR

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time." *1 Peter 5:6 NIV*

The highest honour one can have is to be called a "Servant of the Lord." This is not meant to describe only those working directly for the church. Jesus' promise from *John 12:26*, "Whoever serves Me must follow Me; and where I am, My servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves Me." was made to all of us. We are to undertake every activity of our day as if we're working for the Lord, so that servanthood becomes a way of life. Our willing acceptance of the servant role is countercultural. The world teaches us to chase after power but advises ignoring opportunities to serve unless there's personal benefit. Like Jesus, though, the leaders of the early church saw things differently. These men were honoured to refer to themselves as bondslaves, the lowest of servants. They loved the Lord so much that they were pleased to do anything in His name – feed the poor, make tents, wash feet, and even go to prison. The Lord has placed each one of us in a position to serve others and thereby serve Him. The feet we wash, figuratively speaking, are those of our family, friends, neighbours, and co-workers. We must give our best effort to the relationships and work we have been given in this world. To offer anything less is to refuse the life we have been called to live, a life of service to our Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, it is the highest honour to be called Your servant.

Tuesday 29th December

CALLED TO SERVICE

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

Matthew 25:21 NIV

Serving our Lord is not optional. People throw out all manner of excuses: too old, too young, too busy, too tired, too sick – and the list goes on. Every excuse is rendered void by the facts of Scripture, which says that we are "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (*Ephesians 2:10*). Service isn't dependent upon health, age, or experience. There are many bedridden men and women who dedicate their day to intercessory prayer. There are those who have never attended seminary and yet make a point of discipling new believers. If we see ourselves as servants, we will be focused on our Lord and dependent upon the Holy Spirit. But if we're busy worrying over how, when, and at what cost we are working for the Lord, then we are self-centred and of little use to Him. Someday we will stand before our Lord, and He will require an accounting of how we used the talents and spiritual gifts we were given. What can we say to Him that will justify ignoring the opportunities He gave us to use those gifts? No excuse will hold up. Complete surrender to our Lord's will is the key to pleasing Him. Our Lord has use for every single talent and ability He has bestowed, and He will continually equip us for greater service to His kingdom. When we serve Him wholeheartedly, we can look forward to hearing, "Well done, good and faithful servant".

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, what a privilege to be Your good and faithful servant.

Wednesday 30th December

A FRESH ENCOUNTER

"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of His robe filled the temple." *Isaiah 6:1 NIV*

We live in busy times. Sadly, for many Christians, church is an item on their checklist, and they think attending a service fulfils their "spiritual duty." As a result, the Lord seems distant, so they feel unexcited about His work in their lives and lack compassion for the unsaved. The Lord desires an intimate relationship with us. As in Biblical times, He still has personal encounters with His people, sometimes to comfort or encourage; other times to guide or convict of sin. The prophet Isaiah wrote of such a meeting with the Lord (*Isaiah 6:1-9*). His reaction to the awesome holiness of His presence was a profound recognition of his own sin: "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty" (*verse 5*). As the prophet experienced, when the Lord reveals His presence to us, we are likely to be overwhelmed with awe and a sense of our unworthiness. Then, as we humbly respond in repentance or obedience, we, too, will know that our sins have been forgiven (*verse 7*). We cannot manipulate or create one of these encounters, but we make them possible when we're available to the Lord. Are we spending time with the Lord, praying and reading His Word? Or has life become too busy and our spiritual walk too mechanical? Let's ask the Lord for a personal encounter with Him, as we step into 2027.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, give us a fresh encounter of Your Presence as we face a new year.

Thursday 31st December

ENDING WELL

But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" *Luke 12:20 NIV*

Today's verse is in the context of a rich man who made poor use of his days. Incorrectly assuming his life would last for many years, he not only left the Lord out of His plans but also allowed materialism to guide him. The apostle Paul, on the other hand, knew his time was short and yet made the most of His life on earth. For one thing, his priority was to give to others until his final days. His letters from prison illustrate this despite knowing he would soon face death, Paul devoted his time and energy to instructing fellow believers and praying for them. Paul also recognised the value of time spent encouraging Christians to do everything as if for the Lord (*Colossians 3:23*). This is important even when our task seems unrelated to the church. Our Father's work isn't just for missionaries and pastors; He calls all His children to different fields and assignments. The apostle knew that the Christian life encompasses struggles. He was realistic about acknowledging his own imperfections. This meant that to make the best use of his time, he needed to persevere, keep faith in God's promises, and rely on divine power for victory. Life is a gift. Every one of us has a limited number of days on this earth. How will you utilize your time so you can look back and, with Paul, confidently say that you ended well?

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, life is a gift from You, may we use it to bring glory to Your name.

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Your November 2026 Bible Readings
(As supplied by and with grateful acknowledgement to the I.B.R.A)

READINGS IN ROMANS (3)

1 Love and harmony

Sunday	1	Romans 11:1-12
Monday	2	Romans 11:13-24
Tuesday	3	Romans 11:25-36
Wednesday	4	Romans 12:1-8
Thursday	5	Romans 12:9-31
Friday	6	Romans 13:1-7
Saturday	7	Romans 13:8-14

2 Respect one another

Sunday	8	Romans 14:1-12
Monday	9	Romans 14:13-23
Tuesday	10	Romans 15:1-13
Wednesday	11	Romans 15:14-21
Thursday	12	Romans 15:22-33
Friday	13	Romans 16:1-16
Saturday	14	Romans 16:17-37

TREASURE

Sunday	15	Deuteronomy 26:16-19
Monday	16	Luke 12:15-21
Tuesday	17	James 5:1-6
Wednesday	18	1 Timothy 6:6-11
Thursday	19	Job 28:12-19
Friday	20	Luke 12:22-34
Saturday	21	2 Corinthians 4:4-10

READINGS IN 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

Sunday	22	1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
Monday	23	1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13
Tuesday	24	1 Thessalonians 4:1-12
Wednesday	25	1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11
Thursday	26	1 Thessalonians 5:12-28
Friday	27	2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
Saturday	28	2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

SYMBOLS OF ADVENT

1 Foreshadowed from ancient times

Sunday	29	Genesis 22:1-19
Monday	30	Exodus 3:7-14

Your December 2026 Bible Readings
(As supplied by and with grateful acknowledgement to the I.B.R.A)

SYMBOLS OF ADVENT

1 Foreshadowed from ancient times

Tuesday	1	Lamentations 3:21-30
Wednesday	2	Ezekiel 34:20-31
Thursday	3	Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14
Friday	4	Isaiah 2:2-5
Saturday	5	Isaiah 12:1-6

2 Words of the prophet

Sunday	6	Isaiah 35:1-10
Monday	7	Isaiah 40:1-11
Tuesday	8	Isaiah 42:1-4
Wednesday	9	Isaiah 49:1-3
Thursday	10	Isaiah 52:7-10
Friday	11	Isaiah 53:1-12
Saturday	12	Malachi 3:1-4

SYMBOLS POINTING TO CHRIST: 7 great 'O's

Sunday	13	1 Corinthians 1:26-31
Monday	14	Exodus 3:1-6
Tuesday	15	Isaiah 11:1-10
Wednesday	16	Luke 1:68-79
Thursday	17	Isaiah 9:2-7
Friday	18	Ephesians 2:14-20
Saturday	19	Isaiah 7:10-17

A SAVIOUR COMES: GOSPEL STORIES

Sunday	20	John 1:1-14
Monday	21	Luke 1:26-38
Tuesday	22	Matthew 1:18-25
Wednesday	23	Luke 1:39-45
Thursday	24	Luke 1:46-55
Friday	25	Luke 2:1-7 Christmas
Saturday	26	Luke 2:8-12

LEFTOVERS

Sunday	27	Psalm 122
Monday	28	Psalm 126
Tuesday	29	Jeremiah 6:13-19
Wednesday	30	Mark 13:26-37
Thursday	31	Hebrews 13:17-21

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ABBREVIATIONS

GNB	–	Good News Bible
NIV	–	New International Version
NLT	–	New Living Translation
NKJV	–	New King James Version
RSV	–	Revised Standard Version

For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be
upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6-7 (NKJV)

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