

Daily Bible Reading



St Paul's
Anglican | REAL
HOPE
JESUS

Advent 2023

Advent 2023

In Advent – the 24 days of December before Christmas Day – we traditionally focus on Christ's coming as the promised Messiah. We celebrate his Incarnation, the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies, when he came as the baby Jesus who would grow up to die for us and save his people from sin. We also look forward to his promised Second Coming when he will return in glory to judge the world and to usher in his kingdom – the new heaven and earth where God will dwell with his people for ever.

You will see that our readings come from various passages in the Bible and include prophecies from Isaiah and other Old Testament prophets as well as New Testament promises about God's kingdom and the return of Christ. We have included key verses and a prayer or hymn each day along with the usual commentary. We hope that these will help you to focus your mind and heart this Advent season.

As always your feedback is welcome as we try to create notes which encourage and support you in your Bible reading and prayer.

St Paul's Daily Bible Reading Team

Sign up for Daily Bible Reading emails that will be sent to your inbox starting tomorrow.



ADVENT DAY ONE

ISAIAH 2:2-5

Come, Let Us Walk in the Light of the Lord

Which direction are you walking as you approach Christmas?

As Christmas approaches we can find ourselves walking in familiar ways – to the nearest Westfield for some shopping, to a loved one's home for different meals or walking to church ready to hear about Jesus' birth. This season brings with it many familiar ways of walking for many of us. This passage challenges us to be intentional about a different kind of walking. *To walk in the light of the Lord* (5). As Christmas approaches, this is in fact the most important kind of walk that we need to make sure we do.

But what does that mean? In the context of this passage, Israel is meant to be encouraged by this picture of the final day when all nations will come into Jerusalem. They will come wanting to walk in the light of the Lord. They will seek God's laws so they can walk in his ways. The nations will not only come seeking God's ways, but also wait for his judgement. God will cause all wars to cease as he makes his final judgement. Israel is being encouraged to walk in the light of the Lord because this is what all nations will all do one day. This is the future.

As this season of Advent begins, let's remember this future that is in store for us. All the world will walk in God's ways and he will be the final judge for all things. We will seek Jesus *in order to have him teach us, have him rule over us*. Why not consider how you can be intentional in walking in the light of God this Christmas – to have him teach you, to have him rule over you?

Reflect on your time commitments over the next few weeks. Pray that as you spend time in God's word and listening to him, he will direct and guide you through this season and beyond.

KEY VERSE

*Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the temple of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths.*

Isaiah 2:3

PRAYER

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put on the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came among us in great humility; that on the last day, when he comes again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

*An Australian Prayer Book (1978):
Collect for First Sunday In Advent*

ADVENT DAY TWO

ISAIAH 9:1-7

For to Us a Child is Born

Why does most of the world still measure time with reference to Christ's birth?

Our calendar is separated into BC – Before Christ, and AD – in the year of the Lord. In our more secular age some now refer to the Common Era, but the pivot point is the same – Jesus' birth. The moment of time that most systems of time reference, is the coming of Christ. Why is the birth of Jesus so significant?

Let's take a step back and think about the people this promise was given to. The child in verse 6 was promised to an Israel held in contempt. The northern parts of Israel, like Galilee, were decimated by the Assyrians. Israel was in exile, in gloom and anguish (1). The people were walking in darkness, in fact, they lived in a land of deep darkness (2), in oppression, slavery and warfare (4-5).

Does this describe our world? Does it seem as if we are constantly living in the shadow of death, overwhelmed by the destruction and hatred reported constantly in the media? Does it describe you? As Christmas approaches are you burdened by your sin? Are you oppressed? Do you feel like you are walking in darkness? Jesus can be your light, he can be your freedom and your peace now in whatever circumstances you find yourself. And, when he comes again, there will be an end to all war and suffering. There is nothing greater than the Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace coming to our world to establish it with justice and righteousness.

Reflect on the significance of Christ's birth in your own life – and for our world. Ask for help to encourage others not to focus on the coming of the child alone, but on the reason he came and the many other names that describe him.

KEY VERSES

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.*

*And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.*

*He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.*

*The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this.*

Isaiah 9:6–7

HYMN

Come, O long-expected Jesus,
Born to set your people free!
From our fears and sins release us,
Christ in whom our rest shall be.

Born your people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a king;
Born to reign in us forever,
Now your gracious kingdom bring.

C. Wesley (1707–1788)

ADVENT DAY THREE

ISAIAH 11:1-9

The Branch from Jesse

What aspect of Jesus do you most cherish?

Yesterday we read the promise of the child to be born from David's line and the promise of his righteous kingdom. Today that theme continues, with a more detailed description of what this promised saviour will be like. The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him: he will be wise, but also powerful, delighting in the fear of the Lord (2-3). Full of understanding and might, he will be able to judge righteously and justly, punishing the wicked (3-5). After this judgement there will be beautiful harmony between all creatures on earth, because "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord" (9).

In Jesus we see the fulfilment of these words. He himself quoted from elsewhere in Isaiah, proclaiming "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Luke 9:18). We know from the many eyewitness accounts in the gospels that he is righteous. He has the insight to see into people's hearts, to judge our motives and secret thoughts. He is truly wise and understanding, a man who delights in the fear of the Lord.

In these weeks before Christmas we can worship Jesus for his humility in coming to us as a child and then living amongst ordinary people, demonstrating his extraordinary kindness as well as his wisdom and power. We can also be thankful that he is the righteous judge who cares deeply for the poor and needy. We can trust that all the wickedness we see in this world will come under his wise and powerful judgement. We can look forward to the time when peace and harmony will rule the new creation.

These verses look forward to the coming of the wise, just, powerful, righteous Saviour. We can actually know him and receive his Spirit when we trust in him. Ask for the Spirit's help to model in your own life the just, wise and peace-loving life anticipated here.

KEY VERSES

*The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—
and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.*

Isaiah 11:2–3

HYMN

Hail to the Lord's anointed
Great David's greater son!
Hail, in the time appointed
His reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression,
To set the captives free,
To take away transgression
And rule in equity

He comes with comfort speedy
To those who suffer wrong
To save the poor and needy
And help the weak be strong
To give them songs for sighing
Their darkness turn to light,
Whose souls, condemned and dying
Are precious in his sight.

J. Montgomery (1771–1894)

ADVENT DAY FOUR

ISAIAH 12

Song of Salvation

"The Lord, the Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation" (2)

Isaiah 12 begins "in that day" when there will be judgement, but also salvation and restoration for the remnant of God's people. This chapter serves as a moment of joy and praise in the book of Isaiah, completing this early section which looks ahead to the Messiah, before we begin the prophecies against the nations that have been attacking Israel at this time.

Isaiah is confident that God's anger will be turned away and there will be no fear, only comfort and joy. He can trust not just that the Lord will provide a way for salvation, but that the Lord himself "is my salvation" (2). At Christmas we celebrate God's fulfilment of this vision. Jesus' very name means "the Lord saves" or "the Lord is salvation". In Acts 4, Luke quotes Peter as saying *"Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12).

All this can seem like Christian jargon, but take time to reflect on these words. We too can trust and not be afraid, because of what the Lord has done for us in Jesus. We should not only thank him, but also be full of praise for all he has done. We should be making him known among the nations and glorifying his name. And of course, with Jesus as our salvation, we should be shouting and singing for joy!

As you thank God for Christ this Christmas, and look forward to his coming again, pray that, whatever your circumstances, not only will you be enabled to sing for joy for all that God has done, but that by your words and deeds you will be able to make him known to those you meet, perhaps from all nations.

KEY VERSE

Surely God is my salvation;

I will trust and not be afraid.

The Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my defense;

he has become my salvation.

Isaiah 12:2

HYMN

Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord!

Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;

Tender to me the promise of this word –

In God my saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out my soul, the greatness of his name

Make known his might the deeds his arm has done

His mercy sure, from age to age the same –

His holy name: the Lord, the mighty one.

© Timothy Dudley-Smith

ISAIAH 39:5–40:11

Comfort for God's People

What comforts you both in this present world and as you look to the world to come?

There seems nothing comforting in Isaiah's words to King Hezekiah at the end of chapter 39. His palace and possessions will be utterly destroyed by the Babylonians and some of his family will become eunuchs in the service of the Babylonian ruler. Hezekiah's surprising response reveals his self-centredness (8). It is good news – as long as there is peace in his own time.

Chapter 40 provides us with a striking contrast. Throughout these 31 verses, Israel's almighty, omniscient God is shown to tenderly care for his people (11), to be concerned for their sufferings and to offer hope, comfort and strength to those who trust in him (29–31). These verses were written originally to give comfort and reassurance to those facing the destruction of Jerusalem and consequent exile. The Lord's word endures forever (8); he loves his people and he is mighty to save.

Strikingly, Luke uses verses 3 to 5 to describe the ministry of John the Baptist as he prepared the way for Jesus, calling on his listeners to repent for the forgiveness of their sins and directing them to look for the one who would come after him. Luke meant his quotation to alert readers to Jesus' true nature as Lord and God. As we remember Jesus' coming into the world, we are comforted by his tender love for us, and his powerful strength to protect us. He comes as our good shepherd, to carry us close to his heart. This is his glory, which all people will one day see.

What opportunities will you have today to share with others the good news of God's sovereign rule and tender love, as seen in the Lord Jesus?

KEY VERSES

Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

*The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.*

*He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.*

*He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.*

*Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;*

*but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.*

*They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.*

Isaiah 40:28–31

PRAYER

All powerful God, increase our strength of will for doing good, that Christ may find an eager welcome at his coming and call us to his side in the kingdom of heaven, where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit. One God, for ever and ever. Amen.

An Australian Prayer Book (1978):

Alternate Collect First Sunday in Advent

ISAIAH 52:1–12

Your God Reigns

What would be the news you would most like to hear today?

As I write, Jerusalem is at the centre of bloody and bitter conflict. It is hard to read these words of Jerusalem's restoration, without being impacted by the hate-filled rhetoric of the opposing nations or by a sense of hopelessness about peace ever being restored there.

Although this passage may also refer to the period of temporary restoration which would occur when the exiles returned from Babylon, the true focus is not the earthly Jerusalem. The Israelites saw Jerusalem as the place where God dwelt with his people, but it would be lost through their own persistent rejection of God's commands. They had continued for a while with some rituals and outward shows of piety, but their hearts turned away from the one true God and the justice, mercy and obedience he asked of them.

So, when we read this passage and its call for Zion to awake and rise up, our focus is on the new heavenly Jerusalem, the coming kingdom. God's people have been mocked and his name blasphemed, but our powerful Lord acts to rescue. So we shake off the sin that we have been sitting in; we depart from the uncleanness of our former lives. We have been redeemed! The excitement of this kind of restoration is good news that is worth sharing.

Do you hear echoes of the angels' proclamation to the shepherds in verses 7 and 8? They too brought good news proclaiming peace, bringing good tidings, proclaiming salvation and shouting for joy (Luke 2:10–14). Jesus' coming demonstrated God's faithfulness to these promises. The Lord will truly comfort and rescue his people and the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

Pray for anyone you know who feels hopeless in the face of world events. Pray that you can be someone with "beautiful feet", who brings good news, proclaims peace and shouts for joy about all that God has done for us, his people.

KEY VERSE

*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

HYMN

You watchmen lift your voices joyfully as one,
Shout for your King, Your King.
See eye to eye the Lord restoring Zion:
Your God reigns, your God reigns!

Waste places of Jerusalem break forth with joy,
We are redeemed, redeemed.
The Lord has saved and comforted his people:
Your God reigns, your God reigns!

Ends of the earth, see the salvation of your God,
Jesus is Lord, is Lord.
Before the nations he has bared his holy arm:
Your God reigns, your God reigns

Leonard E Smith Jnr. © New Jerusalem Music/Thank You Music

ADVENT DAY SEVEN

ISAIAH 61:1–4

The Lord's Favour

Read these verses again and imagine what it would be like to live in “the year of the Lord's favour”.

This is such an exciting vision – almost every line announces some wonderful reversal of the darkness that engulfs humanity. The poor hear “good news” for once. Broken hearts are repaired. The captives are freed and the prisoners are released. Those who mourn are comforted and the grieving are provided for. Beauty replaces ashes, praise overwhelms despair. There will be justice, restoration and renewal!

For the Israelites of Isaiah's time, this was a promise to cling to through the difficult years of exile and suffering ahead, caused by their faithlessness. In the post-exilic period, perhaps, it was a promise for the faithful remnant to hold on to when the prophets seemed to be silent and Israel was once again oppressed by foreign powers. God revealed to Simeon, who was “waiting for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25-32), that the baby Jesus he held would fulfil these promises.

Early in his public ministry, Jesus proclaimed himself to be the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophetic words. As he stood up to read in the synagogue, he took this scroll, chose to read these very words, and then proclaimed “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:14–21). As he taught with perfect wisdom and demonstrated his power over nature, sickness, death and spiritual oppression – and especially in his own sacrificial death and amazing resurrection – Jesus revealed himself to be the one who would usher in this time that we all long for.

We know that we cannot by human effort renew or redeem the world, but let's pray that we can follow our Lord by living lives that enact “kingdom values” and so point to his coming.

KEY VERSES

*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour*

Isaiah 61:1–2a

PRAYER

Father God, as the days fill up with celebrations, help me to look for those who are isolated, suffering or hopeless. Enable me, through your Holy Spirit, to share the joy, hope and peace that is found in trusting Jesus, the Saviour of the world. Amen.

GALATIANS 4:4–7

A Loving Father's Adopted Children

Think back over Isaiah's prophecies and dwell on the excitement of the words "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son..." (4)

Repetition in the verses at the end of each sentence and beginning of the next in this passage highlights the clear order that Paul communicates here. Once enslaved (3), then redeemed (5), then adopted as sons (6), and subsequently heirs (7), all through the trinitarian work seeping throughout this passage with involvement of the Father, Son and Spirit.

The birth of Jesus opened up the possibility of a halt to our slavery to the spiritual forces of the world and serves as the origin of the chain of events in the passage. God had orchestrated the right time for Jesus to be born as a human, considered under God's law (4). Though humans like us could never adhere to God's expectations perfectly, Jesus did, so he can redeem us from our slavery. Therefore, we are no longer aliens or slaves, but now we are considered God's own children, holding the same right and privilege of calling God our Father (6) – something that Jesus himself did frequently, such as in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:8–13).

As his sons and heirs, God has given us his Spirit who allows us to cry out to him in confidence (6); this relationship with God himself is the greatest gift an heir could ever receive. The title of Father involves intimacy, trust and provision and is not something that is shared lightly. Sonship and heirship have even greater meaning when our Father is the loving and listening, almighty creator of the universe.

Praise God that we can call him our Father through Jesus, whose Spirit is in our hearts. Praise God for our redemption from slavery, and take delight in the undeserved privilege of being a beloved son and heir.

KEY VERSES

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

HYMN

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:
Mild, he lays his glory by,
Born that man no more may die;
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth:
Hark! The herald angels sing
Glory to the new-born king

C. Wesley (1707–1788)

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13–18

Raised to be With the Lord Forever

Are we certain of Jesus' resurrection and what it means for us? Are you confident you will see those in Christ again?

In 6 packed verses, Paul describes the events surrounding the return of Jesus. The Thessalonian church grieved that their deceased brothers and sisters would miss the return of the Lord. However, those 'sleeping' won't miss out on the return of Jesus – they'll even be the first to rise (15). Despite the various views about the chronological and spatial specifics in 16–17 a few certainties remain: Jesus will descend, and it will be audibly clear, with both those asleep and those alive being with the Lord forever (17).

The death of a loved one is full of sorrow and the pain of loss. However, as Christians, our grief for our brothers and sisters who have fallen asleep should be different from the despair of those who do not have a resurrection hope (13). Instead, we grieve in hopeful anticipation that we will see those in Christ resurrected once again, united with him forever. It is through our belief that Jesus died and rose again (14) that we have such a strong hope that those who believe in him will also rise.

The Lord has come once as a child born in a manger and he will come again to raise those in Christ to be with him forever. May we all remember Jesus' first coming, and remind ourselves of his second coming, encouraging each other in the resurrection hope we have as we await his glorious return.

Ask God to comfort those who mourn during this time of family celebrations. Pray that we may be sharing the hope we have for life beyond death in Jesus to our non-believing friends and family this Christmas.

KEY VERSE

For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

1 Thessalonians 4:14

PRAYER

Almighty God, thank you for the certain hope of eternal life with you. Thank you for Jesus who broke the power of sin and death. Thank you, that even though we grieve the loss of loved ones, we can be assured that those who loved you are now safe in your presence. Amen.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:1–11

We Belong to the Day, Not the Night

If a friend suddenly planned to come over soon, how would you prepare yourself and your home for them?

Continuing directly from yesterday's reading, we see Paul revisit a few ideas, such as those who are alive and asleep (10) and the day our Lord Jesus will return (2). Paul also makes references to other helpful analogies in the Bible, including living in the light and not the darkness in verse 5 (Matthew 5:14–16). The Thessalonian church is again instructed to encourage each other as they are doing (11) by living readily in anticipation of Jesus' return which will come like a thief in the night (2).

The Day of the Lord, in the Old and New Testaments, incorporates aspects of both judgement and salvation. Paul echoes this in references to the coming destruction (3) and eternal life in Christ (10). The Thessalonian church is aware that this Day could come at any time, and they know that it will not be like a friend's surprise visit. So how should they live, while they wait to receive salvation?

Paul instructs them not to be fearful or anxious, nor to fall into complacent comfort or sluggish sin. Instead, they should continue living as children of the light, putting on faith, love, and the hope of salvation in Jesus that transcends death (8–10). Jesus could return at any time, taking us to live forever with him. Let us prepare well like the Thessalonian church in eager anticipation of his return.

Pray that we may be living as children of light and day as we await Jesus' return. Pray that we would continue to encourage and build each other up like the Thessalonian church, as we keep awake and sober in preparation for the day of the Lord.

KEY VERSE

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

1 Thessalonians 5:8

PRAYER

God of power and mercy,
Open our hearts in welcome.
Remove the things that hinder us from receiving Christ
with joy,
So that we may share his wisdom and become one
with him when he comes in glory,
For he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God for ever and ever. Amen.

*An Australian Prayer Book (1978):
Alternate Collect for Second Sunday in Advent*

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20–28

The Risen Christ, Firstfruits

What will it look like when Jesus returns?

Paul builds on a courageous statement made earlier in the chapter – if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile (1 Corinthians 15:17). At the crux of Christianity is Jesus' resurrection and subsequent Lordship, and hence according to Paul, if somebody wanted to disprove Christianity, they simply need to disprove Jesus' resurrection. Christ's resurrection has stood strong for millennia in the public arena of historicity and Paul discusses the implications of Jesus' resurrection for us in these nine packed verses, providing assurance for our own resurrection into life with Christ (22).

Sin entered the world through Adam's rebellion, but resurrection comes from Jesus' righteousness (Romans 5:12–18). The first fruits of any season indicate the start of the fruiting season, but also shows the quality of the fruit to come. Christ has indeed been raised from the dead (20) and his resurrection as the first fruits is an example of what is to come for our resurrection. Christ's return will precede our resurrection and culminate in all dominion, authority and power being destroyed (24), prior to being handed over to God the Father when all things are subjected to Christ (27).

We may still be saddened by death, but death's defeat is as good as done for us in Christ. Death will be completely destroyed when Christ returns. Let us pray this day comes soon, as we live prepared for his return.

Praise God for the certainty of eternal life we have in Jesus' resurrection. Pray that we would look forward to the day when death is no more. May we eagerly wait for his return and faithfully live out our identity as those going to be raised to eternal life with Christ.

KEY VERSES

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

1 Corinthians 15:20–22

HYMN

These are the facts as we have received them
These are the truths that the Christian believes,
This is the basis for all of our preaching;
Christ died for sinners and rose from the tomb.

These are the facts as we have received them:
Christ has fulfilled what the scriptures foretold,
Adam's whole family in death had been sleeping,
Christ through his rising restores us to life.

© Michael Saward/Jubilate Hymns

COLOSSIANS 1:15–20

The Supremacy of Christ

Come, and behold him, born the King of angels!

Every one of these six short verses reveals a rich truth about who our Lord Jesus is, underscoring Christ's role in creation, salvation, and relationship to us. In his incarnation, Jesus became man. He was directly tangible and completely visible to the human eye, God in the flesh, and thus was the visible image of the invisible God (15). Jesus is considered the firstborn of all creation not because he was created, but because he is the rightful heir of all that is God's, all the privileges and rule of the reigning King.

The phrase "all things" is repeated 4 times in these verses, which emphasises the extent of Christ's role in creation and subsequent rule; there is not a maverick molecule that is outside of Christ's supreme authority (17). As stark as it sounds, death is the one thing that is guaranteed in life, yet Christ in his resurrection displays his supremacy over death. Echoing yesterday's reading, death is put to death in Christ and, by Jesus' blood shed on the cross, all things are to be reconciled to him.

Re-read the passage, dwelling on Christ's true nature and ponder the wondrous thought that the Lord, Creator and Sustainer of the universe, at one point lay in a manger, with the fullness of God pleased to dwell in and through him. Paul goes on to remind his readers that they, too, having been alienated from God, are now one of those "all things" reconciled to God by Christ's death. He urges them, and us, to *"continue in the faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel"* (23).

Come let us adore him. May we marvel at the incarnation – the true God-Man in the flesh who came to die for our sake. And may we hold onto our hope in him.

KEY VERSES

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Colossians 1:15–17

HYMN

At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow
Every tongue confess him king of glory now;
This the Father's pleasure, that we call him Lord
Who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

At his voice creation sprang at once to sight,
All the angel faces, all the hosts of light;
Thrones and dominations, stars upon their way,
All the heavenly orders in their great array

Name him, Christians, name him, with love strong as
death,
But with awe and wonder and with bated breath;
He is God the saviour, he is Christ the Lord,
Ever to be worshipped, trusted and adored.

Caroline M. Noel (1817–1877)

2 PETER 3:3–13

The Day of the Lord

Has someone ever mocked your faith in Jesus?

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (9).

In the 2000 years since Jesus walked the earth, derision and attacks against Christianity – including scepticism about Jesus’ return – have been almost commonplace particularly in the Western postmodern era. God knows this. Peter quotes scoffers who appear to ridicule the belief of Jesus’ return (4), but he provides an ample twofold explanation for their remarks. They follow their own sinful desires (3) and do not desire to submit to the Lord Jesus; Peter also references the great patience of the Lord in his “slowness” in fulfilling his promise to return so all should reach repentance (9).

Mocking and ridicule is not new for Christians. In our finite minds and lives, God’s patience may seem like slowness. A balloon being blown up continues to grow until it suddenly bursts, just like the perceived slowness and normality now prior to the sudden return of the Lord like a thief (10). The heavens and earth are bound for destruction (7,10). Jesus’ return is surer than the sun rising tomorrow. We are encouraged to live righteous lives of holiness and godliness in preparation for the new heaven and new earth that is coming, where righteousness will dwell (11– 13).

Let us not forget God’s patience towards this world as we know it, seeking godliness and holiness as the Lord has commanded, knowing that with Jesus’ return we will dwell in righteousness. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Praise God for his patience shown to us. Pray we may not lose sight of the coming of the new heavens and earth where righteousness dwells. Ask for the Holy Spirit’s help to live “holy and godly lives” as we wait expectantly.

KEY VERSE

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:9

HYMN

Blessed Lord, you have caused all holy scriptures
to be written for our learning:
grant us so to hear them,
read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them,
that, encouraged and supported
by your holy Word,
we may embrace and always hold fast
the joyful hope of everlasting life,
which you have given us in
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

*An Australian Prayer Book (1978):
Collect for Second Sunday in Advent*

MARK 14:60–65

The Messiah Has Come and Is Returning

If you were innocent, yet being accused of something terribly wrong, would you defend yourself?

Now at the tail-end of Mark's Gospel, Jesus stands before an unruly crowd along with authority figures of Jewish society.. All appear to be calling for his death, a stark contrast to the praises they were shouting at Jesus just a few chapters earlier (Mark 11:1–11).

When asked if he is the Messiah, Jesus' simple "*I am*" echoes God's personal name (Exodus 3:14), emphasising his own glory. Jesus goes on to reference Daniel 7:13, boldly proclaiming that he is the exalted Son of Man that had been prophesied. With the Messiah in front of them, the high priest ironically accuses Jesus of blasphemy. He is beaten unfairly and mocked, yet he does not speak or defend himself, despite knowing he is innocent. Jesus would go on to be crucified and executed, but that would not be the end of the story. Raised in accordance with God's plan, now seated on God's throne with all authority, he will come again on the clouds of heaven, bringing salvation and hope to all who will call him Lord.

Christmas may be a time of immense joy for some, but for others, Christmas can be a time of mourning and sadness. Some Christians will spend this time in prison, rejected, spat on, because they follow Jesus. Remember that although Jesus has come, we are still in that "not yet" period where we await his return. This present life may be full of trials, but our hope is certain. The God who has orchestrated and fulfilled his promises in Jesus' life, death and resurrection, can be trusted to ensure Jesus' return in glory.

Praise God for His wisdom in orchestrating our salvation in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Pray that we would remember Jesus not just as a baby this Christmas, but also as our Lord who will return on the clouds of heaven.

KEY VERSES

"Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"

"I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Mark 14:61b-62

HYMN

I cannot tell how he will win the nations,
How he will claim his earthly heritage,
How satisfy the needs and aspirations
Of east and west, of sinner and of sage
But this I know,
All flesh shall see his glory,
And he shall reap the harvest he has sown,
And some glad day his sun will shine in splendour,
When he the saviour, saviour of the world is known

W. Y. Fullerton (1857-1932)

JEREMIAH 33:14-17

Fulfilment of a Promise

Have you ever found it hard to keep a promise or honour your word?

We return to the Old Testament this week to look at some specific prophecies – made by six different prophets, but all finding their fulfilment in Jesus. The book of Jeremiah covers a point in history when Israel had badly broken their covenant with God (again). They were giving their worship and allegiance to idols instead of the Lord. Jerusalem was full of social injustice. God warns that they will face exile and destruction for their sinful disobedience.

Jeremiah had seen first hand the terrible state Jerusalem was in, and would have understood how deserving the people were of the consequences. And yet, the Lord declares: *“I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah”* (14). I can’t imagine how wonderful it must have been for Jeremiah to hear these words spoken by the Lord! God himself brings forth a declarative reminder that, even seeing Israel’s terrible disobedience now, he intends to keep his promise to his people; the promise that there will be a king for Israel forever (17).

A Ruler will come in David’s bloodline, and the city of Jerusalem then will be so different. His rule will be just and righteous (15). There will be salvation and safety, and the city itself will be known by the name of that Messiah (16; 23:5–6). How amazing is it to know the fulfillment of God’s promise began at the coming of Jesus, his very own Son? And not only so, but to look forward to his return when the new Jerusalem he brings will be its fruition!

Heavenly Father, thank you for your unswerving love and faithfulness despite our sin and disobedience. Thank you so much for sending your Son, and please help us to eagerly await and be ready at his return. Amen.

KEY VERSE

In those days and at that time

*I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line;
he will do what is just and right in the land.*

Jeremiah 33:15

HYMN

O come, O come, Emmanuel
and ransom captive Israel
who mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God draws near:
Rejoice, rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to you O Israel.

O come, bright Daybreak, come and cheer
our spirits by your advent here;
dispel the long night's lingering gloom
and pierce the shadows of the tomb:
Rejoice, rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to your O Israel.

From the Latin (thirteenth century)

J. M. Neale (1818–1866)

MICAH 5:2–5a

Ruler, Shepherd and Peace

Has there been a time when you've been grateful for a change in leadership?

This prophecy about Jesus' birthplace is cited in Matthew 2:6. The chief priests and teachers of the law point out to Herod this prediction of the Scriptures. Although the Magi go to worship this newborn king, Herod, apparently trusting the prophecy but rejecting the Lordship of the one who caused it to be written, orders the murder of all male infants in Bethlehem. Herod should have realised that the "ruler from ancient times" who would come from Bethlehem could not be overcome by human power and cruelty.

The rulers of Israel were often referred to as shepherds of their people, but earlier in Micah (chapter 3), we find out that Judah's leaders are terribly corrupt. Verses 4–5 would have been a great comfort to the people. The shepherd to come out of the otherwise insignificant town of Bethlehem would stand in the strength of the Lord. We know him to be the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (John 15: 11).

The original readers would have realised, as we do, that this prophecy was not about an ordinary human ruler. For this ruler would not only reign over Israel, but the whole earth (4). And he would not just *bring* peace (against the Assyrians – at that time the biggest threat), but he himself would *be* their peace. For us, this brings to mind Jesus' promise to his disciples that "*in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33).

Give thanks to God for keeping this promise about the ruler from Bethlehem and for Jesus Christ the Messiah King. Praise Him for his present rule, and pray for his kingdom to come 'on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:9–10).

KEY VERSE

*"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times."*

Micah 5:2

HYMN

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above your deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by:
Yet in your dark streets shining
Is everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in you tonight

O holy child of Bethlehem,
descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin and enter in,
be born in us today!
We hear the Christmas angels
the great glad tidings tell –
O come to us, abide with us,
our Lord, Emmanuel.

P. Brooks (1835–1893)

EZEKIEL 34:11–31

The Lord is My Shepherd

For yourself, what does it mean to be taken care of?

This passage paints such a beautiful picture of what it must be like as sheep living in safety and abundance, dearly cared for by a loving Shepherd. We see lush material providence in land, feed, and rich pastures to graze and rest (13–15). We even see providence relationally, in a shepherd that can be depended on. *God himself* will tend to his flock; his people (11–12, 15–16).

The Lord's character comes through so clearly. All the lost he seeks, and those who humbly depend on him receive compassionate and tender care for their every need (16). And from verses 16 – 22, a part of this Shepherd's care for his flock involves bringing justice and judgement. He will protect his sheep and will not allow those who selfishly destroy his flock's nourishment to go unpunished.

Though leaders of God's people at the time were evil shepherds, we now have God's perfect shepherd, Jesus the Messiah, to tend to the Lord's flock (23–24). Verses 25–29 tell us that he will completely renew and cleanse the world to bring peace, justice and even "showers of blessing". And the covenant of 'peace' is not merely a promise of no more wars or conflict, but a reality of secure contentment and fulfilment.

What a truly beautiful picture of what it's like (already), and will be like in physical reality, to be in the Lord's care! The Lord is with us (30), and he declares "*You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God.*" (31)

Rest secure in the tender care of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, today. Bring your worries and burdens to him and have assurance of his love for you! (1 Peter 5:7) Give thanks for God's providence in Christ, and pray for his help to live faithfully.

KEY VERSE

You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign Lord.

Ezekiel 34:31

PRAYER

Lord God, may we, your people,
Who look forward to the birthday of Christ
Experience the joy of salvation
And celebrate that feast with love and thanksgiving.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy spirit,
One God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*An Australian Prayer Book (1978):
Alternate Collect for Third Sunday in Advent*

ZECHARIAH 8:1–8

The New Jerusalem

What is your picture of an ideal life in an ideal city?

It is hard at this point in history to think of Jerusalem as a place of peace. And, truthfully, its history has been littered with conflict and destruction. When Zechariah was writing (around 520 BC) the returned exiles were in the process of attempting to rebuild the city and its temple after its complete destruction by the Babylonians. Jesus himself wept over what would become of this city, longing to gather its people under his protection (Matthew 23: 37–39), but knowing its destruction by the Romans was imminent.

So we are looking here towards the new Jerusalem, the ideal place where God will be with his people and they will live in harmony with him and with each other. What beautiful pictures are painted of the most vulnerable – old men and women and young children – all enjoying the peace of the city, the children playing and the elderly just sitting and enjoying each other's company.

The chapter before emphasises the kind of society the Lord requires – one of justice, mercy and compassion; where there would be no oppression of the weak and where men would not “think evil of each other”. There has, sadly, been no such society established on earth through human effort.

However, as we look forward to the new Jerusalem – the City of Truth – and to the gathering of God's people from every corner of the earth, it is clear that this new, holy city is only possible because of the intervention of God in Christ who, faithful and righteous as he is, acts to save his people.

Do you just vaguely hope for the peace and joy of life in the heavenly Jerusalem or are you, by the grace of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, actively trying to live a life worthy of that place each day you are given on earth?

KEY VERSES

This is what the Lord says: "I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City, and the mountain of the Lord Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain."

Zechariah 8:3

HYMN

Glorious things of you are spoken,
Zion, city of our God:
He whose words cannot be broken
Formed you for his own abode:
On the rock of ages founded
What can shake your sure repose?
With salvation's walls surrounded
You may smile at all your foes.

Saviour since of Zion's city
I through grace a member am,
Let the world deride or pity,
I will glory in your name.
Fading are the worlds' best pleasures,
All its boasting pomp and show;
Solid joys and lasting treasures
None but Zion's children know.

J. Newton (1725–1807)

ZEPHANIAH 3:14–17

The Lord, the King, Is With You

What fears hold you back from confident trust in the Lord?

Yesterday we had a picture of life in the ideal city for those gathered there by their Saviour and Lord. Today the message, though still prophesying the restoration of Jerusalem, applies to its people, focusing on the remnant who are left in the new city, those who trust in the name of the Lord.

The coming of Christ, which we celebrate at Christmas, heralds the coming of his eternal kingdom – the beginning of the end of evil. These words of hope and confidence are for us too. We can sing and shout, we can be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has taken away our punishment and turned back our enemy! Christ has broken, by his death and resurrection, the domination of human life by the power of sin and death.

Take these words to heart today. We go into the daily “battle” with what Paul calls the “powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12), but also with our own tendencies to selfishness and indulgence, to choose the easy rather than the good, to look for comfort rather than sacrificial service. Zephaniah reminds us that our Lord is with us and “he is mighty to save” – so you too, if you trust in the Lord, never again need to fear any harm nor that you have the resources to resist temptation. Not only that, but the Lord takes great delight in you – he loves you, he rejoices that you are one of the faithful – and he is singing too!

Remind yourself that, despite appearances, the battle against evil, sin and death has already been won. Ask for help to trust the Lord daily and that even if you are busy in his service, you will also be able to be “quiet” in his love and delight.

KEY VERSE

*The Lord your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing.*

Zephaniah 3:17

PRAYER

Lord, fill our hearts with your love,
And as you revealed to us by an angel
The coming of your Son as a man,
So lead us through his suffering and death
To the glory of his resurrection,
For he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*An Australian Prayer Book (1978):
Alternate Collect for Fourth Sunday in Advent*

ISAIAH 7:10–17

The Lord Himself Will Give a Sign

“Born of the Virgin Mary” – take a moment to ponder this miraculous intervention in human history.

Although this passage is quoted in Matthew 1:23 – and, for us, contains one of the greatest of God's promises – the original sign was prophesied in spite of the king's faithlessness. Although Ahaz claims he doesn't want to “put the Lord to the test”, really he is refusing, perhaps because of unbelief, the extraordinarily generous offer given in verse 11.

This then, is the Lord's chosen sign (14) originally given to herald God's righteous judgement on the kingdom of Judah. A child would be born to a young woman at present unmarried. He would be called Immanuel – God with us. This child would be part of the remnant saved when, because of the consistent faithlessness and disobedience of both king and people, God would send the Assyrians to destroy his birthplace.

So how does this sign of judgement become a sign of hope for us and a foundational truth of our faith? There is a clear link between the preservation of the faithful remnant and the eventual coming of Jesus – the perfect, faithful, righteous one who would fulfil all God's promises to his people. The fact that Jesus' miraculous birth was prophesied hundreds of years before is astounding. But even more astounding is God's faithfulness to his people. Despite their continued rejection of his commands and of the close loving relationship he offered to them, he intervenes in human history miraculously to be “God with us, Immanuel” and takes the punishment for his people's sin upon himself.

Thank God for his faithfulness, despite his people's long history of rejecting him. Read Philippians 2: 5–11 and reflect on what it means for Christ to be “God with us” at his birth, through his life, death and resurrection and into eternity.

KEY VERSE

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:14

HYMN

Christ, by highest heaven adored
Christ, the everlasting Lord;
Late in time behold him come,
Offspring of the virgin's womb
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see
Hail the incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with man to dwell
Jesus our Emmanuel:
Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the new-born king

C. Wesley (1707–1788)

MATTHEW 1:1-17

God's Promised King About to Arrive

Have you ever traced back your family tree? Were there any surprising results?

The gospel of Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus, split into fourteen generations between each major figure or event, beginning with Abraham, to David, to the exile to Babylon and finally to Jesus the Messiah (17). Matthew does leave out a few generations to form this perfect fourteen generation split. However, he chooses to include some unexpected names in the genealogy: Tamar (3), Rahab (5a), Ruth (5b) and Uriah's wife (Bathsheba) (6). Not only is this unusual in ancient genealogies, but their inclusion shows God's amazing grace to people who would have been considered unworthy in many respects whether due to their gender, lifestyle or ethnic background.

The form of the genealogy brings to mind the promises God had made in the Scriptures. Firstly to Abraham, that God would bless Abraham and his descendants, so that all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:1-3). Secondly to David, that God would raise an offspring of David's own flesh and blood to build a house for Himself and who would be the Son of God (2 Samuel 7:11-16). So it is through the genealogy that Matthew demonstrates that Jesus is both a son of Abraham and David, and therefore the long-awaited Messiah.

As we come to a time when our society gears up for Christmas, Matthew reminds us that Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, has come and fulfilled the promises that God made to his people hundreds of years before. How does knowing the hope that Jesus brings flow out in your life? How might it change the way you celebrate Christmas with family and friends this year?

Thank God that his promises are fulfilled in Jesus. Reflect on the amazing hope that Jesus brings by fulfilling God's promises. Pray that you will share this with your family and friends this Christmas.

KEY VERSES

Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham

Matthew 1:1b

*Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be
used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.*

Philippians 2:6

HYMN

Lord, you were rich beyond all splendour,
Yet for love's sake became so poor;
Leaving your throne in glad surrender,
Sapphire-paved courts for stable floor.

You are our God beyond all praising,
Yet, for love's sake, became a man
Stooping so low, but sinners raising
Heavenwards, by your eternal plan.

F. Houghton (1894–1972)

LUKE 1:26-38

Two Miracle Babies

What surprising news have you read or heard recently? How did you respond to it?

Luke recounts two miraculous conceptions back-to-back, and the two accounts are very similar with a few key differences. The first is Zechariah and Elizabeth's pregnancy in their old age (1:5-25) which reminds us of Abraham and Sarah's story. The second is Mary's virgin pregnancy where the angel Gabriel delivers a pregnancy announcement that brings the supernatural to earth.

Mary is greeted as "highly favoured", which is strange as she knows she is not anyone special and she is understandably "greatly troubled" at the appearance of an angel (29). Gabriel's reassurance "Don't be afraid" is necessary as the enormity of her responsibility becomes apparent. God had chosen her to become the mother of Jesus, the "Son of the Most High" – the one all faithful Israelites have been waiting for, the one whose kingdom will never end. This is a pivotal moment in human history, where an ordinary girl is touched by the divine power of God to conceive the Lord Jesus, both fully God and fully man (35). What a privilege to be witnesses to this miracle through Luke's account.

It is interesting to see the different responses of Zechariah and Mary to Gabriel upon hearing his message from God. Zechariah responds with disbelief (18) whereas Mary responds with curiosity (34) and later obedience (38). Her trust in Gabriel's words that "no word from God will ever fail" is demonstrated in her response, "I am the Lord's servant" (38). Do you often respond to God's words and commands with such simple obedience?

What is an area of life where you find it difficult to trust and obey God? Pray for God's help to be able to respond like Mary with "I am the Lord's servant" especially when you find it difficult or the task too daunting.

KEY VERSES

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

Luke 1:32-33

HYMN

Jesus, hope of every nation,
Light of heaven upon our way;
Promise of the world's salvation,
Spring of life's eternal day.

Look, he comes! – the long-awaited
Christ, redeemer, living Word;
Hope and faith are vindicated
As with joy we greet the Lord.

© Michael Perry

LUKE 1:39-56

A Beautiful Song

Have you ever been so overjoyed that you burst into song?

Finding out about a pregnancy is often a time filled with many emotions. This is especially true for Mary who rushes over to Elizabeth after receiving the announcement from Gabriel. Elizabeth would be the only other person who would truly understand Mary's situation. Upon Mary's arrival, the Holy Spirit fills Elizabeth and she recognises Mary as someone truly blessed and calls her "the mother of my Lord" (43). The Holy Spirit allows Elizabeth to know that Mary has been chosen by God and she is filled with so much joy that her own "baby leaped in her womb".

Mary's song of praise expresses her joy and praise for God alone as the centre of all her emotion. She begins it with "My soul glorifies the Lord" (46) as it is with her whole being that she praises God. Throughout her song, Mary recognises her own place as "his servant" but also that she has been greatly, undeservedly blessed. Her praise captures the true nature of our God, praising him for his power and sovereignty, but also for his holiness. He is merciful to those who fear him, lifting up the humble, looking after those in need. This is our God!

We too, would do well to praise God, as Mary does, for his sovereignty and great mercy in sending Jesus our Lord and Saviour. We can often lose the joy we once had when we first heard of the saving news of Jesus. Take a moment to feel the joy in Mary's song and let your soul glorify the Lord.

Thank and praise God (in song if you would like) for our Lord Jesus Christ as we remember his birth this Christmas. What are some other blessings God has placed in your life that you are joyful for?

KEY VERSES

*My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,*

*His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.*

Luke 1:46-47, 50

HYMN

Tell out my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
The hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise and his mercy sure:
Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord
To children's children and for evermore!

© Timothy Dudley-Smith

MATTHEW 1:18–25

Immanuel – God With Us

Sometimes to experience the highs of life, we also need to experience the lows.

The account of the supernatural birth of Jesus recorded in Matthew's gospel picks up Joseph's side of the experience. Mary, his betrothed, is found to be pregnant before they had actually been married! Imagine the emotions that Joseph must have been feeling when he saw Mary's baby bump after returning from her trip to visit Elizabeth, where she stayed for 3 months (Luke 1). He decides to save Mary's reputation by quietly divorcing her rather than making a public example of her, showing his heart of mercy.

God however, had his hand over this situation and sent an angel to Joseph to clear the air. Mary had not been unfaithful, but rather faithful to God, and had been blessed to conceive through the Holy Spirit. Joseph is told not to be afraid to take Mary home as his wife, and that she would have a son, who he is to name Jesus *"because he will save his people from their sins"* (21). Joseph goes from a low point of considering divorcing Mary due to her sudden pregnancy, to finding out that God has blessed Mary and him to raise a son who would be the Messiah.

Matthew even points to the fulfilment of Scripture here where he references the prophet Isaiah in verse 23. He helpfully points to the meaning of Immanuel, "God with us", a perfect and mysterious name for Jesus, God incarnate, walking among us. Certainly, this is a high point in history, the birth of Jesus which we celebrate and remember each year.

Thank God that we can celebrate Christmas freely in this country. Reflect on the wonder and eternal significance of the birth of "Jesus who will save his people from their sins" (21), who is also "Immanuel, God with us" (23). Pray that this Jesus will be clearly at the centre of your celebrations.

KEY VERSE

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.

Matthew 1:21

HYMN

Joy to the world – the Lord has come!
let earth receive her king,
let every heart prepare him room
and heaven and nature sing!

He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness,
the wonders of his love.

I. Watts (1674–1748)

JOHN 1:1–18

The Lord Has Come!

Today – dwell in the joy of Christ's birth.

John 1:1–18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 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.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

(John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

You may also like to read the other Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth – Matthew 2 and Luke 2:1–39.

Notes

Notes

