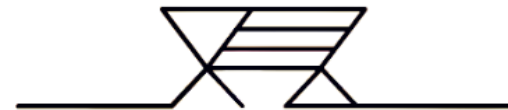


*THE GOD
YOU'VE
BEEN
WAITING
FOR*



December 25

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Our heartfelt hope is that this humble collection of devotional readings will be a source of blessing to you and your household all throughout the days of the Advent season this year. There are 25 short devotional reflections, one for each of the first 25 days of December, each based on a well-known passage of Scripture, and each accompanied by a short prayer.

Each of these short devotions has been thoughtfully and prayerfully written by one of the members of a group made up of over 20 Sevenoaks Alliance Church leaders; a group made up of Pastors, Elders, Administrative Staff members, International Workers, and even a few leaders from the Canadian Pacific District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada.

We are confident that you will find spiritual food in the words that follow. As followers of the Newborn King, we know that a daily diet of Scripture reading and prayer is essential to healthy spiritual life and growth. But Scripture reading is not an end in and of itself. We read the written Word of God so as to encounter the very real presence of the Living Word of God Himself, in the Person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ - the risen, regnant, and returning Sovereign over all of creation.

Most of us spend most of our lives in waiting for something. It is our conviction that once you peel back the layers, the answers that we are all waiting for, to most of the questions that hang over all of our lives, can all only ultimately be found in the Person of Jesus Christ. May this collection of Advent reflections help you to recognize Him more surely and deeply as The God You've Been Waiting For.

Scripture John 1:1-5, 9-14 NIV

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.

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.

Reflection

The first three words of John's gospel mirror the first three words of the book of Genesis; *in the beginning*. We're thus taken back to the primordial darkness and chaos that reigned prior to creation. It was into this darkness that God spoke; His Word calling forth light and order. The Word challenged the darkness then and the Word challenges the darkness today. Through the birth of the child (Word became flesh) God again triumphantly declares; *let there be light!* In what dark area of your life or circumstance do you need God's light to shine?

Prayer

Dear Lord, on this Christmas morning would You remind us of the true light that came into the world and comes into our lives. Where there is darkness and pain would You shine deep within. Please also equip us to be agents of this light to the dark world around us. Amen.

December 24

Scripture Isaiah 9:2, 6-7 NIV

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

*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.*

Reflection

I remember walking home from school one day as a child, looking at the sky and wondering if there was something bigger than me out there. I was one of the people walking in darkness. Then, when my babysitter came to Christ and invited my family to her baptism, my Dad teased her about having "seen the light." But we all went, and the experience changed our lives forever. We, too, experienced the light of God's love when we, too, met the One who we would all come to call "Wonderful Saviour, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Prayer

Jesus, You are the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who broke the curse of sin and death through the cross. Kingdoms come and go but Your kingdom will never end. Thank you for rescuing me from the darkness of my sin. You brought peace, hope, forgiveness, love and purpose to my life. I am a child of the King! Amen.

Renee Carter

December 1

Scripture Jeremiah 33:14-16 NIV

The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.

"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.*

In those days Judah will be saved

and Jerusalem will live in safety.

This is the name by which it will be called:

The LORD Our Righteous Savior.'

Reflection

Advent is all about promises – promises made and promises kept. It was a very dark time in the nation of Judah when Jeremiah prophetically delivered the Lord's promise to raise up a Righteous Branch. They had been dragged into captivity and had been plagued by bad kings, suffering the consequences of sinful choices. They needed more than just a good king; they needed a Saviour. This Advent season we reflect on God's promise to become human, entering the world as a baby. God promised and Jesus came. Let all the promises God has already kept build your trust in Him.

Prayer

Father God, our lives are affected by broken promises, yet we confidently can trust Your many promises to us. This advent season, we wait for You to reveal Yourself to us in new and fresh ways. Amen.

Grace Jorgensen

December 2

Scripture Isaiah 11:1-4a NIV

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. 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.

Reflection

Scripture like this causes me to ponder the long-term expressions of God's love. As soon as Adam and Eve fell from God's grace, He was implementing and communicating His plan for our redemption. Far before Christ's birth, God was telling us how He would bring us salvation. From something that was dead...new life would appear. He tells us, clearly, that His plan is far more/better than mankind alone could ever produce. God's redemption plan is a judge that not only brings truth and merciful justice, but also the full reconciliation of our souls back to relationship with God.

Prayer

Father God, thank you for Your undeniable love for us, demonstrated and communicated before we ever knew You. Though we are born into sin, Your plan is available to bring our spirits to life; reconciled and saved through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank you. Amen.

Dale Enns

December 23

Scripture Luke 3:1-6 NIV

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar ... the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

*"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.
Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill made low.
The crooked roads shall become straight,
the rough ways smooth.
And all people will see God's salvation.'"*

Reflection

My prayer is that, this Christmas, you would have a deeply meaningful celebration of the advent of Christ. As you celebrate Jesus' incarnational arrival on earth, may you also be inspired by the words and actions of his cousin, John the Baptizer. John was one who went ahead of Christ and prepared a way for His coming, meaning he helped others be ready to know Jesus. Helping others "...see the salvation of God..." is a role all Christians are called to play. Who is in your life that God is longing for you to make known the Gospel of Christ to?

Prayer

God, Father, Son, & Holy Spirit: I pray that You would bring to mind the people in my life that You desire for me to make You known to. Holy Spirit, I ask that You fill me and thus empower me to be a part of Your mission to this world, in this way. Amen.

Zach Meisenheimer

December 22

Scripture Matthew 2:19-23 NIV

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.” So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Reflection

Matthew 2:19-23 is the account of Jesus and His family’s return to Israel from their escape to Egypt. Herod had died, but was it safe? God gave Joseph assurance through a dream that it was safe to return to Israel. Joseph accepted God’s assurance and returned. God had a plan for His son – Jesus - and Joseph had a part in that plan. Joseph listened and followed as God led him safely to the next chapter of his life. As we accept God’s promises, we can be confident in His guidance in our life.

Prayer

Lord, may we accept Your assurance of guidance in our life. Help us to put our full trust in Your plan for us. Amen.

Les Stobbe

December 3

Scripture Isaiah 61:1-3a NIV

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 brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

Reflection

Christmas is a season of joy, but real joy is more than a warm happy feeling. To be filled with real joy we must be filled with the Holy Spirit. Filled with Christ’s Spirit, we are emboldened to proclaim His Gospel to others, empowered to proclaim His freedom to those held captive by sin, encouraged to act as His hands and His feet, and entrusted with helping the poor and broken hearted to set aside their despair and put on the garments of beauty and praise. When we let the Holy Spirit fill us with His joy, that joy overflows to others.

Prayer

Lord, open our eyes to see those who mourn and are captives of sin. Fill us daily with Your Spirit that we may be Your voice and hands to hurting, lost people around us. Amen.

Dave McCarthy

December 4

Scripture Luke 1:5-17 NIV

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old. Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Reflection

Waiting... "Don't be afraid Zechariah, God has heard your prayer... your wife will give you a son." Usually not surprise news for a young couple, but when you are in your 80s? A child would have removed Elizabeth's public shame, but they had probably stopped praying for one once they had hit their 50s. Which means that God had answered a prayer that had been uttered at least 30 years before. Waiting... how beautiful their faithfulness to God despite seemingly unanswered prayer. God himself – not whatever else it is that we are waiting for - is the ultimate reward of our waiting.

Prayer

Abba Father, thank you for Your written Word that tells us You hear our prayers. Help me to trust Your wisdom when I experience barrenness, when life doesn't produce what I am hoping for and please give me the courage to wait well. I ask these things as Your child, through faith in Christ and filled with Your Spirit. Amen.

Matthew Carter

December 21

Scripture Matthew 2:13-15 NIV

When [the Magi] had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Reflection

Matthew gives a harrowing account of the ruthless King Herod, who upon hearing of a child born king of the Jews, tries to have him killed.

However, Jesus was not destined to die as a child at the hand of a maniacal king. He was destined to die on the cross. And by doing so, destroying him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil. Knowing the schemes of the enemy, God sent an angel to Joseph in a dream with a plan of escape.

Our God cannot be out maneuvered and His plans cannot be thwarted.

Prayer

God of all wisdom, we thank You that nothing and no one could ever foil Your redemptive plans for Jesus Christ crucified. Amen.

Ron Demers

December 20

Scripture Matthew 2:9-12 NIV

After [the Magi] had heard [Herod], they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Reflection

As I reflect on this beautiful passage of scripture, my heart cannot help but beat a little faster as I imagine the joy that I observe in the actions of the Magi. These wealthy, influential and educated men from a far away land, were willing to make the uncomfortable journey to witness this world- and life-changing event. Why would they do such a thing, giving up the comfort they knew so well? Only because this child was the God that their souls had been waiting for. On hands and knees they bowed their bodies, minds and souls in reverence to the miracle of Emmanuel, God with us.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for Your grace and the greatest gift ever given to this earth in the form of Jesus Christ. Fill my heart with overwhelming joy this day and may my life be forever changed because of Jesus. Amen.

Robby Jeffery

December 5

Scripture Luke 1:18-20, 57-66 NIV

Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years." The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy. On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, 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." Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

Reflection

For the 400 years that Israel was held captive in Egypt, God was silent. For the 400 years between the time of the prophets and the time of Jesus, God was silent again. In imposing 9 months of involuntary silence on him, perhaps Gabriel was reminding Zechariah that, as he went on to say in verse 20, "My words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time." Honestly, we don't always appreciate God's timelines, or His silences. But they are there to remind us, perhaps, that He is in control. And for this we give glory and praise to Him.

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, help us to have a right understanding of the gift that silence can be. Help us to be constant in trusting in Your love during those times when Your voice seems to fall silent. And help us to practice silence in Your presence, so that we may be all the better able to hear Your still small voice through the background noise that seems to so characterize the Christmas season. Amen.

Jon & Anita McCarthy

December 6

Scripture Luke 1:67-79 NIV

[When John the Baptist was born] his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

*“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.
He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David
(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us—
to show mercy to our ancestors
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”*

Reflection

“Filled with the Holy Spirit”, so as to say, ‘this is what God is saying’, Zechariah tells us what God’s plan is subsequent to the birth of John (the Baptist). What lies ahead is all about ‘redemption’, ‘salvation’, ‘being delivered’, ‘forgiveness of sins’, and ‘the way of peace’. And the objective God has in mind is stated in verses 74 and 75: “that we ... might serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.” The birth of this child is the next step by which God intends to draw us to Himself so that we may live life as He designed it.

Prayer

Oh Lord, Your great goodness has come to us in living form, and we gladly respond with our embrace and give ourselves in service to You. Amen.

Ed Wiebe

December 19

Scripture Matthew 2:1-2 NIV

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

Reflection

In Matthew’s gospel, the birth of Jesus causes there to appear in the sky a light that is so mesmerizing to look upon that it compels the Magi to travel far from their homes in search of the promise it offers. Kings come and go, but this star proclaims the birth of a King whose coming prompts the offering of not only tribute and treasure, but of worship and adoration. This Christmas season, may we, as His people, reflect to those around us the kind of light that draws men to the promise to be found in such a Saviour and King.

Prayer

King Jesus, as we turn our faces to worship You this Christmas season, may the light of Your love be so brightly reflected into the lives of others that they cannot help but be drawn to its glow. And may we be ready to give answer when they ask “Where is the one who has been born?” Amen.

Brian Robertson

December 18

Scripture Luke 2:36-38 NIV

There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Reflection

The Bible is full of larger-than-life characters, great 'heroes' of the faith, like Abraham and Esther and Ezekiel and David and Paul. But the story of Christ's birth, as told by Matthew and Luke, is the story of a Saviour whose coming can be received with joy by both the great and the small, the 'significant' and the 'insignificant.' Anna is a 'small' character in the Bible, but she's the Christian I'd like to become when I 'grow up.' Thank God for the quiet, gentle saints who spend their lives praying, and whose prayer is to have the joy of seeing the face of Jesus.

Prayer

Lord, during this Advent season, and during all the seasons of our lives, as we await Your coming, may we live in - and live out of - a faithfulness to You that knows no limit to its steadfastness, and which desires no reward other than that gift which has already been given – that unto us a child has been born, and unto us a Son has been given. Amen.

Brian Robertson

December 7

Scripture Luke 1:26-38 NIV

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 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." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Reflection

My answer is YES... what is the question? Have you ever had a face-to-face encounter with an angel of God? Have you ever been asked by God to do something that is unthinkable to most people? Have you ever experienced such an emotional fear, that you were shaken to the core of your being? Mary, a young innocent single Jewish girl, experienced it all...and more! When the Living God asks us to participate in a Divine event that could change our lives forever, are we ready to answer by faith... YES, I am the Lord's servant?

Prayer

May the beauty of the Living God, be seen in me as it was seen in Mary, and may I trust You, Lord, as she did, and say YES, to whatever question You ask of me this Christmas season. Amen.

Brian Derksen

December 8

Scripture Luke 1:39-45 NIV

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

Reflection

When have you faced a situation similar to that of the Virgin Mary? You have submitted to the Lord to carry out a purpose of His, received His Word and His promises to you and know the Holy Spirit is in you. However, there have been complications—people have criticized or judged what God has asked you to do. It is during those times that you and I need the community of God to encourage us. Elizabeth was God's instrument of encouragement to Mary. How can you be such an instrument of encouragement in someone's life today?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, forgive me if I have been in the crowd that criticizes and judges others as they carry out Your purposes. Help me to be like Elizabeth, who, filled with the Holy Spirit was able to encourage Mary and bless her because she "believed that the Lord would do what he said". Amen.

Gaileen Warden

December 17

Scripture Luke 2:33-35 NIV

The child's father and mother marveled at what [Simeon] said about [Jesus]. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Reflection

For many, the celebration of Christmas is restricted to the sentimental; there is no meaning or power to the season beyond their experience of weak and passing emotion. In this text, the *cost* of the salvation of God's supreme creation, humankind, is announced by Simeon in unflinching terms. The meaning of Christmas is so much more profound than mere sentimentality! Jesus will divide the crowd, says Simeon. In their response to him, some will exhibit pride and self-dependence, and will ultimately fall. Others will manifest the humility and faith that result in confidence in Messiah Jesus and they shall rise on the last day to everlasting life. And Mary, dear Mary, while forever honoured by bearing Jesus, will weep at the foot of the cross as her Son and Saviour is crucified. The God that she, and we, are waiting for, perishes in weakness but rises in power to save all who will look to him!

Prayer

O God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we thank and honor You for pursuing us in our lostness and need. You sent Your Son, a sign of your love and justice, a sign that was spoken against, rejected, and crucified for our sins and raised for our justification! Amen.

Errol Rempel

December 16

Scripture Luke 2:22-32 NIV

When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.” Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”

Reflection

Simeon had been longing for things to get better for his nation. “When will God provide the salvation we’ve been waiting so long for?” The Spirit had assured him that it would happen in his lifetime, and the Spirit guided him to the temple courts that day. There Simeon saw 40-day-old Jesus and knew in that instant that the wait was over – *wrapped up in the life of that child was all the hope and comfort there could ever be in this world of sadness and pain.* What are you waiting for today? Jesus has come for you.

Prayer

Father, help our hearts to believe this Christmas that Jesus is what we and our world need most. Thank you that You have come, and we eagerly await Your return. Amen.

Tim Olson

December 9

Scripture Luke 1:46-55 NIV

And Mary said:

*“My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.*

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

*He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.*

*He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.*

*He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”*

Reflection

Mary’s soulful expression in response to God’s work through her is all about Him. “He has ...”, “His ... “ The only descriptor of herself is ‘humble’. And of all the ways in which she might mean ‘humble’ --in occupation, gender, wealth, land ownership, power, community status-- the most notable is in relation to her position to God. He is mighty, just, good, merciful. She is nothing to notice but for what God has done. She is the benefactor of His love and work. Recall the song, “Oh, Lord, it’s hard to be humble..” Truth that hurts, isn’t it?

Prayer

Lord, It *shouldn’t* be hard for us to be humble because we are *not* perfect in *any* way, but it is. Remind us, daily please, of your great work in our lives and our very imperfect humanness, so it drives us to serve you, humbly, in word and in deed, for Your glory. Amen.

Tammy Toews

December 10

Scripture Matthew 1:1-17 NIV

Reflection

Read the first 17 verses of Matthew's gospel. His account of Jesus' birth begins with a genealogy that draws a line from Abraham to Joseph. Matthew wrote for Jewish readers, so he presents a paternal ancestry, and all of the "fathers" who appear on it are Jewish. But notice that in 4 different places he has added in the names of the mothers as well, and these women in Jesus' family tree are all non-Jews: Tamar the Adullamite, Rahab the Canaanite, Ruth the Moabite, and Bathsheba the Hittite. In Old Testament terms, these women were "foreigners." Our cultural instinct at Christmastime is to get together with the people who are 'nearest and dearest' to us: our family and friends. But Matthew's genealogical insertions reveal an unsettling truth about Messiah Jesus: that the heir to David's throne had come to redefine our ideas of family and tribe and nation. The Saviour of the world would establish an eternal kingdom in which, as the Apostle Paul would later write, there would be "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." This Christmas, may we act on the belief that the celebration of Christ's birth should be at least as much about welcoming the stranger, the foreigner, the alien among us as it should be about spending time with family and friends.

Prayer

Precious Saviour, help us this Christmas season to live out Your love and care for the lost, the lonely, the isolated, the depressed, the discouraged, the heart-broken, and the hopeless. Help us to begin to understand how spacious and gracious the family is that You have adopted us into. Amen.

Brian Robertson

December 15

Scripture Luke 2:15-20 NIV

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Reflection

Luke's shepherds are visited by an angel and told of the Saviour's birth. Upon receiving this news, they take action by traveling to experience the truth themselves and then by sharing their experience with others. They offer a model for Christian discipleship: they KNOW the way, they GO the way, and they SHOW the way. For me as a boy, Christmas was about receiving and giving gifts, but only of a material nature. For us today, it should still be about receiving and giving, but the gift that we have received, and are called upon to give away again to others, is the gift of the gospel.

Prayer

Dear Father in heaven, we thank You for the gift of Your Son, who made reconciliation with You possible. We thank You for the gift of Your Holy Spirit, who leads and guides us. We ask for a refreshing of Your Holy Spirit, to empower us to win more to You, for the sake of Your kingdom and Your glory. We love You, oh Triune God. Amen.

Frank Kucey

December 14

Scripture Luke 2:8-14 NIV

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, *“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”*

Reflection

When the tough shepherds encounter angels, they are instantly “filled with fear.” Why were they frightened? Perhaps because, as an angel is sharing the news of Jesus’ birth, suddenly a “multitude of the heavenly host” appears. This multitude is often depicted as an angelic choir, but in Greek the word ‘host’ paints a different picture: it literally means a band of soldiers. God sent His army to announce that the Messiah had arrived and the rescue mission for humanity had begun. The angel army arrived to announce the birth of a baby — an unexpected way for God’s rescue mission to begin.

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for boldly proclaiming Your love for us, a love that propelled you to intervene incarnationally, coming to earth on a rescue mission for me. Amen.

Dwayne Toews

December 11

Scripture Matthew 1:18-25 NIV

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 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.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Reflection

Joseph’s decision to quietly divorce the pregnant Mary was motivated by his noble desire to protect her from public disgrace. Still, this wasn’t what God had in mind. Why was it so important to God that His entrance into humanity come through two ordinary people? Beginning as a helpless baby meant relying on the faithfulness of two imperfect human parents. Perhaps it was because this meant that Jesus would enter this world in arguably the most intimate way possible: by becoming a part of a loving family. Ultimately, His nature was reflected in His entrance. He is Immanuel, God with us.

Prayer

Lord, we thank You that your plan included us because You wanted to be with us. Thank you for the hope we have because You came down to save us from our sins. Amen.

Nick Rolleman

December 12

Scripture Luke 2:1-7 NIV

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them in the inn.

Reflection

Think of what a challenge it was for Mary and Joseph to have to make the journey to Bethlehem! The discomfort for a pregnant woman to have to travel such a long way by donkey. Giving birth in a strange place ... far from home, family, and friends. Yet God had long since laid out His plan for the Saviour to be born in Bethlehem. His plan ensured that they would have a place to stay. Though each of us faces our own challenges in life, we know that God has a perfect plan for each of us as well.

Prayer

Lord, we thank You for watching over our daily lives including in our struggles and allowing us to glorify You through Your actions in us. Amen.

Keith Carpenter

December 13

Scripture Micah 5:2-5a NIV

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. Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be our peace.

Reflection

Most Christmas seasons I have intentionally focused on the miraculous birth of Christ. But when I read Micah 5:2-5, I marvel to realize that it was prophesied over 700 years before it happened! From a tiny, insignificant village came our Ruler, our Saviour, the King of kings. Originally written as a prophecy that Israel would be delivered from its oppressors, this passage reminds us that Jesus' birth was for all mankind. A world in turmoil talks about peace, but doesn't seem to know where to find it. This Christmas let's remember that Jesus is the true source of peace.

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for coming to this earth to be born in such a humble way, in such an insignificant place. I pray that the world will see that You are the King of all kings and the source of peace that they are desperately looking for, especially in this Christmas season. Amen.

Dave Verwoerd