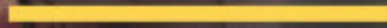


MENU



ADVENTURE

DEVOTIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE





ADVENT intro

ADVENT just means “to arrive” or the anticipation of arrival, a getting ready for something that is on the way.

The aim of these short thoughts through ADVENT is to help us get ready for the arrival of Jesus. We are going on a journey through the Bible before we finally get to the birth of Jesus, but that is pretty important to do - Jesus’ coming wasn’t a last minute thought. All through the Old Testament, the first part of the Bible - we have hints and clues to follow that show us God is working out His purposes and plans, with some incredible people right at the heart of it - and we will get to meet some of them on the way.

We start hundreds of years before Jesus was born and trek through the Bible right up to that first cry of Jesus as a baby in Bethlehem. There will be something to think about, maybe an action you can do with your family and a prayer for each day - so, if you are up for it join me as we travel through Advent together.



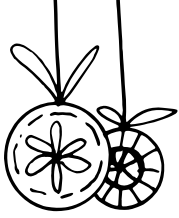
Day 1



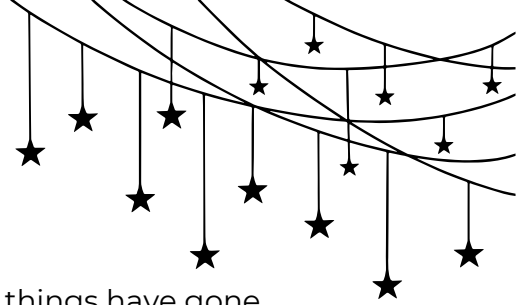
The Lord God asked,
“Have you eaten from the tree
that I commanded you not to
eat from?”

Read Genesis 3 : 8-15





Day 1



We are just three chapters in to the first book of the Bible and things have gone wrong. Genesis means “beginnings” and after a GREAT beginning disaster strikes . . .

Wait a minute . . . what does this have to do with advent?

Well, in this newly created world of wonders it hasn't taken long for brokenness, sadness and pain to arrive - but **God is already making a plan**. Sometimes when we read the Bible we have to pick up on some clues, just as if you were going on a long trek and need to pay attention to your environment. Is that rock supposed to be on my left or right? Is the sun behind me or just coming over that hill ...ah. Now I know where I am!

There is a clue tucked away in this chapter about what is going to happen. A clue about why there is journey that Jesus is going to make from the glories of heaven to the dust and dirt of a crowded little town called Bethlehem.

The serpent who has tricked Adam and Eve is cursed by God - give verses 14 and 15 another read. See where it says, “**He will crush your head, and you will bruise his heel.**”? Well - although sin has entered the world, God has a plan already. Jesus will be coming to “crush” sin and death! Jesus will be “bruised” for us when he dies on the cross.



Look at your hands for a moment. Your finger prints are on everything you touch. You can't see them, but they are there. When you open the fridge for a snack, on your toothbrush, your pillow, your football, when you tap a message on your phone. We leave a mark where ever we go, whatever we do - what mark will you leave on the world and those around you today? How might you bring joy or hope or encouragement to someone else?

God's fingerprints are on everything he has made. God is always paying attention, always loving, always good. God sees where we go and what we do, the good and the not so good - the mess we make, the mess we can't clear up for ourselves.

God made a plan for Jesus to come and walk among us, be with us and show us what He is like. Through Jesus, God has walked among us - His fingerprints on the bread that turned a small loaf in to a feast for others, his finger prints on the eyes of a blind man - imagine, the first image he saw when he regained his sight was Jesus! His fingerprints on the back and neck of a donkey when he rode in to Jerusalem . . .



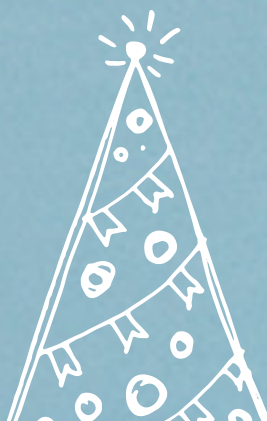
Dear God, thank you so much for your plan! Thank you that even when things were such a mess, you were already getting things ready to put everything right through Jesus. As we start this journey together, help us to discover just what an adventure it is to follow you - help me to see your fingerprints on my life and to know that you are with me.

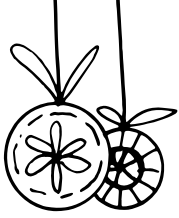
Day 2



Through your descendants all
the nations of the Earth will be
blessed

Read Genesis 22 : 1-18





Day 2



Have you ever had to really trust someone? Like, REALLY? Sometimes this can be so hard. What if they let us down? What if they are wrong? What if I end up looking stupid?

Abraham has a huge “faith test” - (Read Genesis Chapter 22). God promised him a son. Abraham is chuffed - it was pretty miraculous! But then, it feels like a very cruel twist - God asks Him to do the hardest thing - **give his son back, offering Him up to the Lord as a sacrifice!**

At the very last moment God stops Abraham and provides a ram instead. Wow, that was close! I don't know if Abraham knew what was going to happen, but He knew that God was good and trusted that. God then made an amazing promise to Abraham - because of his faith and trust everyone on EARTH would be blessed. Including you and me.

Here was what God said to Him, “**Through you descendants, all the nations of the earth will be blessed.**” God kept his promise - at the beginning of Matthew's gospel, we read in verse 1, “This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham”



Have you ever played the trust game? You stand with a clear space behind you and then fall backwards, trying to keep your legs straight as you tip towards the ground - and someone is there to catch you? Did you always trust when you played that game - or, did you turn and check someone was there, or did your knees buckle because you just weren't quite sure?

Maybe you still play that game - or have never played it - why not have a go with someone in your home, a brother or sister, parent or carer. Give yourself plenty of space - maybe throw some cushions on the floor just incase!

Trusting God can sometimes feel like falling in to thin air. Maybe that was how Abraham felt. Will God catch me? Will this be alright?



God, thank you for always being faithful. Help me to trust you, even when I don't know what is happening or when things are a mess and I can't see how things will be made right. Thank you for the example of Abraham's faith AND that you keep your promises.

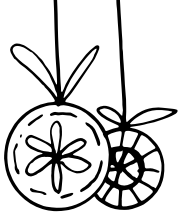
Day 3



He is the one who will build a
house for my Name, and I will
establish the throne of his
Kingdom forever

Read 2 Samuel 7 : 12-16





Day 3



We leap from Abraham to King David, a jump of 750 years! During that time God's people have made a home, saved a nation, been slaves, tasted freedom, wandered in the desert, had judges and prophets and Kings - things have not been boring!

Today we are in the book of 2 Samuel at chapter 7. We find another promise about descendants - this one is to King David, "**He is the one who will build a house - a temple o for my name, and I will secure his royal throne forever.**" - you can read that in verses 12 to 17.

Right at the beginning of Matthew's gospel Jesus is referred to as a "Son of David" and then a bunch of times after that in the New Testament. David was just a human King, but here in 2 Samuel we have a promise that someone is coming who will be the greatest King ever. It would be another 1000 years before Jesus was born!

Some things last a short time, some things last for a while - but it is only with God that something can last forever.

What is amazing about these linking generations - from Abraham through to David, then David through to Jesus - is that that linking of the generations continues right through to us today. Because of Jesus, you, and me - all of us - have the chance to be part of God's family - God has linked us in!

In fact, John says this, right at the beginning of his gospel, "**To all who did receive him (meaning Jesus) he gave the right to become children of God.**"



Ok - here is a thought, have you put your tree up yet? Whether you have or not, how about making your own simple home made decoration and hanging it on the tree - grab some A4 sheets of paper, cut some strips as equal as you get them width ways across the paper. Now, on each strip write the name of someone that you would LOVE to be linked in to God's family - friends you know, maybe someone in your family? Then add some strips of people you know are already friends with God - right, now grab a pritt stick or glue and start linking them together to make a paper chain. Lob it up on the tree (or keep it safe, until the tree is up!)

Whenever you look at that chain of paper links have a quick pray for those you have linked in, pray they might know peace this Christmas time, pray for a chance to chat to them about being linked in with Jesus!



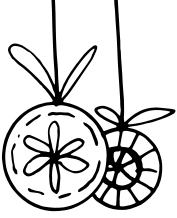
Dear Heavenly Father, thank you so much for your amazing Bible. Thank you too for your promise to David - thank you that Jesus is the King of Kings and that He links us in to his family and his Kingdom - help us to live for him today.

Day 4

She will give birth to a son and
will call him "Immanuel" which
means "God with us"

Read Isaiah 7 : 13-14





Day 4



Throughout the Old Testament there were constant signs of God's presence - from a burning bush for Moses; a pillar of smoke for God's people fleeing the Egyptians; the Ark of the Covenant which carried the Ten Commandments; A still small voice for Elijah - God spoke or showed himself in different ways, but now - we have the promise of a different sign through the prophet Isaiah,

"the Lord himself will give you a sign, look! The Virgin will conceive a child. She will give birth to a son and will call him "Immanuel" which means "God with us" - you can read that in Isaiah Chapter 7.

We are still 700 years from Jesus being born - but what a promise this is. God himself is coming! Everything else has been preparation - the real event is now being foretold. I recently went to a gig. There was a supporting act and they were great - but then, the headliners stepped up and blew my socks off! Here, Isaiah is saying that the Lord is planning something special - we aren't there yet, we don't know the release date, but WOW it is going to be incredible!

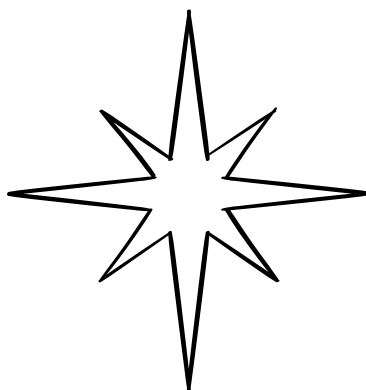


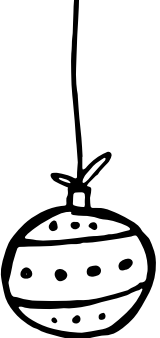
What signs do you look out for? Maybe you can tell when you are getting tired - you get a bit cranky with your brother or sister, slam your bedroom door in frustration at nothing. Maybe you can spot the signs when you are hungry, there is a bit of rumble from your stomach and before you know it you are in the kitchen emptying the fridge. Can you spot the signs of God's presence as we get closer to Christmas - the Immanuel himself - with you?

What might be a sign for you that God is with you today? What will help you to remember that He is here, He is with you.



God, thank you for another amazing promise that Immanuel is coming. Thank you for being with us. Help me to see and know your presence today - help me to pay attention and not miss the signs of where you are working and what you are doing.





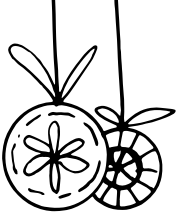
Day 5



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

Read Isaiah 9 : 6-7





Day 5



Yesterday we were thinking about Immanuel, a name Jesus would be called. Today I'm kind of blown away by the **LIST** of names that Isaiah launches in to for this coming King . . . this wonderful verse is found in Isaiah chapter 9,

"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."

We have surnames today like Baker or Butcher or Miller, because of the jobs people have done in the past - someone in the family line would have baked bread, or sold meat, or ground wheat in a mill. These amazing names in Isaiah tell us who Jesus is - what He does. He is being called these names because of what He will do and what He will bring - a *Wonderful counsellor* is someone who comes along side when they are most needed; a *Mighty God* has incredible power; *Everlasting Father* points to Jesus bringing a way for us to be part of God's family that will last forever, and - in this troubled world (now, as much as when Jesus did arrive 2000 years ago in Bethlehem) as He comes, he brings peace, **he MAKES peace** . . .

In our families, in our homes, we might not all be bakers, butchers or millers - although some of you reading this might be! There will, however, be words we use to describe each other - sometimes when we are frustrated or fed up with someone we live with, and then those words might not be very kind ones!



BUT - take a moment, think about those closest to you - friends or family, what words would you use to describe their character, when you think of them at their best - what words spring to mind? Faithful? Reliable? Loving? Great listener? Hilarious? Warm? Generous? Kind?

Now, here might be a tough think to do - go and tell them. It is such a good thing to be an encourager! It might feel a bit awkward, but it is a reminder to us - and to them - just what we value about who they are.

Then take a moment to think - if Jesus is all those things Isaiah says, and MORE - how wonderful is it to have Him as our closest friend!



Lord Jesus, words cannot really describe how wonderful you are - but thank you for these words that help us understand a bit more about your love and power and who you are. Help me to get to know you better in this time of Advent.

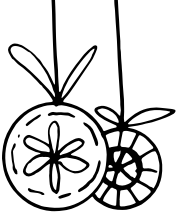
Day 6



A shoot will come up from the
stump of Jesse, from his roots
a branch will bear fruit

Read Isaiah 11 : 1-3





Day 6



In the book of Isaiah we read this in Chapter 11, ***“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.”***

Have you ever seen a tree stump? A dead thing. Maybe it has been cut down, maybe the tree has died. Sometimes a shoot might spring up bringing new growth - but, there is not much chance of it surviving. It won't be noticed.

Well, Jesse is King David's father and, as we know from what we have already discovered on our Advent journey - Jesus will be born from his line. In the film Jurassic Park, the character played by Jeff Goldblum says, ***“life will find a way”***. God, the author of life finds a way!

From a place that nobody paid much attention to, a little place called Bethlehem. And, as a boy Jesus would then grow up in a place called Nazareth. Not important, easily overlooked - yet, right where the one who was the King of Kings would live! God does things in surprising ways and often in surprising places! Are we paying attention to see what God might be up to?

Sometimes it can feel like there are dead things, or dead places in our own lives - what can come from this? There is nothing here of value we might say - but, what could we be missing? Or, you might be tempted to look in the mirror and think, I am nothing - I have nothing, what use am I?

In the New Testament there are some who are getting in to a big comparison contest - what is important? who is important? Let's value people differently because of what they have, or what we think they can give us - but, Paul, writing to the Church in a place called Corinth, reminds his readers . . . ***“Take a good look, friends, at who you were when you got called into this life. I don't see many of “the brightest and the best” among you, not many influential, not many from high-society families. Isn't it obvious that God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these “nobodies” to expose the hollow pretensions of the “somebodies”?***



It is so easy to miss things - especially the little things! Take time today to notice and thank God for things you don't normally pay attention to. Maybe you take them for granted, maybe you don't spot them. Ask God to help you see what is going on - even right under your nose!



Dear God, I don't want to miss a green shoot of your goodness today. Help us to see where you are doing small things and bringing life - in my own life and in the lives of those around me - help me to celebrate the small, the unnoticed and the overlooked today.

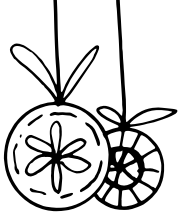
Day 7



a voice of one calling “in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God”

Read Isaiah 40 : 1-5





Day 7



We are still in the book of Isaiah, in Chapter 40 we read, ***“a voice of one calling, “In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord” Make straight in the desert a Highway for our God . . .”***

We will get to who that is about in a moment, but here is a question for you - How do you get ready for something?

Do you calmly prepare for Christmas? Maybe you have a wall planner and you count down the days, maybe you have made a list of who you need to get presents for - what kind of things they like and, here we are, still in early December and you have done your Christmas shopping - Or do you run about madly at the last minute shouting “it’s happening, it’s happening!”

What about just day to day stuff like trying to get out the door for school or a trip somewhere - Maybe you are the first to get ready and have to wait for everyone else . . . or, maybe you are the one everyone else is waiting for, “hurry up!”

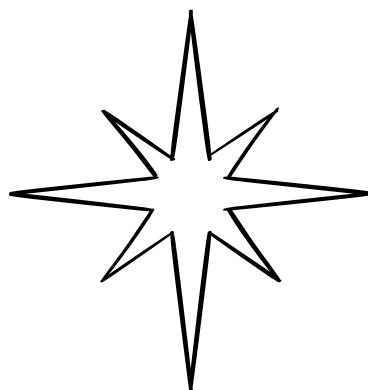
Today, these verses look ahead to a time when someone will walk out of the desert and say these very words. *“Get ready, He is coming”* This is what John the Baptist said as he helped people get ready for Jesus. We might be way off Christmas still, but part of the reason for these reflections each day is to take our time, get properly ready, so we can welcome Jesus when He arrives (and we arrive!) at Christmas.



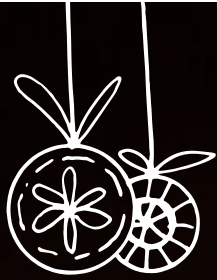
Are you ready? For some things coming up, Christmas Eve is going to be too late - think about what you need to do, make a list and check it twice! Making a plan and being prepared isn’t boring - it can add to the excitement. The thing we most need to get ready though - aside from the Tree, presents, food and what films we hope we can binge watch on Netflix - is our hearts.



Thank you God for your plan to send Jesus - thank you for the clues we are finding through the Bible that show us just how many people were involved in getting things ready - help me to be ready too.

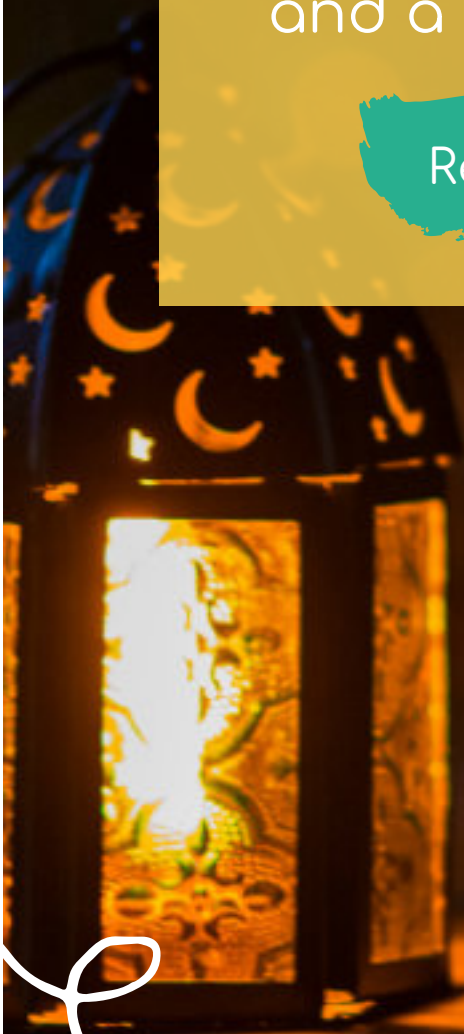


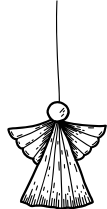
Day 8



I will take hold of your hand. I
will keep you and make you to
be a covenant for the people
and a light for the gentiles

Read Isaiah 42 : 5-7





Day 8



We are STILL in the book of Isaiah, he had loads to say about how God was going to fulfil his promise and bring humanity back in to right relationship with Him. Here we are in Chapter 42,

"I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the gentiles - to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison, and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness."

There is a lot in just those few short verses, but to start off - the word covenant simply means promise. God is faithful, he keeps his promises - what he says he will do. Here in Isaiah, he does - 700 years later through Jesus arriving. "For the people" is about the people of Israel, and for the gentiles is about everyone else - nobody is missing from this promise.

And what is said next, the blind see, captives are set free this is what Jesus did on earth - and that dungeon of darkness is life without God, life without the truth and goodness of Jesus - who is the light of the world, shining in our hearts and lives.

Isaiah could see it - we don't know how these words came to him, whether a vision or a dream or a whisper in his ear from God - but He seems something of what God is going to do and writes it down for us.

The words about Jesus in Isaiah are one of the reasons we can trust the Bible!



If you can, and you have this stuff at home - have a go at this. Get a candle and some tea lights. Place the candle in the centre (with tea lights around) and light the candle. Now, using the candle carefully light each tea light - obviously, do it carefully, ask permission of your parents / carers! Or do it together - now, notice as you light each tea light - the candle can "give" light without losing any.

This light that comes from God is for all, it can't run out - there is enough for everyone. Nobody can put this light out!



Thank you God that Jesus, the light of the world is coming! Thank you for being our light and hope in our families and in our lives - would your light shine on us today.

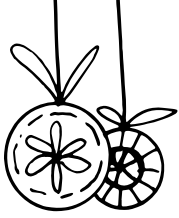
Day 9



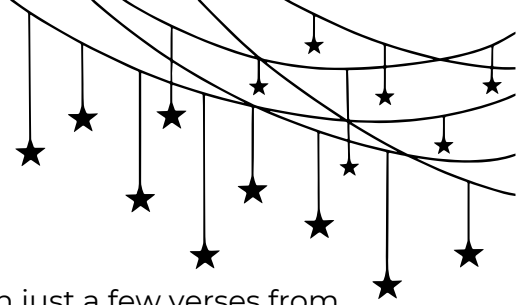
He was despised and rejected, a
man of suffering and familiar
with pain. Surely he took up our
pain, and bore our suffering

Read Isaiah 53





Day 9



Would you believe it, we are still in Isaiah! I'm going to mention just a few verses from Chapter 53, but the whole chapter is really worth a read.

This is a picture of Jesus that hasn't been sharpened up for Instagram, it isn't a picture that is going to gain loads of likes, Isaiah says, ***"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him - nothing in his appearance that we should desire him."***

in fact . . .

"He was despised and rejected . . a man of suffering and familiar with pain. Surely he took up our pain, and bore OUR suffering . . . He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities - the punishment that brought us peace was him and by his wounds we are healed"

We can wonder in amazement as we think about Jesus today - but when he was on earth he didn't win any popularity contests! These are some tough verses to read, but really important. Isaiah paints a picture for us of what will happen, of the kind of person who is coming to bring us home to a place of goodness. Chapter 53 of Isaiah tells us why Jesus came, what he had to do and what he went through to destroy death and bring us freedom and peace.

Have you ever wondered if God knows how you feel . . . when you are misunderstood? Overlooked? Treated badly? Left out? Laughed at? Jesus knows.

Jesus knows - not as an idea or because He is God and knows everything, Jesus knows because it is his lived experience. He suffered, he came to serve and take our place - In making things right with God for us, we are forgiven, we can call God "our Father". All because of this suffering, servant - King Jesus.



Like I said, there is a lot in this chapter - if you've got some time later today, maybe before you go to bed. Just read the chapter through - see what stands out to you. If reading is not massively your thing - you can find it via an app like YouVersion where you can listen to the chapter as someone reads it to you! If you enjoy art - maybe draw a picture to remind you of what Jesus has done for you and for the whole world.



Lord, help me when I feel rejected or left out, help me when I feel awful about things I have done. Help me to come to you and seek your forgiveness and peace. Thank you that you know what it is like to be me - thank you for your incredible love.

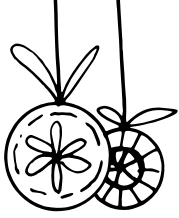
Day 10



Here is the man who's name is
the Branch. He will branch out
from this place and build the
temple of the Lord

Read Zechariah 6 : 12-13





Day 10



We've already mentioned through these short reflections that names matter - well, hear is one for you,

"Here is the man whose name is the Branch; And he will branch out from this place and build the temple of the Lord . . and he will be clothed with majesty and sit on the throne."

That's a couple of verses from Zechariah, one of the last books in the Old Testament. Hi the name is Branch. Branch - what kind of name is that? Maybe called a seed when he was little, then maybe twig as he is growing up (or twiglet) then, growing stronger - branch!

It's picture language for us, someone is on their way and they are going to branch out - the picture in chapter 6 of Zechariah is someone who is coming who will be both priest (deal with our sin) and serve as King (bring in God's rule and reign).

Branching out means something that is going to grow and expand - it can't be contained! What God is doing will build and strengthen and branch out to reach all people . . .

Jesus grows God's kingdom as he plants the seed of God's goodness in our lives. Each of us has an impact and makes a difference to others as **we** branch out.



Maybe you could track down a pond or a lake - take a stone and have a go at skimming! How many bounces can you do before the stone disappears? Imagine each bounce is the impact you have on those around you. What do you bring when you come in to contact with others? When the stone finally slid in to the water, how far out did those ripples stretch.

If we are friends of Jesus, we are invited to bring in God's Kingdom - we are invited to branch out too - ask God to help you today to be a positive influence on those around you.



Thank you Jesus that you came to be our priest and King, help me to live today in a way that pleases you - in the different ways that I branch out, help me to be good news to those around me.

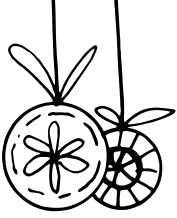
Day 11



But you Bethlehem, Ephrathah,
though you're small among the
clans of Judah, out of you will
come one who will rule Israel

Read Micah 5 : 2-4





Day 11



We are inching our way towards the end of the Old Testament. Today we are in the book of Micah and we find these words in Chapter 5,

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

Have you ever felt small? When I was growing up it took a while for my height to get going - I remember being in the equivalent of Year 11 and some Year 8 girls walked past me in the corridor at school and said, “oh are you lost, can we help you find your class . . . ?” I stood as tall as I could (I was about the same height as them at the time) and squeaked (my voice hadn't broken properly yet either!) “No, I'm in Year 11 I know where I'm going!”

It felt proper humiliating!

But I'm so encouraged by this verse today. It reminds me, that although it can be tough to wait - “come on body - grow taller!” - God has often (and still does) use the small or the insignificant or not so important places and people to do amazing things for him - it's all through scripture.

Gideon, Samuel, David, King Josiah, a servant girl, a little boy sharing his packed lunch with Jesus and thousands of others! Being small, we can think we don't matter - we can think we don't have much to offer and can't make a difference. Bethlehem was a nowhere place, but is now known the world over as the place that Jesus was born!



There are lots of things we can do for God, whatever our size - here are just three :: We can talk to God; We can use our gifts and talents to serve Him and others; We can tell others about Him. Why not pick just one of those today and DO it.

You are not too small!



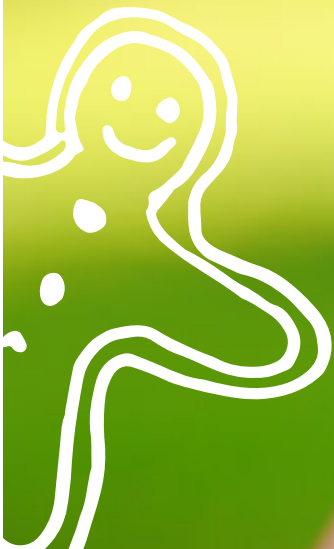
Thank you that you are the God of small things, and places, and people - like me. Help me to know just how BIG you are as my God. Thank you for loving me, giving me a place in your family, use me in a mighty way for you today!

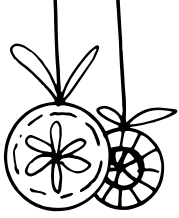
Day 12



See, I will send my messenger
who will prepare the way before
me - then, suddenly, the Lord
you are seeking will come

Read Malachi 3 : 1-2





Day 12



Have you ever been taken by surprise? Maybe someone creeps up on you and shouts BOO. Maybe you thought you had ages for that piece of homework and then - suddenly - it's due tomorrow!

We are hit with the last book in the Old Testament today, and it's a hint at what is coming - a reference to both John the Baptist and Jesus,

"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me - then, suddenly, the Lord you are seeking will come . . ."

This is in Malachi chapter 3, then we have 1 more chapter and that's it no more prophecy, no more words from the Lord - before we hit the New Testament, we have 400 years of silence . . .

That doesn't sound like "suddenly" to me.

The suddenly here is a bit like a picture that is blurry, to the prophets that have been speaking to us through the History of God's people they are catching glimpses, seeing bits and pieces - then it will be suddenly - suddenly we are watching in HD with millions of colours.

You see, part of being ready is about not missing the signs, not forgetting that the more time passes then the closer we are getting to the special arrival. The start of December can seem like a distant memory, we've another 12 days until Christmas Eve - another 12 of these devotions before, SUDDENLY - it's Christmas!

The prophets didn't know when, like we do today - our history hasn't happened yet. They know someone special is coming, they know it will change everything and they don't want people to miss it. Suddenly - reminds us that even if we are waiting and paying attention, there is still the suddenly of the doorbell being rung, the knock on the door, the phone ringing, the ping of a text, and suddenly - Jesus has come.



You might not have played the game of snap recently, well, how about praying the game of snap? Divide up a couple of sheets of A4 paper in to roughly 9 sections on each of about the same size. Then write some simple things to pray for in those spaces on each bit of paper, so you have two copies of each thing to pray for. Now, find a friend or family member and ask them to pray snap with you! Do the usual, take it in turns, wait for it - when you have a matching phrase - whoever shouts "snap" first - say a quick prayer for that! Keep playing, and suddenly - yep, suddenly, you'll have found you've prayed for nine things in no time at all.



Dear God, help me not to be so desperate for Christmas to be here that I miss the fun of getting ready, but also - when suddenly Christmas day arrives - would you fill me with your joy and peace!

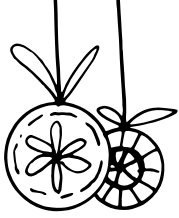
Day 13



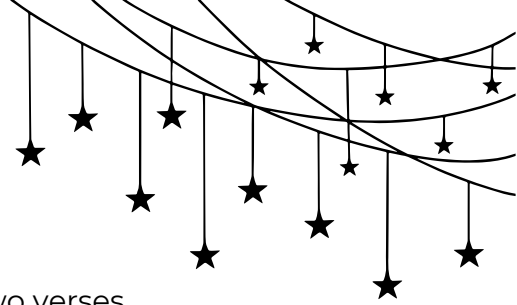
See, I will send the prophet
Elijah to you before the great
and dreadful day of the Lord
comes.

Read Malachi 4 : 5-6





Day 13



We are at the very end of the Old Testament, in fact the last two verses,

“Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord arrives. His preaching will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers.”

That's it. Like I mentioned last time, 400 years to wait . . .

One of the reasons people thought John the Baptist might have been Elijah is because of these verses, that and the fact that Elijah didn't die . . . he was whisked off to heaven in a chariot of fire - a pretty incredible way to go!

If Elijah was coming back then, AND he left in a flaming chariot his return is going to be spectacular! Then, over 400 years on from these verses, this wild looking man walks out the wilderness and start preparing the way for Jesus ministry!

Today we live in a world where we don't have to wait for anything! With a click of a mouse or a swipe of the finger, stuff is ordered. We can microwave food in a fraction of the time it would have taken to cook it; we can download films to watch, binge watch a series on Netflix without having to wait a week for the next episode! Maybe you have been on a journey, and it has felt like it is going on for ages and you have uttered these words, famous words, used by children and young people the world over, *“are we there yet?”* You give it five minutes and then . . . *“NOW are we there yet?”*

Waiting is good for us though - we appreciate things more when we have to be patient and wait a bit. I'm enjoying the second season of The Mandalorian, and actually - part of the joy is the excitement of the next episode dropping, I've been enjoying it for weeks rather than getting through it all in a day and then saying, *“NOW what am I going to watch!”*



How are you at waiting? Can you wait all day - are you able to wait patiently without demanding or getting fed up that something isn't happening right now that you want? What do you need to wait for . . . what are you looking forward to coming that isn't here yet . . . (yes, I know - Christmas!) but what else, maybe you are saving for something and you haven't got all you need yet, maybe you are waiting for someone to apologise to you for that thing they did or said - maybe someone is waiting on you to do the same thing? Let's pause . . . have a crack at waiting for a moment, take a breath and ask God to help you to wait patiently.



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

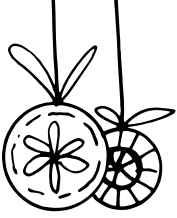
Day 14



You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great . . . the son of the Most High.

Read Luke 1 : 26-33





Day 14



Finally, the 400 year wait is over! Something truly remarkable is about to happen - In the first Chapter of Luke's gospel, we read this verse,

"You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the son of the most high."

OK, so we know Jesus is coming, we know Bethlehem will have something to do with it. We know He will be both priest and king - but, he's going to be BORN? The Son of the most high, born . . . like one of us? God is going to "grow up" as a helpless baby, relying on Mary and Joseph to be changed, clothed and fed, God is going to say his first word, learn to walk . . . all that stuff?

Thing is - we worship a God of the improbable - from creating everything out of nothing to the parting of the red sea, helping a child defeat a giant, making prophets run faster than chariots, bringing the dead to life . . . among all of that mind-blowing stuff, this is the most important part of God's rescue plan.

God had to become one of us, experience all that we are and all that we can be as humans - the creator, becoming like his creation - with one difference, the first and only human to live a perfect life.

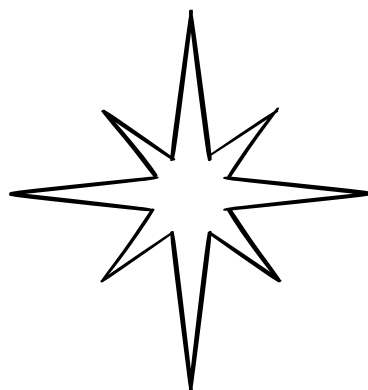


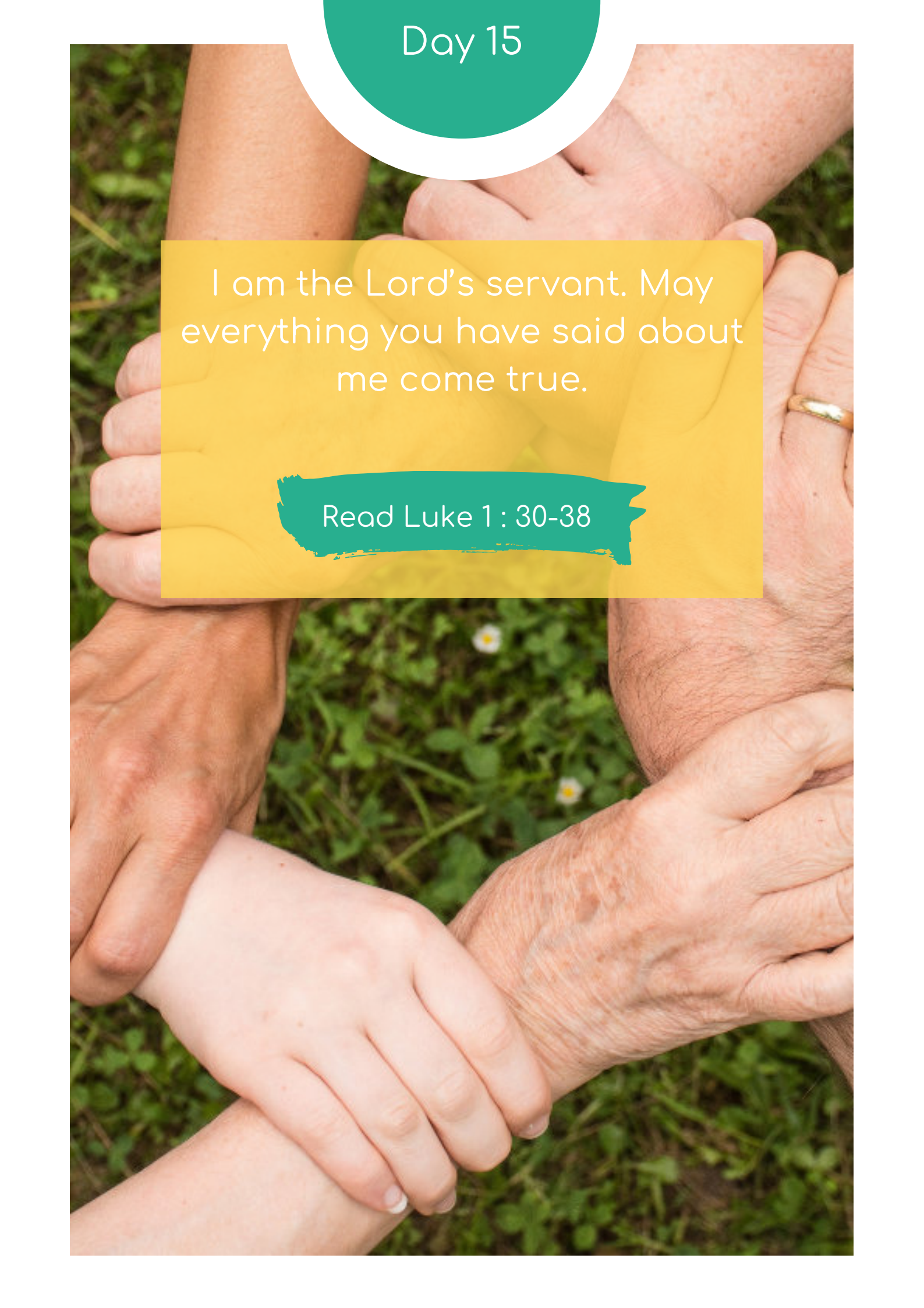
Get some plasticine (or anything else you can "make" something from) and make a person, maybe make it to look like you or someone in your family (be kind!) . . . Now, have a good look at your creation, you made it - now, imagine becoming like the very thing you have just made.

God became one of us, he was fully human and fully God at the same time.



Dear God, this sounds so incredible - but thank you for becoming one of us. Being a child, a baby, and knowing what it is like to grow up. Help me as I continue to grow - Help me to know that you are always with me, help me to become the person that you made me to be.

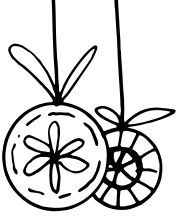


A background image showing several hands of different ages and skin tones clasped together in a circle, resting on a bed of green grass with small white daisies. The hands are positioned in a way that suggests prayer or a supportive grip. A teal circle is at the top, and a yellow rectangle with a teal brushstroke is in the center.

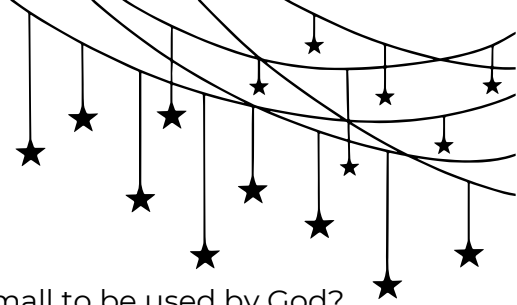
Day 15

I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true.

Read Luke 1 : 30-38



Day 15



Remember how I said a few days ago that you are never too small to be used by God? Well, you can't get much smaller than a baby who hasn't been born yet. Elizabeth, Mary's relative, is carrying a baby who will grow up to be John the Baptist. This is the prophet mentioned by Malachi - the 400 year wait is well and truly over!

For Mary, her son will be the son of God! This gobsmacking news is delivered by an angel . . . and Mary basically responds like this,

"I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true . . ."

What a different reaction to some of the blokes God has used in the past - think of Moses, "I can't do it", or Gideon, "You must mean someone else" or Jeremiah, "I'm too young."

Mary was also probably a young teenager at the time.

Mary took God at His word and was obedient, she did ask "how can this be?" And here is the answer, "nothing is impossible with God." That "with" is important - are you living your life day by day WITH God - or just giving him a shout when things are tricky or you want something?

The word translated "with" is a small Greek word, "para" it literally means alongside or close to. Are you walking alongside God? Are you trying to be close by Him? It is seriously the best place to be!



Write those words down, "***nothing is impossible with God.***" Stick those words on the fridge, by your bed, top of your mirror - wherever you look - and be reminded of that daily, with God - anything could happen, without him - I'm a bit lost, more prone to messing things up and just not living life to the full.

Can you trust and believe, like Mary?



Thank you God that you are the God of the improbable and that nothing is impossible alongside you! Help me to trust you and have the kind of faith that Mary did. Help me to remember that you are close by. You are Immanuel - God alongside us!

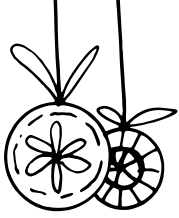
Day 16



Oh, how my soul praises the
Lord, How my Spirit rejoices in
God my Saviour

Read Luke 1 : 46-55





Day 16



We continue with Mary's response to her incredible news today, as she is visiting Elizabeth (remember, soon to be John the Baptist's mum),

Mary starts celebrating, "***Oh, how my soul praises the Lord How my Spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.***"

This has become known as Mary's song - the Magnificat - if you haven't already, read the whole thing in Luke chapter 1 - it is pretty glorious and links back to the covenant, the promises we started with on this Advent journey . . . It has also been turned into a great worship song by Chris Tomlin.

Mary praises God not just for what he has done for her, but for his faithfulness through the generations, for keeping his promises, for remembering his people. When we praise God or say thank you - is it a big wide generous thank you, pulling in wonderful things from the past and stories from other places, do we find ourselves rooted in a bigger story than our own lives?

Mary celebrates and is gobsmacked and overjoyed, but she also has a sense of place and time, this isn't all about her (I'm going to be God's mum!) I think it is part of what helps to keep her so grounded and real in the different episodes we have from the New Testament where she makes an appearance.

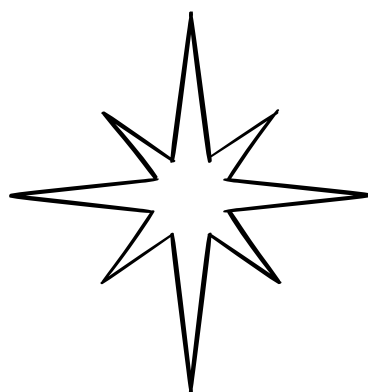
She knows that this blessing through her, is about God's grace, mercy and goodness being poured out on the whole earth!



Do you ever just take some time out to praise God? Could you write your own song of praise? What would you sing? What would you write? Would you come up with dance moves and actions . . . what ways could you tell God how amazing he is? AND who could you share this incredible news with?



Thank you God for your faithfulness - not just to me, but your love and care for those around me, your faithfulness through the generations - through all of history. Thank you for your promises of the past, thank you for your presence today, thank you for being alongside me as I face tomorrow. Give me your joy and peace I pray.



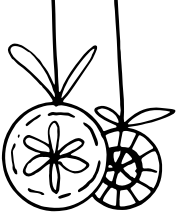
Day 17



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 in
to the path of peace

Read Luke 1 : 68-79





Day 17



"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 in to the path of peace."

Zechariah is John the Baptist's dad - these are among the first words he speaks after MONTHS of not being able to say anything (God shut his mouth up because he did not believe his wife was going to have a baby!) . . .

A different John, writes these words at the beginning of his Gospel - *"the one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming in to the world."* - I love how The Message, by Eugene Peterson puts it - Jesus was **"moving in to the neighbourhood"**

When you cannot see - you need a light to shine the way! We take it for granted perhaps that we can flick a switch, we can walk down a street and lamps come on, torches, electric light everywhere - so much so that in many places we have light pollution, so much light that the night sky is obscured and even on a clear night, we can't see the stars.



How dark can you make it? Like, in your room - pull down the blinds, shut the curtains, block anything that might let light in. Can you see anything, our eyes get used to the dark after a while - maybe you can make out your hand in front of your face, now - light a candle (obviously, you need to have stuff with you ready to go, rather than fumble around looking for it when you've made it really dark) . . . Now, just one small light - and boom, the whole room comes in to view. **We see more than the light itself, we see - by the light!**

When Jesus comes, His light illuminates all that surrounds us - shedding light on challenges we face, helping us see which way to go, shows us what we need to see - I'm challenged by this, because when Jesus starts his ministry and gathers his disciples as he teaches them - he throws out a remarkable thought - At the sermon on the mount, Jesus has just gone through the Beatitudes - the blessed are they, blessed are those . . . and I can imagine the disciples nodding along, you are so right Jesus - preach it Jesus, and then Jesus turns to them and says, "YOU are the light of the world." . . . Wait, what? The light of the world - Jesus, tells his followers that THEY are the light of the world. Here is the thing, if we have received the light of Christ - the light of Jesus shining in and on our lives, we are to pass that light on. We are to be a light to others. Are you going to be a bringer of light this Christmas?



Thank you Jesus, light of the world! Thank you for guiding me to the path of peace - help me to be a light to others that they might also find your ways and walk in them.

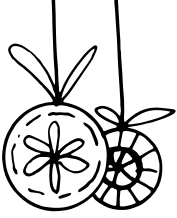
Day 18



She gave birth to her first child, a son, she wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them

Read Isaiah 42 : 5-7





Day 18



How many months ahead do you start to get ready for a journey? Planning the trip, where you will stay, what you need to take with you? How long have you been thinking about Christmas - we are just one week away now! Eeek! God had centuries to get ready for this . . .

What is this then, that I'm reading today, in Luke's gospel,

"She gave birth to her first child, a son, she wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in the manger, because there was no lodging available for them."

Did God miss something in his planning? The words in the Old Testament, promises to Abraham, Mary, the Angel's words . . . what seems to be missing is booking the place where it is all going to happen! No room? Did they not call ahead . . . ? Jesus was born and placed in a feeding trough because there was nowhere else for Him. Nowhere else for the King of Kings, the Saviour of the World, the Prince of Peace, Mighty God, Wonderful Counsellor. Nowhere for Jesus!

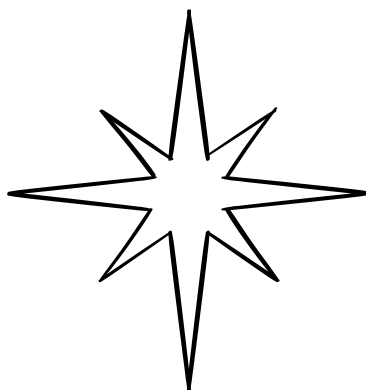
But, it was part of God's plan. Jesus came through a regular family, born in a small town. He did not appear mighty and great! He was not rich and famous. He did not come to be some distant King in some remote palace. Jesus came to be one of us. To know life as an ordinary human being. To know what it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



There was not room for Jesus - but, as we think towards Christmas - will YOU make room for Him? That is a simple question, but with everything else crowding in on our Christmas (presents, food, family, decorations, church activities - online for most of us - more food, falling asleep in front of the TV). **Don't get so wrapped up in Christmas that you forget to unwrap the greatest gift of all.**



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

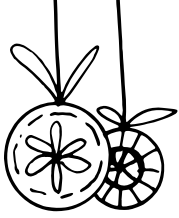


Day 19

Suddenly an angel of the Lord
appeared among them, and
the radiance of the Lord's glory
surrounded them

Read Luke 2 : 8-15





Day 19



A few days ago we had a “suddenly” and here we are again, we read this in Luke 2, **“Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them “don’t be afraid” he said . . . ”**

The Shepherds got not warning - they didn't get an email or a phone call, not a clue! They did not know it was almost the first Christmas. They were terrified. We can sometimes feel that the Bible is full of don'ts - don't do this, don't do that. But, here the disciples are on the receiving end of a don't that is comforting and kind and it is the most often given command in the whole Bible - **“don't be afraid”**.

They had no idea what was happening, or why - they were also not important people AT ALL. In fact, in those days - the sheep were more important than the shepherds, Yet - here they are, this bunch of nobodies in a field being the first to hear the greatest news in the history of the world. Shepherds couldn't worship in the temple because they were considered unclean. Shepherds couldn't give testimony as witnesses in a court, because they were thought to be too unreliable.

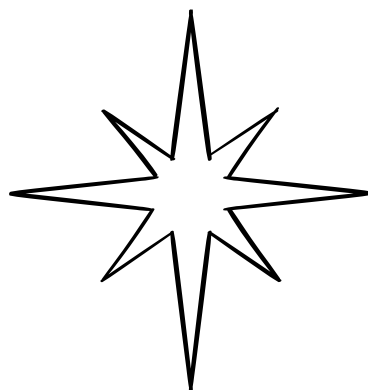


. . do you ever get afraid? Ok, maybe you have not had a host of angels sing outside your bedroom window . . . but, whatever we face - whether it is exciting, scary or just confuses us - we can be encouraged that God is with us and we do not need to be afraid. Maybe, like me, you can worry about things when you are trying to go to sleep - how about this for an encouraging verse, **“In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety”** - Psalm 4:8

So here we have a picture, through the Shepherds, of a God who welcome all - those considered unclean - invited to be in the presence of the one the temple was built to worship; those considered unreliable witnesses - the first to share the good news. This is the nature of God's Kingdom, and you and me are invited to be part of it.



Lord, help me to see through the Shepherds, your loving welcome to all this Christmas time. Help my anxious thoughts to be stilled when I read, “do not be afraid” and help me, this Christmas, to share the good news that Immanuel has come and invite others to join me and worship the King of Kings.



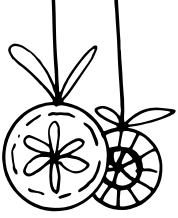
Day 20



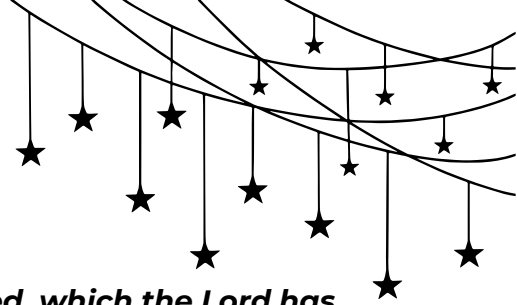
Let's go to Bethlehem and see
this thing that has happened,
which the Lord has told us
about - so they hurried off

Read Luke 2 : 15-18





Day 20



Let's go to Bethlehem! **Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about** - and with that, the Shepherds are off!

You can get ready for something, have it all lined up, packed and booked and everything - and still not go. At some point, you have to make the move. As the angels shared the good news with the Shepherds (and, think about this for a moment - the solitary angel was suddenly joined by the armies of heaven to praise God - and, as far as we know, just these Shepherds got to see that!)

But then - off they go - they couldn't wait to see for themselves! **Do we go along with following Jesus because we have gone and seen for ourselves, like the Shepherds, or do we base what we know on what others have said and seen?** Someone else showing up isn't enough - you and I need to show up for ourselves - we need to go!

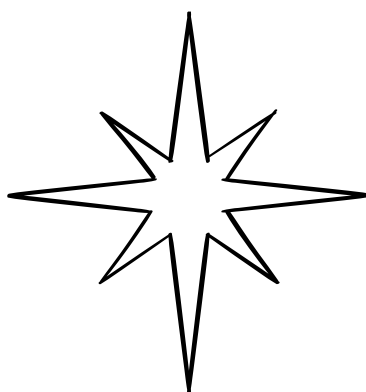
It's tricky though - we can't actually go and see Jesus in Bethlehem. We can't rush down the hillside, in to Bethlehem and see Jesus for ourselves - but, we CAN still see Jesus. We can see him through the actions and words of those who love him. We can know that Jesus is right with us, even as we look for him, because it is what he promised his followers. Others might even see Jesus in us!



AS you journey with Jesus and follow Him in your life, ask Him to help you with your thoughts, words and actions - He is here, he is with us, We can see Him - so let's go!



Lord - may people see you in me today - through what I say and do. As I go about my day, may I also see you in the people I meet.



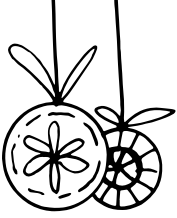
Day 21



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

Read Matthew 2 : 1-9





Day 21



Where is the newborn King of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose and we have come to worship him.

This is what the wisemen, mentioned in Matthews gospel, say as they talk to Herod in Jerusalem . . . There is a Christmas song we sometimes sing, “We Three Kings” - but, we don’t know how many there were. They were known as Magi - which is a bit of latin and where we get our word “magic” from. We really don’t know much about them, except that they have travelled a long way.

They pitch up in Jerusalem, so they are in the right area, but aren’t exactly sure where this new King is to be born. What might seem strange - seeing as they don’t all rush off to worship him - is that the leading priests and teachers DO know where Jesus is to be born! **Knowing though is not enough!**

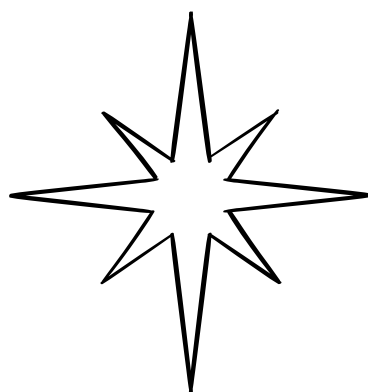
It is the wise men, these people from a different land, who want to worship the new born King. We have to choose to follow. We can know the story - we can know what the Bible says about Jesus - but we have to choose like the wise men, to come and worship.



Who will you be like this Christmas? The Magi or the priests and teachers? What will you choose?



Dear God - help me not to watch from the sidelines or be so familiar with the story that I don’t pay attention, I don’t follow the star, I don’t worship. Help me to see you, follow and worship you this Christmas time.



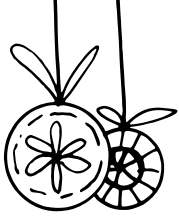
Day 22



They entered the house and
saw the child with his mother
Mary and they bowed down
and worshipped

Read Matthew 2 : 10-12





Day 22



Have you ever missed something? Maybe you have turned up on the wrong day, got to a party so late that it is finished, or didn't even get the message and only find out later than something was going on that you could have been a part of! I hate it when that happens.

Well, the wisemen finally arrive, ***“they entered the house and saw the child with his mother Mary and they bowed down and worshipped.”***

The wise men don't arrive just after the Shepherds, they haven't heard the commotion they caused in the streets of Bethlehem. According to the time the star has been guiding them, *they could have been up to 2 years late!* Jesus might have had at least one more birthday before they eventually arrive. But, it's not too late to worship. They had to wait for their moment with the King of Kings, but when they get there they are filled with joy!

We don't have to wait - Jesus is here. We don't have to waste our opportunity - we can come to Jesus right now.

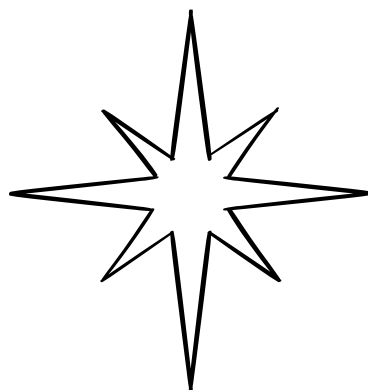
In the midst of the wisemen story is the story of Herod - the King, who wasn't really a King, he was the puppet ruler of the Romans who were actually in charge. Herod wasted his opportunity - despite hearing from the teachers and religious leaders that there was to be an important King to be born in Bethlehem. He wanted no part of it, tried to have Jesus killed, and wasted his opportunity. The wisemen had to wait - they were really late, but it didn't put them off. You've heard the phrase, “better late than never” - well, that was the Magi!



Let's not waste out time this Christmas, let's take the time to worship - the waiting is over!



God, help me to be patient when I have to wait for things - help me not to waste the good things you have given me. Fill me with Christmas joy - Help me to worship you.

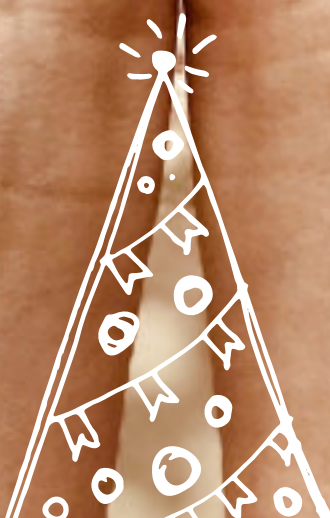


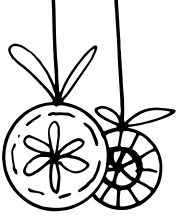
Day 23



Then they opened their
treasure chests and gave him
gifts of gold, frankincense and
myrrh

Read Matthew 2 : 11-12





Day 23



Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

What? What kind of gifts are those for a baby? Even if Jesus is a toddler by now, where is the fluffy rabbit that squeaks when you squish its tummy? Where is the blanket or the babygrog? I thought these were WISE men?

These gifts might seem strange to us, but they are special gifts for a special king. Each gift has a meaning. Gold is gift for Jesus the King. Frankincense - which was used in worship - for Jesus the Priest. (remember, we had a day thinking about Jesus being our King and priest?) and finally, myrrh - which was used for cuts and bruises, but also for embalming the body when someone died - Jesus, the suffering servant. Amazing, costly gifts - which bring in to focus different aspects of the journey we have been on through prophecies in the Old Testament to where we are today . . .



What gifts do we bring? We might not have much (do you have a spare bar of gold lying around?) and - we only have a couple of days to go before it is Christmas day, but - what are you going to give to Jesus? What do you think He would like?

There is a Christmas carol called "In the bleak mid winter",

*What can I give him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb,
If I were a wise man
I would do my part,
Yet what I can I give Him —
Give my heart.*

We don't know if the Shepherds brought any lambs, we know the what part the magi played - but what can **you** give Him? Will you give your heart?

We can offer ourselves - just as we are, you don't need to be wrapped up or stick a bow on your head and sit under the tree - as we follow, worship and love Jesus - we are a gift, to Him and to those around us.



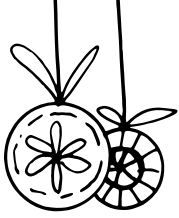
Dear Jesus, help me to offer myself as a gift to you. Help me to give you my thoughts, words and actions - may the gift of my life be like the star that points others to the light of your love.

Day 24

the word became human and
made his home among us

Read John 1 : 1-4





Day 24



This is what John says, ***“the word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness, and we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father’s one and only son.”***

The first four books of the Bible are called the Gospels - good news. Bringing them all together, we get a really well rounded picture of who Jesus was, why he came and what he was going to do. It is only in Matthew and Luke that we get aspects of the nativity story - Mark’s gospel is very short and punchy, like an action film - he launches straight in with Jesus getting baptised as an adult and misses out his birth and childhood completely!

John’s gospel is different again, he deliberately starts his book with **“In the beginning”** which takes us back to Genesis. John picks up some themes we have explored through this short series of reflections - he highlights God’s plan to send the light, and links Jesus with God’s WORD saying, they are the same!

Jesus is the LIVING word of God.

This is not just a special human, this is not just a good person, this is God himself stepping down in to our world in human form. Er, WOW. In greek, “word” is logos, which is where we get the word logo from.

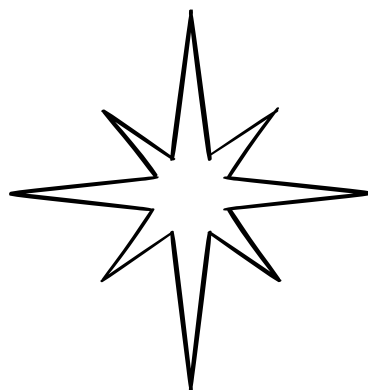


Can you draw a bunch of famous logos and see if others in your home can guess what that are for? You could do the NIKE tick, or the Pepsi Circle thing, or the golden arches of McDonalds . . . plus throw in some more obscure ones. The most famous logo in the world, the *most recognised symbol is the cross*.

Even at Christmas, it is good to remember that the logos of God, came to show us HOW to live, but also died on the cross so that we MIGHT live. We cannot finish thinking about Christmas without pausing and remembering Easter . . .



Thank you Jesus for your unfailing love and faithfulness. For becoming one of us, for dying for us on the cross. As we celebrate Christmas and your coming, help us remember Easter too and the gift of your life that brings us home to a place of goodness with God.



Day 25

