

Meeting Jesus

Reflections through Advent



‘For unto us a child is born.’

Meeting Jesus

Reflections through Advent 2020

As we journey through Advent towards Christmas this year, we are mindful of the challenges that continue to surround us with the COVID-19 pandemic. This past year has seen our lives impacted and changed significantly, and it can be easy to be filled with concerns as we continue to seek a way forward. However, the season of Advent invites us into an expectation of hope as we await the birth of the Saviour, Jesus.

Jesus is hope for the individual, hope for the community, hope for the world!

This Advent we want you to be expectant of hope as we reflect on some of the titles and names of Jesus. Each day you will be invited to read about a name of Jesus as a way of discovering and knowing him more. As you do, you will discover the extent of a gracious, loving, and generous God who has revealed himself in Scripture as a God who is for you. We pray that as you meet Jesus over these next few weeks, that you will feel your heart stirred and your hope reawakened. We pray that you will know with confidence that you are loved by a great and wonderful God. So, do not fear, rather trust, for he is a God who never fails, and a God who is always with us.

May you be blessed richly over this Advent and Christmas season.

*Rev Ken Connor
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Advent Week 1

SUNDAY 29 NOVEMBER

Hope

As we begin our journey on this first Sunday of Advent, we begin with hope. Hebrews 10:23 says, *'Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.'* This hope we profess is that God loved this world so much, that he gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Regardless of the trials and struggles of this world, we have a hope that proclaims God is with us, and a hope that assures that this God is able. We must hold tightly to this wonderful hope. The passage in Hebrews 10 continues: *'And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another...'* In this time of social distancing and restricted gathering, we may not be able to meet up in ways that we once did, however, let us not forget that we can still encourage each other and spur each other on in love. As we begin this Advent journey, be mindful of one another and take time to encourage each other in love.

Advent Challenge... Today, why not pick up the phone and call someone that you have not spoken to in a while, remind them they are not forgotten and encourage them to keep holding on to hope. Amen.

CP

MONDAY 30 NOVEMBER

Jesus, The Word

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' (John 1:1)

What do we do when we want to communicate with someone? Generally, we use words, whether they are written or spoken. Communication has become so much easier these days; we can of course still write a letter or speak to someone in person or on the telephone. But now we can send emails and texts, make ZOOM calls or Facetime to see someone even far

across the world instantly which is wonderful, particularly during this year of such uncertainty. When we do not have words, communication can become a little more difficult, but not impossible. Words small as they may be, have a big impact on people and we must be careful how we use them, always for good and not cruelly. So how else then would God communicate with us other than through words and using our language in the way that we understand. In the Old Testament he spoke through Abraham and Moses and through the prophets. Finally, God spoke through the Word, His own Son, who was with Him from before time began, together they spoke the world into existence. The Word was God, and the Word is God. Through Jesus, God spoke to our hearts, the word spoke grace and peace to us, communicating love and compassion for us. He spoke healing and hope into our lives. The Word – Jesus – was an expression of God’s holiness. He is the only one who met that standard of holiness, as he expressed justice and then satisfied that justice with His life as He was brutally killed on the cross. That Word still speaks today are you listening for the Word to speak to you?

Lord, thank you for sending your living word to live among us, may my heart be open to His voice. Amen.

LM

TUESDAY 1 DECEMBER

Jesus, Author of Salvation

‘...and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.’ (Hebrews 5:9)

The phrase 'made perfect' in this verse simply translates as “his mission was completed”. Christ, through his human life and death on the cross has opened the way to forgiveness and eternal salvation, for all who believe. Every experience of testing prepared Jesus for his final act of obedience to the Father in his sacrificial death, and in doing so, enables those who trust in him to share in the world to come. The words, ‘all who obey him’ do not suggest that salvation is only found in obedience, but that salvation comes

through God's gift to us in Christ. Our obedience is a thankful response for God's great gift.

The Stuart Townsend's song '*Across the Land*' has these words:

*With a shout You rose victorious,
Wrestling victory from the grave,
And ascended into heaven
Leading captives in Your wake.
Now You stand before the Father
Interceding for Your own.
From each tribe and tongue and nation
You are leading sinners' home.*

Lord, you are the author of our Salvation, you designed the plan to rescue us, and brought it to completion. Receive our thanks and praise. Amen.

KC

WEDNESDAY 2 DECEMBER

Jesus, The High Priest

'Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.' (Heb. 4:14)

The office of Priest in the Old Testament was an incredibly important one. The Priest was the mediator between God and the people and was set apart for this distinctive role. The High Priest was the chief of the religious leaders. On the Day of Atonement for the Jews, the High Priest would have to make his own sacrifice before he could enter the Most Holy Place to then offer sacrifices for his people. Jesus as our High Priest mediates for us before God. His sacrifice was a once-for-all sacrifice, and because of it we can come before God with confidence. Hebrews 4 continues '*Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*' As we understand Jesus as our High Priest, we understand that he has acted on our behalf, by dying for our sin, so that we might be united with God. As you thank Jesus,

your High Priest, speak to God about what your needs are in this moment, and ask him to pour out his grace and strength upon you once again.

Wonderful Lord, our High Priest, what love you have shown us, sacrificing yourself so that we may live. Amen.

CP

THURSDAY 3 DECEMBER

Jesus, The Light of the World

‘When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”’ (John 8:12)

I have never known anybody who particularly likes darkness. The world is full of darkness today, never mind the fact we are now in winter and there seems to be more darkness than light during the day. There are many different types of darkness in our world, we only have to turn on the news to see the evil that exists out there. There is the darkness of illness that hangs over the head of so many people, and this year with the COVID-19 global pandemic it has seemed worse than ever. Then there is the darkness that comes with mental health struggles that can be so isolating. In a battle against darkness, all it takes is one match, one candle, only one source of light and the darkness is sent rushing away. This source of light can be the beautiful sparkling coloured lights at Christmas that bring a little joy. Or the kind generous actions of those who reach out to help those who are suffering in times of need, such as charities and food banks. We have celebrated the NHS and all frontline workers who have cared so wonderfully for our communities during this pandemic, often bringing light to patients who could not see family. This is what God did when he stepped into our world. He did not leave us stumbling around in the dark; helpless and alone. The light of His presence invaded our darkness when He sent His Son, Jesus, the Light of the World to guide us back to the Father. Jesus opened many people’s eyes, both literally and figuratively displaying the love of the Father. Today, God still wants to scatter the darkness, to light our way to Him and to use our lives to light the way for others.

Lord, thank you for sending your light into my darkness. Amen

LM

FRIDAY 4 DECEMBER

Jesus, Man of Sorrows

'He was despised and rejected by humankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.' (Isaiah 53:3)

Here we see in these words of Isaiah, the image of the Suffering Servant – an innocent servant suffering for others. Why did Jesus willingly die such a violent death? He did it for one reason, to become the final and complete sacrifice for our sins. Christ became our substitute; all our sins were placed on him. Why? Because he loves us and wants us to spend eternity with him. A man of sorrows, for he gave himself to take on suffering and pain for our relief. The ultimate gift. The old hymn *'Man of Sorrows'* by P.P. Bliss words it perfectly in the second verse: *'Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned he stood; sealed my pardon with his blood; Hallelujah! What a Saviour!'*

Lord, we thank you that you took on our sorrows and sins, so that we might experience life in all its fullness. Amen.

KC

SATURDAY 5 DECEMBER

Jesus, The Vine

'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.' (John 15:5)

This passage in John 15 of the vine and the branches is an incredibly beautiful and encouraging passage. It uses the image of the vine to help us understand the relationship we have with Christ. The vine is the source of life for its branches. It provides water and nutrients by which grapes can

grow. If a branch is cut off from the vine, it will not grow any fruit and eventually will die. A branch is utterly dependent on the vine. When we understand Jesus as our vine, we understand that he is the source of all life. It is Jesus who provides and sustains and who equips us to grow. Without him, we cannot experience the fullness of life. When Jesus uses this image of the vine, he invites us to remain in him, and as we do, he will remain in us. These words give us a hope and a future. They too encourage us to a life that, with Jesus, is full of growth for the glory of God's Kingdom. Jesus is our everything, and we must draw close to him, at all times, and in all seasons.

Lord Jesus, our Vine, you are our source of life. Help us to grow in you this day and every day. Amen.

CP

Advent Week 2

SUNDAY 6 DECEMBER

Peace

As we come to the second Sunday of Advent, we want to take a moment and dwell on Peace. In 2 Thessalonians 4:16, Paul writes his final greetings to the Church and says, *'Now, may the Lord of Peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you all.'* Paul says this as a blessing upon the believers in the church in Thessalonica expressing it as a gift that is given to them from Jesus himself. If we look back in the New Testament to the Gospel of John, we hear Jesus talking to his disciples about leaving his peace with them. He says it so that they will not be anxious or afraid about his leaving, but that they will trust in the work of God, the God who is greater than all other worldly things. We also hear Paul in Philippians 4 talk of the peace of God that goes beyond our understanding, guarding our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. These verses build for us a picture of a peace of God that is protective over us. A peace that is to steady us amid the storms of worry. A peace that invites us to remember that God is great, and that God is with us. Peace is a wonderful

gift, graciously given to us by the God who loves us deeply. Accept this gift today and may the peace of Christ fill you as you put your trust in Him.

Advent Challenge... Today take some time to be still and silent. Create a space at home that can feel peaceful, maybe even light a candle to symbolise the presence of God as you sit still or play some music softly in the background. Take a moment in the stillness to just listen for God. Ask him to fill you with his peace for the week ahead. Then, take some time to pray God's peace for others that you know. Pray his peace into illness, worry and anxiety. Amen.

CP

MONDAY 7 DECEMBER

Jesus, the Rabbi

Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?" (John 1:38)

I am sure many of us have special memories of particular teachers that stood out to us. Someone who made a difference in our life or made a big impact on us. Maybe that was a teacher in primary school who taught you to read and opened the world up for you. Maybe it was a teacher in secondary school who opened a particular subject up for you or perhaps encouraged you to follow your passion into a career. Or perhaps it was your Sunday school teacher who was a great storyteller and made the bible so special, or maybe a Sunday school teacher who led you to Christ. A large part of our lives is spent in school of one kind or another and there are many wonderful teachers who impact the lives of so many. Jesus would have been taught by His mother, Mary, and we know he was a carpenter most likely taught by His father, Joseph. When He was a young boy around 6, He would have gone to the synagogue where He would have been taught the Jewish ways and studied the Talmud. During His ministry he was often referred to as Rabbi or Teacher used as a term of respect and as he would

often speak to many crowds preaching and teaching. He touched many people with His words of grace and healing bringing life and wholeness to many people. Christ continues to teach us today if we allow Him. He promises to teach us, giving us the direction, we need for life. He promises to watch us and counsel us with His wisdom and His presence. For any teacher to be successful, the student must have a desire to learn. God warns us against stubbornly going our own way. If we trust the Lord and come to Him with an open heart and mind willing to learn, He will surround us with His love and mercy and teach us everything we need.

Lord, we give thanks for teachers who have touched our lives and pray that we would remain open to your teaching. Amen.

LM

TUESDAY 8 DECEMBER

Jesus, Pioneer, and Perfector of our Faith

'...Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.' (Hebrews 12:2)

This passage reminds us of the song 'Turn your eyes upon Jesus' and the words:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.*

The greatest encouragement comes when we fix our eyes upon Jesus, he is the perfect example of the faith we seek to express in our lives. We strive to follow the perfecter of our faith. In verse 1 of this chapter, it talks of running the race with perseverance. We may struggle and face many obstacles, but we have a great crowd of witnesses who are cheering us on. We have a Heavenly Father who loves us when we are weary and troubled.

We have a Saviour, who left his place in heaven and came to earth to show us how to run the race.

*O soul are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There's light for a look at the Saviour
And life more abundant and free!*

If we will keep our eyes on Jesus, how can we help but finish the race?

*Lord, help us to fix our eyes on you, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.
Help us to run with perseverance to the very end of life's race. Amen.*

KC

WEDNESDAY 9 DECEMBER

Jesus, The Christ

'Then Jesus asked, "But who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ."' (Mark 8:29)

There can be a common misconception that the word Christ is a surname for Jesus, and the way we use this title can be suggestive of that. However, it is much more accurate to understand it as 'Jesus, the Christ', for Christ is a title of declaration of who Jesus is. When we look to the title and how it is used in the Greek accounts of the New Testament, we discover that it is linked to familiar Old Testament and Hebrew titles such as *Messiah* and *Anointed One*. There are various occasions in the Gospels where this title of Christ is used for Jesus. For example, just before his crucifixion the High Priest asks, 'Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God!' (Matt 26:63). Or in Luke 4 as Jesus casts out demons they cry out, 'You are the Christ, the Son of God.' These usages help us to understand who Jesus was and what he had come to do. He was the long awaited and expected One, the One of whom prophets spoke long ago, the One sent to save the people of God. He is the Christ, the promised Saviour. He is our Christ. Our Saviour, Lord and Son of God. When Peter answers Jesus' question in the verse in Mark above, his answer declares his faith and belief in who Jesus is. Peter was

confident that Jesus was the Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah and Saviour for Israel. Do you share Peter's conviction? If Jesus were before you, asking the question, 'Who do you say I am?' How would you reply?

Lord, revealed to us as Christ, Son of God, we thank you for saving us. May we be filled with the confidence to proclaim that you are the Christ of our life. Amen.

CP

THURSDAY 10 DECEMBER

Jesus, The Lamb

'They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death'. (Rev 12:11)

I have often heard it said that sheep are silly animals, usually because they will follow one another even if they should be led to danger. However, I got to know a couple of farmers, and they would argue otherwise and say they are actually a very intelligent animal. In scripture we are told that they recognise the shepherds voice and will follow only him (Jn 10:4). Even so why would the God of the universe choose to call His Son a lamb? Israel's annual Passover sacrifice honoured the substitute accepted by God during the final Egyptian plague. The Angel of Death 'passed over' God's people because they had smeared lamb's blood on their doorposts. The Passover lamb was more than just an annual sacrifice for the Jews as it pointed to another lamb – God's perfect Lamb, sacrificed so that we would also escape death. Lambs are gentle, harmless, and defenceless. The Lamb of God stood before His accusers and did not defend himself, His silence fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy (Is 53:7). The unblemished Passover lamb pointed to the sinless Saviour who died taking our sins upon Him. Christ is not like a lamb; He is *'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'* (Jn 1:29). So, how do we give thanks to someone who died in our place, taking all of our sins upon His broken body? We bring him our praise, worship, and adoration, and we live a life striving to be more like Christ, our spotless Lamb.

Lord, we can never thank you enough for giving Your Son, the Lamb of God, to take away our sin with His sacrifice, help us to be more like Him. Amen.

LM

FRIDAY 11 DECEMBER

Jesus, The Creator of All

'For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.' (Colossians 1:16)

The Colossians were Greek Christians, and although they had heard a lot about Jesus, they did not know much about the God of Israel.

When Paul wanted to tell them about God, he told them that Jesus was the image of the Invisible God. This may sound strange, after all, how can something that is invisible have an image? What Paul is reminding us, is that as the image of God, Christ is an exact, as well as a visible, representation of God. Through Jesus we see who God is, and what he is like, a God of mercy and love who wants to reconcile all of creation and humanity. Paul knew that if the Colossae Christians knew about Jesus, then they would know all about God. If there is ever anything you want to know about God, then remember to look to Jesus, he will make clear what God is like. The invisible has become visible in Christ.

Lord of all, from beginning to end, you are found in all things. Open our eyes to see you that we might dare to know you more. Amen.

KC

SATURDAY 12 DECEMBER

Jesus, Messiah

'The woman said, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will tell us all things."' (John 4:25)

The word Messiah means, the promised one, “the one anointed with oil.” In biblical times, the custom of anointing with oil was a ritual act designed to elevate those designated for priestly, royal, or sometimes even prophetic roles. Here we see the word Messiah used as John is telling the story of an encounter between Jesus and an unnamed Samaritan woman. It starts simply enough. It is the middle of the day and Jesus is thirsty. A woman comes to the well and a conversation starts up. She has had a conversation, perhaps out of her depth at times, with a man who has deep insight into who she is, which makes her wonder whether he is the Messiah. She says in verse 25, ‘I know that Messiah’ (called Christ) ‘is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.’ Jesus follows up by saying. ‘I, the one speaking to you—I am he’. At the heart of the story, the woman is exposed for who she really is by Jesus and yet is not shamed by it. Rather, she is set free to become what grace will make her. She embraces a new identity based on facing the truth about herself, but much more the truth of who Jesus is. Jesus shows himself to be not just Israel’s Messiah but the Saviour of the world. How would we feel in this woman’s position, would we too try to change the subject if Jesus exposed our truths to us? How do you respond to Jesus’ offer of grace to you? How does his extravagant love make you feel?

Lord Jesus, our Messiah, we thank you for loving us with such grace and mercy. You see us for who we are, and you love us deeply. We are forever thankful. Amen.

KC

Advent Week 3

SUNDAY 13 DECEMBER

Joy

As we begin week three of Advent, we want to focus our attention on joy. This season is about expectancy as we await the coming Messiah, but it is also a birthplace of joy as we see the story of God’s saving plan for his creation unfold in the birth of a tiny baby. We find joy in the manger because there we find a God who humbled himself to be born as a baby for

love of us. We see a God who did not leave his creation in their brokenness, but One who came and dwelt among it so that it could be restored. There is such joy in the message of Christ, and we are invited in Scripture to find strength in this joy. Nehemiah 8:1 says that *'the joy of the Lord is your strength.'* Joy is not a frivolous emotion; it is a depth of being and a strength of our souls. In knowing God, we can find a deep joy even amid struggles, for we can know a God who is always good, always faithful, and always with us. With him, all things are possible. Whatever your circumstances this day, may the God of love fill you to overflowing with his strength and joy.

Advent Challenge... Joy is contagious, so your challenge this week is to share joy. Maybe that means surprising someone with a small gift or unexpected visit or phone call. Set yourself the goal to bring a bit of joy to at least one person per day for all this week. Amen.

CP

MONDAY 14 DECEMBER

Jesus, Deliverer

'and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob."' (Rom 11:26)

Slavery is repulsive! It demeans and degrades people in ways we cannot even imagine. Even though slavery was abolished in the UK in 1833 and in the USA in 1865 it is estimated that there are roughly 40.3 million (The Global Slavery Index, 2018) individuals caught in modern slavery, with 71% being female, and 1 in 4 being children. Modern-day slavery is not just in foreign countries, it exists in the UK and can take many forms, including forced sexual exploitation, domestic slavery, forced labour on farms, in construction, shops, car washes or manufacturing. Forced labour is the most common form of slavery in the UK, fuelled by a drive for cheap products and services, with little regard for the people providing them (antislavery.org). If we look back to the Old Testament the God of Israel allowed His chosen people to experience slavery for 400 years. They suffered harsh oppression until they had nothing, and no one left to depend on other than Him. When He did finally deliver His people, God did

it in a way they would never forget. Today we live in a sophisticated society and yet slavery is going on all around us and even within us. We buy products and use services that have been provided by someone in forced labour and we ignore the shackles of sin that bind us more cruelly than any human oppressor could. This makes us feel ashamed, hopeless, and alone. Until our deliverer comes. God delivered us from slavery to sin in a way that we could never forget, Christ undertook for us something that we could not do for ourselves. The chains of sin and shame fall away when we look to Jesus and we are free. We are Gods children saved by grace. May we then be prompted to seek freedom for others, both from sin and from oppression.

Lord, thank you for being my Deliverer, for freedom from sin and freedom to live as I choose. Help me to seek freedom for those who are still enslaved. Amen.

LM

TUESDAY 15 DECEMBER

Jesus, The Good Shepherd

'I am the good Shepherd. The good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.' (John 10:11)

The image of the Good Shepherd is one we are all familiar with. We often turn for comfort to the 23rd Psalm in times of trouble. However, in this passage we see another side to the Good Shepherd, that of one who lays down his life for his sheep. The first quality of a good shepherd is to be ready to sacrifice yourself for your sheep. This is a quality unique to the shepherd and unlike the hired hand (v12) who flees at the first sign of danger because the sheep do not belong to him. Having just spoke of abundant life in the previous verse (v. 10) Jesus then speaks of giving up his own life, a voluntary act which would benefit the sheep, because he is the Good Shepherd. This Good Shepherd knows his flock intimately and loves them deeply. He will protect them when Satan tries to harm them. In fact, Jesus goes on to say: (v16) *'I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall*

be one flock and one shepherd.' This points us to the bigger picture of the worldwide mission of the Church and how the Good Shepherd loves and welcomes all.

Lord, our Good Shepherd, draw us close to you that we may find comfort and rest in the safety of your presence. Amen.

KC

WEDNESDAY 16 DECEMBER

Jesus, Wonderful Counsellor

'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 Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.' (Isaiah 9:6)

As Isaiah prophesied to the people of Israel it came as a promise of hope amid the Assyrian invasion. Isaiah pointed to the coming Saviour who would deliver his people and establish his Kingdom once again. To a people who were struggling with the loss of power and status and all that was familiar, these words came like water to a thirsty people. Isaiah's prophecy spoke of one who would come to restore what had been taken away from the people of Israel. There was great expectancy and great hope. The image that surrounded the title 'Wonderful Counsellor' spoke to both the humanity and divinity of Christ. The Hebrew term pointed to a child that would be miraculously born and who would become a wise advisor working in all things for God's purposes. Jesus is called the Wonderful Counsellor because he can bring to his people guidance, help and deliverance through his mighty works and wisdom. As we journey through the Gospels and get to know Jesus more, we hear through his teaching and example how to walk in the ways of God. He makes the path clear for us to follow and guides us through all circumstances. In his wisdom we can trust, in his truth we can depend. As you dwell on this title today, what might it mean for you to think of Jesus as your wonderful counsellor? In what areas of your life do you need his wisdom and guidance? Spend a moment in stillness, and just listen for your Wonderful Counsellor to speak to you.

Lord, draw close to us today. Speak your wisdom into our lives and guide our every footstep as we follow you. Amen.

CP

THURSDAY 17 DECEMBER

Jesus, Immanuel

“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). (Matt 1:23)

The great ‘I Am’ existed before anything else. He spoke and the universe was created out of the chaos. We read in the bible that he is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient. However, just over 2000 years ago something astounding happened. This great ‘I am’ stepped into His creation in the form of a human being, a tiny, vulnerable baby, Jesus of Nazareth. God became man. In the words of Charles Wesley’s much-loved hymn, *“Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see; hail th’ incarnate Deity: Pleased, as man, with men to dwell, Jesus our Immanuel”*. Immanuel, God with us, walked with and among His creation. He lived a human life, experiencing all that we do: joy, sadness, hunger, anger. He laughed, he cried, he shared food and he stood up for justice in the temple. He understands and experienced all that we experience, only without sin. When humanity fell into sin humankind was separated from a holy God as God cannot bear to be anywhere near sin. But God who is a gracious and loving God, bridged the gap caused by the separation. God would no longer be ‘up there’ out of reach. He would now be here, in the company of humanity who so desperately needed Him, however, did not have the capability to reach Him. God bridged the gap with that tiny, vulnerable baby and we will never be alone again, for God is Immanuel, God with us because even when Christ ascended, He sent the Holy Spirit to be with us. We can now reach out to God at any time in any place, He will never desert us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5).

Lord, we thank you that you are always with us, help me to be mindful of your presence with me each day. Amen.

LM

FRIDAY 18 DECEMBER

Jesus, King of Kings & Lord of Lords

'On his robe and on his thigh, he has his name written: KING OF KINGS & LORD OF LORDS.' (Revelation 19:16)

This verse is taken from a passage entitled 'The Heavenly Warrior Defeats the Beast' and is full of powerful imagery. The opening verse creates an incredible picture: *'I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war.'* (v11). Amid all this we see he has his name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. This phrase is also found in 1 Timothy 6:15 where Paul writes, *'which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords'*. Here, Paul is urging Timothy to fight the good fight of faith until Christ's return. Again, this phrase is used in Revelation 17:14 *'They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.'* We are reminded that it is God who will ultimately rule, and will reign as the KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS, but that we like Timothy, must stick firm to the professions of faith we have made to God and to one another.

*Lord of lords and King of kings strengthen us as we follow you each day.
May we trust fully in your sovereign power. Amen.*

KC

SATURDAY 19 DECEMBER

Jesus, Son of God

'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."' (Luke 1:35)

Fully God, yet fully man, stepped down upon the earth. Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin. This miraculous birth

had been anticipated for thousands of years and had been prophesied in Isaiah 7:14, “Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call him Immanuel.” Our salvation could only be achieved by God Himself because only God could live a sinless life to fulfil the law. Only God could provide the perfect substitutionary sacrifice. Only God had the might and sovereignty to break the stranglehold of sin and death. God became man. It had never happened before because the time was not right, and it will never happen again because Christ accomplished our salvation once and for all. However, he will come again at the end of days to establish His Kingdom for eternity. We live in the Kingdom now but are we prepared for the full realisation of the Kingdom and are those we love prepared for Christ’s second coming. May we consider today how we can help those we care for get to know the Son of God who loves us and died so that we may live eternally with Him.

*Lord, give us the strength and courage to share your love with others today.
Amen.*

LM

Advent Week 4

SUNDAY 20 DECEMBER

Love

As we come to the fourth week of Advent, we focus our attention on love. There is a familiar Christmas Carol that perhaps puts words to this week’s thoughts called *Love came down at Christmas*. It is a carol that we may sing, but it was originally composed as a poem by Christina Rossetti in 1885. The words for her poem go like this:

*Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love Divine,
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and Angels gave the sign.
Worship we the Godhead,
Love Incarnate, Love Divine,*

*Worship we our Jesus,
But wherewith for sacred sign?
Love shall be our token,
Love be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.*

Love is the central message of the Christmas story, in fact, love is the central message of all of Scripture as it reveals to us time and time again a God who so loves his creation that he is continually at work for its good and its restoration. At Christmas time we celebrate the God of love who took on flesh to live among us. Such an action is extravagant, generous, and sacrificial... this is what real love looks like. In our modern-day language, we use the word love to mean so many different things. We throw it around often carelessly. However, when we talk about love in relation to the actions of Jesus, there is nothing careless about it. It is a love that grips us and holds us in both joy and sorrow. It is a love that is beyond measure, and it is a love from which nothing can separate us. May you know how incredibly deeply loved you are this Christmas time. May you know that God loved YOU so very much that he took on flesh and blood, that he lived and worked and served so that you could further grasp the greatness of God, and that he humbly took on your sin and your shame and journeyed to a painful death so that you could be free to experience life in all its fullness. This God of wonderful love loves you. May you know this to be true, and may it fill you with hope, with peace, with joy and with love overflowing.

Advent Challenge... Love is not a selfish emotion, rather it is selfless in how it expresses itself to others. This week your challenge is to find ways to love extravagantly and selflessly. This can be done in many ways: phone calls to friends to tell them how valued they are; kind gestures to strangers to interrupt their day with some joy; a handmade gift to a neighbour to draw a smile.... The opportunities are endless. Be creative, be inventive, be people of love this week and spread love around.

CP

MONDAY 21 DECEMBER

Jesus, Cornerstone

'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic.' (Isaiah 28:16)

In verse 15, we see that the people of Israel have in effect allied themselves with a “lie,” the idea that human power alliances with other kingdoms are a better means of protecting themselves than God’s power. Here Isaiah reminds them that “the Cornerstone, the tested stone” is the opposite of this “lie” on which the leaders have built their “refuge” (v. 17). A Cornerstone is the key part of any building, it is in fact the rock upon which the weight of the entire structure rests. A cornerstone can stand whatever shocks might come to it, and this is the image Isaiah wants to give us of God. A God who is trustworthy, and when anything else is measured against Him, it becomes immediately clear, that it does not measure up. Isaiah encourages us, by reminding us, that the one who relies on the Cornerstone as their firm foundation will never be stricken with panic or fear.

Lord, our firm foundation, and cornerstone help us to put our trust in you at all times. Amen.

KC

TUESDAY 22 DECEMBER

Jesus, The Righteous Judge

'Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing'. (2 Timothy 4:8)

Chief Judge Frank Caprio has become famous on TV and across the internet for being very fair and compassionate towards all people who come through his courtroom. He takes careful consideration of each offence and each person’s individual circumstances. The way he treats individuals and

families, (including their children, who he often includes when making his decisions), has people describing him as merciful, a blessing, kind and the world needs more people like him. Speaking about himself he said, 'I'm only doing what my father taught me, balance the equities and treat people with decency and respect'. Judge Caprio has the power in his hands to decide whether someone is guilty or not guilty, he can decide whether they pay a fine and how much it should be, however, that's as far as his remit goes. We too have a Righteous Judge who has power over all of eternity and the judgements He makes affects where we will spend eternity. God is just but His holiness requires that His justice be applied without exception. All sin offends His holiness and must be judged. The Psalmist David found comfort in knowing a day would come when God would execute justice for everyone (Ps 37:28-34). The wicked will be judged, and God's people will receive His reward. David did not know Christ's crucifixion would be the way God would provide perfect justice and salvation. He simply knew that God is a God of justice, and that was enough for him. However, we still face that judgment at the end of time, but we have the assurance of God's forgiveness because of Christ's death and resurrection, if we repent and turn to Him.

Lord, thank you for Your forgiveness through Christ, help us to keep our focus on Him. Amen.

LM

WEDNESDAY 23 DECEMBER

Jesus, Prince of Peace

'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 Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace'. (Isaiah 9:6)

What does Peace mean to us? Sometimes we think of peace simply as an absence of noise. No one likes their eardrums to be assaulted for too long, we all love to escape from excessive noise, but there is more to it than

acceptable volume levels. Often peace implies an absence of conflict. We are not happy when people are in conflict, physical or verbal, and the world seems a better place when the matter is settled, and relationships are restored to normal. We also think of peace as an absence of activity and busyness. There cannot be many people who do not look forward to sitting down and relaxing after a busy day or a busy week. God rested after he had created the universe and he wants us to take time out to spend with him, just as Jesus did. Work and activity have their proper place, but they can damage health, relationships and society if not balanced by peace and relaxation. This too is part of God's peace, though not the whole story. The Old testament word and the word Jesus would have used for peace is 'shalom', familiar enough to us perhaps but not necessarily understood. In Jesus culture, shalom was not defined as an absence of something. Instead, it was the fullness of every possible good thing in heaven and on earth. What he has given is an overflowing of blessings from a loving, benevolent God. Unlike the typical human understanding, the Peace of Christ is not offered to us in moments. It is ours every minute of every day. To be someone in whom the gift of Shalom is opened and enjoyed is to be always aware and fully appreciative of the state of abundant blessedness in which we live. Jesus is the only one who brings this real peace because He is peace. True peace is more than the absence of noise, hostility, or fear. True peace is the gift God gives when He reconciles us to Him through Christ the Prince of Peace. When we allow Christ's peace into our lives, we can become peacemakers, not just by arbitrating in disputes but also by bringing 'shalom' to those around us.

Lord, help us to know Your peace in our lives and may we be a peacemaker in the lives of others. Amen

LM

THURSDAY 24 DECEMBER

Jesus, Alpha & Omega

'I am the Alpha and the Omega', says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.' (Revelation 1:8)

The declaration that God is the Alpha, and the Omega is a pictorial way of affirming that God is the Lord of all ages. Alpha is the first letter in the Greek alphabet, Omega is the last. This is an expression that the Jews would have been accustomed to. The Priests would have said that Adam transgressed the Law from A to Z and that Abraham kept the law from A to Z. In this passage, John is writing to assure the seven churches in Asia, who are facing opposition and persecution, that even when Jesus appears to be losing his grip on his kingdom in a troubled world, from heaven's perspective he is enthroned on the clouds, and he holds dominion over the heavens and the earth for all time. Let us also be at peace knowing that the words of John are still as relevant for us today: *'I am the Alpha and the Omega'* means:

I am the beginning of history,
I am the end of history
and the Lord of all that lies in between.

AMEN.

Lord, fill us with confidence, hope and trust as we proclaim you as Alpha and Omega, Lord of all time and all ages. Amen.

KC

FRIDAY 25 DECEMBER

Jesus, Saviour

'And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world.' (1 John 4:14)

The name Jesus in Hebrew is Yeshua, which translates as 'the Lord saves.' From the very beginning the role of Jesus was laid out. In Matthew 1:21 as the angel speaks to Joseph, he tells him that Mary will give birth to a son, that they are to give him the name Jesus, *'because he will save his people from their sins.'* When we refer to Jesus as our Saviour we are declaring our belief that in the sacrifice of his own life, Jesus took upon himself the sin of the world, so that the world might be forgiven and might experience eternal life. Such a large title to be given to such a small baby, yet Mary knew as she held her new-born son that this was no ordinary boy, but here

in her arms was the Son of God, the promised Saviour, sent to save the world. Paul writes to the church in Rome and lays out the work of our Saving God. *'You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'* (Romans 5:6-8). Such an action reconciled us with God and allows us to come into the presence of God without blame or fault, for we stand in the power of Christ. He has saved us, he has given us a hope that this life is not all there is, but that eternal life awaits if we put our trust in Christ. Such hope is the source of our life and being.

Lord, our words seem so small to express such great thanks for all that you have done for us. You are our reason for living. You are our hope of things yet to come. Thank you for saving us. Take our lives and use them for your glory we pray. Amen.

CP

Final thoughts...

As we spent the last few weeks reflecting on some of the titles of Jesus, you have perhaps noticed some repetitive themes being reinforced time and time again. Each of these titles help us to enlarge, or expand, our understanding of the work of God in Christ. The offering of God in Christ is no small measure. It is a generous and extravagant gift of grace to those who believe. We pray as you have journeyed towards Christmas that you have been drawn in to see this generosity and extravagant grace.

God's love for you is so great that he stepped into his creation to bring restoration and reconciliation. Christ became a visible image of our invisible God. In him, we see more fully the character and holiness of God. We see evidenced the truth that his power is magnificent and that truly our God is able. As we follow the life of Christ to his death on a cross, we witness a love so vast in measure that it willingly accepted undeserved shame and guilt so that we might be free from our deserved shame and

guilt. In death we receive life. In resurrection we receive victory over sin and death and can stand before God with confidence and joy.

In the work of Christ, we find indescribable hope, unexplainable peace, abounding joy, and overwhelming love. Such is the goodness of God.

This Christmas amid worries, stresses, illnesses, and global pandemics, we still find a story that speaks light into our darkness and joy into our sorrow. Hold tightly to the truth of Christ this season. Be captured by it once again. Fall in love with your Saviour and be blessed.

'For unto us a child is born.'

Amen.



Merry Christmas & Happy New Year



Advent 2020

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