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Get ready for the King!

Advent reflections on the coming of Jesus

28 November – 24 December 2010

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Scripture
union

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Advent reflections on the coming of Jesus

Are you ready for Christmas? The celebrations are very important, of course. But in the midst of the shopping, the carol singing and nativity plays it's all too easy to forget who Christmas is really about.

These advent reflections show us something of God's big plan which reaches its climax in the coming of Jesus. From the beginning, God was thinking about how he would bring a suffering, sinful world back to himself. These readings trace the hints, clues and prophecies given throughout the Bible: one day, a great Redeemer, Saviour, Messiah, King would come to provide a way for all people to draw near to God. The 'little town of Bethlehem' would be big news. God wanted his people to be ready for the coming of Jesus. As we begin our celebrations of Jesus' birth, let's pause to make room for him in our hearts. May these daily devotionals help you focus on him through this time of Advent as you meet with God through the Bible and prayer.

Sun 28th Nov LIGHT FOR THE WORLD

Read: John 1:1-18

Reflect: Jesus, the Word, has come into our world! What amazing words – so simple in language, so profound in truth. As the glory entered the Old Testament tabernacle, so Jesus entered our world. The one who was with God before all creation entered that creation to live among us and in us!

Pray: There is only one source of real hope. There is only one source of true light. Worship him now.

Mon 29th Nov BLESSING FOR THE WORLD

Genesis 12:1-3

Reflect: Centuries ago, God promised Abraham that his descendants would become a great nation. Not only this, but through Abraham, God promised that all people would be blessed. This promise comes to its fullest expression in Jesus. We receive God's blessing through him, and are called to share that blessing as we reach out to those around us.

Pray: For opportunities to bring God's blessing into the lives of others today.

Tues 30th Nov HIS ONLY SON

Read: Genesis 22:1-19

Reflect: Abraham, ancient ancestor of Jesus, received the instruction from God to offer his only son. Faithfully he set out to obey him. As he reached the point of sacrifice, he got a reprieve. Later, God himself would go the full length in sacrificing his only son. Though Jesus prayed in Gethsemane: 'If there is any other way, take this cup from me ...' (Matthew 26:39), no such reprieve was given.

Pray: Thank God for sacrificing his only Son.

Wed 1st Dec BETHLEHEM ROOTS

Read: Ruth 4:11-22

Reflect: Bethlehem features early in Jesus' story! God often uses the seemingly insignificant and unimportant situations and people, and weaves them into his plan. Here, Ruth, a Gentile widow living in Bethlehem, becomes a key character in the genealogy of David and hence Jesus. Don't underestimate the significance of God's work amongst ordinary people – people like us.

Pray: Look back and thank God for the ways you've seen him at work in your life.

Thu 2nd Dec THERE IS A REDEEMER

Read: Job 19:23-27

Reflect: In the place of deepest despair, pain, confusion and suffering Job pours out his heart to God. Suddenly, his words have a deep sense of conviction and assurance that God is his redeemer. Though God seems to have brought trouble on him, he will also bring about his salvation.

Pray: Thank Jesus for being your redeemer. Trust him for difficult circumstances today.

Fri 3rd Dec FORGIVENESS

Read: Psalm 51

Reflect: It's all too easy to gloss over sin and explain it away. This psalm won't let us do that but instead brings hope without ignoring the messiness of sin. It describes the rawness of someone taking the worst to God and still finding mercy.

Pray: Thank God for Jesus! Make this psalm yours by praying the words aloud. Confess your sins, receive God's mercy, and recommit yourself to love and serve him.

Sat 4th Dec JOY AND LAUGHTER

Read: Psalm 126

Reflect: God's people had been in exile far from home for many years. Rescued by God, they praise him for all he has done for them. Centuries later, Jesus probably would also have sung this psalm as he went up to Jerusalem at Passover. This Christmas, let's celebrate what God has done through Jesus – what great things for us!

Pray: Praise God for sending Jesus to rescue us from sin.

These reflections are based on material from WordLive, Scripture Union

Sun 5th Dec IMMANUEL

Read Isaiah 7:12-14

Reflect: A baby may seem a small thing as a sign of hope. But when his name means, 'God with us', there is hope. When God offers a sign of hope, no matter how small the glimmer, it's worth clinging to with everything we've got – because however bad things look, 'God with us' is the best that there can be.

Pray: For those who lack hope today, that they'd experience God with them.

Mon 6th Dec THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Read: Isaiah 9:2-7

Reflect: God raised Isaiah's vision to the future hope that would one day be fulfilled in Jesus. Even though Isaiah couldn't have known how or when God would do it, he sees clearly the birth of a baby – the one who would be called, 'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace'. In a dark world, God's light shines in Jesus.

Pray: For opportunities today to share his light.

Tue 7th Dec HOPE

Read: Isaiah 11:1-5

Reflect: A Saviour is coming. From the 'stump' (Israel), and from the family line of David (Jesse), Jesus would be born. There was still hope for the 'fallen' tree of Israel. For us too, although we are 'fallen', we have hope through God's Son.

Pray: Ask the Holy Spirit to 'rest' on you today. Take time to delight in God. Be ready to share the hope he brings with those you meet today.

Wed 8th Dec 'SHOUT FOR JOY'

Read: Isaiah 35

Reflect: Isaiah looks ahead and sees all of nature cheering at the brilliance of God. Jesus is the one who would bring healing to the diseased and make the 'feeble' strong. Jesus himself is the 'Way of Holiness'. We were once struggling along in the desert, too. What a great hope we have to share with people!

Pray: For opportunities today to share this hope.

Thu 9th Dec GET READY!

Read: Isaiah 40:1-5

Reflect: For God's captive, exiled people this prophecy brought good news – one day they'd be set free. As Christmas approaches, what might it mean for us to 'prepare the way for the Lord' (v 3)? When John the Baptist quotes this verse (John 1:23), it's clear that it's about repentance – preparation to allow God into our hearts.

Pray: Confess anything that is getting in the way of your relationship with Jesus.

Fri 10th Dec GOD'S CHOSEN ONE

Read: Isaiah 42:1-9

Reflect: Four hundred years before Jesus' birth, Isaiah paints an intimate word-picture of the Father's love for his only Son and the nature of his vocation. Through the prophet's words, God makes promise after promise about what 'his servant' will do and what he will be like. The hallmarks of justice, compassion and the light of God's presence will be stamped on every detail of the new covenant.

Pray: 'Lord, give me your heart of compassion, your sensitivity to the vulnerable and weak.'

Sat 11th Dec THE SUFFERING SERVANT

Read: Isaiah 53:1-6

Reflect: Isaiah sensed that God's saving plan would only come through suffering. Israel was expecting God's Saviour. But what would he be like? Humble, vulnerable, not good-looking, not oozing charm; he's the one people overlook. He knows about pain. Read verses 4-6 again slowly as you meditate on Jesus' death on the cross for you.

Pray: It was all done for us. Thank God for his servant Jesus.

Sun 12th Dec CONSIDER JESUS

Read: Isaiah 53:7-12

Reflect: Take a moment to pause in awe and wonder. We are on holy ground here, touching the Father heart of a God whose nature is love, seeing again that grace is completely free yet enormously costly. Reading this description of God's servant, we are moved by his commitment to the task and by his willingness to suffer for others.

Pray: Spend some time in wonder that it is God doing this for us.

Mon 13th Dec GOOD NEWS!

Read: Isaiah 61:1-3

Reflect: God's true compassion is revealed in this word of hope for the downtrodden and broken-hearted. God's new day is dawning, and he will bring an end to injustice. The poor will hear and know that they matter to God, the broken-hearted will be strengthened, the captives of fear and sin will be released, and the grieving will find comfort.

Pray: Who are the poor and broken-hearted in your community? Will you tell them the good news?

Tue 14th Dec PROMISE FULFILLED

Read: Jeremiah 33:14-16

Reflect: Jeremiah's listeners must have been filled with hope when they heard God's promise to them here. Despite their failures, God was ensuring stability and safety for Judah and Jerusalem, and his continuing commitment to his chosen people. But it was also a promise for all people, fulfilled through Jesus, 'The Lord our Righteousness.'

Pray: Thank Jesus that all the promises of God find their 'yes' in him.

Wed 15th Dec A RULER FROM BETHLEHEM

Read: Micah 5:1–5a

Reflect: Bethlehem was an obscure village, south of Jerusalem. Yet, it's from here that God's promised ruler would come. He promises to bring something out of nothing. He does that for us too. No matter how insignificant and ordinary we may think we are, God's plans for us are breathtaking. Guidance, care, security and peace are available for all God's family.

Pray: Place your life in God's hands once more, trusting in his plans for you.

Thu 16th Dec THE COMING OF JESUS

Read: Matthew 1:1–17

Reflect: Descended from Abraham and David, Matthew wanted to show his Hebrew readers that Jesus *is* the Messiah, the one God had promised to send. Whether righteous or sinners, kings or poor, all of these people in the list played a role in God's great plan to bring salvation to the world through Jesus. Most were unaware of the part they played.

Pray: 'Use me for your purposes today, Lord!'

Fri 17th Dec SURPRISE!

Read: Luke 1:26–38

Reflect: The angel tells Mary she is going to give birth to the Messiah, the one whom God has promised would reign for ever – not just over Israel, but over the whole world. This King would be God's Son. How might you have responded?! Mary is available and willing to serve, to go where God leads, knowing that his grace will supply whatever she lacks.

Pray: 'Father, give me the same willingness to follow you.'

Sat 18th Dec PREPARE FOR THE LORD

Luke 1:5–17

Reflect: Do you sometimes respond unbelievably to God? It seems Zechariah needed to learn that God will perform what he has promised, but in his time and his ways – which may be unexpected, even mysterious. The child to be born would play a vital role in God's purposes. God's plan would be worked out through the void in this couple's life being filled.

Pray: 'Lord, help my unbelief.'

Sun 19th Dec ZECHARIAH'S SONG

Read: Luke 1:57–58, 67–80

Reflect: Zechariah's song expresses his praise, first for God's gift of a Saviour and then for his own son John who would 'prepare the way'. The neighbours joined in the celebrations (v 58). God's story has amazing power on its own. Sometimes we need to explain it, and sometimes we need to let it make its own impact...

Pray: Ask God to help you share your story with a neighbour today.

Mon 20th Dec THE KING IS COMING

Read: Matthew 3:1–6

Reflect: John the Baptist announces the coming King. The essential requirement was repentance: a change of heart and mind leading to a change in behaviour. How do we prepare for the King's approach? Have we become complacent about his grace and forgiveness? What might living a life to please the King look like for you?

Pray: Confess your sins to God today, asking him to cleanse you and forgive you.

Tue 21st Dec JOSEPH AND MARY

Read: Matthew 1:18–25

Reflect: Joseph may have wanted children at some point in his life, but not now, not this way. The unmarried status of this engaged couple made them both vulnerable: if this got out, reputations and lives would be ruined. But Joseph's stature in this story is immense. He is prepared to trust God and not the conventions of his age – he does what the angel commands.

Pray: 'Lord, show me how I too may hear and obey you.'

Wed 22nd Dec SHEPHERDS AND ANGELS

Read: Luke 2:8–20

Reflect: You can't help feeling some sympathy for these unsuspecting shepherds who are suddenly blasted with enough light to flood a football stadium and are given a message of monumental significance! But once they get over the shock, they don't waste time but hurry off to look for the sign the angel told them about.

Pray: Are you prepared for the unexpected today? God might just surprise you!

Thu 23rd Dec VISIT OF THE MAGI

Read: Matthew 2:1–12

Reflect: Whereas Herod was desperately scheming to prevent a challenge to his throne, a star in the sky proclaimed Jesus' authority and his kingship. While Herod turned to advisors and experts to decide what to do, God sent a dream and an angel with instructions for the protection of King Jesus.

Pray: For Christian leaders in all areas of society to base their authority in what God says about them, rather than in the power struggles of this world.

Fri 24th Dec THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Read Luke 2:1–7

Reflect: Being born in an animal's feeding trough isn't what you'd expect for the long-awaited Messiah. Yet this is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. If we were arranging the birth of the Saviour of the world, we might have organised a rather more spectacular entry!

Pray: Worship Jesus today, the one who came in humility but who brought our salvation.

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