



What
child is
this?

a worship experience for
ADVENT

ADVENT MEDITATIONS 2015 IS A
TRAC BOARD OF WORSHIP PUBLICATION

FOREWORD

Rev. Yong Wai Yin mooted the idea of doing an Advent Meditation devotional to the Board of Worship and Music when the yearly TRAC Lent Meditations ceased publication. The board believed that it was essential to continue maintaining writers among our own circle of churches, who contribute good writings and ideas in their own words.

The writers who have graced us with their stories and thoughts this Advent season—Grace Moo, Chua Lay Har and Sam Ong—are no strangers to us. Their writings capture the essence of our Advent focus, “What Child Is This,” and touch on themes that enliven the hearts of those who read and ruminate on them.

I thank God for the support I enjoyed from those who carried out various tasks—editing, designing, proofreading, keeping track of deadlines, reporting, translating, liaising with the printers, and others too numerous to mention. I am grateful to all who have contributed to the publication of this wonderful booklet you now hold in your hands.

Enjoy the writings. Let the words seep into your soul as each daily reading speaks to you. Listen closely to the stories and writings, and you will hear your own heart's response. I leave you with this booklet as your companion and guide during this Advent season.

Chairperson
The Board of Worship and Music



EDITORIAL

How do we prepare for Christmas? Many of us are often occupied with buying presents, cooking and baking, decorating the house, or attending the many Christmas programmes, while some others are into Christmas carolling or even church planning. In other words, busy, busy, busy!

Of course, a lot of faithful Christians also do spend time reading the Bible and pondering over the Birth narratives of Jesus in the Gospels and other related passages, just as they would with the Passion narratives of Christ during Lent in prayer and meditation.

After publishing a series of Lent Meditations, the TRAC Board of Worship and Music decided that this year they should produce a book on Advent Meditations instead. What you now hold in your hands is a first-fruits – the labour of love from various persons from our TRAC churches. We hope that this will be the first of many other such meditations for use by our church members and other believers.

We have tried to keep these meditations short, original, stimulating.

Short because these notes are not meant to be the main focus of your reading--the Bible passage for the day is. Read the passage, meditate on the word of God, and use the notes as a spring-board for further reflection, prayer and thanksgiving.

Original because we have tried to maintain the original sense of each writer's work. They consider themselves ordinary church members and fellow-pilgrims along with all the rest of us in our journey of faith. May their sharings bless you as you seek to know the Christ-child better.

Stimulating because we hope that these meditations will spur you on to read more of the word of God, and to think through afresh what it means for God's only Son to come into this world as a baby, in order to be incarnated to become the Saviour of the world.

Emmanuel! May God's peace, joy and good-will be with you this Advent and Christmas.

Chief Editors.



Grace Moo worships at Trinity Methodist Church Penang. After graduating with a Master of Divinity from the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary, she serves in Christian music ministries and aspires to write for the edification of the Malaysian Church. She has contributed many reflective writings in the past Lent Meditations and her works can be found on the TRAC website in the Lent Meditation section.

Dr. Samuel Ong is a servant of God, a family person and a doctor of hearts, both physical and spiritual. Blessed with many talents by God's amazing grace, he is active in many different arenas of life. He has a passion for young people, the All Blacks and hymns, and now, he is also active in photography, capturing God's creative wonders. He served as Trinity Annual Conference Lay Leader from 2007-2012 and is a pioneering church-planting leader at Whispering Hope. He is married to Loo Ling and they have three lovely daughters (Ming, Xian and En).

Chua Lay Har stumbled upon the contemplative journey in 2011 when she completed "The Journey" under TRAC and since then, there has been no looking back. Blessed with a strong and logical mind, God needed to transform and renew her mind so that it would become aligned to the purposes and destiny of God. As such, God has moved her from investing her life and time in engineering and financial services to children and the next generation. Contemplative spirituality is today an integral part of her being and the numerous beautiful encounters with God that it offers has placed her on an exciting and yet reflective journey with her Maker. She has also contributed to the past Lent Meditations.

Rev. Hwa Jen & Chang Tsyh Yong (Chief Editors) complement each other in this generous labour of love. They spent more time than we could have asked for –working both separately and together, and having all kinds of arguments along the way (or so they claim). In exercising their gift of editing these devotions, they have shared with us their minds, their talents and their hearts.

We owe them a great debt of gratitude.



A Child Born in God's Perfect Time

We begin our Advent reflections with Matthew's genealogy of Jesus. Many suggest that Matthew's genealogy must have served as a literary device to portray who Jesus, the son of Joseph, really was. Abraham's journey of faith pointed to Jesus – the promised Saviour for all who believe. The line of David, a central kingly figure of the Old Testament, pointed to Jesus – the promised Messiah King. The five women honoured amongst Jesus' ancestors were women of faith, yet from differing backgrounds. They point us to the requirement of entering Jesus' gracious Kingdom – God's sovereign choice and human faith.

Yet, also significant in the genealogy is the mention of Jeconiah (vv.11-12) the last king of the Davidic dynasty. As a result of his sins (and also because of the sins of all the other kings and the people), Jeconiah's male descendants had been disqualified from inheriting David's throne (Jeremiah 22:24-30).

Was Matthew then implying that had Jesus been the biological son of Joseph, He too would have been disqualified? But He was not. The story of Jesus' conception by the Holy Spirit immediately following the genealogy highlights the necessity of Jesus being the divine Immanuel (meaning "God with us") as well as human. God was made flesh in order to reclaim what Abraham's descendants had lost through disobedience – and ultimately their potential to bring salvation to all nations. The Jews needed Jesus, the whole world needs Jesus. We need Jesus.

During the next four weeks of Advent, we will anticipate Jesus' second coming in light of His first coming as Immanuel. God came to be with us in the fullness of His time; God is with us today as we observe the wonder of the season in our daily lives; and God will be with us at the end of time. Blessed Advent!

Prayer:

Our God, as we journey with You through the season, refresh the portrait of the Messiah King that is in our minds so that we may wait on Him with even greater joy, hope and expectation. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.



A Child Destined to be King and Priest Forever

Jeremiah's prophecy addressed a grave and dire period in Judah's history, during which the invading armies of Nebuchadnezzar were right at the doorstep. The city of David was about to be destroyed by the Babylonians. The temple of Solomon would be burned. The people of Judah would be exiled as a result of their rebellion. The Davidic dynasty would come to an end, even though God had promised King David, "a man after God's own heart", that the throne of his kingdom would be established forever. Was God withdrawing His promise? Would the Jewish nation then lose its identity and election? Would God abandon His people forever?

To a people devastated by loss, Jeremiah's prophecy directed their eyes to the future. All might seem lost, but God is faithful to fulfil His promise. The house of David might be cut down to a mere stump, but God was (and is) able to bring life out of death, abundance out of nothingness, and a new beginning out of what seemed to be a tragic ending. A Branch will sprout--not only a just and righteous King, but a King who would be Priest to make atoning sacrifice for the sins of the people in the presence of God forever. In Christ, we Gentiles have become heirs of promise along with Israel. Even as the Jewish exiles were consoled by the words of God's faithfulness in their suffering, grief and loss, may our anticipation and celebration of Christ's birth lead us to the peace, joy, and faith in the Sovereign God. As we wait on Him in our various trials, He too waits to deliver us in His time.

Prayer:

Father Almighty, faithful God, lift our minds in watchful hope to hear the voice which foretells Your glory and grant us the strength to yield to Your Spirit who prepares us for Christ's returning with joy. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



King and Priest Forever after the Order of Melchizedek

Who really was Melchizedek? Many hold the view that he was a human being whose priesthood was a model of the superiority of Christ's priesthood (Psalm 110:4).

As recorded in Genesis 14:18-20, Abram, great as he was, showed submission to Melchizedek by giving him a tithe. Melchizedek blessed Abram, and by extension, all his descendants, including all the Levitical priests. Melchizedek's service was unaffected by death, unlike the service of the Levitical priests. And Levi himself, who received tithes from the people, paid tithes to Melchizedek, as it were through Abram.

In light of Melchizedek's priesthood, we may appreciate three additional aspects of Christ's priesthood. First, Christ's supreme priesthood brings about the perfect redemption and reconciliation of man to God. Secondly, Christ's priesthood began with the fulfilment of the Law so that it might be abolished forever (Matthew 5:17-18). Thirdly, Christ's priesthood makes it possible for us to "come boldly to the throne of grace" and "obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

When Christians observe the season of Advent as many parts of the one Body of Christ, and share in the priesthood of Christ from which different ministries flow, we stand together as a witness to the whole world. Do our attitudes toward Advent and Christmas point the world to its need to know God's redeeming love? God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to intercede for them (Hebrews 7:25). May this be the good news that we bring to those around us this Advent.

Prayer:

God of Love, Your Son Jesus is your greatest gift to us. Help us throughout this Advent to appreciate Him even more and thus, inspire the world to wonder at the reason we celebrate Christmas. In His name, we pray. Amen.



A Child Destined to Usher Everlasting Peace

Meditation

Today we have the words of prophecy from Isaiah that speak to some of the deepest desires within us. The prophet speaks of Galilee being honoured. Out of an unknown backwater overrun by Gentiles, the Light of God will come,--a child destined to establish an everlasting kingdom. Our God continually surprises us in our lives. We need to lean to wait patiently.

This Advent we celebrate the coming of this great light, Jesus Christ. He is the Prince of Peace who reigns on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness forever. How do these words connect with the needs or longings you are aware of in yourself or in the world around you?

In writing to the Ephesians, Paul declares, "He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through Him we both (Jews and Gentiles) have access to the Father by one Spirit." This reconciliation is made possible by Jesus, the Prince of Peace, thereby granting peace and access to the Father by the Spirit at work within us (Ephesians 1:13,14). What are you going to do with this truth, for the people around you this Advent?

Read these passages slowly once more, and listen attentively for the words that touch you, that connect with your own desires and longings, and speak to you most strongly.

Song

"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given,
and the government shall be upon His shoulder;
And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor,
the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father,
the Prince of Peace."

--from George Frideric Handel's "Messiah"



Prayer

Speak to God now about where His word rings clearly in your heart and stirred something in you. Ask God, what these words, and your feelings tell you about your own desires, for yourself and for your world.



God's Glory Shines to All Humanity

Meditation

"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

These words of the Almighty God offer consolation and reconciliation to His people. Sin is atoned for. The debt is paid. The slavery is ended. In what ways, or in what areas of my life, do I long for this to happen?

As I listen again to the passage, how do I understand these words, the meaning of this reading? What do I learn from God's promise here? What is God saying to me?

"Prepare the way for the Lord." These words are also addressed to me. Can I speak to God now about what might be asked of me? What role might I have to play in preparing the way for the Lord in these days?

The Isaiah 60 passage paints a wonderfully vivid picture of hope for us: ". . . the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn." Pause for a moment, and acknowledge the presence of the Lord here with you and in you. He has come to give you life and light.

Welcome Him and celebrate your new life in Christ.

Song

Arise, shine for Your light has come,
Arise, shine for Your light has come.
And the Glory of the Lord has risen upon you,
And the Glory of the Lord has risen upon you.



Prayer

The Lord has proclaimed His light in my life.

What can I do to share God's comfort and light with others around me? How might the Church be called to show forth God's glory and draw the nations into His light?

I know I can speak freely to the Lord now about how I want to respond to His word. Thanks be to God.



Foreshadowing the Perfect Lamb of God

Key Verse: "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (Hebrews 9:14)

Some Thoughts

Have you ever wondered why God's redemptive plan for humanity required the death of His only begotten Son? Why were the animal sacrifices prescribed in the Mosaic Law not good enough to make them pure and holy for God? Yes, it has to do with a most Holy God and a sinful, unholy people. The fact that these sacrifices had to be offered again and again only showed that "the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper." (Hebrews 9:9) Nothing that His people did could bring them near to Him.

God knows that "the human heart is deceitful above all things." (Jeremiah 17:9) We deceived even ourselves. All too often the sacrifices the people brought to the Lord were blemished and totally unacceptable, because their hearts were far away from Him. Yet God loved His people and desired that they be reconciled to Him. This required a perfect, unblemished sacrifice. So God gave for the world the perfect sacrifice in His Son,—His One and Only Son who is forever obedient and faithful! His blood and sacrifice was all-sufficient and continues to save us from our sins today.

Questions for Reflection

Think about what Jesus has done for you by His sacrifice. How would you respond to His love? "Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid? / Your heart, does the Spirit control?"

Prayer

O Lord God, Your Son saved me and sanctified me by His one and all sufficient sacrifice on the cross. I thank You that I can now come into Your Presence as Your child. Teach me to love You as I ought, and give myself as a living sacrifice for your service. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen



The Sun of Righteousness Brings Hope

“But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.....” (Malachi 4:2)

Some Thoughts

In this passage God declares that a day is coming when the sun of righteousness will arise and two things will happen:

- (1) there will be redemption and hope, healing and rejoicing for God's people who revere His name;
- (2) there will be victory for God's people over the wicked who will be totally crushed.

That day will surely come because God Himself has spoken!

During Malachi's time, the people were unfaithful and deceitful; the nation had lost hope; and judgment was coming upon the earth. Yes, there would be fiery judgment for those who rejected God and were bent on evil. Their destruction would be complete. Yet God – the Everlasting and Unchanging God – promised hope for those who looked to Him, trusted in Him and honoured His name. Why? Because He is forever gracious and compassionate. When everyone and everything else fails, He still watches over His people in love.

We know His promise of redemption and healing holds true even today to all who put their trust in Him. He has sent us His Son, the sun of righteousness, to save us from our sins and to give us life and light for all eternity.

Reflection

Are you downhearted and heavy laden as you see wickedness and lawlessness increasing around you? Do not lose hope, but take heart, for as surely as the sun rises each day, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with redemption and hope. Jesus the Son has come.

Prayer

God, I pray that You remove any discouragement and hopelessness from my inner most being. In its place, sow Your words of truth and assurance in my heart, and let the love of Jesus fill me with healing and hope, in order that I too may bring hope to many others around me.



God Breaks into the Mundane

We have arrived at the second Sunday of Advent, and continue our journey through this liturgical season of waiting. Some of us may be enduring the pain of some form of waiting in context of our everyday lives. Perhaps you have been praying for many years about something and are discouraged by the seeming lack of divine response. Or perhaps you are grappling with illness, or hoping to see a loved one again. Waiting is hard. What then could motivate us to persevere in the mundane?

What if we saw life as a journey designed to prepare us for the moments when we may savour God's glory?

During the 400-year inter-testamental period of God's silence from the time of Malachi to the appearance of John the Baptist, there were those in Israel who continued to be faithful: they anticipated His glory, they longed for His appearing, they prayed without ceasing! For those who lived in the days of Herod – a foreigner king with unbridled ambitions and paranoid delusions that drove him to murder even his own wife and children – how they must have clung on to God's promise of a Messiah.

And then there was the priest whose wife was barren, even after much praying and longing. God was waiting to surprise Israel – and Zechariah! How wonderful then, that He should choose to break His silence during the service of a priest who had lived his life with unwavering faith in God despite shattered dreams and, very likely, social stigma.

As we persevere in the mundane of our daily lives today, let us take comfort in the fact that God too waits to make all things beautiful in His time.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we pray that this Advent would help us reflect on the present time as a gift – as we anticipate and prepare for Your deliverance to all our troubles, in the return of our Risen Saviour, Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, Amen.



God Breaks the Silence by Promising a Son

God works in mysterious ways. What do you think might have been Zechariah's prayer at the altar of incense?

Zechariah and Elizabeth had prayed for a son for many years. I imagine that as Elizabeth moved past childbearing age, Zechariah might have given up wanting to be a father. *"Forget it. There are more important things to pray for."* The Messiah had not yet come – and the Messiah must come. (This was Israel's lament during God's silence.) Which of Zechariah's petitions was the angel referring to – the one long-forgotten or the one at the altar of incense that day? Isn't it amazing that God never forgot the buried dreams of Zechariah's heart even while fulfilling His promise of a Messiah for Israel? Above and beyond a miracle offspring to carry the family name, God was giving the couple a son who would have an unprecedented ministry – that is, preparing the way of the long awaited Messiah.

This story highlights that God is both a sovereign and personal God. While He rules over the entire creation and is in the enterprise of redeeming it, He also presents Himself to us as a Father who knows us intimately and delights in giving us good gifts. None of our prayers escape God's hearing – from the fervent to the half-hearted, from the latest to the earliest ones many years ago, from the most eloquent to the most hesitant. He causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him, to those who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

Prayer:

Come, thou long-expected Jesus. What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You crown us with such glory and honour. Excite in us the awe of the wisdom of the Father and a joy responsive to His tender care for us. In Your most precious name, we pray. Amen.



Zechariah Doubts the Promise of a Son

We often read of Zechariah's silencing as a punishment for unbelief. Yes, it is true that Zechariah had doubted the angel's message and so, had the power of speech taken from him.

But what if we saw Zechariah's inability to speak not merely as a punishment but also an act of grace? First, it was a sign to remind him of God's promise. Secondly, it prevented Zechariah from talking about the vision and kept Elizabeth's pregnancy a secret for the time being. Thirdly, it surely afforded Zechariah quietness to ponder what the miraculous gift of a son would mean to him and his wife. Lastly, Zechariah's imposed silence reminds us also of God's silence in the prior 400 years when He stopped speaking to Israel through the prophets. The return of Zechariah's speech foreshadowed the return of God's prophetic voice through his son John, who would prepare Israel for the Messiah's advent. Silence then, could have been an invitation to Zechariah to identify with God's silent activity at that time.

Advent is likewise a season during which *silence* may be a means of preparing our lives on Earth till Christ returns. Setting aside consistent times of sitting quietly before God in reflection and prayer, going for a silent retreat, and turning away from habits that distract us from His voice are some of the ways we could practise silence this Advent. As we do so, may the grim backdrop of what we encounter daily in our world magnify the beauty and miracle of Christmas. Christ will come again.

Prayer:

God of hope, be with us in our journey through the silence of Advent. Grant us the joy of watching and waiting as You silently bring forth Christ's Kingdom in us and through us into our broken world with your love and your healing. In Your mercy, receive our prayers as part of our service of the Lord who enlists us in His work. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.



A Merciful God Restores Joy --The Birth of John

In the Jewish culture, the name bestowed upon a child is a matter of great importance. A name expresses who the child is, has considerable influence on character development, and suggests what the child might become. In the times of Zechariah and Elizabeth, it was common to name the baby boy at his circumcision. The drama of our text has to do with a conflict over the name "John" – not because "John" was a bad name but because, according to their neighbours and friends, no one in the family had that name. When Zechariah's tongue was loosed following Elizabeth's insistence escalated the excitement throughout the region. The miraculous pregnancy, now coupled with the unconventional naming practice and God's obvious pleasure in it, evidenced that something big was happening. The child was named "John", meaning "The Lord is gracious". God was graciously lifting His veil of silence – one that had persisted for four centuries. "What then was this child going to be?"

John's calling as the forerunner of Jesus the Messiah clearly involved a break from the past.

This suggests the kind of lives that we should live as Christians who anticipate Christ's return. Do we prioritise the building strong marriages and families, showing hospitality, caring for the vulnerable, and advocating for the voiceless? Are we doing all these things with the joy of the Lord, as salt and light in the world? Does the way we live invite others to ask the big questions of life and seek God? Will Christ find us faithful when He returns?

Prayer:

Holy Spirit, inspire and strengthen us to be faithful as we wait on the Lord Jesus Christ today. May our lives and our communities reflect God's glory and holiness to be a joy and blessing to many others. In His mighty name, we pray. Amen.



Jesus, Born of a Virgin

Throughout my own pregnancy last year, I thought often of Mary, the humble courageous and willing vessel of God's creative work to reveal to the world the mystery of Immanuel – God with us.

God worked in an extraordinary way through a very ordinary person. Mary was graced by the presence of Jesus – the enfleshed Word that was with God and was God Himself, through whom all things were made, in whom was life and the light of all humanity (John 1:1-4). God reconciled the world to Himself through Jesus, so that we are no longer enemies under His wrath, but friends for whom He laid down His life.

Who was Mary that God would grant her this privilege to nourish the baby Jesus in her body, comfort Him with the sound of her heartbeat, and mother Him with her love? She was but a girl of humble circumstances (Luke 1:48), and yet willing to bear the shame and scorn. Mary is a reminder to us of how God is able to fill with purpose, life and hope those whom His Spirit indwells. Immanuel invites us to be with God as He is with us. Let us join Him in His mission to the world wherever we live, work, and witness, whether we be homemakers, students, artist, or engineers.

Will you, like Mary, say YES to the Lord today?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank You that You are with us in our world, where many are shackled by sin and fear. You are with us to bring in Your righteousness and justice. And You are with us, as the author and perfecter of our faith, in our personal journeys of life. Grant us the passion and tenacity to say YES and stand with You, in good times and in bad times. In Your name, we pray. Amen.



A Child who is the Son of God

The Child born of a virgin was in actual fact the Son of God. "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law that we might receive the adoption as sons." (Galatians 4:4-5)

The concept of sinners being restored as sons is a common theme in the New Testament, but Paul is the only New Testament author to call it adoption. What are the privileges guaranteed for adopted sons? First, an adopted son became legally the son of his adoptive father who would provide for him. Secondly, the covenant protected the adopted son against any potential rejection by his adoptive father, e.g. being reduced back to slavery if he had been a slave, or being returned to his natural parents. Finally, adoption mandated the rights of an heir to be given to the adopted son. Consequently, Paul was affirming the Galatian Christians (and all Christians) of their identity in Christ adopted sons and daughters, who are no longer slaves but beloved heirs who would receive their inheritance at the return of Jesus Christ.

Today, we rejoice because the "Spirit of His Son" (Galatians 4:6) is in us, guaranteeing our status, enabling us to call on the Heavenly Father, and regenerating us into children of His own nature of whom Christ is firstborn. May we therefore seek to know daily God's gracious means to lead us to yield to His Spirit – a Spirit of power, love and hope.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). Thus, we wait in all our trials with hope. With Your Spirit in us, we long for that day when we are revealed as God's sons and daughters, and You wipe away our tears, and we dwell forever in the presence of our Heavenly Father. Come Lord Jesus, come. Amen.



Nothing is Impossible with God

One of the Bible stories that fascinates me the most is God's provision of bread for Israel in their journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai. The bread or manna served not only as food for the hungry but also a means of teaching Israel to trust and obey God as His chosen people. Its supply would only cease after they had arrived at the Promised Land.

Everything about the bread was a mystery – its origin, appearance, timing, abundance, even doubling on the sixth day, and its preservation over Sabbath when there would be none for gathering. Nevertheless, many have attempted to rationally explain away the miracle as a natural phenomenon. But God did rain manna with the dew (Exodus 16:14). Why domesticate the unknowable possibilities of God? Why not allow this manna to awaken in our hearts a sense of wondering awe just as it did among the Israelites and focus on what God's provision really was – grace revealed? Instead of attempting to answer "what is it?" why not live with "I don't know, but isn't it amazing?" Nothing is impossible with God.

Time and again, we need to return to childlike wonder and thus trust in the God who is not bound by our limitations, methods, and concerns. With regard to Luke 1:36-38, Mary did not even try to rationalise how her barren relative could conceive a son in her old age. Rather, she let herself be amazed. Consequently, her immediate response to the news about Elizabeth was to accept for herself the appointment as the Lord's chosen servant according to His will and purpose – body, soul, and spirit.

Prayer:

Almighty God, indeed, You are able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to Your power that is at work within us. As we draw closer to Christmas, may we delight in the wonder of belonging to You in Christ and the privilege of serving You not merely as servants but sons and daughters whom You love. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.



A Child Named Jesus

Key verse: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)

Some Thoughts

God chose two ordinary people to bring forth the Saviour into the world. What did God see in Joseph and Mary that He chose them to be parents of the Saviour of the world? From the Scriptures, it would appear they possessed genuine obedience and trust in God. Joseph and Mary chose to follow God's will, without even knowing what it meant or what it would cost in terms of hardship and suffering. Through obedience to the Lord, they brought forth Jesus the Messiah, into the world. Thirty-three years later, in obedience to the Father's will, Jesus Himself laid down His life to offer to the world forgiveness, salvation, and hope, through His death and resurrection.

This same principle of obedience holds true for us as disciples of Jesus Christ. We need to trust Him, obey Him, and follow Him, and let Him accomplish His purpose in us and through us. It takes radical obedience and faith like that of Joseph and Mary to do this.

Questions for Reflection

"We are not our own, but yours." We make this pledge at the Covenant Service. Do we know what this really means? It might cost us much hardship, suffering or even death. What is God drawing your attention to? How willing are you to lay down your life for Jesus?

Prayer

Father God, I thank You that You know me as fully as You knew Joseph and Mary. Lord Jesus, my Messiah, grant me the obedience and faith I need in order to choose to follow You. Lord Holy Spirit who lives in me, empower me and grant me the courage to follow Jesus faithfully. Amen.



A Child Called Immanuel

Key verse: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14)

Some Thoughts

This prophecy of Isaiah made more than 700 years before Jesus was born was a message to the people that "God is with us."

No one from Isaiah's days lived to see the fulfilment of this prophecy, nor would they have understood its importance. But God remained faithful to His word. In God's perfect time, He fulfilled His word through His chosen servant Mary, and brought into the world His promised Child who is the sign of His everlasting presence with us. The coming of Jesus, culminating in His death and resurrection, has become the tangible, unchangeable sign that "God is with us" from now to eternity. This demonstrates for us and the whole world that our God is not an angry and unmerciful God, but one who is loving and compassionate, who cares for His people and who chose to save them from their sins and give them life and hope.

Questions for Reflection

Have you ever doubted that God is with you, that he cares for you? What in your experience enabled you to hold on to God and to trust Him?

Prayer

Almighty God, today I affirm this truth – that You are with me whether or not I am able to feel Your presence. I proclaim and worship You, Jesus, as Immanuel, for You have promised never to leave me or forsake me. Holy Spirit keep this truth alive in me day by day with joy. Amen.



A Child to be Worshipped

Key verse: "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." (Matthew 2:2)

Some Thoughts

When the Magi or wise men from the East saw the star, they knew that something of tremendous significance had occurred. That star led them on a long journey to Jerusalem in Judea and then on to Bethlehem where they found the child they were seeking. Overjoyed, they bowed down and worshipped Him, and presented their gifts of gold, incense and myrrh. These gifts signified His kingship, His divinity, and His death. We wonder how and when these wise men received their knowledge and insight.

Their willingness to follow God's leading paved the way for them to enter into a glorious encounter with the child who would be the Messiah. The gift to see with spiritual eyes, not merely the natural, enabled them to witness and worship the Messiah.

Questions for Reflection

Imagine that you were a servant of one of the Magi, what would you have thought and felt when you went into the house and saw the child?

Prayer

Almighty God, open my eyes and my heart to see You at work wherever I am no matter what the situation I am in and the circumstances I am facing. You spoke through Your prophets, You spoke through the wise men, You have spoken through Your Son. Speak to me and help me to hear and follow You. Through Jesus Christ my Lord, I pray. Amen.



A Child who Upset the Status Quo of Jerusalem

Key verse: "When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him." (Matthew 2:3)

Some Thoughts

A newborn baby brings joy and excitement to everyone, especially to those who are significantly and intimately related to him, in addition to much anxiety and trepidation to the new parents.

Yet, we read in this passage of a child's birth that greatly troubled a king who had previously been clueless to his existence. Why should this be so? Because this King Herod thought that his own position was being threatened. He was not to know that this child would be a different kind of king – one who came to claim the whole of our lives in order that He might fill us with His love, joy and peace. Above all else, He had come to grant life eternal to all who would receive him. Even as the wise men looked for this child, Herod sought to destroy Him, and did terrible things out of his own fear and paranoia. (Matthew 2:16-18)

But this child born to be King came to the world to bring God's love and salvation. And this gift is still available to all.

Questions for Reflection

Would you react in fear or respond in joy at the coming of the King? Would you seek to know Him and worship Him?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for coming into the world, and coming into my life. I pray that You will help me to bring the knowledge of Your love and salvation to many others, and draw them into Your kingdom and Your joy. Amen.



A Child Born in Humble Bethlehem

Key verse: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel." (Matthew 2:6)

Some Thoughts

In these verses, we see a powerful and amazing embodiment of humility in the way God chose to bring forth His Messiah. He chose a small village – Bethlehem, and the lowliest of birthplaces – a manger! He had already chosen ordinary people like Joseph and Mary as part of His great redemption plan. This goes against everything the world might define as befitting the Messiah's birth! It reminds us not to despise the small things, for God's wisdom is far greater than our understanding.

We must remember that Bethlehem was also the birth place of King David, Jesus' human ancestor. By way of another example, Jesus came from Galilee from which place no prophet had come before (John 7:52).

God is a God of surprises. Let Him surprise you. But first, learn to trust Him.

Questions for Reflection

Are you being challenged to give up some big dreams or ambition because the Lord is calling you to consider something smaller or less significant than what you are looking for? Remember His word to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Prayer

Lord God, please take charge of my life and decide what is best for me. Teach me to be humble and follow after You. Amen.



A Child Befitting Costly Treasures

Key verse: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field." (Matthew 13:44)

Some Thoughts

Imagine you were there in the house with Mary and the child Jesus. Three wise men came in and bowed down in worship to the child, offering costly treasures. Mary already had an inkling that this child was special. But why such costly treasures?

The wise men were willing to travel far to look for this child, and brought these precious gifts, because they knew that they were coming to see a king. But even then, they had no idea how special this king was going to be.

Jesus reminds us that the Kingdom of Heaven is like hidden treasure, waiting to be discovered by those willing to give everything they have for it. He still challenges us today to seek out His Kingdom. He gave up His glory and honour in heaven above, and He also gave up His life, in order to establish this Kingdom of God and open the door for you to enter into the Kingdom. What will you give to Him?

Questions for Reflection

Who is Jesus to you? What are you willing to give for Jesus and His Kingdom?

Song

Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown,
When Thou camest to earth for me;
But in Bethlehem's home was there found no room
For Thy holy nativity.



O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for Thee.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, open my eyes to see You and Your kingdom as befitting my worship and the whole of my being. Help me to comprehend the joy of being in Your Kingdom. Amen.



Firstborn Over All Creation

Key verse: "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."
(Colossians 1:17)

Jesus came into the world as a helpless little baby and was even in danger of being exterminated by the King Herod. He lived a humble life among the poor, the helpless and the social outcasts. But the church came to realise that He was truly the Son of God, who was God Himself, the Creator of all things in heaven and on earth. He is the first-born over all creation – that is, the whole creation rightly belongs to Him. He is also the first-born from among the dead, and thereby becoming the head over the whole church. He is our Lord and rightly deserves our worship.

Remember also that He is the one who holds everything together. This includes your life, your family, your work, your hopes and aspirations. This includes all the affairs of your community, your country, and the whole world. While everything around you seems chaotic and out of your control, nothing is ever outside His control. He loves you, cares for you and is always watching over you to help you, to guide you and to lead you along the journey of life towards eternity.

As Christmas draws near, and we are caught up in all the Christmas celebrations both at home and in the church, let us also pause and spend time in worshipping Jesus Christ the Lord. Try to make time intentionally to read the Gospel narratives of His birth, sing the carols and songs that you love pray and give thanks to Jesus who condescended to come to earth as a human,—and a helpless little baby at that, in order that you may know God's love. Know that no one is either too small or too insignificant for the Almighty God. And rejoice in that He came to be with you this Christmas and forevermore.



The Firstborn SonMeditation

To be the firstborn in a family can be a privilege or a burden. In many cultures, to be the firstborn carries with it special meaning, especially for a son. That Jesus was the firstborn has many meanings. Jesus was the firstborn son of Mary. Joseph and Mary were full of joy and trepidation, of course. But they never could have anticipated the many surprises that were in store for them, beyond what they could have ever imagined.

Following our reading in Colossians 1:15-18 Jesus is firstborn of all creation, not in the sense that He Himself is a created being, but rather that, as the only begotten Son of God, He was the Father's agent in creation and hence has authority over all created things. He is the firstborn in the new creation by being the first to be raised from the dead. Jesus is thus the firstborn in a whole family of the children of God who are destined to bear his image (Romans 8:29). As the firstborn, Jesus has rights and authority over me, the church and all of creation.

Question for Reflection

Which of the many meanings of Jesus as the firstborn has special significance for you? Why? Mull over it and commit it to God with praise and thanksgiving.

Song

See Him lying on a bed of straw
A draughty stable with an open door
Mary cradling the babe she bore
The Prince of Glory is His name
O now carry me to Bethlehem
To see the Lord appear to men
Just as poor as was the stable then
The Prince of Glory when He came.



Prayer

Our heavenly Father, thank you that by his death and resurrection, Jesus is the “the first in a long legacy of those who are going to leave the cemeteries” (1 Corinthians 15:20, The Message). Teach me then not to fear death, but to know that “because he lives, I can face tomorrow.” Amen.



A Child Who makes Heaven's Choir Sing

Meditation

What a night of contrasts! Routine broken by the unexpected. A dark night illuminated by the glory of the Lord. Shepherds living in the fields confronted by angels singing in the sky. A nightly humdrum of watching sheep interrupted by supernatural beings with earth-shattering news. The shepherds' sense of complacency rocked by terror and anxiety. Bethlehem, a little-known village, catapults into the news. A simple stable meant for animals becomes the birthplace of the Messiah, the Lord! It was not just another day, but a prelude to the coming of the Kingdom of God! No wonder the heavenly hosts sang a hallelujah of praise to God, "Glory to God in the highest Heaven! Peace upon earth among men of goodwill!"

Question for Reflection

Is the birth of Jesus good news for you as it was for the shepherds? Will you receive the angelic proclamation with joy and thanksgiving in your heart? Will you sing a song of praise and jubilation to the God on High?

Song

Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plains,
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains.

Refrain:

Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Prayer

Our Father in heaven, thank you for the good news of Jesus, our Messiah and Lord. May I always rejoice in the peace that You have impart to me, and help me to share this good news with others around me. May we sing together with the angels in heaven, "Gloria in excelsis Deo!" Amen.



A Child Who Makes the Shepherds Praise God

Meditation

The shepherds had been taken unawares. They were stunned, terrified, and awed by the great company of the heavenly host. They could have run away or stayed put. Yet, they accepted the angel's message as the Lord's word! So they said to one another, *"Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us."* Off they hurried to Bethlehem, and they were not disappointed.

And, yes, there in the manger was a newborn baby – a Holy Child, the Son of God, the promised Messiah, who was born to save the world from darkness and sin. The shepherds spoke excitedly. Those who were present heard what they said and were amazed. But Mary stayed silent – quietly pondering and treasuring the stunning news. Because they heard and responded to the amazing proclamation, the shepherds met the newborn Messiah! And many praised God because of their testimony. They returned to their sheep, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Of course, their lives were never going to be the same again. "Gloria in excelsis Deo!"

Question for Reflection

When God speaks, will you take Him at His word, and obey, even though it may seem odd?

Song

See how the shepherds, summoned to his cradle
Leaving their flocks, draw nigh to gaze.
We too will thither bend our joyful footsteps;
O come, let us adore him
O come, let us adore him
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord.



Prayer

Our Father in heaven, thank You that the shepherds responded and went to see what You had revealed to them through the angel. Teach me to hear You when You speak, and come after You in faith, as did the shepherds who saw the Christ-child. Help me to give glory to You by my witness to Your love. Amen.



The King of Kings Riding with the Armies of Heaven

Meditation

From open fields and draughty stable, we turn our eyes upwards to catch a glorious glimpse of heaven in the vision of John the Apostle. The first Advent was marked by the birth of the baby Jesus in Bethlehem. He was Immanuel, "God with us". He was Jesus, for "he will save his people from their sins". He was the promised Messiah, God's Anointed One. He brought Good News of life abundant and life eternal – and He offered it to all humanity, freely and without charge.

But there is a second Advent. When Jesus comes again, He comes not as a defenceless baby. He will come as a mighty warrior, king and judge, striking down the nations and all those who have turned their backs on God and rejected Him who had created them and offered them love, forgiveness and new life in Christ. This is the end of all things. Jesus will rule as "King of kings and Lord of lords."

Question for Reflection

Are you ready for the second coming of Jesus? Are you living out your life in obedience to Him or in rebellion against Him?

Song

Come, thou long expected Jesus,
Born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.



Born thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to thy glorious throne.

Prayer

Our Father in heaven, thank You that Jesus is coming again. Thank You that He will come as King to make complete the fullness of Your kingdom come to earth. Prepare me for that day and help me live out my life here in humble submission and obedience to You. Amen.



The Lamb Shines Forever in the Holy City

Meditation

When the Israelites were held in captive slavery in Egypt, God rained numerous devastating plagues upon the land to break Pharaoh's resolve. Yet Pharaoh's heart remained hardened. Then Yahweh God sent an angel of death to kill every firstborn in Egypt, both human and animal. But the Israelites were commanded to put the blood of an unblemished lamb on the door-frames of their houses. When the angel of death struck, he would pass over their homes, thus sparing them. Finally, Pharaoh's resolve was broken, and the Israelites were set free—free to worship Yahweh God. To this day, the Jews remember God's saving grace—deliverance from slave-bondage and death—as they celebrate the Passover each year.

Christmas also reminds us that Jesus is the unblemished Lamb of God. By His death on the cross, His blood was shed for us to redeem us from slavery to sin and death. When we put our trust in Him, God forgives us our sins, delivers us from death into life, and sets us free to worship Him in spirit and in truth. And in heaven's glory—the new Jerusalem, the city of God—the Lamb reigns victorious forever. And we, the redeemed of the Lamb, will walk by His light for all eternity. No more will death or darkness ever overshadow us again.

Reflect on what Jesus' death and resurrection mean for you.

Song

King of kings, Lord of lords,
Son of God exalted;
Name above every name,
Lamb upon the throne.
This king will come again,
the Father's only son;
No more a world in darkness,
the Light will come!



Prayer

Our Father in heaven, thank you for Jesus, --my Passover Lamb. Thank you for Your saving grace, delivering me from sin and death. Teach me what it means to live out of a grateful heart. Empower me to pour out my life for You in joyous, thankful worship—loving You and serving You always. Amen.



The Word, Our Everlasting Light

Meditation

What does light do? It dispels darkness, of course! When the sun rises, night fades away. Where there is light, there can be no darkness at all.

Some 700 years before the coming of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah prophesied, *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined."* (Isaiah 9:2, ESV). We were a people in darkness and death, as a result of our wilful rebellion against God,—making ourselves "gods" and doing things our own way – living a life that leads to death, both spiritual and physical. Jesus comes as Light from God to destroy this deathly darkness and to give us new life that is purposeful, wholesome and eternal. Darkness can neither overcome this Light nor withstand it. This is the Light of God Himself that has come into the world – the true light, which enlightens everyone.

This Light is also the Word of God, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. By His light and by His truth, we are able to find our way back to the Father. This is exactly why Jesus came into the world.

Question for Reflection

In what ways are you still struggling in darkness and sin? Will you let the Light of Jesus shine upon you and give you new life?

Song

Son of God, Son of Man,
Word of God incarnate,
Suffering Saviour,
Glorious risen Lord.
For God so loved the world
He gave His only Son;
No more a word in darkness,
The Light has come!



Prayer

Our Father in heaven, thank You that the light of Jesus has come into my life. Thank You that I do not have to live in fear, ignorance, despair and death, for in Christ I have new life that is purposeful, wholesome and eternal. Thank You again, O Lord, for sending Jesus Your Son. Thank You for Christmas. Amen.

