



TLM Daily Devotions

December 2018





Introduction

The Bridge turned 3! Started in Advent 2015, and now we are celebrating 3 years of smooth run!!
Praise the Lord!

Thank you so much to you all for your commitment, faithfulness and readiness in contributing, strengthening the spiritual pillars of TLM worldwide! Many of you have been faithfully sharing since the very beginning, and on a regular basis. Others joined to us later and are coming on with their valuable inputs. All are most welcome, be encouraged to share!

Blessed reading!

Marta



Comfort for God's People - 1

Isaiah 40

¹ Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.

² 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.

³ A voice of one calling:
"In the wilderness prepare
the way for the LORD;
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.

⁵ And the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

⁶ A voice says, "Cry out."
And I said, "What shall I cry?"

"All people are like grass,
and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall,
because the breath of the LORD blows on them.
Surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God endures forever."

⁹ You who bring good news to Zion,
go up on a high mountain.
You who bring good news to Jerusalem,
lift up your voice with a shout,
lift it up, do not be afraid;
say to the towns of Judah,
"Here is your God!"

¹⁰ See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,
and he rules with a mighty arm.

See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.

¹¹ He tends his flock like a shepherd:

He gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young.



ADVENT 1

Comfort for God's People – 2

Isaiah 40

- ¹² Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,
or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens?
Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket,
or weighed the mountains on the scales
and the hills in a balance?
- ¹³ Who can fathom the Spirit of the LORD,
or instruct the LORD as his counselor?
- ¹⁴ Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him,
and who taught him the right way?
Who was it that taught him knowledge,
or showed him the path of understanding?
- ¹⁵ Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket;
they are regarded as dust on the scales;
he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.
- ¹⁶ Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires,
nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.
- ¹⁷ Before him all the nations are as nothing;
they are regarded by him as worthless
and less than nothing.
- ¹⁸ With whom, then, will you compare God?
To what image will you liken him?
- ¹⁹ As for an idol, a metalworker casts it,
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold
and fashions silver chains for it.
- ²⁰ A person too poor to present such an offering
selects wood that will not rot;
they look for a skilled worker
to set up an idol that will not topple.
- ²¹ Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood since the earth was founded?
- ²² He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,
and its people are like grasshoppers.
He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,
and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

²³ He brings princes to naught
and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

²⁴ No sooner are they planted,
no sooner are they sown,
no sooner do they take root in the ground,
than he blows on them and they wither,
and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

²⁵ “To whom will you compare me?
Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.

²⁶ Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:
Who created all these?
He who brings out the starry host one by one
and calls forth each of them by name.
Because of his great power and mighty strength,
not one of them is missing.

²⁷ Why do you complain, Jacob?
Why do you say, Israel,
“My way is hidden from the LORD;
my cause is disregarded by my God”?

²⁸ Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.

²⁹ He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.

³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;

³¹ but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.



The Glory of God

Psalm 19. The heavens declare the glory of God.

I have always loved to look at a clear sky at night when it is possible to see so many stars. It is a beautiful sight, but one we can't always see in England because of the cloudy weather. However, I remember when I worked in Purulia many years ago, and sometimes sitting outside in the evenings looking up at a beautiful sky. The warm, balmy air felt like velvet, and it was with something like awe and wonder that I gazed at the stars. I did not know their names, but I did know that our mighty God had created it all!

A few years ago a friend gave me a book that is full of views of creation through the lens of the Hubble telescope. In the beginning of the book it says, "As you turn the pages be prepared for your heart to soar into the stratosphere of space, worshipping the God Who created it all." Recently I have had more time to gaze at the wonderful pictures in the book, and I am completely amazed at the marvels that have been there since creation, but only visible to us in the last decades, because of NASA and the Hubble.

Genesis chapter 1 tells us that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. God was already there. He is not bound by time or space. He made everything, the sun and moon to divide day and night, the stars, all things in their beauty and complexity, to reveal something of His glory and power. Every day we can enjoy some of the beauties of His creation. At present where we live we have been amazed at the wonderful colours of Autumn this year, the trees and bushes are glorious shades of gold, red, yellow and brown, and even more beautiful when the sun is shining through them. Many people visit New England to celebrate the Fall, but old England can make a very good show too!!

Psalm 8 v3-4 it says, when I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him! It is amazing that the God Who created the whole of the universe, including us, saw fit to set His love upon us.

It is very humbling to think that Jesus was willing to leave the glories of heaven, to be born as a helpless Baby and later to go round doing good, teaching, preaching and healing. Eventually suffering an agonising death, to take our sins upon Himself, so that we may be forgiven, and have life in Him. What an incredible thing it is! He cares about everyone of us. His grace and love are beyond our understanding.

As we begin Advent, and the preparation and celebrations of Christmas, let us take some time to meditate on the wonderful love and generosity of our beloved Lord.

Mollie Clark

English. Went to India in 1961, worked in Purulia for 8 years as a nurse, before being transferred to Bhutan. Worked for 18 years in four different areas in Bhutan until I was transferred to the international office in London as personnel director. I was there for eight years until I retired.



Faith and Deeds

James 2 v 14-26

How can people tell that you are a Christian?

The people you work beside, members of your family, the people you meet when you're relaxing, or playing a sport. How can they tell?.

We read these profound and challenging words from James. At the heart of these verses is this phrase *"I will show you my faith by what I do" (v18)* This comes in the middle of a piece all about the relationship between faith and deeds,

James is clear: *"faith by itself, if not accompanied by action, is dead"* and he makes this point again in verse 26 - "faith without works is dead."

And good deeds alone don't prove Christian faith either – there are lots of good people in the world, doing good deeds, who reject the whole notion of Christianity and God – so good deeds don't prove Christian faith, but the absence of good deeds does suggest the absence of real faith! That's James' argument.

John Blanchard, in his excellent book on James, called Truth for Life, uses this illustration: a man was rowing a boat across the river and his friends were discussing this issue; the man took one oar out of the water and rowed only with the other oar; the boat went round in circles; so he put that one back and took the other one out and the boat went the other way round in circles; only when he had the two oars in the water did the boat head in a straight line for the opposite bank. Blanchard concludes: "Biblical Christianity has precisely that kind of balance. Only the person with faith and deeds working in perfect harmony is heading in the right direction." (Truth for Life p.148).

How can people tell that we are Christian? The best answer to that question is: by the kind of people we are, by the qualities people see in us, by the different way we live and behave; by our attitudes to work and to other people; by the things we value in life; by the good that we do; by the part we play in Church. This is faith being made complete by what we do. This is balanced Christianity; this is how people know that we are Christian; this is what draws others to Jesus, people whose faith is important enough to them that they live it out. Find that balance: let your faith and deeds work together in perfect harmony!

May the words of Jesus from Matthew 5 go deep into your very being –

"You are the light of the world - let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven."

Gordon Brown - Scotland - 2008-2011 Vice Chair of TLM Scotland, 2011-2015 Honorary Treasurer of TLM International. Kindly sending his good wishes to the TLM family!



Hallelujah or Humbug? Christmas or Xmas?

When I hear a rousing Christmas carol or catch the fragrance of freshly baked mince pies, I can't help but feel *Hallelujah! Christmas!* The sight and scent of Christmas brings back so many happy, nostalgic memories. Then there are other times when Christmas adverts appear in August and department stores play sickly-sweet seasonal songs over their tinny loud speakers and '*Bah Humbug*' springs to mind! I would guess most people approach Christmas with an equal mix of *Hallelujah* and *Humbug*.

There are times when Christmas shopping, baking, card-writing and present wrapping gets so overwhelming that I wonder why we celebrate Christmas *every* year – alternate years would be enough for me!

Jesus must watch our celebrations here with a mixture of bewilderment and dismay. Well, how would you feel if it was your birthday and all your family sent cards to each other, exchanged presents with each other and ate a birthday meal all without including you? Admit it - you'd be miffed, hurt, downright angry even.

Seasonal sermons remind us that *Christmas begins with Christ*. Years ago I can remember a friend telling me that Christians should *never ever* abbreviate the word to 'Xmas'. 'That's like taking *Christ* out of *Christmas*,' she said.

'It turns Christmas into a non-religious holiday, losing it's real meaning.'

But let's think about the Xmas issue in another way. When I receive a letter with a row of XXX at the bottom, it tells me that the sender loves me very much. When we see Christmas spelt with an X, let's remember that God really loves us and he sent his son to show us just how much. So Xmas starts with a big kiss which reminds us of God's great love. And of course an X is also a cross and Jesus' love took him all the way from the stable to the cross. Amazing love indeed.

So don't let all the preparations for Christmas overwhelm you. Christmas is about God's love for us which lasts the whole year through. Let's share that love with others – with a card, a home-made gift or perhaps by sharing a coffee.



After 1 Corinthians 13

If I bake a Christmas cake and dozens of mince pies, but have not love, I am just another harassed housewife.

If I decorate my house with outdoor fairy lights and a twinkling Christmas tree, but have not love, I am just wasting electricity for no reason.

If I write a hundred Christmas cards and stick a newsletter in each one, but have not love, I only gain writer's cramp.

Love stops baking to phone a friend in need.

Love stops decorating to hug a child.

Love stops shopping to visit a lonely neighbour.

Love does not envy the colour co-ordinated Christmas decorations in another's house, nor envy the neatly wrapped presents under a neighbour's tree.

Love does not write vain Christmas letters boasting of this year's achievements.

Love does not just send cards to those who will send one back.

Love does not only buy presents for those who can return the favour.

Love does not work out how much a friend will spend on your gift and then seek to spend not a penny more. Love knows the joy of giving without counting the cost.

Love is patient when faced with a seasonal queue at the post office and smiles at those sharing the experience.

Love does not get angry and shout at the kids to stay out of the way, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails. Computer games break, chocolates soon vanish, Christmas trees drop their needles, but the gift of LOVE endures for ever.

Love is not just for Christmas it lasts the whole year through.

Christ is not just for Christmas he wants to stay with you for ever.



The treasure of our hearts

Outdoor “Carols by Candlelight” events are popular in South Africa in the weeks leading up to Christmas. Farmers love them, as it is the one night of Summer when rain is guaranteed.

Some years ago, Elizabeth and I attended a Carols by Candlelight service at a small rural football field. As the service progressed, we became aware of a rowdy group of ‘worshippers’ at the far end of the arena. If they were relishing the celebration of the Nativity, they were keeping their joy well-hidden. About half-way through the service, the source of their anguish became evident. Their team was warming up on the side-lines. The municipal manager had double booked the venue and the footballers were distressed by the delay to the match occasioned by the singing of hymns and the preaching of sermons. Perhaps we should have been more courageous, but “We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them” and we decided to “Stand not upon the order of our going, but to go at once!”

I am sure that you will have many of your own Yuletide memories. Many will bring a smile to your face and a few will bring a tear to our eyes.

In *Luke 2:19* we read that *“Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”* From this we infer, amongst other things, that the Gospel authors asked Mary for her memories of that first Noël when writing their accounts of the life of Jesus.

Pondering. What I delightful old feel that word has about it. I can’t remember the last time I used it. Maybe I’ve never used it in everyday language. It feels so Biblical, doesn’t it? Slow, deep, rich, warm, contemplative.

Advent is indeed a time for us to ponder on Jesus. Unfortunately, for many of us, it is probably the busiest time of the year and a season when pondering takes a backseat to ‘making budget’ and ‘making meals’. I thought about this in Taipei this week as Elizabeth and I travelled with Jonathan [our son] on Taiwan’s wonderful public transport. As I looked around the trains, I was struck by how everyone was resolutely absorbed in their phones, playing games, reading mails, just staying busy. No time for pondering; no time to allow the Spirit to breath into our hearts and lives. [I also have a confession – Jonathan took me to a ‘techno-park’ – eight bewildering floors of computers and phones - and I succumbed and bought my first smart phone. In my defence, the price was great. No, I have not the foggiest idea of what I am going to do with it.]

Jesus offers us an abundant life, yet we so often settle for an abundance of that which is without life. In reality, an abundance of impoverishment. A full life is not necessarily a fulfilled life. Take time to ponder this Advent. Ponder on the life of Jesus. Ponder the life He offers you. Ponder His riches. Make this an Advent which you will remember with fondness in years to come – “That was the year I decided to embrace life in all its fullness.” May He bless you and those you love in the months ahead. May you find in Him lasting peace and exceedingly great joy.

Peter Laubscher - Country Leader, Southern Africa. Peter and Elizabeth Laubscher have worked with the Leprosy Mission since 1981. They are blessed with three children. Peter cruises the waters of False Bay when he’s not trying to polish scratches out of telescope mirrors.



The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

Luke 1,5 - 25

⁵In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. ⁶Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. ⁷But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

⁸Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, ⁹he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

¹¹Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. ¹⁴He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. ¹⁶He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

¹⁸Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

¹⁹The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. ²⁰And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

²¹Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple.

²²When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

²³When his time of service was completed, he returned home. ²⁴After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. ²⁵"The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."



The Birth of Jesus Foretold

Luke 1, 26- 38

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ 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^[b] the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail."

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.



May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him...

I visit a lovely lady who this year celebrated her 100th birthday. In the weeks before it she kept wondering if she would actually make it to her celebration. Well she did, and she had a lot of well wishes, especially one from our Queen, Elizabeth II.

This year we also celebrated 100 years since the armistice was signed at the end of the first world war. There have been various informative programmes on television on how terrible that war was. My sister and I decided we would go to France to look for our Grandad's grave. He was killed at the battle of the Somme, dying from his wounds on 3rd July 1916. We found the grave. Earlier my sister had asked me why I was going and what did I expect to gain from the visit? I wanted to be able to pay my respects to a grandfather I never knew, but who I had been drawn to because of a photo which used to hang on the wall in my grandmother's living room. I wondered who he was and what he was like. I later read a very poignant letter he had written to my grandmother when he was leaving England to go to war. In it he said he was going in order to protect our freedom and he hoped his two little girls would have a better future. The eldest, my mother, was not yet 5 years old. One thing which has been said so often as we have welcomed the peace of that day 100 years ago was that of sacrifice so that others may live. The trouble was that peace was not a lasting peace.

Back to my friend. Today I visited her and she produced, from the side of her chair, a booklet sent from the Bible Society quoting special Bible verses which people treasured because of the help they had been to them. She specially wanted to know what they were. Because she is now unable to read, she is dependent on others to read to her, which is where I come in! She wanted me to read some of the verses over and over again so that she would be able to recall them in the hours when she is sitting with not much to do or to think about. We concentrated on the words, hope, joy, peace, words which we may also associate with advent. One of the verses was, *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow/abound with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13.* The last verse of that chapter is *The God of peace be with you.*

I thought how important it is to have the word of God written in our hearts and memories in order to give us encouragement in difficult times. As we look forward to celebrating again the birth of the Saviour of the World, we remember his words *My peace I leave with you, my peace I give you... not as the world gives.* His is a lasting peace because it is reconciliation with the Father. Whatever our circumstance good or bad, the Father, who loves us beyond all measure, is with us and his peace has been promised to us.

As we look forward in anticipation to the coming king may the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in Him.

Joyce Missing - Living in retirement in the south of England. Formerly a staff member. I worked in Bhutan from 1973 – 1991 [nurse/administrator]; then at the International Office 1991-2006



Fixing our eyes on Jesus

Hebrews 12:1-3

Earlier this year my wife Jan and I attended a wedding of a friend in Ireland. We got to the church very early – almost the first guests to arrive, so we were able to choose the best seats. We took seats next to the centre aisle so we could get a good look at the bride when she came in.

I've been at several weddings before where the bride has used her time walking down the aisle as an opportunity to look to the right and to the left, making eye contact with some of the guests and using that as a way of welcoming friends and family who have come to share this special day.

The bridal procession started with the bridesmaids, each slowly walking down the aisle. We were all turned facing them, and waiting eagerly for the bride. Finally she came in sight standing at the door with her father, and then slowly her walk down the aisle began.

But she didn't catch my eye nor Jan's – nor any of the people watching her. She didn't look to the right or to the left. From the very moment that she came through the door her eyes were fixed – I would even say transfixed on the bridegroom – the one she loves and has come to marry. She walked very slowly but her gaze never wavered for a second. I don't think she even blinked! It was a beautiful moment.

The Bible describes the relationship that the church has with Jesus as being like that of a bride and a groom. We are the church – we are the bride of Christ. When we come into the presence of God, when we start to worship him – are we looking to the right and the left? Or is our gaze transfixed to look at Jesus.

In these days leading to Christmas we will no doubt face many distractions. We rightly make a big thing of this special time in the Christian calendar. But the distractions of finding presents, sending greetings, decorating houses and church, or preparing food can draw us away from the point of it all.

So let's celebrate well, but also let's take opportunities to pause from the busy schedule that sometimes entangles us all and fix our eyes on Jesus – not looking to the right or to the left.

Trevor Durston - General Director from 1993-2006. Now retired and working as a volunteer speaker for TLM.



Joseph

The husband to Mary, stepfather to Jesus. (Matthew 1.16) Very little is written about Joseph but there is enough for us all to learn a lesson or two.

Matthew 1:18-25 NKJV "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS."

1. Joseph served God and had a working relationship with Him. Joseph was faithful to God and to His Law, he was a righteous man which means that he wanted to do things that were *"right before God"*. He wanted to **please God** by obeying The Law. So the correct thing for him to do was to cancel the proposed marriage between him and Mary. God had another plan, He needed a virgin that had been impregnated by God Himself to bring forth The Son of God. He needed Joseph to marry Mary to bring this about, so He sent an angel to tell him to marry Mary. Joseph wanted to maintain a good relationship with God and at the same time he was obedient to God so he married Mary even though she was pregnant.

2. Joseph was an honourable and considerate man.

He did not want to embarrass Mary by making a public example of her so he was going to put her away secretly. He had great respect towards her and her position. Joseph considered Mary's plight and honoured her for allowing herself to become pregnant outside of marriage.

3. Joseph was an obedient man.

"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."

Joseph was considering to divorce Mary but after God's message through an angel **he obeyed God** and married her. As the stepfather of Jesus, Joseph gave him His earthly connection to king David and His title "Son of man".

4. Joseph was a man with self control.

Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son.

To fulfil the ancient prophecies about Jesus Mary had to remain a virgin until Jesus was born. So **Joseph waited** for Jesus to be born before he consummated the marriage between him and Mary. In **obedience** to the angel's command from God, Joseph named his **stepson 'Jesus'**, which is the Greek form of Joshua which means: "The Lord saves".

Dan Izzett - Zimbabwe. Retired pastor. I was diagnosed with lepromatous leprosy in 1972. Served on TLMI board for eight years and on the Zimbabwe board for 15 years. I now serve on the ALM board and do advocacy for them.



The Week Before Christmas

Let's project ourselves into heaven one week before Jesus is born. Heaven is alive & buzzing!

- For 9 months – in time – not eternity - Jesus has been away from heaven in the womb of Mary
- Often the crowds of heavenly hosts had talked about it & now the 9 months was coming to a close!!
- Eternity had been waiting for this moment for Jesus to be born which would start the process of the redemption of mankind

Revelation 13:8 "...the Lamb who was slain from the creation (foundation) of the world.

The heavenly hosts had seen the pain & agony in the world after Adam & Eve had sinned. Now The Lion of the Tribe of Judah was about to start the Father's rescue plan for man! Why Mary? For Jesus to be born on the earth He needed an earthly mother!

- One had been found her name was Mary
- Out of all the ladies in Israel – why Mary?
- In eternity they found Mary

When Adam & Eve sinned God began to tell His story *Genesis 3:14-15 "...I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."* *Isaiah 7:14 "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."* *Matthew 1:18 "This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.*

1. Mary Was Sexually Pure! Sexual purity is so important. There are 2 ways in which a person can be sexually impure

In the body – that is when you have sexual intercourse with a person who is not your husband or wife.

- Anything outside of this God calls sin and this is against His rules for life *1 Corinthians 6:9-10 & 6:17-21 "...Flee from sexual immorality..."*

What is the biblical definition of **Sexual immoral sins**: All types of sexual sin – NIV & consists of the following

- Adulterers: People in a marriage relationship who have a sexual relationship with someone who is not their spouse
- Fornicators: Are people who are not married & have sexual relationships
- Homosexuals: Sexual intercourse between people of the same sex

The second way is in the mind *Matthew 5:27-30 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. The cure: "If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."* (Pornography & other such type of entertainment on TV, talk shows & magazines)

Mary was sexually pure – that's one reason why God chose her!

- Let's follow her example
 - If you've slipped, given in or for whatever other reason Confess your sin & God will forgive you!
- ☞ Then stop sinning. Take some action or else you're in trouble with God

2. Mary Was Chosen Because She Trusted God & His Word

Luke 1:38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

She knew God's Word! Read how she quotes it: Luke 1:45-56 Mary knew God's Word in an era & time when they did not believe in educating women

- Mary loved God's Word
- Knowing the Word of God kept her open to God even to her shame & disgrace!

Operation read the Word & Operation Watch & Pray is so important!

- Are you still reading the bible & praying every day?
- If you want God to take notice of you – do your part!
- Feed your spirit – get your mind right!!!

3. Mary Had God's Favour! *Luke 1:26-28 "...The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."*

Oh to have God's favour in your life!

See other scripture on God's favour Psalm 30:5; Exodus 33:13; Luke 1:25; Luke 4:18-20

Dan Izzett - Zimbabwe. Retired pastor. I was diagnosed with lepromatous leprosy in 1972. Served on TLMI board for eight years and on the Zimbabwe board for 15 years. I now serve on the ALM board and do advocacy for them.



God's insight to Christmas

I don't fully understand how God works: I won't know because He's God. I don't see the big picture like He sees it! If we could understand God – He would not be God. If we could understand God – He would be a 'god created in our own image'! If we could understand God – We would not need faith to please Him. The Christmas story that I want to look at is about 2 ladies: In a period of 6 months God allows an old lady to fall pregnant & then impregnates an unmarried virgin girl!

- Removing shame from one – Seemly bringing shame to another!
- Lifting the apparent social shame of bareness (to God it's not a shame) & imposing real social shame and stigma upon another. Elizabeth's husband was a high priest & Mary was related to her.

I think Elizabeth was impregnated for 2 reasons

1. To show that nothing was impossible for God as stated in Luke 1.37
2. To fulfil prophecy that there would be a forerunner that would announce the Messiah.

I feel Mary was impregnated for the following reason:

- Mary was to bring to the world a suffering Messiah – even though she suffered in shame for being pregnant with the Messiah – The saviour needed be birthed on earth.
 - There was pain in her heart at His conception & pain in her heart at the time of His death.
 - There are people who can identify with these ladies & their husbands, yet Our Heavenly Father had a plan in the midst of joy, shame, surprise & pain. His plan was to connect **'people to a saviour'** *1 Timothy 2:3-4 This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*
 - God has always had a **'People Plan'** and Jesus was to be His plan.
- God will do the impossible to reach people, the "God-image" creation.
- God uses people in their need – Elizabeth & Zechariah to get His **'people process'** working & in place.
 - God uses people in seemingly social shame to get His **'people process'** working & in time and eternity.

God does **'the impossible'** in all age groups – the old, the young & everyone in between. Do you feel it's impossible for God to totally accept you?

1. You're have been lied to by the enemy of your soul – the devil.
2. Your sin my be unforgivable in your sight – you're wrong!
3. God accepts you because of Jesus. His **precious blood cleanses** you for ALL

SIN Then He uses blood-washed sinners & makes them saints & fill them with His Holy Spirit

You may feel washed up & finish:

- God can do an Elizabeth job on you and use you just as you are.
- God can do a Mary on you
- He can take your apparent social shame away. He does this year after year with people around the globe, from every tongue, tribe and nation.
- He loves & uses people in ways you can't think of – anybody who will say as Mary said: *Luke 1:38 I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said – use me!*

The Father is **looking for willing and obedient servants!** It's those kinds of people that He can do **'the impossible'** with & through these ones that He wants to reach the unsaved. God is looking for you:

- He wants to turn your apparent bareness, your lack into something He can use.
- Bareness of joy, hope & a future,

- Bareness of finances, food & failure,
- Bareness of mind, body & spirit,
- Bareness of any kind...
- God wants to use & bless the obedient people to take His message of love & salvation to the nations, to the hurting, the sick, the needy... Are you willing to say: '**Use me Lord I'm your servant**' The rewards for saying that is that He will use you to touch people. God is in the **people business**. He wants to bless & use you! **But it may not be in the way you expect!**

Let this Christmas bring a new hope & determination to you.

With God nothing is impossible!!

Christmas time is a time to bless – so be blessed & be one who will bless others

Bless 3 people today – tell them something nice from the Holy Spirit

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Mary Visits Elizabeth

Luke 1, 39 - 45

³⁹At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴²In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"



Mary's Song

Luke 1,46 - 56

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”

⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.



Am I too busy to meet Jesus?

In the introduction of a Christmas' drama it was said : "Jesus if you had to come these days, don't come at Christmas, you would find nobody to welcome you. People are too busy to find gifts and to prepare a special meal..." What about me, am I too busy to meet Jesus?

I invite you to take some minutes to travel with the Magi. In *Matthew 2. 1-2, 9-12*. (NIV) it's written:

Verses 1-2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

Verses 9-12 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

They stood up and went (verse 1)

I imagine the Magi looking high in the sky, finding some wonderful things happening. They are in their own world. Finally something happened : a special star appeared, having a special message to shine!

They decided to follow the star, to stand up, to go and walk a long way.

- Am I ready to leave my routine to go to meet Jesus?

They arrived and asked (verse 2)

We don't know what's really happened when they arrived in Jerusalem.

Did they lose the star because of the lights of the city or were they so sure to find a king in the palace that they went directly there ?

But we know that they asked a question to a person supposed to know (King Herod).

- It's not always the persons we think they know better who will give us the answers.

They continued and found (verse 10)

Even if they were wrong, they didn't give up, they continued full of joy. What a joy to see again the light when we were in the darkness, in doubts.

Finally they arrived and met Mary and Jesus who were living in a house and no more in the stable!

- Am I keen to continue the way after difficulties?

They adored and changed (verses 11-12)

When they arrived, they adored Jesus. They offered Him all they brought, all the expensive gifts they had. After they obeyed God, they decided to return home by another way. God became their reference, they didn't follow the star anymore.

They didn't stay in the presence of Jesus even if it was good, they returned in their world.

- Do I give to Jesus all I have ? Is He the Lord of all my life, or are there some places that I want to stay the master ? It can be "expensive" to leave Him all ?

When I take time to meet Jesus I'm no more the same, I return in my routine by another way!



The shepherds - the angels

In Northern Ireland, it seems that each year preparations for Christmas begin earlier and earlier — as soon as October ends, the shelves in the supermarkets and the displays in shop windows are quickly swapped around for another busy Christmas season. November and December are often busy and important months of the year in the church calendar. The run up to Christmas can feel a lot like a sprint where you just need to keep your head down and get through everything that has to be done. But if we're not careful, the busyness of the season can stop us from remembering and enjoying why we celebrate it in the first place.

It's important to remember who God first chose to announce the birth of Jesus to and why that was hugely significant. *Read Luke 2:8-20* Luke tells us that the first people God chose to announce the birth of Jesus to was to shepherds. And despite a history which included the shepherd king David, and God Himself who described His care for the Israelites as that of a shepherd caring for their sheep, shepherds in the time of Jesus' birth were a despised class. - The shepherds were down and outs, the outcasts of society that many people want to keep away at an arms distance—just like those who suffer from leprosy today. I remember whenever I was in India 6 years ago, and one day we had the opportunity to spend time with those who suffered from leprosy. Until then, leprosy was something very detached from my day-to-day life, but when I saw first-hand how those people were isolated from their families and ignored by the vast majority of society, I realised what it must've felt like for the shepherds in Jesus' day.

And this is why I love this account in Luke's gospel. Luke tells us that while the shepherds were out doing their job and living another day as societies outcasts, the glory of the Lord shone around them. While others had cast them aside, God had not. God appeared to the shepherds right in the midst of their uncleanness and isolation.

And so as the angel appeared to them, he said "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord."

I wonder if you can recall the when Prince William and Kate Middleton announced the birth of their first son, Prince George? Stepping out of one of London's best hospitals in one of London's exclusive areas and before media reporters from across the world, the news of George was shared to everyone far and near.

And though that was the birth of a special prince, the angel in Luke's gospel tells us that someone even greater was born - he says a Saviour was born, and not just a Saviour but 'Christ the Lord'. This was not any other human prince; this was the Prince of princes and the King of kings!

And yet, rather than announce it before the kings of the world and in the finest palaces, God chose to announce it before the outcasts of the world in a field. The story of the shepherds and the angels reminds us that God loves the outcast — though they were ignored by society for their uncleanness, God chose to share the good news of Jesus' birth with them first. - So as you prepare for your carol services and Christmas activities in the Leprosy Mission, it's good to remember who God first shared the message of the gospel with — and just as He did that then, so too is He still working through the likes of you to help modern day shepherds—like those who suffer from leprosy—to hear the good news of great joy that is for them. God wants us to remember in the midst of the busyness what this season is all about: the good news of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. This good news is for you and I today just as much as it is for the outcast — good news that should bring us great joy, a hope that is alive and enduring, and a Saviour that WILL save us from our sins.



Christmas, why is it exciting? – 1.

Is the true meaning of Christmas lost amidst worldly festivities in this season? Is Party given precedence to Praise? Is Santa given precedence to the Saviour? Are Gifts given precedence to Glory?

Let us look at 3 aspects of the miracle and purpose of Jesus' birth (which is unacceptable to many).

A) Expect the Miracle

The divine/supernatural nature of the birth of Jesus was revealed to both Mary and Joseph (*Luke 1:30-32, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High."; Matthew 1:20, "But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."*).

What is supernatural to man is natural to God. Our Universe is supernatural. The magnitude and order in the Universe are beyond human understanding. Every day is a miracle in the Universe. The unknown is real. Something is unknown only till it is made known. Not everything in the world can be sensed through 5 senses. The Spirit of God is beyond human senses. Not everything can be quantified or measured through human intelligence. Miracles are real. Reality is a miracle, for example the force of gravity. It is a reality that cannot be seen. Every cell in the human body itself is a miracle.

Science explores, reveals and confirms the supernatural. It can only create something out of something and not something out of nothing. But God spoke the Universe into existence out of nothing. His word has created the Universe. He is beyond and outside the space and time dimensions that govern the Universe.

Every created thing must have a creator. Creation manifests the creator. All belief systems and science point toward that. The unseen God is in control of the revealed world. Those who are blinded by Satan cannot see this reality. One can choose to ignore the supernatural God but cannot deny His presence.

Miracles are divine interventions which we desire. We want them to happen in our lives. It is putting our faith in what is beyond the known and the revealed world. Everyone has experienced miracles which are divine provision. But we will not accept the miracle that happened in Mary's life! Satan does not want us to put faith in miracles, which are divine manifestation, because accepting them would bind us to the miracle worker (Jesus). We, like Mary and Joseph can expect miracles in our lives, unashamedly.

Supernatural in natural.

For His glory



Christmas, why is it exciting? – 2.

B) Accept the Miracle

Mary has submitted herself to God's will to receive Jesus (*Luke 1:38 "I am Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.*"). Joseph did what was told to him (Matthew 1:24, "When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ")

She acknowledged that the unknown (supernatural God) exists. Accepted Him in faith. Both Mary and Joseph have accepted God's revelation through faith. They made their choices in faith. Only faith makes the miracles manifest. All miracles take place when we accept that there is something beyond what we know, the supernatural God. Acceptance of the supernatural is a matter of the Spirit. God's power manifests through miracles when we accept Him in faith. (Jesus referred to this many times in His ministry). Miracles can happen to anyone; rich and poor, high or low, educated or uneducated, foolish or wise, believer or unbeliever. Miracle is a great leveller. It happened in the life of a carpenter and a virgin.

For His glory

Dr PLN Raju - Former Director (Resource Mobilization) The Leprosy Mission Trust India New Delhi



Christmas, why is it exciting? – 3.

C) Reflect the Miracle

The shepherds spoke to people that a saviour was born (*Luke 2:17 "When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child."*).

The shepherds raised lambs for sacrifice at the temple. They heard first about the Lamb of God which would be sacrificed later at the Cross. The shepherds made a choice to share the news of the birth of the Saviour. They were not instructed to do so. The shepherds carried (reflected) the news of the lamb, who Himself is the Shepherd. The ordinary shepherds were the first carriers (evangelists) of the news of the Saviour. Experiencing Jesus gave them joy, confidence and conviction.

God has a plan; Jesus is the gift of God, hope of salvation. To transform us. To make us victors over Satan. God's presence is essential for our salvation and nothing else. God, through Jesus, bridges the gap we have created between ourselves and Him. Jesus was born to proclaim the very essence of God as the one who loves us and saves us. He was born to empower our faith by placing His faith in the Father. He was born to die for us and, hence, stand with and for us before the Father as our righteous saviour (Romans 10:9, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.")

What gift can I can give to God in return? How do I reflect His grace?

God gives me the opportunity to reveal Him through me. What an honour and privilege. Reflect the love and compassion of God in the person of Jesus. What I have is nothing, but my soul to gift Him. We give Jesus as a gift to people and bring people to Jesus as our gift. Best Christmas gift we can give others is the gift of Jesus, the Messiah. All other gifts are secondary.

Christmas is the time for Receiving Jesus; Rejoicing with Jesus; Re-igniting with Jesus; Re-energizing with Jesus; Re-dedicating to Jesus, Re-uniting with Jesus and Reflecting Jesus to others through love and compassion.

Let the Christ be in your Christmas!

For His glory



The Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah - 1

Matthew 1,1-6

This is the genealogy^{1a} of Jesus the Messiah^{1b} the son of David, the son of Abraham:

²Abraham was the father of Isaac,

Isaac the father of Jacob,

Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

³Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,

Perez the father of Hezron,

Hezron the father of Ram,

⁴Ram the father of Amminadab,

Amminadab the father of Nahshon,

Nahshon the father of Salmon,

⁵Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,

Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,

Obed the father of Jesse,

⁶and Jesse the father of King David.



The Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah -2

Matthew 1,6-17

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,

⁷Solomon the father of Rehoboam,

Rehoboam the father of Abijah,

Abijah the father of Asa,

⁸Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,

Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,

Jehoram the father of Uzziah,

⁹Uzziah the father of Jotham,

Jotham the father of Ahaz,

Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,

¹⁰Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,

Manasseh the father of Amon,

Amon the father of Josiah,

¹¹and Josiah the father of Jeconiah¹² and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

¹²After the exile to Babylon:

Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,

Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

¹³Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,

Abihud the father of Eliakim,

Eliakim the father of Azor,

¹⁴Azor the father of Zadok,

Zadok the father of Akim,

Akim the father of Elihud,

¹⁵Elihud the father of Eleazar,

Eleazar the father of Matthan,

Matthan the father of Jacob,

¹⁶and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

¹⁷Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.



CHRISTMAS EVE

Matthew Chapter 2

Since its Divine inception, Christmas has been about.....

PROPHECIES BEING FULFILLED - hence the veracity of this unique story in history!

HOPES AND DREAMS - we reflect on the past year and speculate about the New Year!

GIFTS - getting that perfect gift for our loved-one!

In our 'CHRISTMASSY CHAPTER' we have quite a bit about the above said.....

FOUR PROPHECIES

Vv3-6 – Jesus would be born in Bethlehem (cf Micah 5:2)

V15 – Out of Egypt I would call My Son (cf Hosea 11:1)

Vv16-18—Infants would be massacred in the region of Ramah (cf Jeremiah 31:15)

V23 – Jesus would be called a Nazarene (the OT prophets)

FOUR DREAMS

V12 – Wise Men dreamt not to return via King Herod!

V13 – Joseph dreamt to flee with his family to Egypt!

Vv19,20—Joseph dreamt to return with his family to Israel!

V22 – Joseph dreamt to rather live in safer Nazareth!

FOUR GIFTS

V11 – GOLD: Enough of it in Heaven! Missions, however, could use some of it today!

FRANKINCENSE: All Heavenly Dwellers praise and pray with eternal frankincense.

But on the pews today, the Prayer Meeting is missing 'Frank and Sense'?!.....

MYRRH: Since Jesus' death, resurrection and H.Sp. outpouring, His Gospel balm and

Myrrh must be administered everywhere – including my city and my church!

JESUS: God's inexpressible Gift to us (2Cor.9:15)!

Worship Him daily in Spirit and in Truth - with renewed gratitude!

John 4:24 - "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and Truth"

-Amen.



CHRISTMAS 1

Matthew 1,18-24

¹⁸This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.



The Magi Visit the Messiah

Matthew 2,1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

*⁶ "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 shepherd my people Israel.""*

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.



The Escape to Egypt

Matthew 2, 13- 18

¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

*¹⁸ “A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.”*



The Return to Nazareth

Matthew 2, 19-23

¹⁹ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰ and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³ and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.



John the Baptist Prepares the Way

Matthew 3, 1-12

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea ²and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” ³This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

*“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”^[a]*

⁴John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.

⁶Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹“I baptize you with^[a] water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with^[a] the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”



Psalm 87

Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm. A song.

¹ He has founded his city on the holy mountain.

² The LORD loves the gates of Zion
more than all the other dwellings of Jacob.

³ Glorious things are said of you,
city of God:

⁴ “I will record Rahab and Babylon
among those who acknowledge me—
Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush—
and will say, ‘This one was born in Zion.’”

⁵ Indeed, of Zion it will be said,
“This one and that one were born in her,
and the Most High himself will establish her.”

⁶ The LORD will write in the register of the peoples:

“This one was born in Zion.”

⁷ As they make music they will sing,
“All my fountains are in you.”

**Psalm 89**

A maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite.

¹ I will sing of the LORD's great love forever;
with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known
through all generations.

² I will declare that your love stands firm forever,
that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself.

³ You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
I have sworn to David my servant,

⁴ 'I will establish your line forever
and make your throne firm through all generations.'"

⁵ The heavens praise your wonders, LORD,
your faithfulness too, in the assembly of the holy ones.

⁶ For who in the skies above can compare with the LORD?
Who is like the LORD among the heavenly beings?

⁷ In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared;
he is more awesome than all who surround him.

⁸ Who is like you, LORD God Almighty?
You, LORD, are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you.

⁹ You rule over the surging sea;
when its waves mount up, you still them.

¹⁰ You crushed Rahab like one of the slain;
with your strong arm you scattered your enemies.

¹¹ The heavens are yours, and yours also the earth;
you founded the world and all that is in it.

¹² You created the north and the south;
Tabor and Hermon sing for joy at your name.

¹³ Your arm is endowed with power;
your hand is strong, your right hand exalted.

¹⁴ Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
love and faithfulness go before you.

¹⁵ Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you,
who walk in the light of your presence, LORD.

¹⁶ They rejoice in your name all day long;
they celebrate your righteousness.

¹⁷ For you are their glory and strength,
and by your favor you exalt our horn.

¹⁸ Indeed, our shield^[e] belongs to the LORD,
our king to the Holy One of Israel.

¹⁹ Once you spoke in a vision,
to your faithful people you said:
“I have bestowed strength on a warrior;
I have raised up a young man from among the people.
²⁰ I have found David my servant;
with my sacred oil I have anointed him.
²¹ My hand will sustain him;
surely my arm will strengthen him.
²² The enemy will not get the better of him;
the wicked will not oppress him.
²³ I will crush his foes before him
and strike down his adversaries.
²⁴ My faithful love will be with him,
and through my name his horn will be exalted.
²⁵ I will set his hand over the sea,
his right hand over the rivers.
²⁶ He will call out to me, ‘You are my Father,
my God, the Rock my Savior.’
²⁷ And I will appoint him to be my firstborn,
the most exalted of the kings of the earth.
²⁸ I will maintain my love to him forever,
and my covenant with him will never fail.
²⁹ I will establish his line forever,
his throne as long as the heavens endure.

³⁰ “If his sons forsake my law
and do not follow my statutes,
³¹ if they violate my decrees
and fail to keep my commands,
³² I will punish their sin with the rod,
their iniquity with flogging;
³³ but I will not take my love from him,
nor will I ever betray my faithfulness.
³⁴ I will not violate my covenant
or alter what my lips have uttered.
³⁵ Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness—
and I will not lie to David—
³⁶ that his line will continue forever
and his throne endure before me like the sun;
³⁷ it will be established forever like the moon,
the faithful witness in the sky.”

³⁸ But you have rejected, you have spurned,
you have been very angry with your anointed one.
³⁹ You have renounced the covenant with your servant
and have defiled his crown in the dust.
⁴⁰ You have broken through all his walls
and reduced his strongholds to ruins.
⁴¹ All who pass by have plundered him;
he has become the scorn of his neighbors.
⁴² You have exalted the right hand of his foes;
you have made all his enemies rejoice.

⁴³ Indeed, you have turned back the edge of his sword
and have not supported him in battle.
⁴⁴ You have put an end to his splendor
and cast his throne to the ground.
⁴⁵ You have cut short the days of his youth;
you have covered him with a mantle of shame.

⁴⁶ How long, LORD? Will you hide yourself forever?
How long will your wrath burn like fire?
⁴⁷ Remember how fleeting is my life.
For what futility you have created all humanity!
⁴⁸ Who can live and not see death,
or who can escape the power of the grave?
⁴⁹ Lord, where is your former great love,
which in your faithfulness you swore to David?

⁵⁰ Remember, Lord, how your servant has^[g] been mocked,
how I bear in my heart the taunts of all the nations,
⁵¹ the taunts with which your enemies, LORD, have mocked,
with which they have mocked every step of your anointed one.

⁵² Praise be to the LORD forever!
Amen and Amen.

END OF 2018, but not of God's mercy!!



New Year

Psalm 90

A prayer of Moses the man of God.

¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling place
throughout all generations.

² Before the mountains were born
or you brought forth the whole world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

³ You turn people back to dust,
saying, "Return to dust, you mortals."

⁴ A thousand years in your sight
are like a day that has just gone by,
or like a watch in the night.

⁵ Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death—
they are like the new grass of the morning:

⁶ In the morning it springs up new,
but by evening it is dry and withered.

⁷ We are consumed by your anger
and terrified by your indignation.

⁸ You have set our iniquities before you,
our secret sins in the light of your presence.

⁹ All our days pass away under your wrath;
we finish our years with a moan.

¹⁰ Our days may come to seventy years,
or eighty, if our strength endures;
yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow,
for they quickly pass, and we fly away.

¹¹ If only we knew the power of your anger!
Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due.

¹² Teach us to number our days,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

¹³ Relent, LORD! How long will it be?
Have compassion on your servants.

¹⁴ Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,

that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

¹⁵ Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,
for as many years as we have seen trouble.

¹⁶ May your deeds be shown to your servants,
your splendor to their children.

¹⁷ May the favour of the Lord our God rest on us;
establish the work of our hands for us—
yes, establish the work of our hands.

Blessed 2019, TLM worldwide!



'Put your hand into the hand of God'

... 'Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you...' 1 Chronicles 28:20

On Christmas Day 1939, at a time of grim foreboding and uncertainty in Europe, the King of the UK, George VI, in his Christmas broadcast, quoted part of the poem, *'The Gate of the Year'*, by Minnie Louise Haskins. *'I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied: "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."* (George VI, by the way, as you may know, had great difficulty with a speech impediment, and the broadcast itself took much work and courage!)

Scripture has many examples of those who, when God called them, *and* along their journey with Him, felt unworthy, unqualified, inexperienced, clumsy of speech, fearful... (add your own feeling about yourself!). Many who faced unknown or *all-too-well-known* enemies were conscious of their vulnerability and weakness. In scripture we read frequently that God assures those He has called with words like, *"Do not be afraid"; "I will be with you" "I will give you the words", "I will fight for you"*. Moses, Joshua, Isaiah, Jeremiah... Peter, Paul, -no doubt you can think of others. The promises are for anyone called by the Lord into His service, -like you or me, -or those we love and are concerned for. No doubt almost all of us have felt an assuring *'peace that passes human understanding'* that comes surprisingly at certain times.

The combination of feeling inadequate within ourselves and feeling fearful about the future or the present circumstances is very much part of human experience, and God's children are no exception. Like Peter, we may respond with joy and confidence to Christ's call or guidance, but then, a step or two in, we realise we are 'walking on water', and our resolution falters, our faith fails.

It is especially true with so-called 'New Year resolutions', when along comes our first 'failure', or when we fall for the age-old tricks of the evil one: telling us we're no good, comparing us with others, urging us to give up! As in God's firm but loving words to Elijah at a time of lonely despair, He may call us to go back, to continue the work to which He called us. He forgives and restores, *"seventy times seven"*, and the promise of His ever-presence abides with us still (Psalm 46:1!).

That poem King George quoted 80 years ago continues, *"So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night. And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day ..."*. May that be our experience as we place our hand in His!

David Beazley began involvement with The Leprosy Mission in 1992 when he came as Minister to a Church near the International Office in Brentford. He acted as an informal 'chaplain' to the Office, and served on the International General Council for some years. At the same time he became a member of TLM England and Wales Board, serving as Chairman for six years and on various committees. He chaired the Spiritual Ministry MAWG, and is also able to serve TLMI by leading retreat days and other such things as opportunity allows. He now pastors a Church in South-West England part time, and continues as a volunteer speaker for TLM.



'With God all things are possible'

Sermon held on the TLM Global Fellowship Day, 23 Sept 2019, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible." (Mark 10:27)

Jesus statement came out of the story of the rich young ruler who visited Jesus and asked what He must do to gain eternal life (Mark 10:17-27). It was initially pleasant to see the man responding to the first condition Jesus gave concerning keeping the law; but the man cannot meet the second and final condition of which he was asked to let go of his wealth and worth and then come follow Jesus. He went away sorrowful because He trust so much in his riches, Jesus response to his action by telling the disciples 'how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God'; the disciples were greatly astonished and conclude that 'who then can be save?'

As global fellowship members launching out today a new strategy toward Zero Transmission, Zero disability and Zero stigma we are embarking on being part of building God's Kingdom as we work towards realising our vision of Leprosy defeated and life transformed. What this means for us is an attempt to do impossible things in God's kingdom which has the component of destroying the work of the devil (leprosy disease) and building and transforming lives of people affected by Leprosy.

In order not end up frustrated and go away in sorrow like the rich young ruler in this story, there are things we should strongly avoid and things we should do:

We should not depend on or trust in our riches; it's not about the amount of cash we can raise, the strength of our area of influence, the manpower available not even our experience as a leading and very old Leprosy organisation even though this are essential like the young man keeping all the law

We should not trust in ourselves. Because 'by strength no man shall prevail (1 Sam: 2:9) and the word of God says 'do not put your trust in son of man in whom there is no help. (Ps. 146:3-4)

But we should be in one accord with God, for it is only **'with God'** that all things are possible. Jesus said *'Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me....for without Me you can do nothing.'* (John 15:4-5 NKJV). Jesus appointed the 12 disciples that they might be **'with Him'** and He might send them out, (Mark 3:14); and the result is evident in the Ministry of the Apostles; *'when they saw the boldness of Peter and John that they were uneducated and untrained men they marvelled, and they realise that they had been with Jesus* (Act 4:13 NKJV). We can do the impossible if we are ready to release our lives into God's hand and spend quality time with Him. If we get to know Him and His way and be in accord with Him like the Apostle did, we will find our vision of Leprosy defeated and life transformed achieved in our lifetime.

We should Love one another (unity of the body): Loving one another is a command from the Lord our master (John 15: 12, 17). It's the most power gift from God such that anyone that can grasp it can change the world. We saw this gift being misused in the story of tower of babel (*the whole world speak one language*); The Lord testify that *'indeed the people are one and they have one language; and that nothing that they proposed will be withheld from them* (Gen 11:1,6). The apostle were able to do mighty act for God because of their strength of unity; the church was established for the purpose of unity and fellowship. We will be able to accomplish great things for God if we are prepared to invest in our unity. *'Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling (global fellowship) of ourselves as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another and so much the more as you see the Day approaching'* (Heb. 10:24-25 NKJV) -

TLM Global Fellowship will be richly blessed and do the impossible when we strive to honour Him by abiding in Him and fellowship with one another in love.

Bunmi Oluloto - Servant of Christ in the Niger Republic and TLM Country Leader for Niger and Chad



“All things are possible with God”

Mark 10:17-27 What should I do? A very common question we constantly do ourselves. We would like to know what we have to do, especially when it comes to the achievement of the eternal life. But that question could be a blind alley that leads to worry and anxiety.

Jesus repeated the commandments: *"You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal ..."* But, as the man who interrogates Jesus, we often answer: *"I did everything."* We realize, however, like him, that something is wrong; can a non-doing or even to honor the parents correspond to the achievement of the "eternal life". Could we say to God: "I did not steal, you have therefore to make me come into your kingdom!"?

Sometimes we might think instead of getting that award only if we obeys to the whole law. But in that case we will always find an unobserved commandment pointing an accusing finger at us; and in despair we will feel: "I'll never make it!".

This is the blind alley of the law as a path of salvation. This is why the disciples ask: *"Who then can be saved?"* Jesus replies calmly: *"With man this is impossible"*. Then, Jesus loves (cf. v. 21) and gives three important messages:

1. It makes you realize first of all, that you "missing" something, but what you miss is that you have too much, wealth and money. Only people with empty hands can receive the eternal life. *"It is easier for a camel through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God"*; It is an illustration of the impossibility of human salvation.

2. *"Follow me!"*. For the man of the story the invitation is clear. He must leave his normal activities and follow Jesus. But for us the indication is more complex: how can we follow the one who is at the right hand of God in heaven? How not to confuse the following of Christ with the idea that I do of what it means? How do I know that I follow Jesus and not my ego? Really, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God!

There is then the third indication with which Jesus says that the law is not a way of salvation, but a word of salvation, such as Deuteronomy says: "No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it"(Dt 30:14): all "impossible with men," Jesus added, "but not with God! Because everything is possible with God".

*When we give up wanting to save us from ourselves when we surrender to God –
then it is when we give him confidence –
then the way of salvation is opened, even in the shadow of our misunderstandings:
we can believe that God guides us.*

Arianna Bobba – Global Programme Advisor at TLMI since November 2016. She is working with TLM Mozambique, TLM Nepal, TLM Sudan and South Sudan and TLM PNG. Also she is supporting partners in Tanzania and Angola. She is Italian, now living in London with her husband and her 8 months old daughter.

**Psalm 91**

¹Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

²I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."

³Surely he will save you
from the fowler's snare
and from the deadly pestilence.

⁴He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

⁵You will not fear the terror of night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,

⁶nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
nor the plague that destroys at midday.

⁷A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.

⁸You will only observe with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.

⁹If you say, "The LORD is my refuge,"
and you make the Most High your dwelling,

¹⁰no harm will overtake you,
no disaster will come near your tent.

¹¹For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways;

¹²they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

¹³You will tread on the lion and the cobra;
you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

¹⁴"Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him;
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.

¹⁵He will call on me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him and honor him.

¹⁶With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation."



The Baptism of Jesus

Matthew 3, 13 - 17

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

¹⁵ Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Authors in Alphabetical Order

Textuarium

Isaiah, prophet	1,2 December		1 Chron 28,20	2 January 2019
Anne-Claude Jonah	17 December		Psalms 19	3 December
Arianna Boba	4 January		Psalms 87	30 December
Bunmi Oluloto	3 January		Psalms 89	31 December
Dan Izzett	12, 13, 14 December		Psalms 90	1 January 2019
David Beazley	2 January		Psalms 91	5 January 2019
Ethan	31 December		Isaiah 40	1 and 2 December
Gordon Brown	4 December		Matthew 1,1-6	22 December
Joyce Missing	10 December		Matthew 1, 6-17	23 December
Judith Merell	5, 6 December		Matthew 1,18-25	12 and 25 December
Luke, evangelist	8,9, 15, 16 December		Matthew 2	24 December
Matthew, evangelist	22,23,25,26,27,29 December, 6 January		Matthew 2,1-2 and 9-12	17 and 26 December
Mollie Clark	3 December		Matthew 2,13-18	27 December
Moses, man of God	1 January		Matthew 2,19-23	28 December
Otto Kingsley	24 December		Matthew 3,1-12	29 Dec and 6 Jan 2019
Peter Laubscher	7 December		Luke 1,5-25	8 December
Raju PLN Dr	19, 20, 21 December		Luke 1,26-38	9 December
Robin Aicken	18 December		Luke 1,30-32	19 December
Sons of Korah	30 December		Luke 1,39-45	15 November
Trevor Durston	11 December		Luke 1,38	20 December
			Luke 1,46-56	16 December
			Luke 2,19	7 December
			Matthew 2,8-20	18 December
			Matthew 2,17	21 December
			Mark 10,27	3 and 4 January 2019
			John 14,9-11	7 December
			Romans 15,13	10 December
			1 Timothy 2,3-4	14 December
			Hebrews 12,1-3	11 December
			James 2,14-26	4 December
			Revelations 13,8	13 December

The Bridge - TLM Daily Devotions

Editor: Marta Risko - Theological lector: Allan Ekstedt - Grammar proof: Christine Osman, Mo Lewis.