



# ADVENT

*A SEASON OF EXPECTATION*

2021 ADVENT READER  
WEEK 5: WORSHIP



# WORSHIP

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 26

**BLESSINGS**

BY: LYDIA FAWCETT



**READING:** Luke 2:21-40

In The Message, this section is titled 'Blessings'. The first part gives us the context: eighth day, the day of circumcision, the child was named Jesus and then when the days stipulated by Moses for purification were complete, they took him up to Jerusalem. And then the Blessings follow.

These blessings are usually what have caught my attention. They are profound and brim with hope and love! Simeon and Anna, how did they know these things about this child Jesus? And Mary and Joseph, how did these words impact their understanding of who this child was? How would this child's life impact them, their families, the Jewish nation, the non-Jewish nations, and all of the earth?

I wonder too if these blessings impacted Joseph's decision to heed the Wisemen's warning dream about Herod in addition to his dream of the angel warning him about Herod's hunt for this child King? Luke does not tell us about Jesus' flight to Egypt or his return but Matthew does in Chapter 2. We know that Jesus stayed in Egypt until Herod's death. Then God's angel appeared in Joseph's dream again and told him to take his family and return to Israel.

We don't know how these blessings impacted Jesus' mother, father, other family members, or community. The Message uses the words 'speechless with surprise' in describing Mary and Joseph's reaction to Simeon's blessing. Amazing would be a word I would use to describe the Blessings!

We can think about how blessings impact us, individually and corporately. When we receive words of blessing, inspired or filled with love, those words impact us in a variety of ways. They may encourage us to trust, build hope in us, confirm directions we are travelling, or create spaces for questions and discovery.

May we bless each other with words and actions in the Season. May we experience hope and faith in our journey. May the blessing of the Christ Child fill our hearts with Joy.

# WORSHIP

MONDAY, DECEMBER 27  
SAUNTERING WITH WISDOM  
BY: CLIFFORD WEBER



**READING:** Matthew 2:1-12

## Sauntering with Wisdom: A Walk with the Magi

**S**teadfast

**A**stronomical

**U**n-usual

**N**oteworthy

**T**imely

**E**verlasting

**R**oyalty

**I**nquisitive

**N**arrative

**G**racious

**W**onders

**I**nvestment

**S**eeking

**D**reaming

**O**bedient

**M**erciful

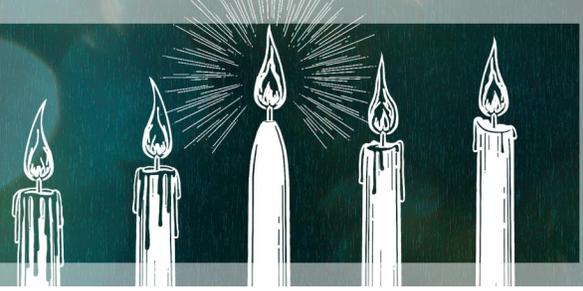
**PRAYER:** This Christmas grant us the Serenity to accept the Baby, the Courage to change the bathwater, and the Wisdom to know the Difference. Thank you Jesus, Amen.

# WORSHIP

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 28

ALL THINGS FULFILLED

BY: JESSE NICKEL



**READING:** Matthew 2:13-23

One of the major themes of the Gospel of Matthew is fulfillment. Eleven different times in his story about Jesus, Matthew makes a statement along the lines of, "So was fulfilled what the Lord said ...," followed up with a quotation from the Old Testament. Matthew seems to be trying as hard as he can to make sure that his readers see the many different and incredible ways in which God's work of restoration, renewal, and redemption was reaching its climax in and through Jesus.

When we hear the word "fulfillment," we tend to associate it with prophecy: a prophet predicts something, and when that thing happens, we consider the prophecy to be fulfilled. So we naturally assume that every time Matthew writes, "So was fulfilled ...," the quotation he follows up with must be a prophecy of some kind. However, if we look a bit closer, it turns out that that is not actually the case. Just look at the first two of the three times Matthew makes this move in today's text (verses 15 and 17). Although both of the passages Matthew quotes are from prophetic books (Hosea and Jeremiah), neither is a "prophecy" in the sense of a prediction about the future. Rather, each of them alludes to a significant moment in the story of Israel: the first to the exodus, and the second to the exile. What does it mean for these references to the ancient past to be "fulfilled" in Jesus?

There are plenty of places where God's promises about the future are fulfilled, and Matthew points those out (see, e.g., 1:22–23). But there is more to what God is doing in and through Jesus. It is not just prophecies that are fulfilled, it is *everything* that has happened in the story of God and God's people up to this point. Jesus himself will say, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish but to *fulfil*" (Matt. 5:17). Since "the Law and the Prophets" was a shorthand way of referring to all the Scriptures, Jesus is making the bold claim that *all* of Scripture—commandments, psalms, stories, prophecies, *everything*—had pointed forward to *this* moment, to the things that were happening *now*, in and through him!

In Jesus, all of God's plans; everything God had done, every word God had spoken, and every promise God had made comes rushing together. In this child—*Immanuel*, God with us—the story of God's work of making all things new, a story with roots in the past and with hope extending into the future, breaks into our present world. As the apostle Paul writes, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ" (2 Cor. 1:20).

**PRAYER:** God, we thank you for your faithfulness. Thank you that in Jesus, your work and your word are fulfilled. We pray that you would enable us to understand this more fully by the work of your Spirit in our hearts and minds, in order that we might live more faithfully in response to this truth. Amen.

# WORSHIP

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 29

**GOD MADE KNOWN**

BY: KRISTINE TOEWS



**READING:** John 1:14-18

“The one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.” (John 1:18). Jesus has made God known. By becoming flesh and living among us, Jesus has allowed us to know God in a way that was never possible before.

But what does it mean to be known? John writes that we haven’t seen God, but we know him through Jesus. Being known is so much more than seeing someone.

When I think of the people I know the best, I can remember some specific moments we’ve shared, but I think truly knowing them comes from a multitude of shared times and experiences. The ones that all blur together, you can’t recall them specifically, but give you certainty in what you know and how you feel about someone.

When we were in Colombia this fall, our daughter Mariana’s first time to visit family, someone asked me, “What will she remember from this trip?” My response was, “I hope she remembers that she knows her family. That they love her.”

She wasn’t even two years old, so it’s highly unlikely that she would have any clear memories of moments from this trip when she’s older. But, she’s not too young to start knowing people. To build her relationships with family that are full of memories of good feelings. I don’t think she’ll remember the first time she met her Abuela (grandma), but I hope she will always know that Abuela is fun to play with and loves her deeply.

This is a helpful way for me to think of how I know God. There are some specific moments in my walk with Jesus that stand out to me and I remember clearly. And there are also many memories and things I’ve learned that blur together, from Scripture, conversations, prayers, feelings, songs, sermons, church services, and more.

When I have doubts, when I am filled with anxiety, I try to rest in the God that I know. The God who is love. The Lord is not some far off, strange entity, but someone who knows me, who has walked with me through joy and dark valleys. Jesus has come to us, and made God known to you and to me.

**PRAYER:** Thank you, Jesus, for the gift of your birth, of your coming to dwell among us. Thank you that you have made God known. We pray for courage and strength to walk deeper with you, to know you more.

# WORSHIP

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 30  
THE HANDS AND FEET OF GOD  
BY: SHELLEY STOUT



**READING:** Phillippians 2:5-11

As I explore this passage my first thought that comes to mind is that this is one of the most profound messages of the bible. Paul's letter to the Church at Philippi gives them a template on how to live their lives. These same words hold true for the Church today. To simplify it we are called to love one another as God first loved us.

God came to earth in human form and walked among us. He spent 30 some years on this earth teaching us how to live in harmony, to love and serve one another. He also came to show us his likeness; how much he loves us and desires to have an intimate relationship with us. Despite being mocked, ridiculed, beaten and rejected; Jesus was obedient to God the Father right to the end – death on a cross.

Paul goes on to say that because of Jesus' obedience, God promoted Him to the highest honour and made his name above all names. We are called to place Jesus above all, in our own lives and worship Jesus the one true God who came in flesh. I believe there is also an underlying message here from Paul. We are to pay close attention to how we conduct our lives here on earth, because when Jesus comes back, and he's coming soon, all will finally know who Jesus is.

More than ever, in these uncertain times and recent catastrophic events, we need to humble ourselves, reach out, support, and serve our neighbours. Pray for one another in times of joy, celebration and in pain and sorrow.

In my daily work, I come across a lot of darkness, despair and suffering. There are times when I have looked evil right in the eye of individuals on the streets that are entrenched in deep addiction and hopelessness. There are times when I can literally feel Satan's presence at some of the community camps. And as we take the time to sit with them in their pain; hear their stories and connect, I can also see the face of Jesus, I see light and a glimmer of hope. When they are able to spend a few moments sharing affection with our outreach dogs, it can create an emotional connection to life and a brief reprieve from their current circumstances. I thank God every day that he has chosen me to serve Him and others and to be His hands and feet.

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, we thank you that you love us so much that you sent your son to show us what it means to love and be loved. We thank you that he gave his life on the cross for our sins, so that we can be saved. Thank you for your unfailing love for us. We pray for opportunities to share the gospel and to plant seeds of hope in lives that desperately need you. We pray for peace and serenity in our hearts and in the hearts of all mankind, as we wait patiently for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

# WORSHIP

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 30  
THE PREGNANT PAUSE  
BY: ALVIN ENS



**READING:** Revelation 19:5-8

## The Pregnant Pause

Contemplative Mary,  
the virgin bride,  
awaiting marriage  
receives a holy visitation:  
“You will be with child.”  
A pregnant pause:  
“How can this be?”  
A meditation:  
“I am the Lord’s servant.”  
A retreat  
to the hill country:  
confirming, affirming, rejoicing,  
before the birth  
breaks into history  
bringing new contemplations  
to treasure in her heart.

The church,  
the bride of Christ,  
in contemplation  
relives a holy visitation:  
“To you a child is born,”  
breaking into history  
to the Lord’s servants  
who in meditation,  
after the birth,  
confirming, affirming, rejoicing,  
may retreat  
into the pregnant pause  
that brings new treasures  
to the heart  
awaiting the marriage  
of the Lamb.

**PRAYER:** Hallelujah, our Lord God Almighty reigns. Thank you, God, that our salvation wedding with Jesus is complete.

# WORSHIP

FRIDAY, JANUARY 1  
GOD WITH US  
BY: JOSH WILLMS



**READING:** Revelation 21:1-7

How many of you have ever entered into a dark room and brushed up against something that you didn't expect to be there? Your body goes into fight or flight mode as some primal part of you assesses the risks and weighs whether this is a life threatening situation or not. In that moment your body is in crisis.

As humans, our instincts and reaction to walking into a dark room are similar to when we enter into times of stress or other crisis situations. Since March of 2020 we have been in crisis and it has been exhausting. We have been stretched to our emotional, physical and spiritual capacity, and then we've been stretched again. Our feelings are heightened, our senses on edge as we try to understand and process what is exactly happening to us and to the world around us.

Just list off some of the challenges that we've endured over the last two years: We are living in a seemingly endless pandemic. This pandemic has dramatically altered our lives and how we interact with other human beings, adding stress and threat assessments to previously safe interactions. Not to forget murder hornets (remember those?!) **We have watched as racial inequalities have come to the forefront of our attention with Black Lives Matter protests and the discoveries of mass child graveyards on the properties of residential schools.** We have suffered through a summer of heat domes and countless forest fires. And finally we have the devastating flood of Sumas prairie, that wiped away the livelihoods of so many and the ripple effects of which we will be dealing with for years to come.... Whoa, this is actually pretty depressing ...

Times like these make me acutely aware of God, either a feeling of his presence or his apparent lack of presence in my life. Questions like: Where is God in all of this? Why is this happening now? What good can ever come from this? These questions roll around in my mind as I grasp to understand all the chaos that is assaulting me.

I find myself crying out for help, for justice, for an end to the suffering ... and I turn to the pages of scripture. In times of crisis I hold on to the promises I find in this leather-bound ancient book. I find myself drawn to stories where the people of Israel or the early church are in crisis, hoping to find how God helped them or was present in their time of struggle. **The book of Revelation is written during one of these times where the early church is in a crisis, they are being persecuted by the Roman government. The Apostle John was writing this book from the island of Patmos where he had been exiled by the Romans.**

John wrote in an Apocalyptic style, which was popular at the time. Apocalyptic literature uses imagery and symbolic visions to reveal God's perspective on what is unfolding in light of the final outcome, where God will make everything right. Revelation **definitely** is one of the most bizarre and misunderstood books in the Bible, but this strange book can be summed up as a message of hope for Jesus followers in times of crisis. Here is one of my favourite Biblical passages because of the hope it gives us:

# WORSHIP

FRIDAY, JANUARY 1

**GOD WITH US (CONTINUED)**

BY: JOSH WILLMS



<sup>1</sup>Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

<sup>3</sup>I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. <sup>4</sup>He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.”

<sup>5</sup>And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!” And then he said to me, “Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true.” <sup>6</sup>And he also said, “It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. <sup>7</sup>All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children.

For me, the beauty of the Bible is in the fact that these words meant something for those who first heard them and they continue to be meaningful for future generations. I don’t know if you’re like me, but I can read the same passage of scripture over and over for years and not think anything of it. Then one day, I’m going through a crisis or something has happened in my life that completely changes how I interact with this particular verse or passage. This is the power of scripture to me. It comes alive when we are ready to receive it.

As I read this passage of hope, I cling to the promises that God will make everything new (vs.5), that the pain, suffering, and chaos we have endured throughout this past year are not the end of the story.

Right now, I am holding onto the promise that God’s home is now among his people - He is no longer distant, he is present with us. His name is Immanuel (God with us). He is a God who comes and enters into our pain and suffering. He is also a God who comforts us. He wipes every tear from every eye and through his son, sorrow, death, and pain will be no more.

Our God is a God of hope and love and we can continually look to scripture and find God at work not only in its pages, but also in our lives and the world that we inhabit.

As we move into a new year I am choosing to trust that the God whom we follow is a God who comforts his people in times of crisis, that he is a God who is present and at work in our world and in our lives, and that he is leading us as a community of faith into this new year.

**Does this passage give you hope for the future? What are the promises that you are clinging to as we move into 2022?**