



Christmas Devotionals



1. Luke 1:5-25

Written by Jacob Parton

Thought:

The story of Zechariah and Elizabeth is the perfect beginning to the Christmas story. They were faithful to God yet childless, and God miraculously provides them a son. This story echoes the miraculous births of Isaac, Samson, and Samuel in the Old Testament.

Isaac inherited God's promise to Abraham to bless the whole world; Samson delivered Israel from their oppressive enemies; and Samuel anointed Israel's first kings, including David. John the Baptist would surpass them all. Many will rejoice at his birth, Gabriel says, and he will go before the Lord and prepare Israel for them. The coming Lord is Jesus and this is about the good news, the gospel, the coming of God's kingdom. Gabriel spoke hundreds of years before to Daniel, telling him about the coming clash of kingdoms. Now, during the terrifying reign of King Herod the Great, the placeholder for Roman power, God's plans are unfolding. This is undeniably a climactic moment in the Bible's grand story. And this moment has only just begun.

A recent climactic moment in my own life was my wedding in November 2019. It was a fantastic day. There was such joy about the present moment, but also hope for all the future would bring. We returned from our honeymoon well into December, meaning Christmas was a bit of rush, and we weren't able to prepare for the season as we customarily would. This year, whatever it will look like, could be an opportunity to focus on the true meaning of Christmas like never before. This might feel like a climactic time in our lives. I know I need a fresh joy for the present moment and a renewed hope for the future. The miracle of John's birth and him preparing the way for the Lord is a reminder to us. They remind us that joy and hope are found in our faithful God, who descended in the person of his Son, Jesus, to be God with us.

As we follow the Christmas story, with all its highs and lows, may we experience the reality of God with us in this season: the ultimate source of joy and hope.

Prayer time:

Let's pray and welcome the presence of Jesus, God with us, now:

*Christ, I acknowledge you.
Christ above me, very God of very God.
Christ below me, incarnate of the earth.
Christ before me, when seen.
Christ behind me, when unseen.
Christ at my right hand in my strength.
Christ on my left in my weakness.
Christ all around me, filling all things everywhere with himself.
Christ within me, formed by faith.*

Led prayer:

Open your heart to the Lord and receive afresh his joy for the present and his hope for the future. Dedicate this Christmas season to him now, surrendering any distractions. And bring any requests before him, no matter how miraculous the answers might need to be.

Collect:

Let's finish with an ancient Christian prayer:

*Almighty God,
as your kingdom dawns,
turn us from the darkness of sin to the
light of holiness,
that we may be ready to meet you
in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen.*

2. Luke 1:26-38

Written by Ali Courtney

Thought:

Wow! Here we see the future mother of Jesus receive an angelic visitor who tells her that she will become pregnant without a husband and give birth to the Son of God!

If we already know the Christmas story this part can seem so familiar that we don't always stop and consider just how momentous this occasion was for this teenage Jewish girl, Mary.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah, living 700 years before Mary, prophesied to the people of Israel - "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." The Jewish people had been waiting for the fulfilment for centuries. Had Mary ever dared consider that she could be the chosen one? Before this moment what hopes and dreams had been stirring in her heart for her own life?

I have always been someone with lots of hopes and dreams for my life. As a teenager and younger adult, I hoped that God's plan for my life would take me off around the world, learning other languages, mixing in unfamiliar cultures, being part of mission and adventure for Jesus. In reality God's path has led to a very settled life in Nottingham. There have been many times when I've questioned His plans for me, but each time I am given the opportunity to follow Mary's example, to accept God's divine interruption to my personal hopes and dreams and to say "I am the Lord's servant." I have discovered over the years that true joy and hope is to be found right in the centre of God's will for my life rather than the life I dream of.

How willing are we to be interrupted by God's invitation to us? Do we seek fulfilment in our own hopes and plans for our life or do we trust God that joy is found in doing his will?

Prayer time:

Let's pray and welcome the presence of Jesus, God with us, now:

*Christ, I acknowledge you.
Christ above me, very God of very God.
Christ below me, incarnate of the earth.
Christ before me, when seen.
Christ behind me, when unseen.
Christ at my right hand in my strength.
Christ on my left in my weakness.
Christ all around me, filling all things everywhere with himself.
Christ within me, formed by faith.*

Led prayer:

Pause and consider any hopes and dreams you have for your own future. Ask God to help you become interruptible and willing to follow His will like Mary was. Pray that you may find the true joy that comes from obedience to Him and the lasting hope that Jesus brought into the world through his birth.

Collect:

Let's finish with an ancient Christian prayer:

*Almighty and everlasting God,
who stooped to raise fallen humanity
through the child-bearing of blessed Mary:
grant that we, have seen your glory
revealed in our human nature
and your love made perfect in our weakness,
may daily be renewed in your image
and conformed to the pattern of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God,
now and for ever, amen.*

3. Luke 1:39-56

Written by Paul McDonald

Thought:

The angel Gabriel had told Mary that she was God's chosen one to be the mother of Jesus. Soon afterwards, she travels 80 miles to stay with her cousin Elizabeth. We have already been told of Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy in her old age. When they greet, Elizabeth's and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, 48 for he has been mindful for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name. baby leaps in the womb and Elizabeth, inspired by the Holy Spirit, erupts in prophetic praise. Mary responds in kind using words that have inspired great musicians over the centuries.

We are told that Mary was chosen and all generations will call her blessed. We should always remember that - and give Mary the respect due to the mother of Jesus. She tells us that God through Jesus was going to do what He had said through the Old Testament prophets - to turn the world upside down – starting with Israel. Empires, proud rulers, ungodly riches will be brought down and the poor will be raised up. The Kingdom of God will clash with human ideologies and empires. We will see these themes worked out in Jesus' teachings later on. Mary was humble (perhaps in nature and material wealth) but she had a rich understanding of God and His purposes.

This seems such a revolutionary passage in the Christmas story. We are counting down the days until the Christmas festivities. We are trying to get to the Christmas card scene with baby Jesus in the manger – and Mary paints an enormous canvas of "God my Saviour" and His Kingdom purposes. How do I read this?

I am a 70 year old male: I have no womb for babies to leap in. But Elizabeth reminds me that my age is not a barrier to God working through me. I am a Christian whose Bible tends to fall open at the New Testament. Mary reminds me that what seems to be the start of the Christian story is really the middle of a bigger drama. It is the epic story of God's great saving project for the whole of creation being worked out in history. I hear young Mary and I sing along with her. This is good news.

Prayer time:

Let's pray and welcome the presence of Jesus, God with us, now:

*Christ, I acknowledge you.
Christ above me, very God of very God.
Christ below me, incarnate of the earth.
Christ before me, when seen.
Christ behind me, when unseen.
Christ at my right hand in my strength.
Christ on my left in my weakness.
Christ all around me, filling all things everywhere with himself.
Christ within me, formed by faith.*

Led prayer:

The voices of Elizabeth and Mary call out to you across the centuries. Listen to them again. Tune in and walk to the beat of Mary's song and be good news to those around you. Ask God to show you your part in His great project to renew this broken world. Worship the God who sees you and knows you - and pray: "Your Kingdom come".

Collect:

Let's finish with an ancient Christian prayer:

*Mighty God,
by whose grace Elizabeth rejoiced with Mary
and greeted her as the mother of the Lord:
look with favour on your lowly servants
that, with Mary, we may magnify your holy name
and rejoice to acclaim her Son our Saviour,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.*

4. Luke 1:57-80

Written by Cathay Burnside

Thought:

After Zechariah's powerful encounter with the angel, he hasn't been able to talk. Now his baby is here, and excited relatives want to know his name. Zechariah calls his baby John, and as his voice returns the most amazing song of praise and prophetic hope pours out. It's full of references to Old Testament promises about the coming King who will bring salvation, rescue, light in the darkness, guidance, peace and so much more.

Long ago the prophets began to speak of a new covenant, a new King, and a new way that God would dwell with His people on the earth. They said that "a voice in the desert" would prepare the way, and now the time has come. This tiny baby John will be a prophet for the coming King and His kingdom. The excitement is building – the King must be coming soon.

Names matter. When my eldest was born I felt the pressure of naming her; the responsibility of speaking identity over a human I didn't even know yet. She may be my daughter, but I was aware even as a tiny baby that I didn't have full say over who she will grow up to be. It felt like a holy thing to put a name to her lovely little face. It's also strange to imagine a tiny newborn as an adult, with passions, and dreams, and a life all of their own. Naming our children speaks to the truth that they are fully human and very precious right from that moment, but also that they will grow up, strong in spirit, to partner with God in His mission on the earth. In this story, a tiny baby is born, and his parents name him in an act of obedience to God with prophetic hope that this baby will be part of the new thing God was doing on the earth.

Very soon, another tiny baby will be born, named in faith and prophetic obedience by his parents. God's promise to dwell on the earth with His people in a new way will be fulfilled. It will be better than anyone could have imagined.

Prayer time:

Let's pray and welcome the presence of Jesus, God with us, now:

*Christ, I acknowledge you.
Christ above me, very God of very God.
Christ below me, incarnate of the earth.
Christ before me, when seen.
Christ behind me, when unseen.
Christ at my right hand in my strength.
Christ on my left in my weakness.
Christ all around me, filling all things everywhere with himself.
Christ within me, formed by faith.*

Led prayer:

God names each of us, and knows each of us so completely. As we pause in this Christmas season, many of us are aware of our own longing for King Jesus and His good kingdom in our lives and the lives of those around us. Spend time preparing the way for Jesus in your own heart, asking Him to dwell with you even more, and for His kingdom to come.

Collect:

Let's finish with an ancient Christian prayer:

*Mighty God,
by whose grace Elizabeth rejoiced with Mary
and greeted her as the mother of the Lord:
look with favour on your lowly servants
that, with Mary, we may magnify your holy name
and rejoice to acclaim her Son our Saviour,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.*

5. Matthew 1:18-25

Written by Phoebe Jones

Thought:

Joseph has discovered that Mary is pregnant, leading him to a crossroads. But the Lord visits him in a dream and unveils the true importance of both Mary and this baby in God's plan for Israel and the whole world.

We are introduced to Joseph, a seemingly ordinary individual, in a time of uncertainty. His situation does not appear to be as God intended. Yet, he was significant to God's plans from the beginning.

Through Joseph's dream visitation from the Lord, we are assured that Mary's pregnancy is fulfilling the prophecy to David's descendants in Isaiah 7: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign; the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel", meaning "God with us." Joseph was chosen by God as Jesus' earthly father; it is through Joseph that Jesus is a descendant of David. What appears as a time of adversity to Joseph was actually God's plans coming to fruition. Joseph chose to trust in God's plans for him and God was with him through all that was to come.

I, myself, chose to trust in God's plans for my life by deciding to remain in Nottingham. I felt God wanted me to pursue further involvement in our church and community, opposed to continuing in the career that brought me to this city to begin with. Only a year later, I am already seeing the fruition of that choice through different serving opportunities in our church that I never thought would be available to me. God's plans went against my own plans for my life. But, by choosing to trust in God and what I felt Him calling me to, I now have even more reason to hope in whatever other plans He has in store for me.

God is always with us in times of uncertainty, just as he was with Joseph, as such, we can hope for and trust in God's plans for us.

Prayer time:

Let's pray and welcome the presence of Jesus, God with us, now:

*Christ, I acknowledge you.
Christ above me, very God of very God.
Christ below me, incarnate of the earth.
Christ before me, when seen.
Christ behind me, when unseen.
Christ at my right hand in my strength.
Christ on my left in my weakness.
Christ all around me, filling all things everywhere with himself.
Christ within me, formed by faith.*

Led prayer:

Picture yourself literally holding onto your worries and anxieties for the future. Then, take a deep breath and let them go. Physically clench and then release your hands if that helps. Hand the future over to your heavenly Father.

Open up your heart to His plans for your life, trusting fully in His provision. Take some time now to listen for His voice, direction, and encouragement.

Collect:

Let's finish with an ancient Christian prayer:

*Almighty God,
as we prepare with joy
to celebrate the gift of the Christ-child,
embrace the earth with your glory
and be for us a living hope
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

6. Luke 2:1-21

Written by Ollie Ryan

Thought:

This passage has almost all the classic bits from our Christmas Nativity stories. There's Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem, Jesus in the manger, and shepherds watching their flocks by night. With such a familiar Christmas story, it's easy to brush straight past it.

Yet when we slow down to hear it afresh, we find two very different settings in the passage. Mary and Joseph, having their first child away from home, without even a room to give birth in. And then the lowly shepherds, another night of work, probably cold, potentially bored, but they become the recipients of the news that will change the world forever. Two different settings, and yet in the midst of both drama and very ordinary life, the saviour of the world is born.

Recently, I was at a beach and was looking out over the sea. In that moment I was slightly overwhelmed by how vast the ocean appeared to be, and I reflected how the same could be said of God. Then, out of nowhere, a baby seal pup popped its head out of the water and swam right up to me, just a few feet away. I remember thinking about the combination of a strangely personal encounter in the midst of such a vast ocean.

And we find the same in this passage. We see the God of the universe, who is infinitely vaster than the sky the shepherds looked up at that particular night, and yet he comes to Mary and Joseph humbly and vulnerably. And then to the shepherds, very ordinary people on a very ordinary night. The sky was filled with glory and they get to hear the good news of great joy for all people. And right now, this Christmas, that same God is here with us in the situations that we find ourselves in. He comes to us in both the moments filled with drama, and those that are seemingly mundane, the highs and the lows, with both joy and peace to be found in his presence.

Prayer time:

Let's pray and welcome the presence of Jesus, God with us, now:

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Christ above me, very God of very God.
Christ below me, incarnate of the earth.
Christ before me, when seen.
Christ behind me, when unseen.
Christ at my right hand in my strength.
Christ on my left in my weakness.
Christ all around me, filling all things everywhere with himself.
Christ within me, formed by faith.*

Led prayer:

Reflect for a few moments on which of those situations you might relate to most. The challenge of the day to day and the ordinary, like the shepherds? Or wrestling with the unexpected, like Mary and Joseph?

In this next moment of silence, let's invite God's joy and peace, and in your mind, give that situation to God. Ask Him: 'Lord, what might you want to say to me through this situation?'

Collect:

Let's finish with an ancient Christian prayer:

*Almighty God,
you have given us your only-begotten Son
to take our nature upon him
and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin:
grant that we, who have been born again
and made your children by adoption and grace,
may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,*

*in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.*

7. Luke 2:22-28

Written by Jonny Norridge

Thought:

Imagine the scene: the grand Temple in Jerusalem with its large walls and various courts. Many people are milling around. Into the scene walks a humble family: a teenage mother with her husband and child. They have come to consecrate their child to God, a tradition linking all the way back to God's rescue of their ancestors from slavery. The law specified a lamb for such an offering, but allowed those who cannot afford it to bring the humble offering mentioned here: two small birds. This is a family of no status, walking into the spiritual heart of the nation with all its political gravitas.

We may assume the other characters mentioned here are officials in the temple. But, Simeon and Anna are distinguished simply by their faithfulness in prayer, attentiveness to the Spirit, and a long-held hope in God's redemptive action. Like the young family, they are "ordinary" people also dwarfed by the huge walls, courts, crowds, and ceremonies. They have lived in prayerful expectancy... for many years. Expectant... but not impatient. Hopeful in the waiting.

I'm reminded of the birth of our children. Pregnancy is a time of joyful anticipation and slowly getting things ready. There is also a lot of waiting. Long days of waiting. Then, one day, the contractions start. You time them, measuring how closely one follows another. And then... "Yes! This must be it. The baby is coming. Quick! Grab the bag. We need to get to hospital now!"

I recently overheard the observation that God seems to work at two speeds: very-slowly and all-of-a-sudden. This certainly connects with Simeon and Anna's experience. Whilst many others in the temple courts continue about their business, here they are: eyes wide open. They're attentive and receptive to celebrate this child, Jesus, the One earnestly longed for. The One who fulfils the rich heritage of the Hebrew scriptures and from whom the revelation expands to illuminate the whole world.

May we know today, as they did, in Jesus, the "hopes and fears" of all the years are met. And, may we also live with eyes open: joyful, hopeful and receptive.

Prayer time:

Let's pray and welcome the presence of Jesus, God with us, now:

*Christ, I acknowledge you.
Christ above me, very God of very God.
Christ below me, incarnate of the earth.
Christ before me, when seen.
Christ behind me, when unseen.
Christ at my right hand in my strength.
Christ on my left in my weakness.
Christ all around me, filling all things everywhere with himself.
Christ within me, formed by faith.*

Led prayer:

What hopes and fears, expectations and concerns, are you holding at this time? Take a moment to acknowledge what you have been carrying recently.

Invite the Spirit into these parts of your life.

As you feel able: yield them to God.

Allow the Spirit to form trust and hope in you, as you wait. And ask God to empower you to live in patient-expectation. "We wait for you, Lord."

"Come, Lord Jesus, Come."

Collect:

Let's finish with an ancient Christian prayer:

*Almighty and ever-living God,
clothed in majesty,
whose beloved Son was this day presented in the Temple,
in substance of our flesh:
grant that we may be presented to you
with pure and clean hearts,*

*by your Son Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

Amen.

8. Matt 2:1-12

Written by Caroline Seal

Thought:

After all the excitement of the last few days of the story, there's a pause of up to two years before it continues. The Magi, from somewhere east of Jerusalem, see a star which foretells the birth of a King and set out following it.

In Jerusalem, they hear the prophecy of Micah, written 700 years previously, saying that the Christ or Messiah will be born in Bethlehem. The Magi travelled thousands of miles, following a star, to see Jesus. When they found him, they responded with joy, worship and gifts. Matthew shows that people of all nations acknowledged Jesus as King of the Jews. People from around the world continue to come and bring their gifts in worship, both physical and spiritual.

When I read this through, I wondered why the Magi bothered following the star? They could have seen it and thought "Oh that's interesting!" and got on with their lives without the hassle of the journey. But, by following, they had the joy of finding and worshipping Jesus. Are there things we see God doing but admire them from afar, either thinking it's too difficult, or that we don't feel we can get involved? Do you want to pray more for people? Do you want to give more? Is he calling you to do something special that you are uniquely designed to do?

We've prayed for many years for our friends in Japan and for those they know there. About 8 years ago we were asked to pray for a premature baby. I love to knit, so I also made a baby jacket to send out. I didn't expect any thanks, but last time we visited, this family wanted to meet me, introduce their daughter, and thank me for praying and for the jacket. What we did gave them joy and hope in a difficult time. I just needed to be obedient in following that star and to use my gift.

What might God be asking of you, not just to see and wonder, but to follow the star? What gifts could you use to worship Him?

Prayer time:

Let's pray and welcome the presence of Jesus, God with us, now:

*Christ, I acknowledge you.
Christ above me, very God of very God.
Christ below me, incarnate of the earth.
Christ before me, when seen.
Christ behind me, when unseen.
Christ at my right hand in my strength.
Christ on my left in my weakness.
Christ all around me, filling all things everywhere with himself.
Christ within me, formed by faith.*

Led prayer:

Ask the Lord to show you the star He wants you to follow. Ask Him to help you if you need to make sacrifices to be able to follow. Prepare to meet with Him and come before Him, offering your gifts in worship now.

Collect:

Let's finish with an ancient Christian prayer:

*O God,
who by the leading of a star
manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth:
mercifully grant that we,
who know you now by faith,
may at last behold your glory face to face;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.*

9. John 1:1-18

Written by Jacob Parton

Thought:

The opening of John's Gospel is a poetic masterpiece about Jesus' identity and mission. No one has seen God, John says, but now Jesus reveals what God is truly like. As we conclude our Christmas devotional series, let's reflect on this passage, which emphasises beautifully that Jesus is God with us.

The opening of John's Gospel is a bold reworking of Genesis 1, which recounts God creating the cosmos through His words. John wants us to know: Jesus was that Word! – all things were made through Him. Jesus was both with God (meaning He is distinct) and was God (meaning He is divine). Jesus is God's Son and in closest relationship with God the Father. To explain Jesus' mission, John uses imagery from the Old Testament, specifically the tabernacle. This was an impressive tent that God filled with his presence when Israel lived in the desert. John says that Jesus "became flesh and made his dwelling among us." In the original Greek, John actually says that Jesus "pitched" or "dwelt in a tent" among us. Just as God's presence filled the tabernacle, Jesus embodied God's presence. Jesus is God in person.

Passages like this one help ground and comfort me as a Christian. Our culture is obsessed with uncovering its identity and purpose in life. I've felt victim to the torturous inward journey of self-discovery, which in the past has left me feeling powerless as I got lost in subjectivity and uncertainty. But John's words fill me with hope: we understand who we are when we learn more about who God is. God is like Jesus. He's full of grace and truth; the source of life and the source of light (or revelation) for all humankind. God is our loving heavenly Father. And our identity has been created by Him: Jesus makes us into the children of God. I am God's child and out of his fullness, I have received more grace than I could ever need.

May we not lose ourselves in the world's quest for identity and purpose. Instead, let's focus on Jesus and who he makes us to be. Jesus is God with us and he is the perfect revelation of God.

Prayer time:

Let's pray and welcome the presence of Jesus, God with us, now:

*Christ, I acknowledge you.
Christ above me, very God of very God.
Christ below me, incarnate of the earth.
Christ before me, when seen.
Christ behind me, when unseen.
Christ at my right hand in my strength.
Christ on my left in my weakness.
Christ all around me, filling all things everywhere with himself.
Christ within me, formed by faith.*

Led prayer:

Spend some time thinking about who Jesus has revealed God to be. Ask the Spirit to bring any misconceptions to your mind that you might have about God's identity or your own. If these answers fill you with hopelessness and sap your joy, give these over to Jesus. Instead, receive the hope and joy that Jesus has for you right now, from the fulness of His grace.

Collect:

Let's finish with an ancient Christian prayer:

*Almighty God,
in the birth of your Son
you have poured on us the new light of your incarnate Word,
and shown us the fullness of your love
help us to walk in his light and dwell in his love
that we may know the fullness of his joy;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.*



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