



Gifts from GOD

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL
BOOKLET





Gifts from GOD

Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas and continues to Epiphany on January 6th. The birth of Jesus was heralded in by angels, worshipped by shepherds and wise men and was given to the world as a gift of God's love for us.

During this time of Advent, we are going to explore the gifts that God has given us through His Son: Love, Hope, Joy, Patience, Peace, and Faithfulness. These are all gifts of God's kindness and grace to His people.

These gifts given by God are some of the 'fruits of the Spirit' spoken of in Galatians 5:22-23. As God's people, the gift of the baby Jesus is an epitome of the immense love that God has for us. There were so many obstacles placed before the baby Jesus and His parents, but God was able to overcome them all and through His Son show us the way to live as His faithful people.

Each week of these devotionals, the focus will be on a different gift that God gives to us and places in our hearts to share and grow in our faith. May you use these devotionals to strengthen your faith and bring you to understand the Christmas season in a different way each day. Each devotion contains a short thought, bible reading and prayer. I would encourage you to read the Bible readings along with the devotion as you see and experience God's grace through the **"Gifts from GOD"**.

***May your faith and family grow through this Advent
Season as we rejoice in God's gift to us in the birth of
His Son, Jesus, at Christmas!***



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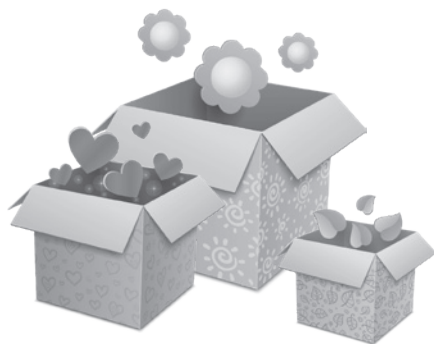
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LOVE

A Never-failing Love

1st Sunday in Advent

Read: Psalm 8

“God sends His love and His faithfulness.” Psalm 57:3b (NIV)

There is so much that boggles my mind. Thinking of God creating the world back in Genesis and everything being formed from nothing. How vast the universe is with all the planets, stars, galaxies and the relationship they have with each other. They turn in just the right way, and the Earth is just the right distance from the sun to make life on Earth possible. Then, there are all the things we know about God: He knows the number of hairs on our head, our inmost thoughts and loves each one of us as if we were the only person in the world.

Love is the essence of God’s character. Through the Old Testament, even though the Israelites sinned again and again, God’s love kept returning to them to give another chance; and another; and another! Today God’s love continues, and even though other relationships may fail, God’s love is permanent. No matter what we do, what mistakes we make, the shortcomings we have; nothing can negate God’s love for each one of us. God loves all the world. The world is a big place with a lot of people; by the end of 2022 the population is expected to reach 8 billion! But we can’t forget what is said in John 3:16: ***“For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son...”***

At Christmas God shows His love to us in a very special way; through giving His one and only Son to come to Earth to be born of a human mother. This continues the story of God’s love which began with the beginning of the world and is displayed to its full measure at Easter when God allowed His only Son to die for us so that we can come into God’s presence eternally. This Christmas see the love of God in the manger that has come especially for you. This is a never-failing love!

Prayer: Thank you Father for your never-failing love. This love that protects me and guides me always. Help me to show this same love to others. Amen.

LOVE

My Hero-God

1st Monday in Advent

Read: Luke 1:67-79

“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has come and has redeemed His people.” Luke 1:68 (NIV)

Harriet Tubman (1822-1913) was a hero amongst the black slaves of Maryland, USA. She was a slave herself who escaped into the free state of Philadelphia and later into Canada. Through her work with the Underground Railroad, she went back into Maryland 13 times and rescued 70 other slaves and members of her family. She took on many personas to lead those she loved and other slaves to safety, but she was never found or captured. Her faith in God guided her to safety each time. Years later, she told an audience: “I was conductor of the Underground Railroad for eight years, and I can say what most conductors can’t say – I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger.” Her actions led to the freedom of others. A movie has been made of her life: ‘Harriet’.

To those who suffered under slavery, Harriet became the Moses-saviour for them. She led them through inhospitable lands to freedom. We are all under slavery in our sin. Unless God sends someone to lead us to our freedom we are doomed to remain in our sin. God saw this problem we were in and through His incredible love, He sent His only Son to be our Hero-Saviour. Jesus was sent by His loving Father to Earth as a baby at Christmas. God didn’t have to do this. But God saw our suffering and sent us Jesus as a gift of love. This gift of love can also be termed ‘GRACE’. Grace is a gift given even though undeserved. Author Philip Yancey writes, “Grace teaches us that God loves because of who God is, not because of who we are.”

Come to the manger this Christmas to receive and see this gift of grace from a loving God. This action of love on God’s behalf came as a terrible cost to Him – His Son! God truly is our Hero-God.

Prayer: Thank you for being my Hero-God. You gave your only Son to the world to save us. Help me to recognise this great gift of love and share it. Amen.



LOVE

Remembering Love

1st Tuesday in Advent

Read: Psalm 98

“Remember, O Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.”

Psalm 25:6 (NIV)

Recently I was trying to cull my stuff. Not always an easy thing if you are a hoarder like me. But I was going through the boxes from my travels, my diaries, and the little souvenirs I collected on my journeys. One trip was taken with a school friend to visit another friend from school who was working on the aboriginal settlement in North Queensland – Wujal Wujal. My friend Julie was working as a nursing sister in this community, so her house was right in town. What I remember from this most amazing trip was the love of the people shown to me and the many journeys they also took me on down the Bloomfield River, collecting and eating pipis and turtle soup. Taking me to special places, and even painting a special piece of bark for me. The love and graciousness shown of these faithful people also worshipping a faithful and loving God.

I sat and listened to many of the stories from this community and so many of them were remembering stories from the past. We also remember stories of our past, through our parents, grandparents, and family histories. The past brings a sense of belonging and fitting in to what has been, to now create a new path and a new future which our children will one day remember and refer to as their past and history.

Psalm 98 is a song of praise from David, praising our Lord and thanking Him for remembering His people. God has been faithful to His people in the past, but He is also faithful and remembers to love us in the now. God loves you and we can remember this love as we go through this Advent season. His love for you culminates in the birth of a little baby in Bethlehem, which happened over 2000 years ago, but this same love is for us today. God's blessings as we remember God's gracious love!HHHH

Prayer: Lord, your love for me is unfathomable. Help me to remember this amazing love for me and others as I celebrate the birth of your Son. Amen.



LOVE

Prophets Fore Tell

1st Wednesday in Advent

Read: Isaiah 40:3-5

“And [John] will go before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Luke 1:17 (NIV)

Paul Revere in 1775 became a hero of the American Revolutionary war. A poem was written about ‘Paul Revere’s Ride’ from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in 1861. Paul Revere is best known for his ride at midnight to alert the American colonial militia that the British forces were arriving by ship.

“Listen, my children, and you shall hear Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere, On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-Five: Hardly a man is now alive Who remembers that famous day and year.

He said to his friend, “If the British march By land or sea from the town to-night, Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry-arch Of the North-Church-tower, as a signal-light, — One if by land, and two if by sea; And I on the opposite shore will be, Ready to ride and spread the alarm Through every Middlesex village and farm, For the country-folk to be up and to arm.”

Throughout the Old Testament, God’s chosen people were always waiting. God kept telling His people to be ready for the Messiah and in His love sent prophets who foretold of our Saviour’s birth (Isaiah, Jeremiah and Micah). Jesus also had a ‘Paul Revere’ to warn the people that they needed to turn from their ways and follow Jesus. John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare the hearts of the people to be open for Jesus’ teaching. He warned them just like Paul Revere. God in His love sent the prophet John to prepare us to keep us ready and waiting for the coming of His Son.

Over two thousand years ago all these prophecies came true and God’s Son, Jesus, was born to be Saviour of the world. During Advent we prepare our hearts to be ready to receive this little child Jesus who was born to be the King of the World. Know of the love that God has for all His children and for you to also experience His grace and peace that came as a tiny baby.

Prayer: Thank you Lord, for sending others to tell me of your love. The gift of your Son was the greatest gift we could ever receive. Amen.



LOVE

Beyond Love

1st Thursday in Advent

Read: Luke 1:26-38

“For great is your love, higher than the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies.” Psalm 108:4 (NIV)

For my confirmation in 1979, I remember receiving the book “Joni” as a present. It is the autobiography of Joni Eareckson Tada. As a teenager, in 1967, she dove into a rock pool without looking and broke her neck and instantly became a quadriplegic, paralysed from the shoulders down. The book told of her struggles including bouts of depression where she questioned her existence and purpose in the world. When she started to see beyond herself and see the love of family and the inexpressible love of God, she saw how she could be used to bring hope to those who also struggled with disabilities. In 1979, she started a ministry for those with disabilities and spoke at conferences giving hope and courage and above all encouraging them to see beyond their difficulties to see a loving God.

Sometimes it takes extreme circumstances for God to get our attention and to see what He has in store for us and our lives. It took Sarah conceiving a child at age 99 for Abraham to see the promises of God in being the ‘Father of all nations’. It took a whole lot of angels for the shepherds to see that there was something special happening in Bethlehem. And it took a virgin Mary to conceive by the Holy Spirit the Son of God who would become the Saviour of the World.

God’s love extends beyond our imaginations. His deep, unfathomable, inconceivable, out-of-this-world love for the whole world works in ways we can never expect. The elderly person needing friendship, love and acceptance. The young family walking into church for the first time needing a community. The mother at playgroup seeking a place to belong and have someone to talk to. God wants us to find purpose and look beyond ourselves to see this love that God longs for us to show to others. This Christmas reach out your arms beyond... see the love of an amazing God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to see beyond what is in front of me and experience a fullness of life in living a life of service to you. Amen.



LOVE

A Love that never gives up!

1st Friday in Advent

Read: Luke 15:3-7

“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail.” Lamentations 3:22 (NIV)

Once upon a time, two little frogs fell into a vat of cream. For a while, the two frogs kicked around in the cream, but it was useless; they only managed to sink down deeper. Then one of the frogs said: “I can’t take it anymore.” Having said this, he stopped kicking and drowned, quickly swallowed up by the cream. The other frog, who was more persistent, said: “I can’t do anything to get out of this but, I’d rather fight until my last breath than give up.” So, he carried on kicking and splashing for hours and hours. Then suddenly, after kicking, beating, and stirring for so long, the cream turned into butter. Surprised, he hopped to the edge of the vat, jumped out, and went home, croaking happily.

You may have heard this story before; it is a well-known one to tell that we should never just give up.

Sometimes I see myself as the frog who gives up, but often I am the one fighting to stay up to survive. God fights for us and has throughout history; He never gives up on us to let us drown. It says in the Bible that He doesn’t want even one of His children to be lost, He wants all to be saved and spend eternity with Him. We read that in the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7).

Christmas tends to be seen as a beautiful time when there is food galore, presents abound and there is joy in every family. We realize that this is not often the case and that there are so many struggling to keep swimming in the cream. This Christmas, throw a lifeline of God’s incredible and boundless love to someone assuring them that God will never give up on them. He will help churn the cream with you to make butter. Experience God’s peace this Christmas.

Prayer: Lord God, I lift my life to you to hold me and not let me sink or drown. Help me also to hold others up and share your love and promise with them. Amen.



LOVE

God's Absolute Love

1st Saturday in Advent

Read: Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

***“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.”
John 3:16-17 (NIV)***

Ever thought about why God does what God does? Usually there is an underlying reason for everyone to do what they do... for God the underlying reason is LOVE. Love for the world, love for His Son, love for all His children (all people) ... LOVE, LOVE and LOVE!!! How can God have so much love to give when so many reject Him, blaspheme His name, and don't believe that He is the one behind creation? How glad I am that God does and is so loving – this brings hope and comfort to a world that would otherwise be destroyed.

I have recently enjoyed reading the historical fiction books by Philippa Gregory of the times in the 1400 & 1500s in England during the reigns of King Richard and then Henry V-VIII. Then onto Elizabeth I and all the Queens and Kings in between. These Kings and Queens wanted the love of the people above all, but their greed and insecurities got the better of them causing wars, beheading, and slaughter of those not following them. Each leader wanted the love of the people but did not show this love or compassion to the people. Our history is littered with such terrible times and uncertainty and wars all coming from the selfish leader wanting more and not thinking of others and their needs.

Our God is beyond all of this, He doesn't just want what is best for Him, He wants what is best for us, so much so that He sent His beloved Son into a world of sin to then die a most gruesome death. Christmas is the epitome of God's love – sending a helpless child to be loved by a world not knowing of this love. Share God's love this Christmas by giving love!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your love. Thank you that you care for me by healing hurts, comforting me, and forgiving me. Help me to share your love to others this Christmas. Amen.



HOPE

God's Certain Promises

2nd Sunday in Advent

Read: Romans 8:22-25

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

‘I hope ...’ These are words spoken so many times every day. I hope it won’t rain so the washing will dry. I hope the boss listens to my suggestion. I hope I don’t get COVID so I can travel. I hope mum has something good for tea tonight. What is it – HOPE? I was reading again from the verse in Romans 8:24: ***‘But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?’*** This is so true, our hope lies in the future things to come, not in the present. It doesn’t make sense to hope for what we already have or have experienced.

Throughout the Old Testament, God made promises to His people. It is in these promises that the people of Israel put their hope and trust in God to fulfill for their future. The biggest promise was that God would send them a Messiah to save them from all their misery and sin and to give them freedom. Jeremiah prophesied hope for the people to rest and rely on. This is a God who promised the people a future giving them hope for what lay ahead. This is the ultimate hope for us as well.

The promise of the Messiah was fulfilled in the little baby Jesus born in Bethlehem. His future contained the hopes of people for ages past and for those to come. The promise God gave in Bethlehem that this child of God would save His people from all their sins and bring them into the presence of a Heavenly Father applies to us also. At Christmas we have hope in this little baby growing up to fulfill the promises made by His Father. At Easter, we see them accomplished. This little baby carries the hopes and dreams of an assured future with our Heavenly Father. Know that the promises made by God are certain!

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your promises in which I can place my hope and trust in you and that you have a plan for my life and hold my future in your hands. Amen.



HOPE

Hope from Afar

2nd Monday in Advent

Read: Matthew 2:1-12

***“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.”
Isaiah 60:1, 3 (NIV)***

When looking at the history of Europeans coming to Australia, we read of stories about why they came. Explorers came hoping to find and discover a new land filled with riches and untouched treasures. Many came when gold was found hoping to fill their purses and fill their dreams of a new life. In the early 1800's many of our forebears came from countries where there was religious persecution and hoped to find freedom to worship their God. We still have many immigrating to Australia hoping to begin again, especially when coming from war or poverty.

Why did the Magi come to Bethlehem? What were they hoping to find? By looking through websites and googling questions about the wise men, we can learn a few things about them. For one thing, there weren't necessarily 3 wise men but that is assumed as there were 3 gifts mentioned in the Bible. They also may not have been kings as we like to portray to children. It is also mentioned that they came from the 'East' – we assume around Persia and Africa, which would have taken them about 3-4 months to travel by camel. They followed a 'star', but scientists say it could have been a comet or supernova or a planet. It even suggests that Jesus was not a new-born, but rather under 2 years old... for when they came to Herod and told him about when the star appeared, he then decided to kill all babies under 2 years old.

It was foretold in Isaiah 60:1-6 that the nations would come to see the 'light' of the world and kings would bow down offering gold and incense. These wise men, whatever they hoped for they found it in the baby born in Bethlehem – God's Son. We too can come with all our hopes and dreams to the little baby Jesus and find in His birth security and hope for our future in the love of our Heavenly Father. Come, just as you are!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, the wise men came to find you from afar. I also come to see you in the manger and place with you all my hopes and dreams of eternal life. Remain with me always. Amen.



HOPE

Hope for a Hurting World

2nd Tuesday in Advent

Read: John 1:1-5

***“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”
John 1:14 (NIV)***

Over the last 3 years Australia has endured incredible natural disasters, pain, and suffering. From terrible fires, flooding, COVID-19 and its various strains, influenza, shortage of food and supplies, increased costs of the basics – food, petrol, electricity, toilet paper. When will we see an end and get back to the ‘normal’? Not only in Australia, but around the world - we see the war-torn Ukraine, world powers seeking more and more at the expense of others, shootings in schools and in the gang warfare. Our world is hurting; its people are hurting. Where can we find hope and a future?

Reading the above it is very easy to get cynical and blame God for all that is happening. Why isn't God doing anything to fix it all? Why isn't God punishing those that seek to hurt others? I hear even in our churches people getting despondent and not knowing what to believe any more. That is where we as Christians need to step forward to give the hope that we have in the loving nature of a Heavenly Father who does love and care for His hurting world. God loves and cares for His people through His people – you and me!

God and Jesus were there in the beginning of the world and will be there when Jesus comes again. It is only in God and the saving actions of Jesus that we can place our unwavering trust and hope for a future. It was at the first Christmas that God sent His beloved Son to be a human – to dwell among us and point us to the future glory in Heaven. God doesn't cause this hurt and pain – it is our sin that causes this hurting world. It is our hope in God and the saving actions of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ that we can begin to feel normal again. Praise God for putting in place our salvation through sending His Son to Earth as a baby to dwell with us!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you came as a baby to bring hope for our hurting world. Use me to play a part to ease the hurt and pain in others. Amen.



HOPE

Hopes and Dreams

2nd Wednesday in Advent

Read: Luke 11:9-13

Jesus said: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you." John 15:7 (NIV)

As a child I remember seeing the first star in the sky and repeating the rhyme:

Star light, Star bright,
First star I see tonight,
I wish I may, I wish I might
Have the wish I wish tonight.

I was told to do this and then whatever I wished for would come true. I was also told to blow the stamens off a dandelion and wish for a dream to come true. Also, blow out the candles on my birthday cake and make a wish, find a 4-leaf clover, and make a wish. Are any of these actions real or true? No, but we like to think that 'out there' is an external force to make our hopes and dreams come true.

The only one to make our dreams and hopes eventuate is God and I know He doesn't operate in the way that I have outlined above... that we make a wish, blow out candles and it comes true. God is omniscient – He is in all and knows all and was before the world began. God wants us to dream and hope for our future, but to leave the other details to Him. He knows what is best for us and also what may harm us, so when things don't go necessarily as planned, we have to trust that God knows what is best.

We are to place our trust and hopes in the little baby in the manger in Bethlehem. He is real, He is the Son of God, and He knows what it is to have human thoughts and emotions. Jesus has a future planned for us and the dreams that we have are small compared to the hopes He has for our lives. During this Advent season have your dreams and hopes for your future but include Jesus in on the planning. His love for us is so great that we cannot fathom what He has in store for us.

Prayer: My dear loving Saviour, you know what is in store for me. I can have my hopes and dreams but ultimately you have my future in your hands. Guide and hold me always. Amen.



HOPE

Hope for the Lost

2nd Thursday in Advent

Read: Mark 1:1-8

“Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Luke 1:16-17 (NIV)

John the Baptist was an older cousin by a couple months to Jesus. God planned from the beginning that there would be one to prepare the way for Jesus to come; to bring the lost to repentance before hearing of the saving love of God. John the Baptist began that mission introducing Jesus in the words of Isaiah 40:3. When John baptised people coming to him, he told them it was a baptism of repentance. The baptism that Jesus then brought was a baptism of the Holy Spirit, of grace, offering forgiveness of sins. John brought the law to point out the sins and Jesus brought the Gospel through the Holy Spirit showing that there is nothing we can do – it is all God's actions.

Forgiveness is one of the special gifts from God and is one of the big celebration parts in Advent – we are forgiven through the coming of God's Son as a baby and comes to fruition with His rising from the dead on Easter Sunday. We no longer need to carry the burden of our sins, our meanness, our faults and our failings. God covers them all over with His grace and mercy through baptism. This forgiveness also brings a challenge to us in our lives; to try to do better and to move on from our sinfulness to a life of care, compassion, love and joy in loving and forgiving others.

For a lost world full of hopelessness, the gift of baptism and forgiveness is lifesaving! It is an assurance that we are loved and accepted and a child of God's. Baptism is not a magical ritual that keeps us from all harm, rather it is the assurance that Jesus has named and claimed us as His own. What a wonderful gift to place our hope in. The season of Advent tells us of Jesus coming to be our Saviour, and it is in our baptism that we have the hope of eternal life forever.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for giving me the gift of baptism. Grow in my heart daily the knowledge of you and your love for me. Amen.



HOPE

Happiness & Hope

2nd Friday in Advent

Read: Isaiah 7:14

“And Mary said: ‘My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour... for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is His name.’”

Luke 1:46-47, 49 (NIV)

No matter what any woman tells you, there is pain in childbirth. In Genesis God says, ***‘I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children.’ (3:16)*** Having had 3 children and with the first having labour for 40 hours, I can say that it is really amazing that one would want to have more children. But it seems that God has given women short-term memory with this pain, for it seems as soon as you have that beautiful little child in your arms all thoughts of the pain are wiped clean. The happiness and joy overwhelm to the point of sheer contentment and bliss.

I can see this joy and happiness in the stories of Mary and Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-45) as they look forward to the birth of their children, both having miraculous conceptions through the Holy Spirit – opening a barren womb and entering a virgin womb. The hopes and happiness that both these women experienced is incredible – God took what was impossible and made it possible! It is easy to sense the joy that they felt. With the birth of a new baby comes an extreme happiness in the wonder of this new life as well as dreaming to the future of the child and the hopes for their life. Elizabeth and Mary knew the blessings from God and that the children they were carrying would markedly change the world.

God promised a baby to bring hope and happiness to the world back in the time of Isaiah. God already knew what was to be in store for John and Jesus and He prepared them through their upbringing with loving Jewish parents. Both grew in knowledge and love of their Heavenly Father. Christmas is such a happy time as we also share in the joy of Mary and Joseph. We rejoice together and share in the hope of God’s promises through the baby Jesus – our Saviour, Immanuel!

Prayer: Father God, you sent your Son to the world for me to live in the hope and promises only you can give. Thank you. Amen.



HOPE

Advent – season of Hope

2nd Saturday in Advent

Read: John 14:25-29

“So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” Matthew 24:44 (NIV)

There are things that are delightfully expected and those that are delightfully unexpected. When your loved one comes home from a day at work and time can be spent chatting and regurgitating the day. This can be expected. Then having a loved one come home when not expected also brings delight. My son who lives in Canberra, without telling us, surprised us with driving up to Noosa and then staying for a week – oh my joy!!

Advent is a time when we celebrate the first coming of Jesus to Earth as a baby and the hope that brings to our lives. God loving us so much that He sent His Son to Earth to be one of us. But it is also the time when we reflect on Jesus' second coming for which we do not know the day nor the hour, only our Heavenly Father knows. On that day when Jesus returns, He will take to Him all who are faithful and believe. I sure want to be ready on that day. So, in reality we need to be ready every day as we live in the hope of eternal life with our Father.

In the meantime we go about our daily work, but all the time keeping in focus our faith, hope and the promise of eternal life. At Christmas, God blesses us with the joy of a baby's birth – not just any baby, but the Son of God. We celebrate with family and friends this joyous season, sharing the love of this beautiful season. Amongst the celebrations don't forget to keep the meaning of the coming of God's Son foremost in your heart. God comes to us every day with His love, grace, and forgiveness. It will be a glorious day when Jesus returns in all His glory to take us to be with Him forever in Heaven. Celebrate the first coming, but don't forget that Jesus is coming back! This will be a delightfully unexpected return.

Prayer: Lord, prepare my heart for your coming to Earth this Christmas. Help me to remember that you will also come back to take me to Heaven and help me also to prepare others. Amen.



JOY

Greatest Joy

3rd Sunday in Advent

Read: Luke 24:36-52

“But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.’” Luke 2:10 (NIV)

What gives you your greatest joy? *[Have a think and share]* When I was younger, I think my greatest joy came at Christmas and birthdays when there were not just special gifts given, but it was a time when our family had special traditions and family time. Now that I am older, I think my greatest joy comes when my children come home and we can spend time together, or when I can fly to Adelaide to see my mother and family.

‘Great Joy’ is mentioned by the angels announcing the birth of Jesus... it is not just GOOD NEWS, but “*good news of great joy*”! Something special had happened and someone special had come into the world and it was incredible. There was also ‘great joy’ in the disciples when Jesus left to go back to His Heavenly Father as we read in the bible reading from Luke 24. Jesus coming to Earth as a baby and then leaving at His ascension to go back to His Heavenly Father; both were heralded and explained that it was done with ‘great joy’. The meaning of ‘joy’ goes beyond happiness; it is something far more extensive and reaches into jubilation, exultation, and extreme delight. The word is mentioned over 430 times in the NIV Bible. God wants us to know great joy.

This Christmas, experience the great joy of family and friends and in welcoming God’s little Son into the world to be our Saviour and Lord. This is something worth being joy-filled over. Share this same joy with others who do not know the love of God in sending His Son. At Easter came our greatest joy with the resurrection of this same little baby. God’s greatest achievement! The disciples knew sadness in Jesus leaving them at the ascension, but it still filled them with great joy knowing that they have a loving Saviour who promises to always be with us – now that brings me ‘great joy’!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the great joy you fill me with in the sending of your Son. Help me to share this great joy with those around me. Amen.



JOY

Jesus Others Yourself

3rd Monday in Advent

Read: Matthew 22:36-39

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” Mark 12:30-31a (NIV)

I remember one youth camp I went on during my younger years was entitled ‘JOY’. At the first session on the Saturday morning, it was explained. When you do something or talk to people you need to do it with JOY, thinking firstly, would **Jesus** like me to say or do this? Then, is this being kind to **Others** in what I say or do? And finally, is saying this or doing this something **You** should do? Living like this: putting Jesus and others before yourself is a real challenge. In this age that we live in, everything seems to be so self-centred and so ‘me’ focused, that there really is no time to think of Jesus and others in each situation.

This is so sad. There are many places in the Bible that Jesus stresses what the order to live is – Love God, then others, then finally yourself. God sent His one and only son, Jesus, into the world to heal the world from all its sinfulness and evil. Jesus came firstly as a Son to show the world the wrong that is happening, then through His death on the cross He gave up His earthly life for you and for me. We celebrate at Christmas the JOY of the season in the coming of a little baby to be the Saviour of the world for you and me.

Jesus is first and foremost the most important thing about Christmas. His coming to Earth is a miracle – God of the Heavens sent His Son. Think about that for a minute. Why would the omnipotent God and creator of the universe want to do that? There is one word to that question: LOVE. It was love that sent Jesus and it is the love God has for all people that He wanted to save them and bring them close to Him. This Christmas – have JOY in the season!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son Jesus to Earth to save me. This Christmas, help me to practice living with JOY – Jesus Others Yourself. Amen.

JOY

Shepherd Joy

3rd Tuesday in Advent

Read: Luke 2:8-20

“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen.” Luke 2:20a (NIV)

It was a night like no other. Abe, Jacob, and I had just had our dinner of a piece of bread and cheese. The sheep were lying on the grassy hill, some were grazing. It was a beautiful star-filled night sky and I noticed one bright shining star which seemed to be right above us. Low and behold, the sky turned as bright as day. What was happening? Then this bright person said, “Do not be afraid.” It was a little bit late for that... I was terrified and Jacob and Abe were both hiding behind me. Then the sky lit up with more of these figures, and they all started singing. I think people in Bethlehem could hear it. The first angel said that God’s Son was born this very night and we should go and see him.

Well, you couldn’t hold me down. So, I started running and shouting and Jacob and Abe followed as did some of our sheep. This amazing sight that these angels shared with us, well, it had to be big, and we were so excited and full of joy. Here God told me about His Son coming to Earth... me a dirty shepherd. I felt so special and loved.

How incredible is the depth of God’s love to even the lowest in society at the time. What joy and amazement would the shepherds have felt in seeing the Son of God? I think we all would have felt the same awe and astonishment. We read in the above verse in Luke 2:20a: ***“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen.”*** Do we do this? At Christmas, do you also go and tell others all that you have seen and heard? Maybe the shepherd’s joy is something we also need to emulate and not become blasé about. Jesus, God’s Son, has been born for you and me. That is truly is something to be joy-filled about!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you that you came to love me. May I be so filled with joy that it will just burst from me to tell others about your love for them. Amen.

JOY

Lost and Found

3rd Wednesday in Advent

Read: Luke 15:1-32

“Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’” Luke 15:6 (NIV)

Being in the family of a pastor, moving is one of the things that comes with the territory. After one such move from Wodonga to Adelaide, I remember my husband asking, “Have you seen my fishing rods?” As the wife I answered, “Well, when did you last see them?” He then stated that before we moved they were kept in this certain place. Well, time went by, and another move came, this time to Loxton, SA. Everything was packed and moved again. This time during our unpacking my husband exclaimed with joy – “I have just found my ‘lost’ fishing rods”. He was so excited that something that was deemed lost for so many years had now been found. Not that those fishing rods were ever really used... but that’s another story.

Jesus told stories to explain the Kingdom of God. He told the stories in Luke 15 of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son. Each of them explains the devastation felt when just one sheep, coin or son was lost to them. It is interesting how these stories grow in value – from a sheep to a coin and then to a child. The joy that was felt when what was lost was found also increased in intensity and is shared with those around them and not just kept to themselves.

Jesus, as a baby came to a lost world to help us find a loving God. Even though we feel we are sometimes lost to Him, God never ceases looking and bringing us into His loving presence. When we are brought to God in baptism, I can imagine the angels rejoicing with Jesus and throwing a huge party. For Jesus says: ***“In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (Luke 15:10 NIV)*** Rejoice with the angels at Christmas that God loves us so much to send His only Son to be the way to save us lost people.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for coming to the Earth as a baby to save me and this lost world. Help me to be a witness also to others about this saving love of a loving Father. Amen.



JOY

Mary's Joy

3rd Thursday in Advent

Read: Luke 1:46-55

“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour... for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is His name.” Luke 1:46b-47, 49 (NIV)

Mary's Song in Luke 1 is a song of love and thanksgiving from the heart of Mary who had been told that she is carrying the Son of God. She is with her relative Elizabeth, who is also carrying a child by the Holy Spirit. They find encouragement and comfort in the presence of each other, and it seems that this song just bursts from her heart with joy.

Songs and canticles have been written about this song from Mary – entitled the ‘Magnificat’. Johann Sebastian Bach wrote a musical setting and scored for five vocal parts and a Baroque orchestra with a Latin setting. The German composer, Johann Pachelbel also composed a set of more than ninety Magnificat fugues. Martin Luther translated into German this song of Mary into a canticle – “Meine Seele erhebt den Herren”. A year before his translation of the New Testament, Martin Luther completed his commentary on the Magnificat, Mary's song from Luke's Gospel that served as the main canticle of the Evening Prayer. Luther saw Mary's song as a model for Christian prayer and praise, not dependent on our works but rather in response to God's grace.

Read out loud Mary's Song from Luke 1:46-55 again. It is easy to picture this joy-filled young woman singing this song of praise to God for choosing her to be the carrier of His beloved Son. She sings of God's incredible love in remembering His promises to His people to send a Saviour. In no way do we hear her grumbling or worried about what others may say, instead she is grateful of God's grace. What a wonderful example Mary is for us. This Christmas share your joy with others of the Good News of our Saviour and Lord Jesus coming to Earth as a baby to ultimately save all people. God's grace rest on you!

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, your earthly mother Mary sang of her love for you and God the Father. Help me to also sing your praises to all who will hear. Open my heart to your love. Amen.



JOY

Shared Joy

3rd Friday in Advent

Read: Luke 1:39-45

“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.” Luke 1:41 (NIV)

‘A joy that’s shared is a joy made double.’ (John Roy)

Last Christmas I received a surprise package in the mail from a friend I hadn’t heard from for such a long time. I was so excited that I ran to my husband and together we opened it and were able to share in the joy of the moment together. If I had just opened it by myself, it wouldn’t have given me as much joy. True joy needs to be shared. When our babies were born, we had to call family and friends immediately to share with them this wonderful news. Our joyful news also brought joy to others.

I am sure that you all can relate to the sharing of good news and joy, and how your own joy seems to increase exponentially. Now imagine the joy of Elizabeth, Mary’s cousin, knowing she was finally about to have a baby and Mary also discovering she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. God had chosen their children to have a special role to play in the history of God’s story. It is not by chance that God gave these women time to get together to support and share their joys, fears and doubts before their children were born. Elizabeth’s baby even jumped for joy when Mary arrived at her home.

God gives us others to talk to, to share with, to confide in and to share both joys and sorrows. Family and friends are so important to each person’s life. When I get together with friends, our joy cannot be contained, and we just talk and share. God is also a friend with whom to share our joys with. Even if there is no one else around, we have our loving Heavenly Father to talk to and pray with. This Christmas share the joy of our new-born Saviour and give Him honour and praise. Joy like that can never be contained!

Prayer: Thank you Lord God that you have brought such joy into my life with family and friends. I also have you as my ultimate friend to share my joy. Amen.



JOY

Joy in Heaven

3rd Saturday in Advent

Read: Psalm 89:5-8

“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.’” Luke 2:13-14 (NIV)

People have always been fascinated by heaven and what comes after life on Earth. God has given us little glimpses of what heaven is like. Jesus spoke in parables about the ‘Kingdom of God’. We can read of the true story of a little 3-year-old boy, Colton Burpo, who in 1998 experienced heaven and came back to tell his family. ‘Heaven is for Real’ is now a book and movie.

As Christians, Jesus has told us of the angels who rejoice over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10). At Christmas the angels and all the heavenly hosts sing ‘Glory to God’ at the Saviour’s birth. In the Psalms King David tells of the joy in heaven and the heavenly beings (Psalm 89). We are only given glimpses and snippets of what heaven will be like, but I sure am excited about going there. We get a beautiful picture of what heaven will be like in the Revelation of John: *“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be His peoples, and God himself will be with them; He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’” Revelation 21:3-4 (NRSV)*

I read from the Bible all the things from God that has been revealed to us about heaven and can be filled with joy. There will be joy in heaven, just as there was joy at our Saviour’s birth those many years ago in Bethlehem. Jesus came as a baby to secure our future in heaven. His dying and rising again on the third day – painful as it was for Jesus, broke the chains of sin that held us captive. Through Jesus’ coming, God opened the Kingdom of Heaven for us; to see as our future home. Thank you, God!

Prayer: Dear God, in sending your Son Jesus to Earth, you opened the door of heaven for me to come and experience joy in your presence for eternity. Thank you. Amen.



PATIENCE

A Messiah is Coming

4th Sunday in Advent

Read: 2 Samuel 7:12-16

“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple” Malachi 3:1a (NIV)

The people of Israel had been waiting for the promised Messiah. God had made inferences through the prophets as to the coming of His Son (read 2 Samuel 7:12-16). This had been foretold by Nathan the prophet talking to King David. So, when was this Messiah coming? Malachi was the last prophet, and the last book in the Old Testament, who prophesied about a coming Messiah, and this was 400 years before the birth of Jesus. How much more patient can the people of God be? After the time of Malachi, God was silent to His people before the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. I can understand God's people becoming impatient.

The book of Malachi sums up what the whole of the Old Testament had been pointing to. Even though God's chosen people were promised and punished over and over again by God, they just were not patient and did things their own way. They kept turning away from God and they continued to fail again and again. And while God dealt with their sins, He never abandoned His people. He promised to redeem a remnant and send a Messiah to fulfill His covenant promises. Can we also as God's people learn something from all this? God never will abandon or leave us – God's promise is sure!

It sure is hard to be patient when what has been promised repeatedly for centuries still hasn't happened. Even today, the Orthodox Jews do not admit that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Son of God. They are still waiting for the promised Messiah to come. Jesus has come and 2000 years later we still rejoice in His birth and what God promised from the beginning of the world has been fulfilled in the little baby born in Bethlehem so long ago. God never forgets His promises or His people. We rejoice in our Saviour's birth and that all the promises that have been fulfilled.

Prayer: Help me Lord to be patient and to listen to your promises and know that they are sure. You have promised always to be with us – bless all your people this Christmas! Amen.



PATIENCE

Living in the Present

4th Monday in Advent

Read: 1 Timothy 4:8-10

***“But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”
Romans 8:25 (NIV)***

As a young girl, I was horse crazy. I had a horse poster, so many little horse ornaments, a stuffed horse or two and dreams of one day owning a horse. I remember asking my dad so many times, when would he take a parish in the country so that I could get a horse? I tried to be patient. I read so many horse books – “The Silver Brumby” by Elyne Mitchell being my favourite. My present reality was going to my cousin’s farm at Keyneton and seeing her horse and sometimes having a ride.

So, what is our present reality? Are we patient with all that God has planned? We go through each year, some being easier than others. Cope with the issues of health and family life and work and live from day to day. Before we know it, Christmas is upon us, and the new year begins again. We look to the future, we long for some things to happen, try to be patient, and we may even plead and bargain with God, but when it comes to it, we are left to living in the present with hope for the future. That is where God comes in! This season of Advent heralds in our hope and our future. Jesus, the baby born in Bethlehem, is our hope for life eternal and our future promised.

We no longer need to plead with God and wonder what is in store for us. We can rest assured that through living day by day we are living our life with God’s promise. Part of this promise involves being patient and waiting and preparing for Jesus to come back. But for now, we live in the present, we rejoice in all that God gives and provides for us each day, and we are patient with waiting to see what the future holds. God’s love is so evident at Christmas... live in it, share with others and wait to see our future planned by our loving Heavenly Father! That elusive ‘horse’ might yet come.

Prayer: Dear God, help me to be patient with what you hold for my future. Thank you for sending your Son at Christmas to be the promise for my future with you. Amen.



PATIENCE

Time of Waiting

4th Tuesday in Advent

Read: Luke 2:1-7

“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.” Matthew 1:21 (NIV)

Elephants have the longest gestation period of any land animal, and a newborn elephant can weigh about 105kg. The frilled shark has an extraordinarily slow growing embryo, which only grows about 1.4cm each month and therefore the total pregnancy is about 3 and a half years. With the opossum, it is the opposite, with their pregnancy lasting about 14 days and then the baby is carried in a pouch for two to three months. Guinea pigs are great breeders. They can get pregnant as early as 4 weeks of age, are pregnant for about 70 days and can become pregnant again as early as 15 hours after giving birth.

From the four gospels, not a whole lot is written about Mary's pregnancy. We read that she became pregnant from the Holy Spirit, visited Elizabeth, and gave birth to a son and laid Him in a manger in Bethlehem. We don't know if she had morning sickness, swollen ankles, an aching back or reflux. We don't know if Jesus was born right at 9 months or if He came early or late or even if it was a hard labour. That is not important – we just know that He was born and the time of waiting for a Saviour was over.

Pregnancy is a time of waiting, a time of expectation and a time for preparing. In many ways it is a time to be patient and wait for this new life to be ready to come into the world. Once the baby is ready and the time is right, nothing can stop it coming. Jesus was coming into the world at Christmas if we were ready or not and God sent Him at just the right time. Every year we wait for Christmas, prepare the festivities for Christmas and then we celebrate that our waiting is over. Our Saviour has come into the world, and with it we have forgiveness and eternal life. Our time of waiting is over!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your Son and that I can know that I am blessed. Your love shows in this little baby – help me to show thankfulness. Amen.



PATIENCE

Waiting! Waiting! Waiting!

4th Wednesday in Advent

Read: Psalm 130:5-8

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Galatians 5:22-23a (NIV)

I remember reading an article about the Emperor Penguin. They sure know what it is to wait and be patient. Once a pair of penguins have courted and produced an egg, the female gives the egg to the male to look after it over the four winter months in Antarctica. The weather can get to -35°C but the male keeps it warm at a toasty 38°C. During that time the male cannot go out to eat and loses about half of their body mass. But, for the emperor penguin, the hatching of the chick is worth the wait.

Patience is one of the ‘fruits of the Spirit’ mentioned in Galatians above. Why is patience a quality that we need for God’s kingdom and our earthly life? Many times, things don’t come quickly when asked for, rather through time and dedication and patience thrown in, we are rewarded with the results we are looking for. Yesterday, the devotion focussed on pregnancy – that is a waiting time. Looking for a new job can involve much patience. Guiding and teaching our children is a time of definite patience with much love and the rest of the ‘fruits of the Spirit’ needed.

As Christians it is written many times in the Bible that we must ‘wait’ on the Lord (we read that in Psalm 130 above as well as in Psalm 27:14). We are called to be patient with our expectations of God’s actions and in relationships with each other. Just as the Jewish nation in the Old Testament had to wait thousands of years for God’s promises of a Messiah to be fulfilled, so we also wait with expectation of all that God holds in store for our lives. Christmas and Advent are a time of eager expectation of the fulfilment of God’s grace and promise to us. We wait for God’s will to be done in all things – for the coming of our Saviour in Jesus, is worth the wait!

Prayer: Lord God, my heavenly Father, thank you that you have asked me to wait for things as this produces patience in my soul. Help me to wait eagerly for the coming of your Son in Jesus. Amen.



PATIENCE

Poor Zechariah

4th Thursday in Advent

Read: Luke 1:5-25

***“And 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 proper time.”
Luke 1:20 (NIV)***

In the 1980's I remember watching an amazing series from the USA – *Ripley's Believe it or Not!* It was based on the travels and discoveries of the oddity-hunter Ripley and it showed some of the stranger things in human history. It was also replicated in the 1990's and again in the 2000's. In the original series, some of the subjects that Ripley explored were the Bermuda Triangle, The Elephant Man, Mad King Ludwig and Nikola Tesla. I remember that this show accentuated the unusual.

I wonder if the story of Zechariah would be on this show. The story begins with the priest Zechariah going into the temple, as was the custom, and it was his turn to burn incense to the Lord. While he was by the altar an angel appeared to him telling him that he and his wife would have a baby – even though Elizabeth was barren and they were both old. The angel was Gabriel and he told Zechariah that this baby would prepare the way for the Lord to then come. The angel told him a lot more and then that Elizabeth and Zechariah were to name him John. Poor Zechariah. I'm sure he was scared and didn't know what to think, so he asked for a sign. Well, the angel gave him the sign of being unable to speak until the baby John was born. Zechariah surely needed patience during the nine months.

So often, we also ask for a sign that God is with us and truly hears all our prayers. Often, we become impatient and expect instant responses from God. God has told us and promised us that His Son will be born in Bethlehem and that He will be our Saviour and Redeemer. Through Jesus' life and finally His death we will receive forgiveness of sins and life eternal. We can be very sure and trust in these promises. God says it – we believe it!

Prayer: Loving Father, thank you for all your promises to me. I believe that your Son came to earth to save me from my sinful self. Help me to be patient as you work in my life. Amen.



PATIENCE

The last Page

4th Friday in Advent

Read: Titus 2:11-14

“[Jesus] 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, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end.” Luke 1:32-33 (NIV)

When I was young, I remember one birthday sneaking out early and checking out my birthday presents left on the couch. I played with them for a bit, then carefully put them back in their wrappings and went back to bed. I remember that when my mum woke me up and I went to see my presents I didn't have the same joy that I would have had if I hadn't had a sneak peek earlier. The same goes with reading an exciting novel. Some I know look to the back page to see how it ends, but I feel that it ruins the story – knowing how it ends spoils the journey.

Fortunately, this is not the same with God. Throughout the Old Testament and through the prophets, God continually tells the people of Israel the last page – there will come a person from God who will save all of humankind. They just need to be patient. Tomorrow, we celebrate Christmas Eve and the coming of the baby Jesus to Earth. But we also anticipate the coming again of Jesus in glory to take us all to our eternal home. I like the way Titus writes it in Titus 2:13-14: *“while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good.”*

This is the glimpse we are given of the last page, the second coming of Jesus. Now, we are in the present and we rejoice to know and remember what God has done through sending His Son to Earth the first time. God has come to Earth to be our Saviour and our Immanuel (God with us). So, let us look to this baby in the manger to see our sins forgiven and God's love showered on us. We can look forward to the last page, we just need to be patient!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you have shown me what is in store for me when you come again. May my life be one of service to you this Christmas as I am also patient for you to return. Amen.



PATIENCE

What's in the Box?

Christmas Eve

Read: Matthew 1:18-25

“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 1:18 (NIV)

It was Christmas morning; all was quiet in the house. Little Stacey crept out of bed and quietly made her way to where the beautiful Christmas tree was standing. At the sight of the tree, the little girl stopped in her tracks and just stared. The tree was so beautiful, the lights shone with magnificence and there under the tree were brightly and beautifully wrapped presents of all shapes and sizes. How excited she was as she glanced through all the labels on the presents. Searching with her eyes she longed desperately to see her name ... STACEY, written in the letters she knew so well.

There, sitting on the floor behind a present for her brother Sam, she saw her name! It was written with a gold pen the paper was a beautiful bright red and it was finished off with a glittering gold and red ribbon tied in a beautiful bow. She stood there for a little while just looking ... should she take it? Carefully Stacey picked up the beautiful present. She caressed the ribbon, stroked the paper ... it was sooo pretty. I wonder what is in this most beautiful box, she thought.

God has given you the greatest present anyone has ever been given. At Christmas we hear the story of God who gave us His Son, born as a baby, only to later die for all the wrong things we do. Don't just patiently look at the present God has given us but open it and experience for yourself the saving story of Christ. Read the story, open the Bible, and live the life Christ has given you. Yes, we can stand in awe and look at all that God did for us, but do more – read about the stories of Jesus, pray for others that they may understand and experience Jesus themselves. Enjoy and live the life Christ has for you. What's in the box? Open it up and see!

Prayer: Thank you Jesus that you have come into the world as my present. Help me to cherish this gift but also share your love with others. Amen.



PEACE

My ‘Prince of Peace’

Christmas Day

Read: Isaiah 9:6-7

“And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6b (NIV)

I have often wondered why Jesus is given all these names – Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Immanuel, King of Kings, Saviour, Redeemer, Lord of Lords, The Word? The name ‘Jesus’ seems to encompass all the above. He was born being God’s Son. He is our counsellor, a person to fight for us, part of the Trinity, bringer of peace, He is always with us, the greatest King, saving us from all our sins, making us redeemed by His blood, the greatest Lord and speaking the Word of God. Is there any question to His sovereignty?

Being named by all the above, God in His wisdom mentioned in Jesus’ titles all the things that we need in this world. One title that has always resonated with me especially at this time of Christmas, is Jesus is our ‘Prince of Peace’. He is not just someone who can offer peace and encouragement, but Jesus is the bringer of a deep peace to a world so in need of it. There is uncertainty, trouble, war, family issues, work problems, inflation and worries which take hold of us and hold us in their grip every day. Only one thing can release us from all this – that is God’s peace. Letting ourselves rest in His loving and caring arms to deal with all the problems that can so overwhelm us.

He can breathe peace into our hearts, minds and souls. This peace can allow us to let things go and leave them in God’s care and realm. As we celebrate this little baby born today, remember the peacefulness that Jesus can bring into your life. As you sing the carol ‘Silent Night’, listen to the words repeated and emphasised: “Sleep in Heavenly Peace, Sleep in Heavenly Peace”! Let go of all worries and let God deal with them. Jesus is our ultimate peace.

Prayer: My Prince of Peace, thank you for coming into the world to bring peace to the world and my life. Help me to rest tonight and every night in your Heavenly peace. Amen.

PEACE

All is Calm

26th December

Read: Micah 5:2-5a

“So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.” Luke 2:52 (NIV)

There is something very peaceful and calming about the nativity scene (maybe that is why I have so many – a couple more since I last counted... 48 by now)! But think about the scene of Joseph and Mary hovering adoringly over their new little son. The sheep lying quietly around, the cow slowly chewing, the birds and donkey resting. Then come the smelly shepherds, but they also are quiet and thinking over what the angels told them. They are kneeling at the manger in worship, as are the wise men and the camels. The angels hovering in the rafters and shining above is the bright star. All is so calm and peaceful.

Each Christmas Eve in our church we put on an impromptu Christmas play (no rehearsals), where the children can dress up as they wish (doesn't matter if we have 3 Marys), and we endeavour to take the children through that peaceful scene and story of Jesus being born. It is at times anything but peaceful, but at the same time I think it is probably more typical of the actual time when Jesus was born. Last Christmas when 'Mary' was supposed to be talking with 'Joseph' over being pregnant, we couldn't find Joseph, until a voice came – “He's gone to the toilet”! So, we had the father of Joseph step in until Joseph reappeared.

Christmas is a time of peacefulness when we can just take time to be still and reflect on what this baby's birth means to us and our families. Sometimes though the peacefulness of Christmas isn't evident in some families and is more like the chaos of our Christmas play. But however your Christmas was, it is so wonderful to know that during noise, laughter, chaos and anything but peace, lies this little baby surrounded by all who love and adore Him. May God's peace and calm enter your hearts and lives this Christmas season. Blessing and peace be yours!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for the peace that is evident in the story of your birth. At times, my life is anything but calm, but bring the peacefulness of your birth to me every day. Amen.



PEACE

Perfect Peace

27th December

Read: Luke 2:25-32

“You, Lord, give perfect peace to those who keep their purpose firm and put their trust in you.” Isaiah 26:3 (NIV)

Simeon had been waiting for the Lord to send the Messiah. The Bible tells us that he was a devout and righteous man. He had prayed that he be allowed to see the Messiah, the Lord's Christ, before he died, and the Holy Spirit revealed that this would happen. When Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem, Simeon recognised Him as his Messiah. He prayed a prayer and blessing (Luke 2:29-32) that we use in worship today. The *Nunc Dimittis* is prayed to dismiss God's people in peace.

The prophet Isaiah gives insight as to how this perfect peace can be attained. Just like Simeon, we are to put our faith and trust in God that He will do all He has said He will. How many times have we felt completely out of control? When everything we touch seems to turn upside down and we are left wondering how to make sense of all that is before us? What is needed, is to adjust our focus from the chaos and place it solely on God and trust that He has everything under control. Shifting our attention in this way can enable us to experience God's perfect peace, joy and hope even amidst all the surrounding chaos.

God has promised that He will always be with us, and we see that promise at Christmas when Jesus was sent to earth to be our Saviour from destruction and sin. He is always the best option and is delighted when we seek Him. So, no matter how many people, piles and projects that need your attention, you can rest knowing perfect peace can be found by keeping your mind focussed on God. *“Now may the Lord of peace himself grant you His peace at all times and in every way [that peace and spiritual well-being that comes to those who walk with Him, regardless of life's circumstances]. The Lord be with you all.” 2 Thessalonians 3:16 (AMP)*

Prayer: God in you I can find perfect peace. When everything around me is all a mess, I know that in you is a calmness for my soul. Let me rest in this peace. Amen.

PEACE

Bringing Peace

28th December

Read: Ephesians 2:13-18

“He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.” Ephesians 2:17 (NIV)

There were 336,000 Allied soldiers (British and French) trapped on the beaches at Dunkirk. The invading German army were closing in on these soldiers during World War II. Due to the shallow waters the British destroyers could not get close enough to save all these soldiers, so an army of ‘little ships’ set sail from Britain and collected these allied soldiers taking them to England or ferried them to the destroyers. Some of these were destroyed by the German forces but so many soldiers were saved due to the courage of these ‘little boats’ owners, captains, and crew. Peaceful fishermen and private boat owners came to the aid of those trapped by war. The movie ‘Dunkirk’ has been made about these brave people risking their lives for others.

We hear many of these courageous stories of those not involved in conflict coming to the aid of those trapped in war. Even in the most recent war conflict in the Ukraine, so many heartfelt stories emerge of those sacrificing themselves to try to help others. Peace does not come without a cost. The cost can be small or life-taking, but ultimately peace is what is wanted and strived for. With peace comes security, stability and a purpose. Compared to the time of war when there is uncertainty and insecurity.

Jesus came at Christmas to bring peace to a troubled world. He came to bring us a purpose, security in our future and stability. As we know Jesus bringing peace did not come without a huge cost to Himself. But even though He put Himself in danger at the cross, He did it, just like the ‘little boats’ of Dunkirk put themselves at risk to save others. Rest in the peace of Jesus knowing that all He did was out of love for you. Jesus came to bring peace, live in this peace and love.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for all that you did to bring peace to my life. This peace came at a huge cost to you, but through it you have shown how much you love me. Amen.



PEACE

God's Peace

29th December

Read: Philippians 4:4-9

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” John 16:33 (NIV)

A sly fox tried to trick a rooster into coming down from his perch. “Brother Bird,” the fox said, “come down for a friendly chat!” “No”, said the rooster. “I’m sure you’d eat me.” “Oh, I wouldn’t,” said the crafty fox. “Haven’t you heard? Everyone has agreed to live in peace.” “Is that so?” said the rooster, who was just as crafty. Stretching his neck, the rooster pretended to look at something far in the distance. “What are you looking at?” asked the curious fox. “Oh, just a pack of hungry fox hounds headed right this way.” On hearing this, the fox trembled in his tracks and ran off. “Come back!” crowed the rooster. “Why are you running away? I thought you said that everyone had agreed to live in peace.” “Well, perhaps those hungry hounds haven’t heard about it yet,” said the fox as he bounded away. (Aesop’s Fable)

What the world wants is an agreement with all to live in peace. What they often find though, is not a true peace, but rather a false type of peace offered by the world – the fox’s peace. God’s peace is a permanent peace which is given by the only One who can be trusted to keep His Word, give us true forgiveness, and heal all our sin. *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:27 NIV)*

God’s peace is permanent and secure. In our chaos, we can find God’s peace. His peace doesn’t change with our circumstances; rather it is secure despite the circumstances. Christmas is a time of peace, when God put things right in our world through the sending of His Son to Earth. Jesus is our only true peace, and through Him and His sacrifice is our only way to attain the peace that God offers. Live and love in this peace!

Prayer: Dear God, place in my heart and life your peace. I need this peace and know that only through you can I attain it. Help me to also share your peace with others. Amen.



PEACE

Mountain-top Peace

30th December

Read: Psalm 121

“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” Isaiah 52:7 (NIV)

I like to climb mountains. Well, I did more when I was younger and fitter. I remember climbing Mount Victoria in Banff National Park in Canada, sitting at the top of Mount Stanserhorn in Switzerland, climbing mountains in Glacier National Park, USA, being at the top of a castle in Bacharach on the Rhine and have ascended the Blue Mountains in NSW. There is something special about getting to the top of a mountain and just taking time to sit, look and contemplate. It is also an achievement. Many want to climb Mount Everest, as that is seen as the pinnacle of mountain climbing.

Mountains are mentioned so many times in the Bible – in the NIV version 154 times. Abraham was to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mount Moriah, God spoke from the top of Mt Sinai to Moses, Elijah met God in a small voice on Mt Horeb, Jesus often climbed a mountain to pray to God and the temple of Jerusalem was built on Mt Zion. There is something peaceful about being on a mountain. There seems to be no outside noise and no outside influences to distract. At Easter, our congregation has a sunrise service at the top of Mount Tinbeerwah (on the Sunshine Coast, Noosa) and we listen and watch the sun rise over the ocean, hearing the Good News of Jesus defeating death at His resurrection.

Experiences that are influential to people's lives are often termed 'mountain-top' experiences. It can be a Christian camp where God's Word reaches the heart, to knowing and understanding grace, to the birth of a newborn child who is brought into God's family through baptism. God brings peace and comfort to our lives, and it is in these special times that God is revealed further. In Jesus coming in Bethlehem, God reveals His intense and immense love for humankind. Seek to know God's peace through spending 'mountain-top' time with Him!

Prayer: Lord God, you bring me peace when I find time to spend with you. Help me to find time to be alone with you on the 'mountain' and experience your grace and peace. Amen.



PEACE

Peace Be With You

New Year's Eve (31st December)

Read: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17; 3:16

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” John 14:27 (NIV)

How has this last year gone for you? Are you glad it is over? Look forward to the next one? I like to review my year and pick out the highs and the lows of the year and then leave them with God. It is great to see the times that God has guided and directed my life. No matter what you do when an old year passes, we know that God's promises and His presence have been travelling with you. Tomorrow is a new year, new beginnings, new hopes and new dreams for the future. Whatever the last year was, bring God's peace with you into it. ***‘Peace is not the absence of trouble, but the presence of Christ’ ~ Sheila Walsh.***

God is our Rock, our strength to steady our souls when a crisis occurs. *“You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you! Trust in the Lord always, for the Lord God is the eternal Rock.” (Isaiah 26:3-4 NLT)* The Isaiah verse assures us that God provides peace for our lives when we leave our concerns and worries with Him. He knows that things may not look good now, but we can trust that God's plans for us are very good. We aren't just promised peace on the other side of eternity, we can experience and walk in strength and peace today.

It is God, by the power of His indwelling Spirit, who gives us the strength internally to face whatever comes our way externally. This doesn't mean our circumstances in the new year will feel peaceful with everything getting better and all our prayers answered, but it does mean that our mind can be steadied with God's peace instead of being overrun with thoughts of fear, anxiety and worse-case scenarios. ***‘There is no power in the universe that can stop God from fulfilling His totally good plans for you’ ~ John Piper.*** God is always doing more than you know – working towards a good you can rejoice in.

Prayer: Lord, help me to keep your promises in my focus and fill my heart with strength from your Word. Thank you for the peace that I find in you. Amen.



FAITHFULNESS

Our Marvellous Sky

New Year's Day (1st January)

Read: Psalm 108:1-5

“Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.”

Psalm 36:5 (NIV)

My oldest son is doing his PhD in astrophysics. He has always been interested in the sky and the stars and planets and is now pursuing his passion. He has been able to share some of the most amazing things about our sky and the heavens and has written many articles explaining different aspects of seeing into space via telescopes for the Canberra Times. This is an area which fascinates most people as it is all so unknown. Some amazing facts about the stars: some stars (eg. Betelgeuse) are so big that were they located where our Sun is, Earth would still be inside them; our Sun is known as a ‘yellow dwarf’ star; we estimate that about 1000 stars explode in the universe every second; and the furthest thing you can see with only your eyes (the Andromeda galaxy) is about 20,000,000,000,000,000,000 (20 quintillion) kilometres away.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1 NIV) This is also a fact written in the Bible to tell us of God’s first action in the world. All that has and will be, has been ordained and designed by God including our marvellous sky and the heavens. In the Psalms, David refers to the immensity of God’s love being like the vastness of the universe and the heavens, and that God’s faithfulness is just as vast. We can trust that God will do what He said he would. Of that we can be sure!

There is so much that we don’t know or understand, especially what lies before us in this new year. But what we can be sure of is that God’s vast love and faithfulness to the people and creation he made can be trusted and we can be sure of His promises. His faithfulness is as vast as the sky, the cosmos and all that He created. God has loved and always will love you. He loved you through all that last year had in store for you, and He will continue to love you through all the things ahead of you this year. Trust God’s faithfulness and promises!

Prayer: My loving God, you loved me through last year, continue to be with me and be present in all that lies before me in this new year. Amen.



FAITHFULNESS

God is Faithful

2nd January

Read: Lamentations 3:22-26

“For great is His love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord.” Psalm 117:2 (NIV)

God’s goodness and faithfulness prevails through all situations and in many different times and environments. We are beginning a new year. How many times have we begun a new year and said: ‘Things will be different this year. I will exercise more, be more involved in my children’s schooling, attend church every week, take some time out each week for my mental health, and so on’? Much of what I hope for goes by the wayside when circumstances and ‘life’ happens.

I am just so thankful that my ups and downs are not related to my salvation. At our baptisms, God placed His hand on our hearts and in our lives and promised to be with us forever, and now that we are His children, we will live with Him for eternity. This promise is sure and can never be broken: no matter the state of our lives physically, mentally, and spiritually. God is faithful and will remain with us until the end of time. I love the verse in Lamentations 3:23 (NIRV) – *“His great love is new every morning. Lord, how faithful you are!”* This gives me confidence that no matter whether beginning a new year, beginning a new job, beginning a new stage of life; God’s love and mercy will continue, and He will never leave us. That sure is a faithful God!!

Even knowing that God is with me and will never leave gives me confidence to try to be more faithful to Him. Maybe this will be the year that I read the Bible consistently each morning or evening. Maybe this will be the year that I give some of my time to the ministries of the church. Maybe this year I will get to know more of my neighbours and bring them to know God. Through God’s faithfulness to us, we are to be His disciples for the mission of God in our part of the world. God is bold with His love – let us be the same!

Prayer: My Lord, thank you for your promises and faithfulness to me through my life. Help me to be faithful to you also in sharing your love with those around me. Help me to be bold. Amen.



FAITHFULNESS

Boldness

3rd January

Read: Acts 4:23-31

“Boldly and without hindrance [Paul] preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.” Acts 28:31 (NIV)

It was 1993 and I had been travelling with the Lutheran Youth Encounter teams for 18 months and the New Vision team for 6 months. I had been taught how to share the Gospel through song, stories, drama and puppetry and how to talk to our hosts about how God had impacted my life. But, being faced by over 200 prisoners in a security prison in Taiwan, to be honest, was a little out of my comfort zone. Firstly, I didn't speak Mandarin Chinese well, and what do you say to prisoners expecting never to be out of prison to lead a normal life. That day, our team sung, spoke and performed a drama in mime. Our interpreter translated for us and to see the hope and smiles on these Taiwanese prisoner's faces was enough to know that the Holy Spirit was moving.

Being bold with speaking the Word of God in a foreign country is one thing, but how can I be bold where I live? To talk boldly about God with people whom I see every day and will probably judge me for my words and actions. The first disciples and apostles faced such difficulties. They had been given power by the Holy Spirit to preach boldly about the saving work of Jesus and for that they were thrown into prison. Upon release Peter and John spoke to the believers and it said that “... *they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly.*” (Acts 4:31b NIV)

In the world today where Christendom is no more, we must be bold with the Gospel and faithful to our God in sharing about His saving Word. Sometimes we may feel out of place, like I did in Taiwan, but allow the Holy Spirit to do its work among those who hear. Proclaim God's Word wherever you are and wherever you live. God is alive and active in our world!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are the only one to give me courage to stand up for you. Help me to tell of your saving love to all around me and be bold. Bring your Holy Spirit to do its work. Amen.



FAITHFULNESS

What is faith?

4th January

Read: Hebrews 11

***“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”
Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)***

Have you ever tried to explain what ‘faith’ is? I like reading in Hebrews 11 of all the examples of what faith is; people who had amazing faith throughout the Old Testament. It really helps to understand what it is to have faith. Reading through this chapter again, I am struck by the last two verses: *“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.” (Hebrews 11:39-40 NIV)* Basically, all these faithful people believed in God’s promises. They may have never received all the blessings in their lifetimes, but in eternal life they received everything and more – that’s what we will also receive one day!

To have faith is to believe that something will happen. We have faith that even though the rains keep coming, one day the sun will come out and all will be dry. Now we can’t see the sun, but we are certain it will come out again. Read Hebrews 11:1. Try and relate it to the weather analogy above. We live our lives by faith, faith that what happens now is only temporary, but knowledge that something better is coming. God is faithful in all His promises to us. *“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:18 NIV)*

God has been faithful to all His people in the past, so we can be sure of His faithfulness to us in the future. Faith is also not something that you can have in measures, you either have it or you don’t. But faith does grow with knowledge. Knowledge of all the things that God has done for us. Knowledge of how certain we can be of His promises. God is faithful to us; of that we can be sure! Grow your faith!

Prayer: Faithful God, grow in me a faith of you and your love that I may share it also with others. You have made promises to me and of them I can have faith and be certain. Amen.



FAITHFULNESS

The Real Story

5th January

Read: 3 John :1-12

***“All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth.”
Colossians 1:6b (NIV)***

The story of ‘Snow White’ (a Brothers Grimm fairy tale - 1812) was suggested to have been based around a real-life story. Countess Margarete von Waldeck (1533-1554) had a lover, Philip II of Spain, and she was supposedly poisoned at a young age at a time when politics was more important than real love. Margarete had a terrible relationship with her stepmother and grew up in the town of Wildungen, which had several copper mines. The workers in these mines were young children, who suffered stunted growth due to poor conditions and malnutrition. They were referred to as ‘poor dwarfs’.

Reading the above, you can see that perhaps there was a real story behind the famous fairy tale. Many people think of the Bible, God, and Jesus’ life as nothing more than a fairy tale. It is up to us to share the real story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection to bring others to faith. After the Holy Spirit came to the disciples at Pentecost, they became bold and shared the Gospel over the whole world. Read the above passage in Colossians 1:6b. Unless people hear the Word of God in all its truth, how can people be expected to believe and understand the importance of living with our faithful, loving God?

In 3 John, the apostle John encourages the faithful in sharing the story of Jesus and being examples of how to live in this faith. We also have heard the Gospel and we understand the grace God shows to us in forgiving our sins, showering us with His promises and love, and bringing us hope in the future of eternal life. Our God has been faithful in all His promises, and through the Bible shares the hope He brings to all those who believe. Make your life an example of God’s love and show others the hope and grace that there is in a loving Father.

Prayer: Dear Father, you have shared your story with me through the faithfulness of others. Please give me courage to do the same that they may learn your true story of grace and love. Amen.



FAITHFULNESS

All God's Gifts

Epiphany (6th January)

Read: 2 Timothy 1:6-10

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Galatians 5:22-23a (NIV)

Throughout this devotional we have discovered a few of the many gifts that God has given us through His gracious love. The greatest gift of all came through sending His one and only Son at Christmas to be a human, as we are. Jesus came to earth to understand all the emotions and difficulties faced with being a person in God's world. God in His goodness then sends His Son to suffer for us so that our sins would be eternally forgiven, and we can then come into the presence of a loving Father. I pray that you will continue to discover in your own life how God has blessed you with so many good things.

God's love for us is incredible and astronomical. As it is paraphrased in The Message: *“God's love is meteoric, His loyalty astronomic, His purpose titanic, His verdicts oceanic. Yet in His largeness nothing gets lost; not a person, not a mouse slips through the cracks.” (Psalm 36:5-6)* God loves you and me with all our faults and failings and gives us incredible gifts to bring us hope and joy in our lives. These gifts are given to us to also be given away. What good is a gift if you keep it yourself? Then it's not a gift! God's gifts were given to be shared and so that others will see in us something different and want this difference in their own lives.

Grow in God's love and faithfulness through being with other Christians, reading the Bible and giving praise and worship to our Heavenly Father for supplying us with everything we need from day to day. Read the Bible verses in 2 Timothy 1:6-10 and read it with your name in the passage rather than Timothy whom Paul was writing to. See the mission field God has set before us in this world. He has given us everything needed for us to go and tell – I thank God for each of you!

Prayer: Mighty Lord, you have set a task before me to not keep your gifts to myself. Help me to share these gifts with others telling them of your incredible love. Keep me growing in your grace. Amen.



Prayer

Loving God and my Saviour Jesus Christ.

Thank you for giving me the gifts of love, hope, joy, patience, peace, and faithfulness.

These gifts are from you, and we can see your goodness flowing through all of them. Thank you for sending your Son to Earth this Christmas to give us your grace.

Please help us to use your gifts to be witnesses of your love. Open our hearts to others and their needs to see how to share with them all that you have done.

Guide and bless us through the year to grow in our knowledge and love for you.

In your precious name,

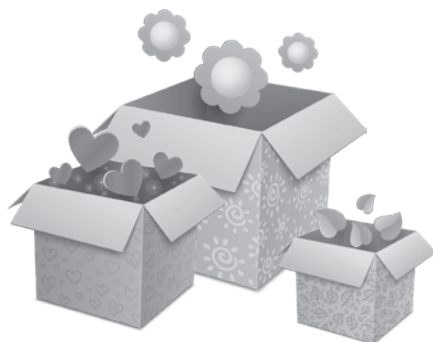
Amen.





“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave Him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

Romans 8:31b-32 (NIV)





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