



# In GOD'S Family

ADVENT  
DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET

Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas and continues to Epiphany on January 6th. During this time, we experience the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and the gift God gave Him in His family – Mary and Joseph.

We were placed into a family – parents, children, grandparents and extended family. The Bible is filled with stories of families and how they live and relate to each other. These families were not always perfect; with deceit, lies and sometimes death surrounding them. Repentance and forgiveness are themes that circulate throughout the families in the Bible. No matter the direction our life may lead later, we will always have a family. Where our earthly family may sometimes fail us, our Heavenly Father, Jesus His Son, and the Holy Spirit never will.

God is all about love and the love of family. Grow your family and learn of Biblical families through these devotionals. See God's love and forgiveness encompass all that happens. The Bible families were not model families and neither are ours, but know that God's love and forgiveness is perfect and will cover all.

Each one of these devotionals focus on different aspects of family life. May you use these devotionals to strengthen your family life 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 delve into what it means to live

**'In GOD's Family.'**

***May your family life be strengthened through the Advent Season as we celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas!***





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# Worldwide Family

1st Monday in Advent

*Read: Genesis 11:1-9*

***“As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.”  
Genesis 9:7 (NIV)***

Once, leading a group of young adults through the book of Genesis, our conversation took an interesting turn. In Genesis 5 we read the genealogy of the families: fathers, sons and daughters from Adam to Noah. We wrote down the names and started to work out the number of years between these fathers and came up with approximately 1656 years. We then got excited with the numbers and added the subsequent years in Genesis 10 & 11, which takes us from Noah to Abraham which was about 400 years. Then we looked from Abraham to Jesus and came up with about 2000 years. Then from Jesus to us is another 2000 years – so all up from Adam to us is about 6000 years (assuming none are missing from the genealogy).

The young adults got excited with the numbers (so did I), but then we looked deeper and looked beyond the numbers to the names, and beyond the names to see that these were real people from the past, our past, who formed our history. Each of these names was a father, mother, brother, sister each forming an important part of God’s amazing family. Looking at the names in this way, read back over some of the names (if you can pronounce them) in the second half of chapter 11 of Genesis.

We each have family histories from different parts of Australia and the world – the length of years lived have changed, (Noah lived 950 years, Methuselah lived 969 years), but the relationships have not. (We shouldn’t get caught up in the details of the numbers but notice that it is about the relationship.) God created each one of us to live as His family and are blessed to be a part of a human family. We live in a worldwide family created in God’s image and to live according to His Word and love. Many in this world have not heard of Jesus as God’s Son. This Advent season remember our brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers all over the world and pray that they may come to know Jesus as their brother and God as their loving Father.

*Prayer: Thank you for the family you have given me. I pray for my worldwide family that your Word may spread far and wide this Christmas. Amen.*



# Family Intensity

1st Tuesday in Advent

*Read: Genesis 7:13-16; 8:13-22*

***“So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives. All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds – everything that moves on the earth – came out of the ark, one kind after another.” Genesis 8:18-19 (NIV)***

In Sunday school, this is one of the wonderful stories in which we read how God saved Noah and his family and two of every kind of animal from the flood. Then, we assume that they were in the ark 40 days and nights. But it says it **rained** 40 days and nights. They were actually all together, crammed on this ark for 377 days – that is over a year together in one small space of an ark also filled with animals. I sure wouldn’t have wanted to be there!

Thinking back over the last couple years with the COVID pandemic, of being shut in the confined space of our house for weeks and for some much longer, family life can become quite strained and intense, living and working on top of each other. Now, give a sympathetic thought for Noah and his family. We hear nothing about the arguments, disagreements and Noah’s wife being sick and tired of picking up after them all, not being able to get out and stretch their legs for even an hour outside, and think of the smell! It gives me a lot of comfort to then read in the above text that after 377 days they all came out of the ark again and it is interesting that it mentions each group in turn. God’s wonderful grace bestowed on them all.

We know that families are not perfect. There are times when families disagree, argue and are intense in every sense of the word. But God’s grace and love covers us all with His love and forgiveness. I’m sure Noah and his family had intense times, just like we do. Jesus was sent to the earth as a human baby to also understand human family life. Jesus confronts this hurting world and brings hope, healing and comfort. This Advent pray for hurting families that God’s love may enter hurting hearts and lives.

*Prayer: Lord, forgive me when I think and do things that hurt my family. Help me to understand forgiveness and love as you have shown me. Amen.*



# Families are Blessed



1st Wednesday in Advent

*Read: Genesis 12:1-9*

***“[The Lord] took [Abram] outside and said, ‘Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’” Genesis 15:5 (NIV)***

In the Old Testament, it seemed that God spoke clearly to people a lot more than today. In Genesis 12, God spoke to Abram and Lot and told them to leave where they were living and move to a new land where his family would be blessed. When do you feel God last spoke to you plainly and clearly? It actually happens a lot more than you may think. Pastors are ‘called’ by God through congregations to do exactly what Abram was told to do. “Take your family and belongings and I will move you to a new land where you will be blessed to be a blessing!” We as a family have answered this call many times and, in every move, our family has been blessed.

Not only pastors are called to different places to live. All people are called to be blessed to be a blessing wherever they find themselves. Whether it is a move from the family home to live across town, across country, or around the world. If you have never thought of each move as a ‘calling’, think about the homes you have lived in, and see how you and your family have grown and have been blessed in every place you have gone.

Abram had times where he even laughed at God’s intentions – particularly at the thought of having a baby at 100 when Sarai his wife was 90. But it happened and came true. The promise God made to Abram came true in you and me – as we are a few of the multitude of descendants as numerous as the stars. God also asked the human parents of his Son to move – first to Bethlehem where He blessed the world with his Son’s birth, to Egypt for safety and then to grow up in Nazareth. God has plans and blessings for you no matter where He leads... count these blessings!

*Prayer: Thank you Lord, for blessing me to be a blessing to my family and to all the lives that I touch wherever it is you send me. Amen.*



# God leads Families

1st Thursday in Advent

*Read: Genesis 24:12-21; 66-67*

***“The Lord, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with you and make your journey a success, so that you can get a wife for my son from my own clan and from my Father’s family.” Genesis 24:40 (NIV)***

Growing up as a teenager I remember asking God who should I marry. Young people in their twenties put a lot of effort and time into dating and finding the ‘right’ person. It is a very stressful and sometimes heartbreaking time for many a young person and the families involved. Many Christian parents spend much time in prayer asking for God’s guidance and leading for their children to be led to find the person that God has intended for them. And if they are not to have a partner, then also for them to be content.

Abraham had plans for his son Isaac. But he also listened to God’s guiding when he sent a servant to find a wife for Isaac. It all happened as God had intended and Rebekah blessed Isaac’s life. Many people believe in destiny and that it is fate that brings people together. I would have to disagree. God places people in one another’s lives for them to choose and see and open their hearts to possibilities. God doesn’t predestine us to one particular person; rather God blesses the choices we make and grows love in the hearts of the two who feel called to be together. God grows love.

God intends two people to love and to grow in this love and for children to be a product of this love. This is His gift to each of His children. As we know, there is a lot of give and take that needs to happen as a couple to then grow as a family, but with God as a third member in this partnership of love ... blessings will grow. Rejoice and thank God for your family this Christmas and share stories of how God brought your family to be.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, your plans and intentions for my life are unknown to me, but you Lord know them and will bless the choices I make. Amen.*





# Complex Families

1st Friday in Advent

*Read: Genesis 31:43-55*

***“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” John 13:34 (NIV)***

My goodness! Talk about complex families and confusion, mistrust and scheming. The story begins with Jacob looking for a wife and seeing Rachel. But first he must get through her father Laban. Laban was also Jacob’s uncle, his mother Rebekah’s brother. Jacob was firstly tricked into marrying his cousin Leah and so Laban became his father-in-law. After Laban then got more free work from Jacob, he gave his other daughter Rachel to be married to Jacob. So, Jacob was married to two of the daughters of his uncle who then were his wives but were also sisters to each other and his cousins. Are you following? Jacob had six sons and a daughter to Leah, two sons to Rachel and then also two sons each to Leah’s and Rachel’s maidservants Zilpah and Bilhah. Talk about complex family relationships – let alone with all the deception that also occurred!

So, we get to the reading in Genesis 31 where peace is declared and promises made before God. Family life is complex and tricky. Relationships are not always easy and many times there are step-mothers, step-fathers, step-brothers and step-sisters thrown into family relationships. Jacob and Laban’s relationship was complex, probably with greed and envy thrown in the mix. During the time of unrest with his uncle/father-in-law Laban, Jacob could probably see no way out and there seemed to always be conflict.

But God has a way of bringing peace and He gave us the command to ‘Love one another’. Jacob and Laban’s story ends in peace and prayer for each other. God knows our complex family issues and knows that these can cause pain and hurt. This Advent season pray for your family each by name and bring all your cares and concerns to God and leave them in His loving hands. Rest in God’s peace.

*Prayer: Lord God, I lift each of my family up to you knowing that you love and care for each of them. Bring each of us to peace this Christmas. Amen.*







# Given a Name

2nd Sunday in Advent

Read: Genesis 41:46-57

***“Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, ‘It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.’ The second son he named Ephraim and said, ‘It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.’” Genesis 41:51-52 (NIV)***

We read in the devotion yesterday about how Joseph was so badly treated by his brothers, but God had other intentions. Today we see that Joseph was on his way to forgiving how he was badly treated and instead looked to the blessings God had given him. We see this in the above verses in Genesis 41. He named his children in thankfulness for what God had done for him through such a harsh time. His attitude to his brothers had changed and he was on the way to forgiving them which we finally see in Genesis 50:19-21.

In each of our family's we are given a name when we are born. This name gives us an identity and a source of belonging. I know I belong to the Gerhardy family, but I also know that by marriage I am a part of the Hansen family. In these families I find comfort and a sense of peace knowing that forgiveness and love are shown to each other. It is in families that we also have the opportunity to share God's love intimately and bring up children into the faith that we ourselves know.

We have also been given another name: 'Child of God'. God comes to us in our baptism and puts a seal on our heart that can never be removed. Written on that seal is all the love and forgiveness that God through Jesus has done for us. Jesus came as a baby in Bethlehem and was given all these names which describe His love for you: Saviour (He saves you), Immanuel (God is with you), Prince of Peace (He brings you peace). Thank God that He has named and claimed you as His own. How very important it is that we also bring others to this family of God. Pray for the chance to witness.

*Prayer: Lord, thank you that you have made me your special child. Give me the courage to share this love and promise with my family and others who do not yet know you. Amen.*



# Travelling Families

2nd Monday in Advent

*Read: Genesis 46:1-7, 26-27*

***“All those who went to Egypt with Jacob – those who were his direct descendants, not counting his son’s wives – numbered sixty-six persons.” Genesis 46:26 (NIV)***

In 2010, our family numbering five journeyed to the USA to travel from Los Angeles to New York in an RV over 88 days. We started preparing the previous year with bookings and passports and working out the route. It was all very exciting. Then came the time for packing – thinking of what is needed and what can be got when there. We had quite the assortment of suitcases, backpacks, and bags to take to the airport. Travelling requires a lot of thought.

Now think of Jacob. When he found out his son Joseph was alive, he was so excited until he was told there was to be a seven-year famine. Joseph wanted him and the family to move to Egypt so that they wouldn’t starve. So, that’s what Jacob did – he packed up all the people, possessions and livestock and journeyed from Beersheba to Egypt, which was about 400km across the desert of Shur, and they had to walk or ride in a cart. I don’t think there was a whole lot of fore planning, but God had said He would be with Jacob’s family as they travelled.

Before we travelled, and in all our subsequent travels, we asked for God’s blessings on our journey and for His angels to guide and protect our way. Many families travel over the holiday season – it can be a very busy time on the roads. Before you travel, ask God to guide and bless you and for His angels to protect you. God’s blessing guided Jacob safely through many dangers and across a desert. He and all his family arrived safely to be again blessed with the protection of Joseph and the Pharaoh. If you are travelling this Christmas season, or if you are not, pray for God’s blessing to rest on all families as they travel. God’s peace and protection rest on us all.

*Prayer: Dear Jesus, guide and protect all who travel and journey from their homes this Christmas. May your angels surround me always. Amen.*





# Adopted Families

2nd Tuesday in Advent

*Read: Exodus 2:1-10*

***“When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, ‘I drew him out of the water.’” Exodus 2:10 (NIV)***

Pets are very much a part of a family. There are many advertisements on TV about adopting a dog or cat to become a part of the family. Adoption is a legal action, and when a pet is adopted there are papers to sign and a written condition that this animal will be cared for and loved unconditionally.

In the story of Moses, Pharaoh had decreed to have every male baby born to the Israelites killed by throwing them in the Nile (see Exodus 1:22). Moses’ mother trusted that God would protect her baby boy when she made a basket of reeds and floated it on the Nile River. She prayed that whoever rescued her baby would love him and protect him as their own. God’s plan involved the daughter of the Pharaoh who adopted Moses and made him her child. Then, through Moses’ life, the people of Israel were freed from slavery.

God adopts us as His children and we are brought into His family when we are baptised. There we are loved and cared for unconditionally by our Heavenly Father. God has commissioned our earthly family with whom we are placed to help us, by loving and caring for each child and helping them to grow knowing the love God has for each of us. This is incredibly precious, for as God’s children we are also His heirs, so that everything God has is also ours.

*“The Spirit himself testifies that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:16-17a NIV).*

At Christmas we remember God’s love in sending His only child to be a part of the family of Mary and Joseph. Every one of us who is baptised have the blessing and inheritance of a heavenly and earthly family. Thank God for His love.

*Prayer: My Father, thank you for naming and claiming me at my baptism and that I am an heir of your kingdom. Help me to grow in love and understanding. Amen.*







# Concern for Family

2nd Thursday in Advent

*Read: Exodus 3:1-10*

***“God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.’ Exodus 3:14 (NIV)***

God gave Moses the authority to speak on His behalf, first to Pharaoh and then to the Israelites. In the story of the burning bush, it is easy to hear in God’s words the concern and love He has for His people. God has heard the cries and seen the misery that the Israelites are subject to under the rule of the Egyptians. It seems like He can’t stand it anymore – so, Moses, you need to go and rescue them with my help, and I will give you the authority. In verse 8, God says “... **so I have come down to rescue them from the hands of the Egyptians...**” God’s concern and love is so great that He came down to them.

God came down to us also at Christmas. His love and concern for the sin that was in the world was so great that He sent His own beloved Son into the world to save us. So many times we focus on God sending a baby to us as a gift of love, which it was, but it was also out of concern for our eternal welfare. Just as God gave Moses the authority to free His people, so also God gave His son Jesus the authority to be our Saviour, our Redeemer, and our gift of love from a loving, concerned Father.

God, our Heavenly Father, sees our pain and knows that we need a Saviour. Every Christmas we are reminded of His immense love and concern for the world and all His children. This Christmas, think of Jesus coming to us as not just as a lovely story, but see it as the greatest love story. Pray for our Christian brothers and sisters who need to be reminded of God’s love for them. God came down to save us and all people!

*Prayer: Gracious God, you sent your Son to be my Saviour. Your love and concern for me is overwhelming. Help me to also be an ambassador for you. Amen.*



# Family Pain

2nd Friday in Advent

*Read: Exodus 7:1-13*

***“At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not one house without someone dead.” Exodus 12:29-30 (NIV)***

Blood! Frogs! Gnats! Hail! Boils! What next? This story could be one out of the Harry Potter series – a stick turns into a snake, all the livestock die, darkness covers Egypt during the day... God must have been thinking hard to work out these plagues. One year in Loxton it felt like the plagues were back: the Murray River flooded and was red with the tannin, the floods brought mice which brought the snakes, which also brought the frogs and the mosquitos. Goodness, a modern-day Egypt set of plagues.

In the plagues, God was showing His power to Pharaoh, but at the same time, His love for His people the Israelites. Pharaoh relented that he had sinned and was sorry during each plague, but as soon as all the flies and hail and blood were gone, Pharaoh changed his tune:

***“But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let the Israelites go.” (Exodus 10:20 NIV)*** I often wonder why it says that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart; it almost seems unfair, but God knew that it wasn’t until the last plague when the oldest child in each family died that Pharaoh’s heart would soften to the Israelite’s cause. Pain had to afflict him and his family personally.

Christmas time is a beautiful time of the year – God sent His Son to earth to be the Saviour of the world. Angels appear, gifts are given by Kings from far away and we are brought into the stable where a baby is loved and adored by the world. God’s love in this baby also included pain. He had to send His Son as a baby at Christmas to then die the most horrible death at Easter for our hearts to be softened and see the love of our God offering eternal life to all. Thank God for His love this Christmas and open your hearts to receive Him.

*Prayer: My God, you began the event at Christmas that would ultimately bring you much sorrow and pain at Easter, and it was all for me. Thank you. Amen.*





# Family Meal

**2nd Saturday in Advent**

*Read: Exodus 12:17, 24-28*

***“This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord – a lasting ordinance.” Exodus 12:14 (NIV)***

Family time is precious and our family loves to get together over food. To celebrate an achievement or birthday we have the celebrated person choose what to do for the meal or where to go out for dinner. Growing up, family time and devotions were spent after a meal that had been prepared with much love and was served for the family's enjoyment and for sustenance. Even now with my own family, mealtime is a precious time to talk, to share highs and lows, and gain strength physically, emotionally and spiritually for all that lies ahead of us.

God ordained the 'Passover' for His chosen people, the Israelites, as a commemorative meal for them to remember all that God had done for them in bringing them out of Egypt and freeing them from slavery. We can read all about the specifics for the preparations in Exodus 12 – every part of the meal had significance. As this meal was being prepared by the Israelites they had to take some of the blood from the lamb and put it on the doorpost of their house for the angel of death to pass over their house and save them. It is still an important remembrance meal for the Jewish community remembering God's love and faithfulness.

God has prepared another meal of love and remembrance for us – Holy Communion. In this, we share together as a family of God the meal to give us strength for all that lies ahead. Many of us celebrate Christmas with a big meal – usually too big – but all made with love for those sharing it. Mealtime is a precious time for family, for our church family and wider community. God's love comes down to us at Christmas, maybe think of sharing it with others over a meal at Christmas to help them also know God's love.

*Prayer: Lord, mealtime is precious and thank you for coming to me in your holy meal. Grow thankfulness in my heart for my community and family. Amen.*







# Guidance for Families

## 3rd Monday in Advent

*Read: Exodus 20:1-17*

***“Then the Lord said: ‘I am making a covenant with you... Obey what I command you today.’” Exodus 34:10a, 11a (NIV)***

Every family has rules. Time for meals. Time for bed. Time to do homework. Way to act at mealtimes and when in the presence of other people. We grow up knowing and abiding by these rules if we want a happy family life. I remember when first training to be a teacher, we were told: set your boundaries and expectations in the first week of school and stick to them, then the children will know what is expected and be happy and secure knowing the boundaries.

God gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mt Sinai to help create a happier community and family life amongst the Israelites. God told the Israelites the rules through Moses. God decided to set these rules in stone, so Moses went to get them from Mt Sinai. The first Commandment was to love and obey only the true God ... they blew that one almost immediately (The Golden Calf – Exodus 32). Following rules is hard. They were good at these rules at times and then at other times – not so good!

We also have these same rules of living set down by God and I think we also struggle to keep even the first one. Then keeping worship time sacred, honouring our parents, not talking badly about others... sometimes it is all too hard, but we try our best. If we had to rely on keeping these rules to get us to heaven – oh dear, heaven would be very empty. That’s why God sent His Son Jesus at Christmas. We just are too human - sinning comes naturally, as does disobedience. Jesus came as a sinless human to change the rules. Love God with all your heart, love others, believe that Jesus came to save us and there’s nothing we can do to save ourselves. What an amazing Christmas gift from God – truly a gift of Grace!

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son Jesus to earth to save me and to give me the promise of eternal life with you. Amen.*



# Love for Family

## 3rd Tuesday in Advent

*Read: Ruth 1:1-18*

***Ruth replied to Naomi, “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God” Ruth 1:16b (NIV)***

Anne of Green Gables, written by Lucy Maud Montgomery, is a story of a young orphan girl who finds herself fostered and later adopted by an old spinster Marilla and her brother Matthew. The book recalls all the activities and events that Anne gets up to, criticized and scorned by some, but finds herself loved by the one who is the hardest and most critical of her actions – Marilla. What she gets up to is tolerated and then accepted and then loved, and as a family nothing could then separate them from each other.

The story of Ruth and Naomi is a very touching one. Poor Naomi loses her husband and sons over several years and she is left a widow with two daughters-in-law. Being women at that time was perilous, and they were destitute as they had no men to provide for them. Naomi could see the fate for them all so encouraged her daughters-in-law to return to their families where they would hopefully remarry and have a life again. Orpah agrees to leave, but Ruth, whose heart is given to her mother-in-law, cannot leave her to an unknown fate. They were family and as family they loved and cared for each other.

In both stories, Anne and Ruth are not family by blood, but are instead welcomed and then loved into their families. In our baptism God welcomes us and loves us into His family and we then become His heirs and inherit all He has promised – eternal life! God had His only Son come into the world at Christmas, but He was not the only one to inherit what God had promised. We are all His heirs. God’s love for us is so great that He forgives us and loves us unconditionally, even though we don’t always do what is right. Christmas truly is a time of sharing the love of family.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you that you came to love me at Christmas. Help me to appreciate my family and your love. Amen.*





# God's Family Plan

## 3rd Wednesday in Advent

*Read: Ruth 4:13-22*

***“The women living there said, ‘Naomi has a son.’ And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.” Ruth 4:17 (NIV)***

Such joy! Naomi must have been bursting at the seams. Naomi, who had lost her entire family and was so downcast in chapter 1 that she wanted to be known as ‘Mara’ which means ‘bitter’, now through Ruth has an heir again. And this heir becomes the descendant of King David who then is a descendant of Jesus Christ. Such an amazing family history. Through all this God had a plan and we see the plan unfold from the very beginning of Genesis. He is preparing the descendants and the family history for His one and only Son to come into the world.

I enjoy watching movies and reading historical fiction novels and stories. For the aristocracy and the royals, we can look back through history and see the family lines, many of which the wives and husbands were chosen for them from birth to keep the royalty line intact. Makes me glad I am not royalty and could choose whom I married! God has a plan, but not like the royalty of old which was set whether love was there or not!

We can see God's family plan through the unfolding of the Bible stories in the Old Testament leading up to our Saviour's family – Mary and Joseph, who were descendants of King David and so also a descendant of Ruth's son Obed. We can try to trace our family back in history, but usually not this far. This doesn't mean we are not descendants though, for through Jesus we are all His brothers and sisters. God's family plan includes each of us. We are related to God through our baptism. Continue God's family through your family and keep spreading His Fatherly love.

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, you came as a brother to this earth. I know that God has a plan for my life and my family, help me to continue sharing this love. Amen.*



# Waiting for a Family

3rd Thursday in Advent

*Read: 1 Samuel 1:1-20*

***“I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord.” 1 Samuel 1:27-28a (NIV)***

Growing up, I remember thinking that I was going to marry a handsome man and have lots of children. I bet many of us said similar things when we were children, not realizing how hard to do these things actually were. Firstly, there is the issue of finding the person God wants me to spend my life with. Finding a Christian person who shares the same faith and morals can be difficult. Ok. At the age of almost 30 I did find my Hansen man. Now, to try the next step... have children. Again, not always easy and many have experienced similar difficulties to what we did. But after three miscarriages, we had three beautiful children.

I can sort of understand and relate to Hannah in the story in 1 Samuel. Why won't God give me a child? This can really be a source of pain and hurt for many couples but be consoled, God does hear you and does love you intensely. Hannah was hurt by seeing the other wife of Elkanah, Peninnah, conceiving and having children, but to then have Peninnah taunt her and provoke her to tears – that is just awful. Hannah cried to the Lord out of her pain and the Lord opened her womb and she conceived and had baby Samuel. Reading the story can bring comfort to childless couples, for it seems that for many years Hannah was barren.

It is so hard to wait and to keep praying and hoping for children. God has a plan for each of our lives and it may include children or not but know that God has not forgotten and does hear our prayers and see our tears. God also had a Son and knows what it is to be a Father – such joy in heaven was there at Jesus' birth. Angels sang, shepherds rejoiced and people from all over the world came to celebrate His birth. In Advent we wait expectantly for Jesus' coming... that's what Christmas is all about!

*Prayer: Dear Lord, at times it is just so hard to wait. I am always waiting. You gave me Advent as a time to wait for Jesus to come. Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.*





# A Listening Family

3rd Friday in Advent

*Read: 1 Samuel 3:1-21*

***“Then Samuel said, ‘Speak, for your servant is listening.’” 1 Samuel 3:10b (NIV)***

The curious reporter asked the leader of a religious community, *“What do you and your sisters in the community say to God when you gather together for prayer?”*

The sister replied, *“We say nothing. We just listen”*

*“Oh!”* The reporter sighed. *“What does God say to you then?”*

And the sister, with a twinkle in her eyes, replied, *“Nothing. God just listens.” (Author Unknown)*

Listening is not an easy task to master. It means putting down any electronic device, turning off the TV and looking directly at the person speaking. This is called ‘active’ listening. I have been caught out many times by my husband or children saying to me, ‘Will you just stop working or cooking and listen to me?’ It can be embarrassing and you can reply, ‘I am!’ But are we really? Each of us enjoy and expect to be listened to when we talk – so why don’t we apply the same courtesy to others? I try to actively listen and sometimes fail, but that means I just have to try harder. A listening family is important as they care and share together.

At mealtime we have a time of sharing ‘highs and lows’ where each person shares something good that has happened that day and something bad. When the children were growing up, and especially at that teenager stage – this became invaluable as we could understand and listen to their issues and try to talk them through any problem and also share the joys. Samuel learned to be a good listener when he was taught by the priest Eli to just listen when God called. Our lives are so busy finding time to listen to each other, but to listen to God... that sure needs work. Find a time this Advent to practise your listening skills both to your family and to God. Much love comes through sharing. God wants to share His love too!

*Prayer: Thank you Lord God that you listen to me when I call to you. Help me to find time to listen actively to others and to learn to listen to you. Amen.*



# Celebrating Family

3rd Saturday in Advent

*Read: 1 Samuel 16:1-13*

***“The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7b (NIV)***

‘The Blind Side’ is a true story made into a movie about a well to do white family – the Tuohy’s who open their hearts to a homeless, African American teenager, Michael Oher, who later becomes a star player in the NFL American Football team in 2009. Leigh Anne Tuohy already has two children, but has compassion for gentle, giant Michael who never seems to have been given a chance. Michael has had little formal education and few skills to help him learn. Leigh Anne soon takes charge however, ensuring that Michael has every opportunity to succeed and is given a loving home. His story comes with problems and issues along the way, but the whole family gets together to help him and celebrate his achievements. This love encourages and lifts him up to achieve in the NFL.

Knowing that this is a true story and filled with true emotions makes it a powerful story of Christian love. In our family, whenever special achievements were attained, the person chose a place to go to celebrate – whether Maccas, a restaurant or a picnic, we needed to celebrate each success. We were able to grow in appreciation of each other and grow as a family who love and celebrate each other’s achievements.

In the story in 1 Samuel, we don’t hear about whether Jesse’s other sons were jealous of David when he was chosen and anointed to be the next King. We do know that God was proud and celebrated with David for He saw what was in his heart. David became the greatest and most loved king in history, for even though he made mistakes, he always expressed his sorrow and asked for forgiveness. His love for God became a book of praise in the book of Psalms. Let us celebrate God’s goodness to us as a family this Christmas – knowing that in God’s great love He sent His only Son to earth. Grow in this love!

*Prayer: Dear Jesus, help me to celebrate your love for me this Christmas. Thank you for all the gifts and talents you have given me to praise you. Amen.*





# Proud or Jealous?

4th Sunday in Advent

Read: 1 Samuel 18:1-9

***“Whatever Saul sent him to do, David did it so successfully that Saul gave him a high rank in the army.” 1 Samuel 18:5a (NIV)***

When you were at school, do you remember that there seemed to be one person in your class who always achieved excellent results, got the lead in the musical and were a leader in the school? There was such a person in my class, and it was so hard not to be jealous of her but rather to be proud that they represented the school in an amazing manner. In families, there can also be the same issues: one family member can seem to exceed in everything whereas the others can be seen as just trying hard. To develop an individual appreciation for each in the family, is to get rid of the ‘ugly green monster’ of jealousy and replace it with an appreciation and pride for everyone.

In 1 Samuel 17, we read about the amazing story of God’s might when the little shepherd boy David killed the mighty Philistine soldier Goliath with just a sling and stones. Saul’s son Jonathan was so proud of David that he loved him like a brother. To begin with, Saul was also proud of David and took him into his home. After a while though, Saul could see the people loving David more than him and succeeding in every military campaign; and so, Saul became brutally jealous of David. Saul tried every possible way to kill David, but the Lord was with David.

Jealousy eats away at the soul, not allowing the person to see anything good in the one they are jealous of. It breaks relationships. Pride in another’s achievements takes the person out of their own self-centredness. It forms relationships and appreciation for each other’s differences. Jesus was the perfect example of loving and serving each other and God was proud of His Son. Live in the love of Jesus this Christmas and build family bonds through appreciation and recognition of each other’s gifts and talents. Love each other as Christ loves us!

*Prayer: Help me Lord Jesus to show pride for one another’s achievements and so be more like you. Thank you that you love me unconditionally. Amen.*



# The Forgiving Family

4th Monday in Advent

Read: Psalm 86

***“You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you.”***

***Psalm 86:5 (NIV)***

In the devotion on Saturday, we read how God chose King David – he was anointed, chosen and handpicked. Despite his tendency to sin, every time he did David confessed and asked for forgiveness from God. And God forgave him. Many of the Psalms King David wrote when he was in despair, feeling neglected and in full need of God’s forgiveness. Psalm 86 above is a wonderful example of King David humbling himself before his Maker asking for forgiveness. Because David was faithful to God, God never left him and blessed him and his rule throughout his life. That doesn’t say that God accepted his sins, but that King David kept trying to do what God wanted.

My family is not perfect. If we are honest with ourselves, we can all admit the same sentence. What we can say though, is even though we are not perfect and that we sin, we are loved and forgiven by God and so we are always given another chance. It really makes me think then, if God can do that to the family with all our faults, surely, I can forgive family members when they might do something to hurt me. If we wrong someone in our family, we need to confess that we may have hurt them and ask for forgiveness. When forgiveness is granted, the rift is mended and we can try again knowing that we are forgiven and loved.

*“But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness ...Turn to me and have mercy on me... for you, O Lord, have helped me and comforted me.”* Psalm 86:15, 16a, 17b (NIV)

Be a forgiving family this Christmas; confess and forgive where hurt has happened. Heal rifts and let God’s love and grace flow from Jesus’ manger to your heart!

*Prayer: Dear God, forgive me when I hurt you and others with my thoughts, words and actions. Give me your grace to start again in the knowledge of your love for me. Amen.*





# Caring for Families

## 4th Tuesday in Advent

*Read: 1 Kings 17:7-16; 2 Kings 4:1-7*

***“I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it - and die.” 1 Kings 17:12b (NIV)***

Christmas can be a very hard and empty time for many families. Unfortunately, just as there are many families with more than enough for themselves and others; there are just as many who do not have enough to feed their family or provide them with the necessities of life. In the two stories from 1st and 2nd Kings, there were two widows who were at the point of despair – one only having enough to eat for that one day and the other about to have her sons taken as slaves for payment. These two widows were at their wits end, but God sent them Elijah and Elisha to care for them and provide for their needs in the present and into the future.

Jesus came to bring life and love to all people. He came to those who were poor, hurting, disabled and despairing and brought them hope and life. When our children were younger, we used to do Samaritan Boxes for children in need around the world. Each of our children would choose a boy or girl and the age, and then we would go to the store, and they would fill a box full of gifts for that child. We also like to give an ALWS Gifts of Grace as a family and as gifts for other family members.

*“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Ephesians 4:32 (NIV)*

In doing things like this we are showing our children that we need to care for others who are in need or less fortunate. Taking groceries to church or school for others to have something special over Christmas can be a huge blessing. Giving and caring for others is a blessing that Jesus encourages us to do. Be a blessing to others less fortunate this Christmas and teach our children to love unconditionally. Shine the love of Jesus!

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to bless and care for others less fortunate this Christmas. Shine your light into their hearts through our gifts of love. Amen.*



# Belonging in Family

4th Wednesday in Advent

Page through: 1 Chronicles 1-9

***“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God...” 1 Peter 2:9a (NIV)***

It seems that the Gerhardy family is related to most in the Lutheran Church. We belong to the Bradtke, Graetz, Miegel, Muster, Kubank/Kubenk, Kalisch, Klose, Schultz and Rothe families. I am sure there are more. When delving into these family history books, I don't start at the front but rather turn to the index and look up where I might be found in these families and from there, I research into which child from which family in which generation my ancestors originated. There is comfort in knowing that I belong to a wider family than just the Gerhardy's. Then, to delve into the Hansen family – well, that just opens up a whole another family in Denmark and the United States.

In the above readings I asked not that you read, but rather page through 1 Chronicles 1-9. This is not necessarily the riveting storyline a movie is made into; rather it is the listing of hundreds of names. It covers from Adam – his sons and their sons, to Noah and his sons and descendants, to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, Saul and all in between. It was important then to know who you were related to and who your father was. To know the family line is to have identity.

All the above can be summed up in one word: belonging! To be secure in ourselves we need to know where we belong. Many orphans or those adopted spend much money and time just to find out where they belong. Peter tells us in the above verse in 1 Peter that we all belong to God. We have been chosen by God, handpicked to be His children and loved unconditionally. Our family is much bigger than the family history books – we are a family of God. This Christmas enjoy spending time with 'family' wherever you are – God's family is worldwide!

*Prayer: Lord God, my heavenly Father, thank you that you have brought me into your family and that is where I belong and have my identity. Help me to share your love with my other 'family'. Amen.*





# Preparing God's Family

4th Thursday in Advent

Read: Luke 1:5-25; 57-66

***“Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John... And he will go on before the Lord...to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Luke 1:13b, 17a,c (NIV)***

God is a God of miracles. It is clear to see God's hand at work through the Bible from the Old Testament to where we are today with Elizabeth and Zechariah. The Bible clearly states that they were the descendants of Aaron – Moses' brother ... so they have identity. It also states that they were well advanced in years and had never had children. Elizabeth was barren, but just when she thought she was too old (60-70 years), God opens her womb to bear the person who will prepare the world for His Son's birth. Wow, God is incredible! But because Zechariah didn't believe when the angel told him, he couldn't speak until he announced the name of his son to the world: "His name is John!" (Luke 1:63b NIV)

Once John was born, Zechariah prophesied with joy who his son was to be:

*“And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.” (Luke 1:76-79 NIV)*

God had planned one miraculous birth to get ready for the most miraculous birth – that of the one and only Son of God to be born to a young virgin and her husband. This young family was to care for, love and guide the Son of God. John also was being prepared as Jesus' cousin to prepare people for Jesus' ministry on earth. God has a way of preparing people for His work. Spend some time in prayer to listen and explore what God is preparing for you.

*Prayer: My God of grace and love. Open my heart to your leading and guiding and to explore where you might be preparing my life and service. Amen.*



# Support of Family

## Christmas Eve

*Read: Luke 1:39-56*

***“Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.” Luke 1:56 (NIV)***

It was a challenging time - three children: a four-year-old, two-year-old and a newborn; trying to get them to sit in church quietly. Having no direct family nearby, my church family in Wodonga saw my need and came to my aid. I walked into church and didn't see my newborn until the end of the service as she was handed around to all her surrogate grandmas. My two-year-old was provided for with different books, snacks, and a grandma's love, and I could sit and listen and help my 4-year-old colour and do puzzles. What an amazing blessing to have the help and support of a church family.

I imagine Mary felt a similar breath of thanksgiving as she spent three months with her older cousin Elizabeth. Both were pregnant for the first time and both through God's gracious love. I imagine also that they could share concerns, misgivings, fears, and excitement as they prepared for the birth of the children that had been foretold back in the Old Testament. Having the support of family was the best thing for both of them and I know that it was all God's plan to settle the hearts and minds of these women who were placed unexpectedly in the position of motherhood. They could pray and talk and dream as to who their children would become as foretold by the angels. An exciting time!

Christmas Eve is a special time for the church and families. It is a time of excitement as children prepare for unexpected presents and those they wished for. We sing the well-known carols and tell the well-known story of our Heavenly Father's love for the world. It is a family time where love and care are shown. Within all the festivities, remember that God loves families and always provides for His children in different ways. Are you able to be a support for someone or another family this Christmas? Find ways to show God's love and care!

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to show the same love to others that you show to all your beloved children. Bless my hearts and hands to work for you. Amen.*





# Born into a Family

## Christmas Day

*Read: Luke 2:1-20*

***“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)***

Jesus was born into a family. That was intentional, for a family gives love, nurture and guidance to a child as they grow. When I think of family, I think not only of my immediate family – my husband and three children; but also the family I grew up in – my mum, dad and siblings. I then also think of my church family where I was baptised and made a special child of God. I am sure that you can relate to these examples but may have others – I remember also spending a lot of time with my grandma Emma when I was younger. She also taught me to appreciate the little things, to enjoy gardening and crocheting. She was born in 1892 when the church was the centre, with families growing from this foundation.

God placed Jesus in His family with Mary and Joseph. They were new parents and in awe of this little newborn, but as we read further into the nativity story, we read of others coming to see and worship Jesus – the shepherds, angels and wise men. They were all a part of God’s story in the birth of His Son Jesus. In many ways they became part of His wider family.

We are also a part of Jesus’ family. In our baptism we were named and claimed by God to be His special child and are welcomed into the greater family of God. You were born into your family as a gift to your parents. So also, we were born through our baptism into the church family as a gift to the family of God. Just as we celebrate every year Jesus’ birth anniversary, let us also celebrate our family in God’s family. What a gift of love!

*Prayer: Thank you Jesus that you have come into the world to be my family. You also have made me your special child. Help me to share this love. Amen.*



# Growing in Family

26th December

Read: Luke 2:41-52

***“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men.” Luke 2:52 (NIV)***

When our eldest son was three, we were out shopping in one of the larger stores looking for Christmas presents. He was particularly interested in some toys and didn't hear when we called him to come and follow. He started to, but then something else caught his attention. Before we knew it – he was lost (or we thought he was). We searched everywhere and started to panic until we heard his name over the loudspeaker. Rushing up to him we asked, “Why didn't you follow us when we called?” He replied, “When I couldn't find you, I found someone from the shop to then help me find my lost parents!”

This was a very similar response from the twelve-year-old Jesus, who supposedly was lost from His parents. Again, Mary and Joseph went everywhere searching for their 'lost' son. What made them go to the temple in Jerusalem to look? To find a twelve-year-old there and not playing with friends would have surprised them to say the least. Then to have their son say: ***“Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?” (Luke 2:49 NIV)***

Mary and Joseph knew He was special... His birth proved that. Born to be Saviour of the world, they weren't ready for Him to be teaching and learning from the rabbis and teachers of the Jewish faith at the age of twelve. From the age of twelve, we don't read anything about Jesus until he was about thirty when He began his ministry. I am sure they had an amazing family life – laughter, talking, and sharing stories. It does say that He was obedient to his parents and grew in wisdom. Assuredly, there were many other times that Joseph and Mary were amazed at their son (God's Son) for it says that, ***“His mother treasured all these things in her heart.” (Luke 2:51b NIV)*** Family life has its challenges. But growing as a family is a blessing to be treasured!

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, you know what it is to be in a family. Help me to grow my family in love for you and to treasure the times we spend together growing as a family. Amen.*





# Given a Family

27th December

Read: Esther 2:5-18

***“And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?”  
Esther 4:14b (NIV)***

If we are honest with ourselves, there is probably nothing that we wouldn't do to keep our family safe. Having children who are young adults and on their own, is when faith grows. Prayer comes every day for our children to keep them safe, help them in their work and friendships, and protect them when they travel. Family connection and love is everything. God gave us our children to pray for and guide. The book of Esther is a fascinating story. God is not mentioned once, but His working is so evident throughout the story. When the Jews were close to being exterminated, God steps in to save His family through Esther.

Esther grew up as an orphan Jewish girl brought up by her uncle Mordecai. He treated and loved Esther as if she were his own daughter and she was very beautiful. Queen Vashti embarrassed King Xerxes, so he got rid of her and wanted a new Queen. Esther was taken along with many other beautiful girls to be trained up for one to be chosen as the new Queen. Esther was chosen as Queen and she was loved and adored by King Xerxes, but she hid that she was a Jew. Mordecai uncovered a plot that Haman, a top Persian official, wanted to get rid of all the Jews not knowing that the Queen was one of them. Through Esther's courage, the plot was foiled and those who were the culprits were discovered and dealt with.

What a story of faithfulness to family and courage in the face of much adversity. God has placed each of us in the family that we are in, to provide strength and courage when issues seek to drag us under. God placed Esther just where she was needed. God also gives you all you need to cope with all the 'times such as this!' Thank God for His goodness to your family!

*Prayer: My dear God, thank you for giving me my family. You have given each of them to me to care for in all situations. Guide me in your truth. Amen.*



# Family Grief

28th December

Read: Job 1:1-22

***“In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.” Job 1:22 (NIV)***

Poor Cinderella! She lost her mother, her father remarried a woman who hated her and made her a servant, she lost her beautiful house and bedroom, and was made to sleep in a leaking attic. As a child, my heart thought, “how unfair that all of this should happen to someone so lovely while those who caused it lived in luxury”. But Cinderella accepted her lot and didn’t blame anyone; she just went about her work. In the end, her life was blessed!

Job, in the Bible, apparently had it all and God was proud of him and his faithfulness. God knew that above everything else, Job loved God. So, calamity was allowed to fall on him and his life: all his livestock were killed or stolen, his servants were killed, all his children were killed in a storm, and his body was covered in painful sores. His friends and wife told him to blame God for this, but he knew that it wasn’t God who caused such calamities on his life – sin and Satan were the cause for this. We read that because of Job’s faithfulness: ***“The Lord blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the first.” (Job 42:12a NIV)***

How often when terrible things happen to us in our lives that we immediately blame God for not caring enough and allowing bad things to happen? God cannot and is not the cause of hardship and suffering. It is our sin and Satan having a go at destroying our faith and love for our Heavenly Father. Just like Job, don’t blame God for the bad in our lives, rather know that God is ultimately in control, and He will work good out of the bad that we cause through our sin. Bad things do happen, but through God all things can be blessed!

*Prayer: Dear Creator God, help me to understand that you can work everything out for good, even when bad things do happen. Help me to trust you always. Amen.*





# Family Faithfulness

29th December

*Read: Psalm 5*

***“But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you.” Psalm 5:11 (NIV)***

In my 20's I had quite the travel bug – travelling to the UK and Wales for nannying and in my free time visiting cathedrals, castles and anything historical. Then for three months backpacking around Europe: France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and Italy before ending up in the USA with Lutheran Youth Encounter. This involved travelling for two more years around the States and Taiwan, before working back in the USA. During these five years of being away from family, I was homesick and missed them dearly, but my mother and father were a constant with their letters and daily prayer for me.

King David had an interesting family life: eight wives and about 18+ children from these various wives. His great-grandparents were Ruth and Boaz; his grandfather, Obed; and his father was Jessie. David was not perfect, but he is described in scripture as a man after God's own heart. He was hungry for God, he sought after God, he had a passion for spiritual things, and he tried to please God despite his failures. He loved being in God's presence so much he wanted to be as close to it as possible. In the Psalms he speaks of those knowing God as 'blessed' and prays for the protection of those who love God. David was faithful in his love of his people (and his family) and lifted them to God in prayer.

A praying family bringing their concerns, joys and sorrows to a loving Heavenly Father is faithful. The love shared with each other and God brings a family closer. I pray every day for my family, lifting them up to God by name and I know my mother still does this for every one of her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Faithfully lift your family to God in prayer today!

***“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” (James 5:16 NIV)***

*Prayer: Lord, I pray for my faithfulness to you. Help me to rely on you for strength each day and to lay all my concerns and joys at your feet daily. Protect and guide my family. Amen.*



# Teach your children

30th December

*Read: Ecclesiastes 11:7-10*

***“Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; ...Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” Deuteronomy 11:18a, 19 (NIV)***

What do you remember about your childhood? More than likely, it is times that you spent together with either your mum or dad and doing things together. I remember cooking and baking with my mum, dad showing me how to prune roses, and gardening with both of them. I still love to cook and garden, for my parents have taught me what they know and their love of doing these things. My parents were also good at entertaining and showed amazing hospitality to whoever entered our house. I love to entertain!

Parents and other adults are the ones who instil how to do things and extend their children in their skills and knowledge. How appropriate it is that God wanted parents to also teach their children the faith. To talk to them about God’s love and what Jesus did and showed us through His life, death and resurrection. God said in Deuteronomy to teach your children when sitting, walking, lying down and getting up... so basically at all times and in all different ways. Children don’t just catch the faith from an hour of Sunday school or 15 minutes a day at school, they are taught the faith through their family in everything the family does. That is how learning happens!

So, parents, grandparents and other adults, be models to children, teaching them about God and His love for them and in all ways be imitators for the children to follow. God also commanded and asked that we do all this not for God’s good, but for our good:

***“...what does your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?” (Deuteronomy 10:12-13 NIV)***

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, open my heart and hands to help my children grow in faith and love for you. Enter the hearts of all who hear your Word. Amen.*





# Husband and Wife

**New Year's Eve (31st December)**

*Read: Song of Songs 1:1-11*

***“We rejoice and delight in you; we will praise your love more than wine.” Song of Songs 1:4b (NIV)***

The Bible begins in Genesis with the beginning of the world and God creating man and woman – it was very good! Family life begins with the love of a man and a woman. I remember when young, Song of Songs as a book was never really talked about. I know that whenever the subject of ‘love’ came up our whole class just turned red and giggled. Love is a good thing – God created it and so how can it be bad. Song of Songs is a book of love about a man (Lover) and woman (Beloved) and the conversations personally shared. King Solomon wrote this book and sometimes it is called ‘Song of Songs’ and sometimes ‘Song of Solomon’ – the title is interchangeable.

Chuck Swindoll writes in his ‘overview of the Song of Solomon’ - *“From courtship to marriage to the assurance of love, Song of Solomon poetically presents a broad range of events and feelings in the days leading up to and during marriage, offering encouragement toward an enduring love amid the petty jealousies and fears sure to threaten even the strongest of relationships. We should heed the Song’s sublime words by continuing to value marriage as one of the bedrocks of society, appreciating the goodness and the beauty borne out of the union of two people in holy matrimony.”*

Marriage was ordained by God as a place to bring up children and treasure as a family. Solomon was very explicit with the love he shared. Song of Solomon reminds us that both marriage and the physical union that follows originate in God; we should therefore consider each of them as evidence of His grace working itself out in the world. During a quiet time, read this book together as a couple and know God is blessing you together which then extends to blessing the whole family. Treasure the love God has given!

*Prayer: Lord, love was ordained and created by you. Grow the love in my heart towards every individual in my family. Amen.*



# Future Plans

New Year's Day (1st January)

*Read: Jeremiah 29:4-13*

***“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)***

The beginning of a New Year for some reason seems untouched. It is a time where the last year is forgotten and we look to a new beginning and a future to try again. Isn't it wonderful to read in the Bible passage that God knows about our future already and has our lives in His hands? But Jeremiah wrote this at a time when the people of Israel were disheartened and depressed for being in exile for so long. Their future seemed bleak. So, God sent Jeremiah to give them hope and to let them know that God is still there watching over and caring for His people in whatever situation they found themselves in. In a time of uncertainty, God put Jeremiah in their lives to give them hope and a future.

He told them to build houses and settle down, plant a garden and have children. Don't be worried about what we don't know – the future is in God's hands and he has it all under control. What a wonderful message for us as well. There are many circumstances and situations that have occurred which we cannot control: COVID19, wars, tsunamis, fires, floods, extreme heat, extreme cold.... It is all in God's hands. He doesn't send these situations to hurt us, for God is a God of love, but he does work to bring good out of horrible situations.

Whatever your future plans may be for this year: a holiday, different job, more study, starting a family... God knows and holds your future. Go forward in confidence, planning, building, planting just as Jeremiah told the people of Israel. Your future with God is assured... Blessings for the New Year and may all that you do bring you hope and a future! ***“And we know in all things God works for the good of those who love him...” (Romans 8:28a NIV)***

*Prayer: My loving Saviour, bless this New Year and may all that I attempt be guided and blessed by you. Help me to be assured that my future is in your hands. Amen.*





# Breathing Life into Family

2nd January

Read: Ezekiel 37:1-14

***“I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.” Ezekiel 37:14 (NIV)***

I remember watching ‘The Mummy’ when it first came out. Stephen Sommers who directed this movie in 1999, must have had quite the imagination. The whole concept of an Egyptian mummy coming back to life and threatening to take over the world and have as a sign the ten plagues of Egypt (think back to Moses), makes me think he knew his Bible. But, when the mummy’s long dead army arose from the sand with bones and limbs working again – that was just rather creepy, and I do remember hiding my face the first time it happened. Computer created images and scenes made it look all very real.

But, now read about Ezekiel in the Valley of Dry Bones. Sounds like one of these movies! But God was able to bring life to these dead, dry bones; attach tendons and make flesh come upon them and cover them with skin. But the biggest part was when God was able to breathe new life into them and they became an army. (Maybe this is where the directors got their ideas!) A God who can bring life into dead bones can surely breathe life into our families and community. There are times when family life becomes a chore, when everyday sameness causes a deadness of life and spirit.

Know that our Heavenly Father who loves us beyond anything, can breathe life and love into hurting lives and families. Call upon and pray to God for His life-giving Spirit to enter your hearts and minds again. Allow God to bring life to you. Families are put under much stress and tension in this fast-paced world. Parents struggle with work and children; children struggle with school and family, and we all feel like we are falling apart. Bring God into your home and settle the family into His love. It’s not easy, but God has an army to help!

*Prayer: Lord, breathe your Spirit of life into my family. Direct and guide me in the way I should go and bring your peace to my life. Amen.*







# A Returning Family

4th January

*Read: Jonah 1:1-17*

***“Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: ‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.’” Jonah 3:1-2 (NIV)***

The story of Jonah has always fascinated me – how could you stay alive in a fish for three days and what would you smell like afterwards? Pinocchio was also swallowed by a big fish and he also survived. Could this just be a fairy-tale story like Pinocchio was? From the study I have done on Jonah, he was a proud man and didn't like to do anything he didn't want to do. So, what did he do when God asked him to tell the bustling city of Nineveh to repent and turn from their evil ways? He ran away. That would solve his problem! But God followed him and caused a storm where he was then thrown overboard, and a big fish was made to swallow him so he wouldn't drown.

Jonah was sorry for what he did and repented and so God asked him again to tell the people of Nineveh to repent. Which he then did and the whole city turned back to God. The story then goes further and shows Jonah sulking... he definitely had his faults. But don't we also. I think the thing I love most about this whole story is the fact that God didn't give up on Jonah and the verse above in Jonah 3:1 says that God came to Jonah a second time.

God comes to us not just once, or twice, but many times and as many times as it takes to bring His beloved children to acknowledge Him as their God of love. God never gives up on us and as a family we sometimes feel there is nothing more that can be done in a situation, but know that even when we might feel like giving up – God never does. He wants to bring all His children to Him where He gives His love and offers eternal life. God will never give up on you, don't ever give up on Him!

*Prayer: Jesus, you come to me over and over again. I fail and repent and you come back loving me even more. Thank you for your love and forgiveness. Amen.*



# God's Family

5th January

*Read: 1 John 2:28 – 3:3*

***“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” 1 John 3:1a (NIV)***

Through these Advent devotions I have taken you through parts of the Old Testament and the stories of families through the centuries. Family life is still difficult and has its challenges with rebelling children, jealousy, unfaithfulness, disobedience, forgetfulness, pain and sorrow. Probably many more! But there is also the family joy, forgiveness, closeness and love for each other which overrides all the other issues. God made us and has called us His children. Through these devotions I hope you have also been able to see some of the wonderful attributes of God as a loving Father.

He loves you, me and our families unconditionally and He will never give up on us or fail us, but will keep coming back reminding us that He is faithful and forgiving. His love and patience surround us as a family, and He will always listen through our family issues and times of uncertainty. Through prayer, talking, reading the Bible, and fellowship both in church and with others, our lives are strengthened, and we grow in our knowledge of Him and His love. In Baptism, God comes to us and gives us everything we need for living out our faith in our family – a loving, forgiving Father, a compassionate Saviour who loved us so much He died to save us, and a listening Spirit to comfort, listen and heal.

We are each a part of God's family and as such have a role and part to play in the lives of our families, extended families, church and community. As we saw through the Old Testament, the people of Israel struggled through their humanity and were not perfect. Our Heavenly Father does not expect us to be either, but He does want us to come to Him for help and to repent when we sin. Family life is not easy, but we know with the help of our loving Father we have a direction and purpose. Live in the love of our loving God and Father!

*Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for your love and forgiveness that you give me every day. You love me unconditionally. Help me to show this love also to my family and others around me. Amen.*





# My Family

Epiphany (6th January)

*Read: 1 John 3:16-24*

***“Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth... And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.” 1 John 3:18, 23 (NIV)***

Today is Epiphany. It is a day when we celebrate the wise men coming to Jesus and when the gospel was extended to the Gentiles (non-Jews). We are the Gentiles in this context - Jesus came not just for the chosen people of Israel, but for the whole world. Another meaning of the word Epiphany is:

‘A moment of sudden and great revelation or realization’. It is an ‘Ah-ha’ moment; a time where everything finally makes sense, and we can see why things happened that way.

The birth of Jesus was the beginning of the ‘Ah-ha’ moment as God revealed His purpose to save the world from the beginning of Old Testament times. He had foretold of a Saviour coming through the prophets Isaiah, Micah and Malachi, and all the events showed God saving His world and His people. God sent His Son to earth as a baby to be a human and live a human life to fully understand the issues that humans experience. Jesus knew what it was to live in this world, but God and Jesus are the only ones who know fully what it took to die for the whole world. God reveals His love to us in Jesus. So how does this relate to my family and to my life?

God’s love and forgiveness is so extensive that it reaches into the hearts of each of our family members. God commands us to believe in Jesus and love each other. In our families we are to share this love of God and learn of Jesus’ life and how it relates to each of us. Parents, we are to teach our children the stories of God in the Bible, how to love and pray for each other and to know that even when we do wrong, we are forgiven and loved regardless. Epiphany relates to my family as we live the ‘Ah-ha’ moments with each other!

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for your love for me. Help me to share and show this love with my family and community that you can be revealed to all. Amen.*





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