



An outreach
ministry of the LLL

Lutheran Tract Mission

175 Archer Street North Adelaide SA 5006

Phone: (08) 8360 7222

Web: www.ltm.org.au

Image: www.shutterstock.com

Written and Adapted: Anne Hansen

37182



God Comes Down

Advent Devotional Booklet



Murray Valley
Lutheran Community

*You are warmly invited to our
Worship Services during Christmas
in Murray Bridge and Monarto*

**Christmas Eve
Tuesday 24th December**

6pm Christ Church ~ Children's Service 'Amazing'.
JD Hall, 31 Swanport Rd Murray Bridge

7:30pm Zion Monarto ~ Christmas Eve Service.
Schenscher Rd Monarto (6pm Shared Tea)

8pm Holy Cross ~ Celebrate Christmas Eve with
Carols & Readings. 31 Florence St Murray Bridge

**Christmas Day
Wednesday
25th December**

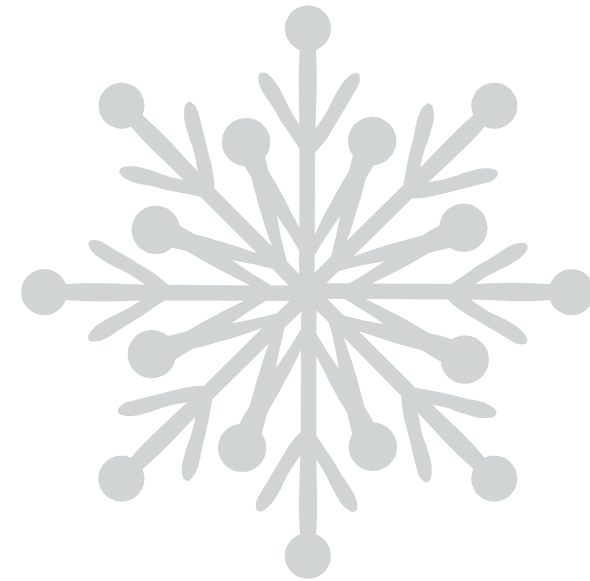
8:30am Holy Cross,
Florence St Murray Bridge



Prayer

Dear God, I praise and thank you with joy for your greatest gift, the gift of your Son. I know I am blessed by the countless gifts you have given me; my talents, resources and skills. Give me understanding and help me not to be afraid to seek new ways to use my gifts to serve others.

Encourage me and help me remember that, as Mary said when the angel Gabriel came to her, "I am the Lord's servant". Give me the strength to serve in your name, always knowing there is nothing that You cannot do. Through your love and grace, help me to serve others and share the story of your Son through my life and actions. Bless me as I begin a New Year in your name and help me to change others' lives. To you be all glory, honour and praise - Amen.



Never be the Same

Epiphany (6th January)

Read: Matthew 2:1-12

“They bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.” Matthew 2:11b (NIV)

‘What if?’ This question can stir up all sorts of thoughts about how different things would have been. What if the Dutch had colonised Australia rather than the English? What if the Allies hadn’t won WW2? What if we had never explored space? What if satellites had never been invented? One thing is sure, our world would be very different than it is today.

Even in our personal lives there are profound events that change our lives so much that they will never be the same again. For better or for worse, we are different.

Think of the wise men’s visit to King Herod. His life definitely changed for the worse. Upon hearing that a Saviour had been born, Herod set in motion a plan to murder the newborn Messiah. Herod, who otherwise might never had been known, now became infamous for his massacre of the infants in Bethlehem.

The wise men also would never have been the same. They found the baby with joy in their hearts worshipping him and praising God, and offering their precious gifts to a new-born King. They gave of themselves to the Lord. This changed their hearts so profoundly that life for them could never be the same.

Does Christmas and the story of Jesus’ birth change you? Does it change your heart, your life? How will it impact your life in this New Year? God’s gift at Christmas is life changing. It is impacting on the lives of those who share in the joy and love of our Saviour’s birth. Let it change your heart and life in a way that you will never be the same.

Prayer: *Lord God, change my heart and life so that others can see the saving love you offer to all. Amen.*

At Advent we especially remember the gift God gives in the sending of His Son to us as a baby. God comes down to earth to live as a human and experience all that we do. In sending Jesus to earth to become one of us, He also opened the door for us to have personal access to our Heavenly Father in the gift of prayer.

God gives each one of us the gift of open communication with and to Him. In coming down to us, we gain a personal connection to our Lord and Saviour.

Each one of these devotionals focuses on prayer which is our gift from God. May you use these devotionals to strengthen your prayer life this Advent and then through the New Year. Each devotion contains a short thought, Bible Reading and Prayer.

The devotionals continue after Christmas through to Epiphany (January 6th). I would encourage you to read the Bible readings along with the devotion as they lead you through the different aspects of Advent.

**May the Holy Spirit richly bless you
this Advent Season as we celebrate
our Saviour’s birth.**

Contents

	Contents	Page
1 st Sunday in Advent	Prescription for Prayer (Psalm 119:169-176)	6
1 st Monday in Advent	Our Father... (Hebrews 4:16; Matthew 6:9-13)	7
1 st Tuesday in Advent	In Heaven (Psalm 84)	8
1 st Wednesday in Advent	Our Father ...Harold! (Philippians 2:12-18)	9
1 st Thursday in Advent	God's Kingdom Comes! (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11)	10
1 st Friday in Advent	Your will be done (Luke 1:38)	11
1 st Saturday in Advent	My Daily Bread (Matthew 19:16-26)	12
2 nd Sunday in Advent	Forgive us... (Psalm 32:1-5)	13
2 nd Monday in Advent	...as we Forgive (Matthew 5:43-48)	14
2 nd Tuesday in Advent	Guard us from Temptation (Philippians 4:4-7)	15
2 nd Wednesday in Advent	Deliver us from Evil (Genesis 5:1-32)	16
2 nd Thursday in Advent	Everything is Yours (Psalm 95:1-7a)	17
2 nd Friday in Advent	Yes and Amen! (2 Corinthians 1:18-22)	18
2 nd Saturday in Advent	Christian Mutualism (Luke 1:39-56)	19
3 rd Sunday in Advent	Stability of Faith (Deuteronomy 33:26-27)	20
3 rd Monday in Advent	Just Forget (Ephesians 4:31-32)	21
3 rd Tuesday in Advent	Rising Above (Isaiah 60:1-5, 18-22)	22
3 rd Wednesday in Advent	Open our Eyes (1 John 1:1-10)	23
3 rd Thursday in Advent	Mush or Steel? (Ephesians 6:10-18)	24
3 rd Friday in Advent	Making Decisions (Matthew 1:18-24)	25

Let Go and Let God!

5th January

Read: Isaiah 41:8-14

*"The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."
Deuteronomy 33:27a (NIV)*

A man once fell over a cliff. He found himself moments later clinging to a thin branch by his fingertips. He began yelling, "Help! Is anyone there? Help!!"

Suddenly a booming voice spoke from out of nowhere, "I'm here. I'll help. Just let go."

After a long pause, the man shouted, "Help! Is anyone *else* there??"

Acrophobia, the fear of heights and falling, afflicts many people. Christians can also suffer from a spiritual acrophobia. We fear falling into the pit of our own problems, usually when we are on the edge of our own strength and resources. We hold on, failing to call out to God to let Him help. God has promised that if we cast our cares and burdens on Him, He will hold us (Psalm 55:22).

Jesus came to earth so that we might never have to face our problems alone. He lived and died to shoulder our burdens for us, especially the burden of our sin. God holds out His arms, waiting anxiously to catch us. When we become fearful of falling, we need to turn to Him, honestly confessing our fears. We need to ask for His help in replacing our fear with strength - not the strength to uphold ourselves but the strength to trust Him to hold us.

God will hold us! We need to never fear dropping into the depths of sin and despair or even the depths of death itself. God's promises stand firmer than any granite cliff. Relax in His strong, eternal arms and 'LET GO AND LET GOD'!

Prayer: *Father, teach me to trust you with all my burdens, problems and cares allowing you to hold me up. Amen.*

Moving Heaven and Earth

4th January

Read: Isaiah 40:25-31

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us," Ephesians 3:20 (NIV)

King Hezekiah was dying (2 Kings 20:1-11). The prophet Isaiah was sent to tell Hezekiah to set his house in order as he will die. So, when faced with death, Hezekiah started praying and wept bitterly before God imploring for healing. He threw himself onto God's mercy.

God heard Hezekiah's prayers and sent Isaiah back to King Hezekiah with the message: 'I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you... I will add 15 years to your life... and I will deliver you and this city from the king of Assyria.' (vs 5,6)

The answer was all that Hezekiah had prayed for and more. Hezekiah asked for a sign that God's promise would happen and that day the shadow on the sundial moved *backward* 10 steps. Our God of the Universe literally moved heaven and earth that day for the sake of a King who prayed earnestly to Him.

Our God is the everlasting King. He keeps urging us to pray asking Him for everything we need. God will comfort and give us strength and courage for whatever we face and in all situations. He *will* hear. He *will* answer. He *will* do more than we can ask or imagine. After all, He didn't withhold His Only Son from us, but gave Him for you and me.

Prayer: *Jesus, the great miracle of your birth shows your deep love for me. I know you are always there to help and hear me when I pray to you. Amen.*

Contents

Contents	Page
3 rd Saturday in Advent	Listen and Encourage (Ephesians 6:18-24) 26
4 th Sunday in Advent	Family Photos (Luke 1:57-80) 27
4 th Monday in Advent	A Round Tuit (Philippians 4:8-9) 28
Christmas Eve	The Light of Christ (John 1:1-5; Isaiah 9:2,6-7) 29
Christmas Day	Depth of Love (Luke 2:1-20) 30
26 th December	Words Not Enough (Romans 8:26-39) 31
27 th December	Our Perception (Psalm 50:1-7) 32
28 th December	Praise the Lord (Exodus 33:17-23; 34:4-8) 33
29 th December	Knowing our Future (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) 34
30 th December	Persistence (Luke 18:1-8) 35
31 st December	God's Mercy (Psalm 71) 36
1 st January	Name Like No Other (Luke 2:21-32) 37
2 nd January	Subliminal Messages (Luke 2:1-2) 38
3 rd January	Thinking of You (Psalm 139) 39
4 th January	Moving Heaven and Earth (Isaiah 40:25-31) 40
5 th January	Let Go and Let God! (Isaiah 41:8-14) 41
6 th January	Never be the Same (Matthew 2:1-12) 42
	Prayer 43

Prescription for Prayer

1st Sunday in Advent

Read: Psalm 119:169-176

"Listen to my prayer, and save me according to your promise! I will always praise you..." Psalm 119:170-171a (GNB)

Advent is the beginning of a new church year. A chance to start again and try to make a habit of something needed for our lives. It is a celebration of God's new beginning in our lives as He came down to earth as a baby so that our relationship with our Heavenly Father could be renewed.

Part of this renewal is learning to communicate our needs and problems, and also to thank God for His goodness to us. Think about times through the last year that you have cried to God for help... How were these prayers answered? God is in the game of always working for our good, even if we don't see it at the time.

Prayer is talking to God!

What is God's prescription for prayer? There are many acronyms people use – PTA (Praise, Thank, Ask), ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication), but the best is just to begin talking with God like you would your best friend... as a best friend there are times you **Praised** them for things they've done; **Thanked** them for what they have done for you; **Confessed** and asked for forgiveness when you've done something to hurt them; been a **Mediator** between others and themselves; and **Asked** them for help.

God is your best friend – talk to Him and treat Him just like that!

Prayer: *Dear God, you came to earth as a tiny baby to show how deeply you love me. I really want to know you better, help me to be able to talk to you as a best friend. Open my heart to be able to hear your words of love through listening to you. Amen.*

Thinking of You!

3rd January

Read: Psalm 139

"O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar." Psalm 139:1-2 (NIV)

Looking at a card rack one day, I noticed that there are not just birthday, graduation and love cards. There are many with just the words – 'Thinking of You'. There are times when friends or family come to my mind which, I feel, is the Spirit's prompting to pray for them or to call them. I also feel warm inside when I receive a card or call with the words – "Just thinking of you!" It's encouraging and comforting to know that we are on someone's heart and mind.

How much more comforting is it to know that we are always on our Heavenly Father's mind and He is thinking about us? In Psalm 139:17 it says: "How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!" God's thoughts of us cannot be numbered. They are thoughts of love and nurture; He wants to constantly reach out to us knowing that we need His love and care. Christmas is a time God reached us in the form of a tiny baby – His Son. This was a love letter to us from God – He knows of our sinful condition and our need for a Saviour. The next love letter came at Easter – with the suffering and death of His Son and then the rising again to defeat death to give us the promise of eternal life with our Heavenly Father.

God is always thinking of us. Let us always keep Him in our thoughts and prayers as we praise Him and pray for others. Prayer is our way of saying we are also thinking of God!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, turn my thoughts to you and your love today. Thank you for always thinking of me, may I keep praying for others. Amen.*

Subliminal Messages

2nd January

Read: Luke 2:1-2

"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases." Proverbs 21:1 (NIV)

When watching the advertisements in a movie theatre before the main feature shows, have you ever felt hungry for popcorn? It has been said that during these advertisements every so often a frame with popcorn on it is shown. We can't see it consciously but apparently our mind processes it and it becomes a subliminal message telling us we are hungry for popcorn.

We may object to having our minds manipulated in this way. It's not nice thinking of ourselves as streams of water which can be directed wherever by outside forces. Yet this happens to our governments every day. Our governments can be manipulated by popular opinion, trends of the world, anything to gain the most power. Satan is especially at work here trying to influence others away from our God. However, it tells us in scripture that God has power and influence over Satan. God's will reigns supreme as He calls the world's governments to abide by His plans. We need to trust that God is in control – even when it feels He is not.

The entire world moved at God's command as pagan Caesar Augustus ordered a census. God arranged to have Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem at the time of their Son's birth to fulfil His 700- year-old promise.

How important it is to pray for our governments, to pray for our leaders, to pray for foreign rulers and countries and bring them to God in prayer. As we pray, we are assured that God will guide all hearts for the welfare of His Eternal Kingdom. God is in control. Trust Him and Pray!

Prayer: *Lord, bless your Kingdom through the affairs of the kingdoms of this earth. Give our rulers wisdom and our nations peace. Amen.*

Our Father...

1st Monday in Advent

Read: Hebrews 4:16; Matthew 6:9-13

"I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:18 (NIV)

Technology has advanced so much – it can brew your coffee when you want it, drive your car for you, have a conversation and get answers, and more. It is all only defined by our imaginations. Even with all this technology and computer interaction, is there any need for real people interaction? Teenagers and others tend to communicate via texting and their phones. But even with all this there is a yearning for a best friend, for someone who knows you inside and out and loves you just the same. We all need a good listener, someone to whom we can pour out our hearts, knowing that they care for us and how we feel.

Jesus' disciples needed someone to listen to them, too. So they asked one day, "Lord, teach us to pray!" Jesus responded without hesitation, "When you pray say, 'Our Father...'"

Prayer is not a speech to a shadowy being floating in the far reaches of the universe. Prayer is not talking to a machine to get rehearsed answers back. Our God is real. At Christmas He became one of us! God knows our pain, He shares our concerns and He feels what we feel.

We are speaking to a real person when we pray. We are sharing the cares of our heart with a loving Father who hears and doesn't tell anyone else. Then God shares the love He feels in His heart for us through His Word. God listens. God feels our needs and He shares His love.

Prayer: *Lord, teach me to pray! Open my heart to hear you speaking to me. Amen.*

In Heaven

1st Tuesday in Advent

Read: Psalm 84

*"The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory."
Psalm 97:6 (NIV)*

'Our Father in heaven', sounds like the address you could write on an envelope. Does the fact that He is *in heaven* even mean anything special to us? It reminds us that the One who loves us more than we could ever imagine sits at the controls of this world. He is totally in charge. Events are not just careening wildly like a runaway roller coaster. Our Father is in heaven.

God is able to see the big picture, the total plan that He is working out for our planet. If you look at pictures of deep space or the beauty of earth from space, you can wonder, with this immensity, how God can care for little me. It seems that heaven is too far away, that God is too far away to notice the concerns and turmoil in our lives.

But, that is where we need to read in Psalm 139 how God knows our inmost thoughts and knows us deeply from before we were born. He cares about every detail of our lives and we can draw courage from the fact that God is in heaven. His plans, thoughts, and actions are settled in eternity. He knew that He needed to send His Son Jesus into the world to save us before the world was even made.

Our Father is on the throne. There are no detours, delays or course changes in His loving plan for our salvation, for our God is in heaven and He is faithful.

Prayer: *Thank you, Lord, that you settle your plans for us in heaven and that nothing can remove your presence from us. We thank and praise you especially in Advent that you left heaven to bring your Son to earth because you love us. Amen.*

Name Like No Other

New Year's Day (1st January)

Read: Luke 2:21-32

*"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow..."
Philippians 2:9-10a (NIV)*

Have you ever sat and looked through the telephone book? It's fun to look at names of famous and infamous people and wonder what they are like. Are there other people with the name 'Dawn Fraser' and 'Harry Potter'? See the unusual names. What would the man named 'Forest Flowers' be like? Would he be related to 'Rosie Bush'? Is 'Art Painter' an actual artist? Does 'Les B. Frank' always tell the truth? Does 'Sandy Beech' live in Queensland?

How do people get names like these? For some, it must have amused their parents at the time, or they didn't think of it. (See the advertisement on TV about 'Callum Murray'). Perhaps some parents liked the image the name brought to mind.

The reading today tells of the circumcision and naming of Jesus. This name, which was given to him by his Heavenly Father at his conception, paints a word-picture for us about His work. The Bible refers to Jesus by many beautiful and descriptive names. 'Wonderful Counselor' refers to his readiness to answer our prayers for guidance and wisdom. 'Mighty God' reminds us of Christ's power and willingness to act on behalf of us. 'Everlasting Father' and 'Prince of Peace' comfort us with the assurance of His eternal love for us.

One name describes our Jesus beautifully – 'Saviour'. This name assures us that we have been rescued from the power of sin and death that we so deserve. Live in this promise and the blessings that the names of Jesus promise us in our lives. Praise be to our Saviour, Jesus!

Prayer: *My loving Saviour, thank you for saving me from my sin and forgiving me. I praise you for the gifts you give me every day. Amen.*

God's Mercy

New Year's Eve (31st December)

Read: Psalm 71

"But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy." Titus 3:4-5 (NIV)

We often hear about God's mercy towards us, but what does this really mean?

Mercy means "compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm."

As you review the last year, do you have regrets and failures? If you're anything like me, I'm sure you do. It feels like more regrets than successes. Do you feel that this year you have gotten closer to God in your prayer life? Worship life? Have you always done the right thing 'in God's eyes'? Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could say 'yes' to all the above questions? But, more than likely, we have failed. If God left us here in our failure or punished us, the earth would not be a nice place. But this is where God's mercy comes in.

Even though we keep failing in so many aspects of our lives, God shows His love and compassion towards us and says – 'Hey, this is a New Year – let's try again!' And, when we fail again, God continually shows us love and forgives us... not because of what we do, but because we are God's special children.

As we end this year, don't look upon it focussing on the failures, rather focus on the mercy and love God has shown to us over the year and let us strive in the New Year to be worthy of it. But then, when we fall short, let's not get discouraged but rather rejoice that we are loved by a loving, forgiving and merciful Father.

Prayer: *Lord, thank you that I can leave the last year behind me knowing of your love and forgiveness and let me look to the New Year confident of your mercy. Amen.*

Our Father... Harold

1st Wednesday in Advent

Read: Philippians 2:12-18

"This then is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,'" Matthew 6:9 (NIV)

A mother sits at her child's bedside and then, as they are about to say the Lord's Prayer together, the child remarks, "I know what God's name is!" The mother questions, "What is it?"

"Harold!" says the child proudly.

Unfortunately, this little boy is not the only one who gets God's holy name wrong or uses it incorrectly. Many people do not experience the holiness of God himself due to experiences with other Christians. The names of God are holy and He has allowed us to come to Him personally using the name that describes His nature: God, Lord, Father, Creator.

In the Old Testament God's name was considered so holy that it could not be spoken but, with the birth and the coming of His Son, He has given us access to His very nature and made His relationship with us personal.

As Martin Luther wrote in his explanation to the Introduction of the Lord's Prayer: '...He [God] is truly our Father and we are truly his children, in order that we may ask him boldly and with complete confidence, just as loving children ask their loving father.'

So, as Christians, we are the walking, living and breathing examples of our Father's love. People will look at us and gauge whether they want to know this God. God deserves and expects our love and respect and He is indeed holy. This Advent let us look upon the gift of God in His Son Jesus with gratitude and reverence.

Prayer: *My dear Heavenly Father, you have given me your name to be able to pray to you personally. Help me to use and share your name respectfully with others that they may also know your love. Amen.*

God's Kingdom Comes!

1st Thursday in Advent

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

*"...For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."
1 Thessalonians 5:2 (NIV)*

In May 1915, the British luxury liner *Lusitania* was torpedoed and sunk in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Ireland. The *Lusitania* was one of the largest, fastest and most lavishly appointed ocean liners of her time. Without warning, one torpedo from a German U-boat struck her hull setting off massive explosions. Unknown to the passengers, the ship's cargo consisted primarily of artillery shells, fuses and other war material, contraband that was undeclared on the ship's forged manifest. The torpedo caused these explosives to blow up, ripping the hull and twisting the bow nearly off. Eyewitnesses state that within 20 minutes the *Lusitania* disappeared in over 300 metres of water. Nearly 1,200 of the ship's 1,900 passengers lost their lives.

The coming of Christ again will be swifter and more unexpected than this. God's kingdom will come at an hour we do not expect. Advent focuses as much on the Second Coming of Jesus as it does the First Coming of Jesus as a baby in Bethlehem. The First time he came with humility and in poverty. At the Second Coming, He will come in power and with great glory, so we must be ready.

As we wait, watch and pray, we have also been given the Commission to tell God's story to those still in darkness about the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. Use us, Lord, to share the news of your coming and to grow your Kingdom!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, give me the confidence and boldness to share the Good News of your coming to earth. Help me to be ready for your Second Coming. Amen.*

Persistence

30th December

Read: Luke 18:1-8

"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV)

The 'Wizard of Menlo Park'; so the journalists called Thomas Alva Edison during his lifetime. Edison combined insight and genius with just plain hard work to perfect the many conveniences we take for granted today. The invention which most changed our society was probably the ordinary light bulb. He developed a filament that would burn brightly in a light bulb over a long time.

Edison tried metals such as platinum and iridium, cardboard and paper, lemon peel, cork and cotton, and over 6,000 different vegetable fibres. He even tried whiskers from a beard before he came upon the solution – a carbonised bamboo filament enclosed in an air-tight glass bulb. Edison's assistants became known as the "insomnia squad". Edison just refused to admit failure and give up.

In the above reading, Jesus tells us the importance of persistence in prayer. We should pray and pray and never give up until we get an answer. Some people ask for their family to know Jesus. They pray every so often for God's blessing on their marriage or children or job or nation. However, we need to pray for these things continually, without ceasing. These are urgent for God to hear.

"Pray!" Jesus said. "Always pray and don't give up!"

We do fail in this, believing that our prayers are a lost cause. We think that God doesn't hear them or that He doesn't answer us. But Christ promises that faith even the size of a mustard seed can move mountains. Trust God. Persist in prayer and believe His promises. When you have prayed 6,000 times, fold your hands again for 6,001. Our Father will hear and will answer.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, teach me to pray and to never give up. Give me persistence! Amen.*

Knowing our Future

29th December

Read: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

"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 a hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

Back to the Future is a classic movie series dealing with time travel. Michael J Fox accidentally visits the past and has a chance to change events as they happen. In so doing they change the future. Sometimes we even think it might be good to be able to go back so that future events could change: natural disasters, car crashes, terrorism events...

But even if we could see into the future, there are small details or happenings that seem insignificant but can influence a later event. We have all heard stories of how one very small detail like missing a bus or losing a watch has set off a chain of events that later changed a life.

Many times, when we make requests of God, we preface it by, 'If it is your will'. God can see the future and He is constantly fitting out and meshing each piece of our lives with His will for our eternal good. God does care about our earthly circumstances, He does feel our pain and He longs to take away our hurt.

God wants to give us eternal life with Him in heaven. He knows what is best for us and sometimes it brings us pain and hurt and we grieve, but we have our Father quietly telling us, "No my child. My grace is all you need."

As tears sting our eyes, we know that God understands: the manger, the stable, the cross. He knows pain well beyond our knowing. Trust God's will to see you through the uncertain future and cling to His love.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me to trust your all-sufficient grace. You have my life in your hands. Amen.*

Your will be done

1st Friday in Advent

Read: Luke 1:38

"Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground." Psalms 143:10 (NIV)

Mary, Jesus' mother, drew courage from her faith in a faithful God. She must have foreseen at least some of the difficulties that carrying the Baby Jesus would bring. Would Joseph divorce her in disgrace? Would her family disown her in disgust at her obvious sin? Who would believe that an angel had spoken to a girl of such humble heritage? She could actually be stoned to death for adultery!

In trust, she doesn't even question God's arrangement and calmly states, "I am the Lord's servant... may it be to me as you have said." God chose a blessing, though it did not seem that way at the time, and Mary praised God by gratefully accepting it.

Accepting 'God's will' is not always easy and requires trust and maybe even risk, for God's will does not always coincide with our human view. Praying 'your will be done...' and really meaning it, can sometimes only come for a Christian after a long battle with our own selfish will. God's blessings come with a surrender of our will knowing that God always wants the best for all His children.

Trusting, waiting, accepting and praying for God's will is not easy, but we can be assured that in God's will is our peace.

Prayer: *My loving Lord, I so often second-guess your choices for my life, wanting other outcomes and blessings. Forgive me. Help me to faithfully accept your will. Amen.*

My Daily Bread

1st Saturday in Advent

Read: Matthew 19:16-26

"Two things I ask of you, O Lord; ...give me neither poverty or riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you... or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonour the name of my God." Proverbs 30:7-9 (NIV)

It is very hard not to long to be rich and famous and not to have to worry or want about needs. Hearing about sports people and movie stars and the amount they make can make us feel somewhat envious. However, the above person in Proverbs wanted no riches neither wanted poverty, but only what was needed for their daily life. Wouldn't it be wonderful just to be satisfied and not feel like we always need more?

Jesus also spoke to a rich young man who was very serious about wanting to follow Jesus. He finished it with saying how hard it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of Heaven. But these verses don't say it is bad to be rich, but that the state of mind and relying on God rather than depending on themselves is the issue.

In the Proverbs text, the person also did not want to live in poverty. He feared the temptation of despair and falling into a life of stealing and disrepute. Few people fear riches as much as they fear poverty. Both these conditions are ultimately temporary, earthly states. We cannot take our riches with us when we die. The only wealth we will have in heaven are the riches we send on ahead. That's why God entrusts us with good things on earth. Whether they be few or many, this matters little in comparison with how we use them for God's Kingdom.

Prayer: *Lord, teach me to trust you each day for everything I need. Give me today my daily bread. Amen.*

Praise the Lord

28th December

Read: Exodus 33:17-23 and 34:4-8

"Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" Psalm 8:9 (NIV)

Handel's masterpiece, *The Messiah*, premiered in London in March 1743. As the choir burst into the electrifying "Hallelujah Chorus", the reigning monarch, George II, felt so deeply moved by the majesty of the words and beautiful music that he rose to his feet. The audience, seeing their king standing, also stood. Even today when the Hallelujah Chorus is sung, audiences stand.

The Hebrew word "Hallelujah" translates to 'Praise the Lord'. What qualities in God lead us to praise him? What has He done that would bring a king to his feet, and saints and martyrs to their knees in worship?

We praise God for who He is! We cannot even see God and live as we hear in the story of Moses in the reading. Isaiah 6:2 says that the holy angels cover their faces with their wings in God's presence. After Moses descended from the mountain after seeing only a portion of God's glory, his face shone so brightly he needed to cover it with a veil.

We praise God for His majesty, for the glory of what He has done: forming tiny crystals of sand, gigantic mountains, stars and planets orbiting in an immense universe, one-celled plants, growing unborn babies. All are His creative masterpieces.

But even creation pales in comparison to what was achieved in the tiny town of Bethlehem. There we find the Creator Himself who laid aside His glory and wrapped Himself in human flesh. He has come to save His most precious creation: you and me. How can our praises ever stop?

Prayer: *Dear Creator God, help me to praise you all my life for you are awesome in power and majesty, but also my personal Saviour. Amen.*

Our Perception

27th December

Read: Psalm 50:1-7

"The sacrifice that honours me is a thankful heart. Obey me, and I, your God, will show my power to save." Psalm 50:23 (CEV)

People can be filled with over importance. Movie stars, musicians and sports stars boast about their greatness. The money they earn could feed a small country. Yet we hold these people up as being great in our eyes. We give awards: Oscars, Grammys, World Cups. Even though these people may hold themselves as great, seldom do we appreciate them boasting about themselves – we still enjoy some humility. However, we also do not like people to criticise or put themselves down. There needs to be a balance in the perception of ourselves.

We also need a balance in our prayer life. Praising or down-playing ourselves also distorts our prayers and our perception of life. We focus on our worries and take on the responsibility for solving our own frustrations. God seems so far from us.

God commands us to praise Him. His might and majesty requires us to thank and praise Him. This is not because He needs our praise, but because we need to continually remind ourselves that it is God who made us and everything in the world and that He cares, loves and gives us His grace and forgiveness.

At Advent we especially remember Him for the love that brought the majestic God to a stable, to be born there for His sinful children. In response we praise God for His power and sacrificial love.

Prayer: *My Heavenly Father, teach me to focus my prayers and praise to you. Amen.*

Forgive us...

2nd Sunday in Advent

Read: Psalm 32:1-5

"If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9 (NRSV)

'I forgive you' are three very powerful words. They can lift up a shattered soul knowing that reconciliation is possible. They are healing words that can literally put pieces together that were once broken. In order to have something forgiven though, we first need to ask for forgiveness and confess what we have done wrong.

Confessing our sins involves saying the same things about sin that God says. The Holy Spirit teaches us to truly mean what we say when we specifically acknowledge our wrongdoings - the ways that we have harmed others, disobeyed any commandments or failed in any other way.

In confessing and asking for forgiveness, we are accepting responsibility and the Holy Spirit teaches us repentance. Even as we confess, our Father works the miracle of forgiveness in our lives. God knows far better than us the hurt that our sins cause. Still we hear God's gracious words of forgiveness and feel His deep peace wash over us as we know we are now cleansed.

Advent is the beginning of a new church year. It is a new beginning that we can experience as we confess our past wrongs, knowing that they are forgiven and washed away, and that we can look forward to the New Year. This Advent, concentrate on God's forgiving actions and the grace He gives us in the birth of His Son.

Prayer: *Lord, forgive me all my sins and lead me to a newness of life. May I remember each day is a new day to live as your child. Amen.*

...as we Forgive

2nd Monday in Advent

Read: Matthew 5:43-48

"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." Colossians 3:13 (NIV)

A lady who had been bitten by a dog went to see the doctor. When the doctor told her that the dog may have rabies, the woman asked for a piece of paper and began writing furiously. The doctor, assuming his patient was composing her will, tried to reassure her. He told her that while rabies was serious, she didn't need to make out her will on the spot. To which the woman snapped, "I'm not making my will. I'm making a list of the people I'm going to bite!"

Jesus told His disciples to 'Love your enemies.' Yet some of the people we deal with each day seem to be so unlovable. Their poisonous attitudes seem to draw our anger, even when we want with all our hearts to obey God. So, Jesus gave His disciples and us some practical advice on how to begin loving. He said, "Pray for those who persecute you."

We are to pray not only for our friends, family and fellow believers, but also for our enemies. Like warm rain on soft snow, our prayers will begin to melt our attitude toward those enemies. Warmed by the touch of the Holy Spirit on our hearts, we can begin to feel compassion toward those who wrong us.

C.S.Lewis once noted that it's nearly impossible to hate someone while at the same time kneeling in sincere prayer for their physical, financial and spiritual welfare. Our attitude of forgiveness and love can be a witness for Christ drawing others into a closer relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Use this Advent season as a time of prayer and interceding for others.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, teach me how to pray for those I find so hard to love. Show me how to forgive and bring others to you. Amen.*

Words Not Enough

26th December

Read: Romans 8:26-39

"The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." Romans 8:26 (NIV)

Eskimos have over 25 different words for snow. One indicates a wet, heavy snowfall. Another indicates powder dry snow. Still another applies to snow that is good for travel by dog sled. On the other hand, certain tribes in the Amazon jungle have no word for snow. Languages change and develop according to the needs of the people using them.

An unabridged dictionary contains millions of word entries. With technology advancing as it is, there are constantly new words added. Despite having all these words at our grasp, we still have trouble finding the right words to use when praying. We may be speechless with awe and wonder from God's amazing and totally undeserved gifts. At Christmas we are filled with wonder at the depth of God's love for each of us in sending His Son to save us. At other times we come to Him with empty hands and grief-numbed hearts.

In times such as these, in moments of weakness, the Comforter, God's Holy Spirit Himself, prays on our behalf. He searches our hearts, feeling what we feel and touching the secret depths of our being, He intercedes on our behalf with our Heavenly Father. Beyond empathy, beyond feeling with us and for us, the Holy Spirit prays on our behalf changing the course of our lives to fulfil God's will for us.

Because the Spirit pleads for us, everything works together for our good. If God is for us, and our Saviour's birth proves He is, who or what can stand against us? Nothing!

Prayer: *Holy Spirit pray for me. Comfort me with the constant presence of my Heavenly Father and teach me to trust in your guidance. Amen.*

Depth of Love

Christmas Day

Read: Luke 2:1-20

"The shepherds went back, singing praises to God for all they had heard and seen; it had been just as the angel had told them." Luke 2:20 (GNB)

Our Father in Heaven,

Christmas time is so joyful as we celebrate your love for us. Easter tells of your Son's victory over sin, death and Satan. Pentecost shows the power of the Spirit's moving in our hearts and in the world.

Christmas belongs to you, who loved us so much that you sent your one and only Son into the world to be our Saviour. What depth of love you have for us! To urge your Son to leave the heavenly home you shared, to renounce His kingship, to abandon His throne, and to give up His rights and titles and glory and honour.

Behind the manger, you saw the cross. You knew the anguish your Son would bear as He assumed the burden of our sins and the sins of everyone. You knew that at that awful moment you would turn your back on your beloved Son leaving him completely alone. What terrible pain this must have brought to your heart.

Yet you loved us so much that you gave us Jesus. **The heart of the Giver makes the Gift precious.** Your heart went out to us who were dead in our sin. Eternity is too short to offer the praise you really deserve.

Cleanse our hearts so that the gifts we give each other may be precious. Teach us that the best gift we can give is the GIFT you gave us – the love of your Son Jesus. Help us to share the love and forgiveness you offer with our loved ones this Christmas. In the name of Jesus, our wonderful Saviour. Amen.

Guard us from Temptation

2nd Tuesday in Advent

Read: Philippians 4:4-7

"The Lord gives perfect peace to those whose faith is firm." Isaiah 26:3 (CEV)

'If I stretch myself much further, I'm going to snap!'

Have you ever heard these words or even said them yourself? At one time or another everyone has felt themselves put under so much stress and pressure that they felt they would snap. Even at Christmas, work builds up, obligations accumulate, chores, family gatherings and responsibilities all pile up and we feel ready to run away. Where is God's peace? The peace that the Christ-child brings?

Depression and Despair are two of Satan's favourite temptations. They rapidly grow more potent in the souls of people under constant stress. Wouldn't it be terrible to be unable to celebrate our Saviour's birth due to these temptations?

Where can we find peace when we are ready to snap? In Philippians 4:7, Paul encourages, "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

God promises to set a watch of peace around our hearts and minds. He himself will guard us. As long as our lives centre on Jesus, as long as the Prince of Peace remains our focal point, our hearts will experience a depth of peace totally unknown in this world. The peace of God will keep us safe!

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, guard me from all temptations. Send your Holy Spirit into my life to give my heart and mind the peace only you can give. Amen.*

Deliver us from Evil

2nd Wednesday in Advent

Read: Genesis 5:1-32

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." Psalm 23:4a (NIV)

In the Lord's Prayer, we pray 'Deliver us from evil.' The word 'evil' is not used much anymore. People don't like to think of anything or anyone being 'evil'. People aren't evil, just socially maladjusted; acts of violence aren't evil, just statements of political belief. Philosophers and TV commentators assure us that good and evil are just relative. "It depends!"

But, God assures us that there is 'evil' in the world and this evil brings death and life without Him. Death is evil. Scripture refers to it as the last enemy.

Eve told Satan in the Garden before the Fall that if she were to eat the fruit God had forbidden, she would die. To which Satan replied, "You shall not die, you shall become like God." She ate it, becoming more aware, but she also died. We are all born to die!

Genesis 5 contains the lineage from Adam to Noah. "Adam lived 930 years, and then he died." "Seth lived 912 years, and then he died." "Enosh lived 905 years, and then he died." The human family tree is traced throughout these generations, but tolling solemnly after each patriarch's history are the words, "then he died."

Christ came into the world that through His death at Easter, the power of Satan, this evil of death, could be destroyed. It's only through Jesus, God's Son that evil is destroyed and eternal life is promised. Yes, we all die physically... but it's Jesus coming at Christmas that brings the promise of eternal life forever with our Lord and Saviour!

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help me to live out my days on earth joyfully knowing that I will be in your presence eternally. Amen.*

The Light of Christ

Christmas Eve

Read: John 1:1-5; Isaiah 9:2,6-7

*"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out."
John 1:5 (GNB)*

The teacher gave the Year 2 class some Art homework. They were to draw their favourite animal and where it lives. Next morning a young child came back with a piece of paper entirely covered in black crayon. The teacher asked the child what it was? The child replied with a huge smile on their face, "It's my black cat sleeping in my room at midnight."

Novels and short stories often describe complete darkness as suffocating. Children are often scared of the dark and many adults never quite lose their apprehension about entering a darkened room. If a match is lit in a dark place, that place is no longer dark. Isn't the power of light over darkness amazing? All the darkness in the whole world cannot even smother a tiny flame.

All the darkness in the world has not and will not ever extinguish the Light of the World, Jesus Christ!

The Judean hills lay in silent, suffocating darkness on that first Christmas Eve. Suddenly, Heaven burst open and the sky was alight with the host of heavenly angels. They sang their praises to God, announcing the Good News that the long-awaited Saviour had finally come.

God's light, Jesus, shines infinitely more brightly than any earthly light. This Light illuminates the whole world with its brilliance, the radiance of God's unimaginable love. Let this Light of God shine into your heart and life this Christmas.

Prayer: *Jesus, you are my Light and your love fills my heart with joy. Help me to be a light that shines your love to others. Amen.*

A Round Tuit

4th Monday in Advent

Read: Philippians 4:8-9

"Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me – put it into practice. And the peace of God will be with you." Philippians 4:9 (NIV)

A story has been told, that a hardware store was giving away hard circular disks with the letters "TUIT" printed on them. The storeowner explained that these disks were for procrastinators. He had become tired of hearing people say things like, "I'll buy weed spray when I have time and get around to it." So he ordered these discs and gave them out to customers and said, "Now you have a round TUIT. So get busy!"

Christmas is almost here. We have had four weeks to prepare for Christmas but how many of us are actually ready? The food is bought. The house decorated. The presents are labelled and wrapped. Family has been invited and celebrations have begun. But are we really ready for what counts?

Many of us have good intentions for the Advent season - to read devotions daily, pray as a family and worship regularly. But do we make time? Do we get 'A round TUIT'? This is not intended to make anyone feel guilty. Unfortunately these things happen very regularly with demands on our energy and time which seem to squeeze out the intentions.

Paul, who wrote the letter to the Philippians, encourages us to put what we learn into practice. Take time to stop and thank God for sending His Son to be our Saviour. Praise God for giving us family and the means to celebrate together. Worship and grow closer to our Lord, appreciating all the magnificent blessings He has lavished on us. Celebrate the birth of Jesus!

Prayer: *Jesus, thank you for all the gifts and blessings you shower on me every day. Help me to be thankful and to put my energy into what matters. Amen.*

Everything is Yours

2nd Thursday in Advent

Read: Psalm 95:1-7a

"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it..." Psalm 24:1 (NIV)

Our galaxy, the Milky Way, contains over 100 billion stars. A light beam that could circle the earth seven times in one second would take 100,000 years to travel from one side of the Milky Way to the other. The closest Galaxy to the Milky Way Galaxy is Andromeda Galaxy which is only 2.5 million light years away.

Yet, compared to the universe, our galaxy seems but a small speck, a grain of dust. There are over 100 billion galaxies in the observable universe and it would take 225 trillion years for a beam of light to travel from one side of the known universe to the other. What is beyond that? No one knows yet.

The sum of the glory and power found within God's universe boggles our small minds. We cannot even imagine the immense distances between the stars. We cannot begin to comprehend the intense heat produced by the blast of each star's nuclear furnace. We cannot understand the principles and laws that co-ordinate the vast, yet intricate ballet of the orbiting galaxies. What a creation our Father made! What a glory that He still preserves and directs it.

This physical creation fades to grey by comparison to the spiritual realities, the blessings He gives to care for each of His children. The God who flung the vast universe into being with a few words bends low to listen to our whispered prayers. He reaches from heaven to earth in the gift of His Son, Jesus. God came from heaven to shower us with His love and forgiveness. To Him be praise and honour and glory and power forever and ever. Amen! (Revelation 5:13b)

Prayer: *Lord, I praise you for your Kingdom, your power and your glory. How amazing is your great love for me. Amen.*

Yes and Amen!

2nd Friday in Advent

Read: 2 Corinthians 1:18-22

"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God." 2 Corinthians 1:20 (NIV)

I'm sure you have experienced it. If we buy an item guaranteed for 1 year, it breaks or stops working on day 367. If we buy a car guaranteed for 6,000km, the transmission conks out and the electrical system burns up as the odometer turns 6,012km. If an item comes with a lifetime guarantee, the manufacturer will go out of business 5 days before the product falls apart. These all illustrate Murphy's Law – anything that can go wrong, will and at the worst possible time.

It's hard to believe in any person's word – even the credibility of people's promises come under question. Ironically, if a person repeats a promise over and over, you can almost be certain it will be broken.

But, when God repeats a promise, we can be certain that He intends to keep it. For centuries God repeated His promise to send a Saviour. All history then converged on the manger at Bethlehem and the hill of Calvary. (Read the above verse again!)

We have God's Word. We have the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus and all of these are the promises and actions of God loving His children. This is all the proof we need to know that we can rely with confidence on His promises.

Not only that, but "God put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." (vs 22) When we pray, we claim God's promises, allowing the Spirit to work within us guaranteeing our future. To this we can say: "Yes and Amen!"

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank you for your Word. Teach me to trust all your promises, relying on them with complete confidence. Amen.*

Family Photos

4th Sunday in Advent

Read: Luke 1:57-80

"And the child grew and became strong in spirit." Luke 1:80a (NIV)

I enjoy looking through old photos. I like seeing the pictures of grandparents, parents and great-grandparents as babies, then growing up with all the struggles that children of today have with school, friends, pimples, puberty and first loves. In these areas, things really are no different to seeing my own children grow. Technology and society are the things that change, not people.

Luke tells the story of John's miraculous birth and his naming. His parents were so proud to have such an amazing son given to them by God. I bet they talked of all the things that John was to do and what a fine man he was to become. (Zechariah even prophesied his life.) Their hopes and dreams would have been no different to ours when we had our first child. The times were just different.

Since Zechariah and Elizabeth were both advanced in years before John was conceived, it is quite possible that neither of them lived to see John grow to adulthood. When John was grown he lived in the wilderness, awaiting the moment the Spirit of God would stir him to begin his work, preparing the people of Israel for their Saviour.

John wasn't born to remain a little baby and neither was Jesus. As Christmas Day comes closer, we see Jesus as a little baby in a manger. But he didn't stay there. He grew in the knowledge of who He was born to be – God's Son, our Saviour! We thank God for giving us this wonderful gift at Christmas.

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for sending your Son to earth to save us. He grew to be my Saviour. Amen.*

Listen and Encourage

3rd Saturday in Advent

Read: Ephesians 6:18-24

*"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)*

Being burdened by guilt can become paralysing. I'm sure we can all remember times as a child when we have done something wrong and then not necessarily told the whole truth about the wrong. Until that wrong has been confessed to mum or dad, the guilt shows on our face and we don't act the same... the guilt eats us up! That wrong is sin and God knows how therapeutic it is to admit the wrong and have forgiveness announced allowing us to go on with our life with a weight lifted. The same applies when we are adults, yet sometimes we are not prepared to let the wrong go and allow forgiveness to settle our souls.

In the letter from James, he encourages the Christians to listen to each other (not pronounce judgement), confess their wrongs, ask for forgiveness and then to pray for each other bringing healing of mind and spirit. Should this be any different today? These words of James still ring true for us and it does bring healing. Every Sunday we also have a time of confession then a time when our sins are forgiven so we can leave those burdens in the hands of our Heavenly Father.

Knowing our forgiveness is sure, we can help each other by listening and encouraging each other to live in the light of God's love. As we come towards Christmas when God sent His Son to forgive every sin we ever committed, leave your burdens at the manger and move forward in forgiveness.

Prayer: *Help me Lord Jesus to be a light for others to see your forgiveness and to know your love. Amen.*

Christian Mutualism

2nd Saturday in Advent

Read: Luke 1:39-56

*"But you, my friends, keep on building yourselves up on your most sacred faith. Pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, and keep yourselves in the love of God."
Jude :20-21a (GNB)*

Living in the long, coarse hairs of the three-toed sloth is a type of algae which, during the rainy season, turns the sloth green. This then causes the sloth to be fully camouflaged so it can escape the notice of its enemies. The algae and the sloth, though mutually exclusive, share their lives with each other and help each other. This helping relationship is called 'mutualism'.

Christians also practise mutualism in their relationships with each other. It begins with thoughts of concern for one another and grows as we act in love toward each other. It will then thrive as we keep each other continually in our prayers, interceding on behalf of one another.

The deepest form of Christian mutualism happens as we pray together with and for each other - united in prayer.

In the Bible reading, Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth as each awaited the birth of their sons. When they first met each other, they threw themselves into immediate prayer, praising their wonderful Lord for His great goodness to them. The peace and joy of these women is so evident in being together.

Mutual prayer is a great equaliser. It cuts away pride so that position and power don't matter. All Christians are equally tall before God on their knees. We are all children of the Heavenly Father.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help me to find joy and peace in praying with and for others. Amen.*

Stability of Faith

3rd Sunday in Advent

Read: Deuteronomy 33:26-27

"But when you pray, you must believe and not doubt at all. Whoever doubts is like a wave in the sea that is driven and blown about by the wind." James 1:6 (GNB)

When a small boat sinks in the waters of the ocean, the Coast Guard rushes to the rescue. They can be hampered by lack of precise information, waves, the current and winds causing the survivors to be blown away from the last coordinates. A little orange lifejacket tossed by huge waves can be hard to spot from a helicopter.

In the 1970s and 80s, the Coast Guard trained pigeons to peck a metal plate when they spotted survivors. They were put in transparent cages beneath the helicopter and were able to locate survivors 90% better than their human counterparts.

If the wind and waves on the ocean hampered sea rescues, how much more do the winds and waves of doubt hamper our prayers? We often allow our prayers to be blown about by the winds of changing circumstances. We need the little pigeon (Holy Spirit) to keep us safe and on track.

God demands the stability of faith when we pray. He certainly can answer our prayers without it and He can override our unbelief. Where can we get faith that stands firmly against the winds of doubt, defying the waves of circumstances?

God's rescue came in Jesus. He had a plan long ago and His Word (the Bible) anchors our hope to the sure promises of God. Jesus can answer our prayers and guide us safely through difficult times.

Prayer: *Lord, teach me to pray with confidence knowing that you hear and answer my prayers. Amen.*

Making Decisions

3rd Friday in Advent

Read: Matthew 1:18-24

"If any of you lacks wisdom, they should pray to God, who will give it to them; because God gives generously and graciously to all." James 1:5 (GNB)

Joseph was facing a decision that would affect him for the rest of his life. He was trapped between his love for Mary and her seemingly obvious sin. We really can't blame him for choosing to do the 'right thing' and divorce her quietly. But, as we read in the Bible verse above, an angel appeared to Joseph changing his mind to conform to the will of God.

When first making this decision, Joseph thought he was doing the right thing, but he was then challenged by God. When we make decisions, do we prayerfully consider all options and then try to listen to God's leading? This is not always easy. In real life, our decisions can be like the decision Joseph made - we try to do the right thing but consequences can be dire. Making decisions can often become extraordinarily complicated. We may even wonder if solutions to our dilemmas really exist. God has promised (in the James verse) that He will give us the wisdom to make decisions for our good.

Let's open our hearts and minds to God's leading and guiding, praying all the while that God's will be done, knowing He loves and cares for us. God will lead us in both small and large decisions, just as He guided Joseph. Let us grow in trusting God's leading.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help me to trust you as you lead and guide me through making decisions. Give me wisdom. Amen.*

Mush or Steel?

3rd Thursday in Advent

Read: Ephesians 6:10-18

“Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” Ephesians 6:10 (NIV)

The Russian philosopher, Lenin, once wrote this succinct summary of his strategy for dealing with opponents: ‘Advance with bayonet. If you encounter mush, proceed. If you encounter steel, withdraw.’

There is evil in the world, for that is why God sent His Son Jesus into the world to save us from all that is evil. When Jesus died on the cross, He battled with the devil for our souls and He came out the Victor. In the Ephesians text above, we are told how to arm ourselves against the oncoming bayonets of Satan. With God’s armour firmly in place, there is no chance for the devil to enter our lives – he encounters steel and must withdraw.

As Christians we need to encourage each other in our spiritual walks with our Heavenly Father to help grow the kingdom of God. C.S.Lewis once wrote that one of Satan’s most successful ploys is in tricking people to believe that he doesn’t exist or that he is just a comic book character with a red suit, tail and pitchfork.

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Ephesians 6:12 (NIV)

Therefore, put on God’s armour in reading the Bible, worshipping with fellow believers, praying, and serving our Lord in love. Go forward in confidence knowing that you are protected and loved. This Advent, ready yourself and help others to be ready for Jesus’ coming.

Prayer: *I thank you, Lord Jesus that you have come to save me from all that is evil. Help me to daily equip myself with your armour. Amen.*

Just Forget

3rd Monday in Advent

Read: Ephesians 4:31-32

“Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me.” Philippians 3:13b-14a (NRSV)

Ever had that ‘oh, no’ moment? You have just spent a couple hours typing a document when you accidentally press *delete* rather than *save*. A computer cannot recall things they have not been required to save – very much a selective memory!

God also asks us to have selective memories. When we pray, we need to forget and forgive what has happened to us earlier by others: the snide remark we chanced to hear at work; the lack of consideration shown us by a neighbour; the pain of being shut out by a friend when we needed sympathy; the unreasonable demands or sharp words that fell so freely from the lips of someone we love.

God commands that we wipe away the memory of those real and imagined wrongs done to us by others, as clean as hitting the *delete* button on a computer. However, we are not as unfeeling as computers. We have human egos and human feelings. How can we just forgive and forget?

We can forget because we can remember. We remember the King of Kings lying in the straw, born into a sinful world to live and die for our sins. We forget because we forgive, remembering that Christ has forgiven us. Too often we forget the log in our own eye and concentrate on the speck in our brother’s eye.

Remembering the manger and the cross makes it easier to forgive those who hurt us, to wipe away the memory of their sins and focus on the love of our Heavenly Father.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, give me a compassionate, forgiving heart. Remind me daily of your forgiving love and make me more like you each day. Amen.*

Rising Above

3rd Tuesday in Advent

Read: Isaiah 60:1-5, 18-22

*“Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”
Isaiah 40: 31 (NIV)*

The black hot air balloon rose gracefully. Higher and higher it flew until it formed only a tiny speck against the azure sky. Julian Nott piloted the world's first solar powered pressurised cabin balloon across the English Channel in 1979. It succeeded and Julian Nott received accolades, even awards from Prince Charles. He rose gracefully above the trees and the ocean.

God would intend that our prayer life should be like this. But, all too often we drift along close to the ground, getting entangled in earthly difficulties. So often without faith and hope in our Lord, we come crashing to the ground. Prayer and faith in our Saviour to help, heal and bring His love should send us soaring above the clouds, above all the difficulties we face on earth. The salvation and forgiveness He brings should lift us up as on eagles' wings. In the Holy Spirit, God gives us the means to rise above our earthly problems, allowing us to communicate directly with our Lord.

Prayer is powerful and effective and, with the Holy Spirit's power, can help us soar in the heights of the Father's love. Jesus came as a helpless baby at Christmas to bring the love of His Father to us on earth. It was God's plan of salvation for us. We can rejoice in the New Life He brings and the new start He allows us to have every day as we are washed clean in His forgiveness.

Prayer: *Lord, you have given me a way to come to you in prayer. Help me to use it often to soar above all the difficulties I face. Amen.*

Open our Eyes

3rd Wednesday in Advent

Read: 1 John 1:1-10

“Their eyes and ears will be open to the needs of the people.” Isaiah 32:3 (GNB)

I still remember my mother telling me to eat all my carrots so that I would see better in the dark. Was this true? There is a story told that during World War II, British bomber pilots began striking enemy targets at night with greater accuracy because the pilots were eating lots and lots of carrots. Counterintelligence leaked that the carotene in carrots converted to Vitamin A, curing night blindness. This sounded very scientific and carrots were in great demand. But, in reality, their success was due to radar being perfected and the 'eye' of a radar device could see what no human eye ever could.

God's eyes see what we can't or don't want to see. But this Christmas, let us pray that our eyes may be open to the needs of those around us. Christmas can be the loneliest time of the year, people can be desperate in their physical needs, emotional needs or in their spiritual needs. Help us ...*“to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide [their] feet into the path of peace.”
(Luke 1:79 NIV)*

We pray that God would open our eyes, not just to see the problems of others, but to see how our Father would use us to alleviate some of their burden. We cannot help everyone, but we can help someone. We cannot tell everyone about Jesus, our Saviour, but we can tell someone.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, may my eyes be opened to helping those in need and my heart be filled with compassion for those still in the dark about your saving love. Amen.*