



**Monday 15 December 2024 to  
Sunday 22 December 2024**



Sunday 15 December 2024

# Sharing and caring

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

**Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none, and whoever has food must do likewise (Luke 3:11).**

Read [Luke 3:7-18](#)

There's nothing better than the warmth of a good woollen overcoat when the chill breezes are blowing. When I was a university student, I had a duffel coat, which was not uncommon back then. It was purchased from an army surplus store and served me well during my student years. When I graduated, I moved to Adelaide and became involved with Jacob's Ladder – a coffee shop and outreach program in the city run by Lutheran Student Fellowship student types. During one of my times there, I was challenged to give my duffel coat to one of the people who attended Jacob's Ladder. Sharing my spare coat wasn't easy (I had a much more conservative, grown-up overcoat that fitted my newly emerging professional image). The faithful duffel held a lot of memories of my student days. I still remember it fondly.

Was I acting like the kind of person for whom John was advocating? I was somewhat happy to share my 'wealth', but was I really the sort of cheerful giver God loves? (See 2 Corinthians 9:6,7.)

I have learnt a lot about giving from my dad. He was the sort of guy who would help whoever he could, and he loved to give to the church. Dad was a member of the then Finance Council of the District. I am told that he and the others in the group would sit and discuss the needs of the wider church (often until one or two o'clock in the morning). It was not unusual that they would then fund the required initiatives. When my dad died, we were intrigued to read some of the tributes that came to us, and we have never heard the story about why he was remembered by some people.

To me, that is the kind of giving advocated in the New Testament – abundant generosity given selflessly and quietly, with no need for public acknowledgement or adulation. It is the sort of generosity I witnessed many times when I was the director at Lutheran Community Care – people giving significant amounts anonymously, others giving numerically small donations that represented a significant part of their income, or the person who faithfully sent a cheque every month, and all we ever knew about them was their name and post office box number. What a privilege it was to acknowledge these cheerful givers!

What a fitting reminder on the third Sunday of Advent, known as Gaudete Sunday or the Sunday for rejoicing. Let's rejoice together in the opportunities we have to give and in all we have been given.

***Generous God, thank you for giving us your Son. Open our hearts, so we can give generously to glorify you and help our fellow people. Amen.***

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*Colleen lives in Adelaide with her husband, John. She enjoys reading, writing and keeping in touch with friends and family in Australia and overseas. After growing up in rural New South Wales, Colleen attended university in Sydney and then moved to Adelaide for two years in 1974. After meeting and marrying her husband, she has never left.*

Monday 16 December 2024

## Such richness!

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

**... so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:7).**

Read [Ephesians 1:15 – 2:7](#)

As I read the verses this week's devotions are based on, the word 'grace' kept appearing. It got me thinking about how we hear the word today. I came up with graceful, gracious, graced (with one's presence), to say grace before a meal, grace days (those extra days of holidays that are sometimes given between Christmas and New Year), Your Grace (how to address a duke, duchess or archbishop) and grace-filled. There are the opposites as well: disgrace, disgraceful, graceless – a bit of a mixed bag, really. I also discovered that my daughter's and granddaughter's names both mean 'grace' (Anne and Hannah). How good is that?

However, none of these (not even my daughter or granddaughter) seem to convey the magnitude of God's amazing gift of grace to us – our glorious inheritance.

The reading incites hope inside our hearts, thankfulness and a sense of God's immense power and generosity. The power is so great that all we have to do is to believe, and we are saved. This gift is timeless and limitless – and kind.

Do we really appreciate what a wonderful gift God is giving us? I'm not sure that I do. Maybe it's because I have grown up knowing about grace. It has always been there – I've known that I have been saved by grace through faith. Maybe always knowing about God's grace means I have never contemplated or appreciated the amazing richness, breadth, depth and width of God's grace for me.

All of my life, there has been a copy of *The Count of Monte Cristo* in the bookcase-cum-writing-desk that I have inherited from my family home. The book was a teenage birthday gift to my mother from her mother about 100 years ago, which I have read and re-read numerous times. It was always covered in brown paper. Earlier this year, I removed the brown paper to reveal a beautifully bound book. The cover was exquisitely decorated by some long-gone bookbinder. I wonder whether I would have appreciated its beauty if I had uncovered the book earlier.

Today's reading may be worth re-reading and savouring. Pause and reflect on the richness of the gracious and grace-filled love God has for you and me.

***Generous God, thank you for your grace and mercy that is always there for each and every one of us. Thank you for the gift of faith your Spirit has given me. Help my faith grow so that I may walk more closely with you each day. Amen.***

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Tuesday 17 December 2024

# One in Christ

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

**So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19).**

Read [Ephesians 2:8-22](#)

Today, we are reminded again that we are saved by grace through faith. Today's reading highlights God's generosity in accepting us as we are, bringing peace and overlooking our differences. We are assured that we are welcome in God's family as 'fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God'. Not only that, but we are also 'a dwelling place for God'.

God has no favourites. What an interesting thought! When we look around us and see the different ways people express their faith in God, how can we tell who is right and who is wrong? This passage and many others make it clear that our faith is a gift from God and that you or I do not get to make the call on who is right and who is not.

Not only that, but grace is also a great leveller. Through Jesus' death on the cross, the dividing wall of hostility between us (whichever 'us' you can think of) is broken down. Hostility is gone. Laws are done away with. Peace removes barriers of distance and difference. You and I are each a dwelling place of God, and Christ is our cornerstone.

Our God is a generous God – giving so much to you and me, no matter who we are or from where we have come. Our God is a kind God, gladly welcoming all into a close relationship. Our God is a peaceful God who casts aside the hostilities between us.

How should we respond to this generosity, kindness and peace? I guess the only answer is 'gracefully'.

I have checked out the meanings of grace in my oversized Oxford Dictionary. There are a variety of definitions: implying attractiveness, courtesy, goodwill, favour – or (in Christian belief) the unmerited favour of God, a divine saving and strengthening influence.

It's becoming obvious that I will have to think more about grace and what it means to live in God's grace and how I relate to others in light of that. You may choose to do that, too.

***Gracious God, thank you for accepting me into your household. Thank you for your generosity, courtesy and kindness in welcoming me and giving me the gift of faith. Please help me treasure that faith and nurture it so it continues to grow and sustain me through the good times and challenging times. Amen.***

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Wednesday 18 December 2024

# The great game changer

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

**... this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ (Ephesians 3:8b).**

Read [Ephesians 3:1-13](#)

The incarnation of Christ – his being present in the flesh here on earth – and his consequent ministry were making a significant difference. Not only was the mystery of Christ – that through him anybody can be saved by grace – revealed, but Paul has been actively promoting this good news. The fact that Gentiles – as well as Jews – can be saved is a game changer.

Removing this barrier opens the way for the good news of God's grace and generosity towards all to be spread throughout the world.

Have you noticed in this week's readings the mentions of God's generosity to us all – no matter who we are or what we have done? It's something I find incredibly appealing and appallingly challenging. The implications of God's grace mean that no-one is ruled out by the definition of who they are.

Paul refers to the mystery of Christ that was not revealed to humans in the past. As Christmas approaches, I love to soak up the wonderful choral options surrounding us at this time. One of my favourite pieces is 'O Magnum Mysterium' (O great mystery). The translation is:

O great mystery,  
and wonderful sacrament,  
that animals should see the newborn Lord,  
lying in a manger!  
We have seen the infant  
and the choirs of angels  
praising the Lord together.  
Alleluia!

The poetry in this piece of music marvels at how amazing our God is. God brings the news of the birth of Jesus to the world through choirs of angels, and even the animals share in the mystery. Maybe it's fanciful – maybe it's true. We don't know the limits of what God can do and many of us certainly know of the sensitivities and responsiveness animals can show to humans.

What we do know is that through the revelation of the mystery of God's presence among us, we can be assured of God's grace being there for us. And that is a great game changer for you and me.

***Mysterious God, thank you for sending your Son Jesus to live among us. Thank you for Jesus' humanity and divinity. Thank you for the many ways we hear the message of Jesus' birth – through art, music and the proclamation of the good news of the gospel. Amen.***

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Thursday 19 December 2024

## A full life

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

**And to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19).**

Read [Ephesians 3:14-21](#)

Today, let's rejoice that Christ dwells in our hearts through faith, giving us access to his totally amazing, all-consuming, all-forgiving love. Paul talks about a humungous love – beyond our comprehension. His prayer is that we all have the power to comprehend the magnitude of Christ's love. It's that generosity and kindness of God again. He has given us so much – so very much more than we can imagine.

I have lived a privileged life: a happy and stable childhood, access to tertiary education, a fulfilling career, a happy marriage that spans nearly 50 years, happy and healthy children and grandchildren, and a faith that sustains me into the next phase of life.

And what is asked of me in return? Not a lot, really. My understanding is that we are asked to 'live full lives – full in the fullness of God', which is how *The Message* Bible translation describes it. And if we leave God in control and live in God's fullness, God's Spirit will be able to work in and through us to spread God's love into the world.

I pray that each of us – you and I – open our hearts to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit so that we can fully comprehend, experience and acknowledge Christ's love and the fullness of God.

And I wonder how much we limit God's power within us by simply not trusting in Christ's love. What would happen if we weren't bound by our imagination or fear and simply went where God leads us? What could God do through us if we 'let go and let God'?

When you reflect on your life, how often do you see God's hand leading and guiding you through the good and not-so-good times? Have you seen how challenges that may or may not have been conquered can lead you to places or people you would never have imagined?

Or what about when you are faced with something overwhelming, and you hand it over to God, resulting in an okay and unexpected outcome? Have you ever thought that life could be easier if you went to God first rather than as a last resort when all else seems to have failed?

***Glorious God, thank you for not being limited by my imagination. May you be glorified in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.***

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Friday 20 December 2024

# Building the body of Christ

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

**But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift (Ephesians 4:7).**

Read [Ephesians 4:1-16](#)

How are your preparations going for Christmas? The countdown is well and truly underway – well, I guess it has been for a couple of months.

I'm a great one for lists. Leading up to Christmas, I need to:

- Write a Christmas letter for that annual contact with family and friends.
- Post/email Christmas letters and cards. Note to self: make sure to remove those who are no longer with us.
- Buy Christmas gifts – it's hard to know what to give people nowadays. There's nothing that people seem to need, and their wants may well be things that I can't or won't be able to buy.
- Make Christmas cake and pudding – except that no-one seems to like to eat them anymore.
- Sort out where we will spend Christmas Day – whose turn is it to host?

We know that Christmas Day is one of the most challenging days of the year for many people. There are those caught up in domestic or family violence who are particularly vulnerable as people come together, and differences are heightened by the enforced contact. At the other end of the scale, some have no family or people close to them with whom they can share that seemingly all-important day and those for whom Christmas is a time of remembering people they are separated from, either by death or other circumstances.

In today's reading, Paul reminds us of the gifts of grace and the love Christ has given us – and that we each have our own giftings. Once again, we are made aware of the extravagance of God's gifts to us: God has filled the heavens and the earth with gifts.

I want to encourage you to take some time in the following days to reflect on what gifts God has given to you. I believe everybody has been blessed with their own unique combination of special gifts and talents. Let's acknowledge those and use them to God's glory and to the good of those with whom we celebrate and remember this Christmas season.

***Gracious and generous God, thank you for making me in your image. Thank you for the gifts you have given to me. Please help me to use them for your glory and the good of my community. Amen.***

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Saturday 21 December 2024

# God's shining face

by Colleen Fitzpatrick

**O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved (Psalm 80:7).**

Read [Psalm 80:1-7](#)

How's your eyesight? Mine is not as good as it used to be – and it's getting worse. Ageing and encroaching cataracts are taking their toll. I have trouble reading the small print, and street signs aren't as clear as they used to be. It's okay – I had my eyes checked last week and am still okay to drive, in case you were concerned about that!

The changes to my eyesight mean it is harder for me to see people's facial expressions. I guess body language can be a good indicator of moods, but I need to be closer to people to see their smiles.

The *Message* translation of the Bible translates verse seven of the psalm above as: 'God of the angel armies, come back! Smile your blessing smile: *That* will be our salvation.'

I quite like the notion of God's face shining on us being a blessing smile. And I like the idea of needing to be close enough to God to see his face smiling at me. When you next hear the benediction, 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace' (Numbers 6:24-26), you can imagine that you are close enough to God to see his face shining on or smiling at you. What a great way to go back out into the everyday world!

As you sing 'O Come, O Come, Emmanuel', do you remember that Emmanuel/Immanuel means, 'God with us'? Once again, you can cherish the knowledge that you are close to God, close enough to see God's blessing smile and to, once again, celebrate the coming of God's precious Son, who cared for us enough to give his life so that we might one day be close enough to God to actually see his shining face.

***God of us all, thank you for your great love for us. Thank you for blessing and keeping us close to you through the good times and the not-so-good times. May your face continuously shine on us as we walk towards the time we are with you and Jesus forever. Amen.***

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Sunday 22 December 2024

# Baby talk

by Pastor Jim Strelan

**As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy (Luke 1:44).**

Read [Luke 1:39-45 \(46-55\)](#)

My wife and I have long believed that a baby growing inside a pregnant mother is aware of external noises, emotions, the general wellbeing of the mother and her relationships, and whether the world it will enter is a warm, welcoming one or a disturbing one. Parents who think that way are comfortable talking to the child within and even playing calming music to help create that sense of safety and security for the child.

In this passage, it is as though two babies talk to each other. The baby within Elizabeth acknowledges, recognises and relates to the baby within Mary. And the baby within Elizabeth, to be named John, already does what he as an adult is called to do, points to Jesus so that Elizabeth refers to Mary as 'the mother of my Lord' (verse 43). Isn't that something? Baby John is excited and overjoyed when he is in the presence of Baby Jesus, and Mary feels the dramatic movement in her womb. John, who later points to Jesus as 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29), already connects with Jesus, and he (not Elizabeth) leaps for joy.

The celebration of the birth of Jesus is getting close. Can you feel the excitement? Are you anticipating something good? This is an amazing thing. This is earth-shattering. This can almost make you want to leap for joy. God coming to our world as a baby. If you are an expectant parent, you can identify with all this. If you have children around you who are excited about Christmas, you will appreciate this. It can be more challenging if you are an empty-nester or don't have children. But this pre-birth announcement of what is to come can grab hold of you, whatever your present situation is – it's the beginning of the greatest story ever told.

***God of heaven and earth, let your Spirit fill me in these days with great anticipation and joy as I prepare to celebrate the birth of the world's Saviour and mine. Amen.***

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*Jim is a retired pastor who lives with his wife, Ruth, on the north side of Brisbane. He is a proud and not very humble Brisbane Lions supporter. Jim likes to read, listen to music and play golf. He and Ruth love being with their young grandchildren and watching them grow. For Jim, grace is everything, and he will share that however and whenever possible.*