



**Monday 23 December 2024 to
Sunday 19 January 2025**



Monday 23 December 2024

A new time

by Pastor Jim Strelan

To be made new in the attitude of your minds, and to put on the new self (Ephesians 4:23,24a).

Read [Ephesians 4:17–32](#)

You more than likely have a will. ‘This is the will and testament of ...’ A dictionary definition of a testament is ‘something that serves as a sign or evidence of a specified fact, event, or quality’ (Oxford Languages). In a will, you signal your intentions regarding your estate; the document is evidence of those intentions.

Our Bible is divided into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The New Testament begins with the story of Jesus. It is ‘new’ and is both a sign and evidence of God at work in our world.

I’ll admit that I am struggling to understand why this reading is set down for this Christmas week. But maybe it is meant to be a pointer, a reminder that when we celebrate the birth of Jesus, knowing what is ahead – a new beginning, a new direction, a new life that puts off the old and shows itself in a whole new mindset – that makes our celebration even richer and fuller.

Here is Jesus, who brings us God as he hasn’t been known before. Here is Jesus, who comes to bring wholeness and oneness and newness. A new will and testament. One that turns away from the old and shows itself in truthfulness, kindness, compassion and forgiveness.

That’s why we celebrate the birth of Jesus as we do every year. That’s why we hear the same Bible readings, sing the same carols and maybe follow a family ritual year after year. To remind us that the baby in Mary’s womb and the baby in Elizabeth’s womb got excited – because they knew the new thing God was going to do.

Loving God, you sent Jesus to bring in newness. As we celebrate his birth, remind me again of what it is that Jesus brings and to be filled with joy in my reflections. Amen.

Tuesday 24 December 2024

What brings you joy?

by Pastor Jim Strelan

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

Read [Luke 2:1–14 \(15–20\)](#)

Nick Cave is an Australian singer and songwriter whom I greatly admire. I can't get into his music, but I have great respect for the man. Over four or so years, he tragically lost two sons. He speaks a lot about grief, loss, finding purpose and faith in God. After answering thousands of questions from people subscribed by email to his online community *The Red Hand Files*, he was asked if he had a question to ask, and he did. His question was, ‘What brings you joy?’

So, I ask you to spend a moment to answer that question, and if you are reading this with someone else, then share your responses. One of the things that brings me joy is when my little grandchildren run with open arms to my wife and me when we turn up somewhere they are. It's a beautiful thing and brings joy.

On this night we sing, ‘Joy to the world; the Lord is come’. The angel of the Lord brought a message to the shepherds of good news and joy for all people. You look around you, especially at the children's faces, and you see joy. Their delight might not always come from the birth of the Christ-child in the manger as we might prefer, but joy is infectious, and whatever its cause, it's a great thing.

One of my favourite Bible verses is Psalm 30:5b: ‘Tears may flow in the night, but joy comes in the morning.’ The night is a period of time, short or long. But joy comes. It comes because God is in the things we deal with in life. That's Christmas. Immanuel – God with us. If the joy of Christmas is difficult for you to recognise right now because of how things are for you, be assured there is joy awaiting you. It's the joy of and from the Lord. And as the angel said, it is good news. And if it comes easily, thank God for it and let it infuse you.

Fill me, Lord God, with the joy that comes from you. Tonight, I celebrate the birth of Jesus – joy to the world. Amen.

Wednesday 25 December 2024

The manger baby

by Pastor Jim Strelan

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger (Luke 2:16).

Read [Luke 2:\(1–7\), 8–20](#)

Do you sometimes feel that your life is so ordinary? Nothing special about it, nothing anyone would write about in a magazine or report on TV news. Just a day-to-day struggle, trying to keep our heads above water. When we think about God, especially at Christmastime, we can easily think about majesty, glory, shining light, accompanied by choirs of angels – other-worldly, nothing at all like your life or mine. And God is in all those things. After all, God is God.

But see what we have when God comes to our earth. He comes as a baby, covered in gunk, bawling his eyes out, desperately seeking his mother's breast. Not in the most prestigious hospital in the land, but in a cow shed, in a feed box for the animals, with no reporters and cameras and bright lights as witnesses, just some shepherds tired from a night out in the fields. A manger baby. Very, very ordinary if you ask me.

But that's the magic of God. He loves to be in the ordinary, in muck, the inglorious – where we are. It's interesting that the Christmas story, as we have it in the Gospel of Luke, consists of both the awesome and the ordinary at the same time. A bit like my experience of life with God. I am in awe of him, worship him, lift up his name, and I know that he is with me in all my ordinariness and brokenness. A traditional image of the baby Jesus in the manger is with his hands open and reaching out as best as a baby can. Reaching out to you and me as if to say, 'This is for you; this is how I want to be involved with you. Come to the manger with me, and we will journey together. I am born for you. I enter your ordinariness and show you God'.

That's worth doing what the shepherds did: glorifying and praising God (verse 20). May your Christmas celebration of the manger child bring you great joy.

Thank you, God of all, for choosing to enter our world in the ordinary. Be in the ordinariness of my life. Bless me today as I celebrate the birth of the Saviour. Amen.

Thursday 26 December 2024

From the beginning

by Pastor Jim Strelan

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the word of life (1 John 1:1).

Read [1 John 1:1–10](#)

As I was growing up, I fought against an idea of God that had him as very removed from me and my life, someone to fear, respect and keep at a distance. Then, there was a movement to bring God closer and be my friend, and this came through Jesus. Some called it the Jesus Revolution. While I would much rather have an idea of God that says he is approachable and nearer than distant, sometimes I think we need to pause for a moment and just consider who he is.

When we think of God in the human form of Jesus, flesh and blood, living our life, understanding our fears, crying our tears, stop for a moment and recognise just who this Jesus is. Especially now at Christmas: the bawling, red, wrinkly baby Jesus in the shed out the back in the feed box is the one who was from the beginning. You might know the song ‘Mary, Did You Know?’. It has the words, ‘Mary, did you know ... this sleeping baby you’re holding is the Great I Am?’

The writer of 1 John calls on us to pause for a moment and reflect: the one who was heard, seen, touched and with his followers is the one who was from the beginning, one with the Father. That’s mind-boggling. But not so mind-boggling if you have a view of God who is distant from us, who is removed from us. But if he is close to us, with us, even in us, that gives a different perspective. What is proclaimed is an eternal mystery, not just a fanciful, wishful-thinking thing. As wondrous as it is, it is something seen and heard (verse 3).

This eternal Jesus, who is one with the God of the universe, is with you. Little old you, little old me. We are connected, and we are in fellowship (verse 3). Be humbled and be glad.

Jesus, I acknowledge who you are, and I am in awe. I am overawed when I think about how you took on the form of a baby, entering my world, for me and for all. Thank you. Amen.

Friday 27 December 2024

Shining

by Pastor Jim Strelan

... the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining (1 John 2:8b).

Read [1 John 2:1–11](#)

Children bring a lot of joy to our Christmas celebrations, don't they? One of the things my wife and I love to do as grandparents is to take our grandchildren to see the Christmas lights. One of the best displays in our area has thousands of lights, probably more than most other displays, but the true Christmas message is clearly announced. It brings us a lot of joy to see the sense of wonder in our grandchildren's faces – the more lights, the better!

It's not by chance that our Christmas celebrations are full of light because what we celebrate is the birth of the true light, someone who comes to dispel our darkness and bring us to a new time. If your church lights Advent candles in the four weeks leading up to Christmas, they will also have a central, taller Christ Candle – the one for Christmas Day and the days following. Here's Jesus. Here is the true light. Let him shine.

If we carry the name of Christ, then what he is washes over us. When we are baptised, we are *christened* – linked inextricably to Jesus Christ and all he is. And he is the light. So, in this Bible reading, we are reminded to be what we are. If we are one with the one who is light, then live in that light. And that shows itself in how we are with our 'brother', the other one, the one to whom we relate, whoever that might be. We deny who we are when we act toward the other as though we are in darkness. If you claim to be in the light, then you will live as one in the light. It makes sense, doesn't it? That's a daily determination. Letting the darkness pass so the light can shine.

So, Christmas is for every day. It is for living. It's not always easy, but we have someone who speaks in our defence (verse 1) and advocates for us so that we can start again. It's all good news, and we are reminded of that and celebrate it during these days.

Light of the World, shine your light into my life so the darkness can pass. When my light is dim, rekindle it by your presence, which repels all darkness. Amen.

Saturday 28 December 2024

Praise, praise, praise

by Pastor Jim Strelan

He has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his saints, of Israel, the people close to his heart. Praise the Lord (Psalm 148:14).

Read [Psalm 148](#)

Sometimes, when we think about God, we are left with the need to praise him. We try to fathom him, explain him, grasp him, but he is beyond our capacity to do those things, so we are left with nothing but praise. The wonder of such undeserved love. He doesn't just love us a little bit. He doesn't just love us reluctantly. He sees us as precious jewels that he holds in his hands. And that includes you. And then there are times when we are just blown away by something beautiful: a sunset, the ocean, a waterfall, a majestic tree – and we are left with nothing but praise.

In this psalm, we have all of creation praising God. All of it: the sun, moon, stars, sea creatures, storms, animals and humans – from kings to children. We can sometimes think that praising God is only something we humans do, but this psalm reminds us that every created thing sings its own song in praise of the Creator.

And then there's the interesting verse 14, which talks about God raising up a 'horn' that is 'the praise of all his saints'. Now, that is a little obscure. It could refer to the raised horns of a rampaging bull, a symbol then of triumph. It could refer to the horn of oil used to anoint a special person for a specific role. It certainly suggests someone who deserves all our praise and all the praise of creation.

This past week, our focus has been on the birth of God's Anointed One, Jesus. The angels sang their praises in the Bethlehem fields. The shepherds left the stable, praising God for everything they had seen and heard. We have sung the carols of praise as we've retold the story. There is wonder in it. God is at work. We – and all creation – praise God over and over, day after day. Praise the Lord!

God of all, help me to listen and hear the praise of creation all around me. I join that song and thank you for joining your life to mine in Jesus. Amen.

Sunday 29 December 2024 **Questioning for wisdom** by Jo Corney

When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, ‘Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you’. ‘Why were you searching for me?’ he asked. ‘Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?’ (Luke 2:48,49) Read [Luke 2:41–52](#)

Only days ago, many of us will have travelled and gathered for Christmas celebrations with loved ones. You may be feeling the post-celebration fatigue and relief. I wonder if you’ve experienced questions at your get-togethers fuelled by emotion, sincere questions of inquiry, or just ones to throw thoughts around? It’s these types of questions that I see in this passage.

Most of this passage sets the scene for three lots of questions that are asked. The scene conjures up lovely images of a regular family trip, familiar as it is done each year, attending a festival – a time of gathering seemingly shared with a close group. A sense of tradition, expectation, purpose and celebration with a probable experience of post-celebration fatigue. Against this backdrop, the questions arise – the overall passage gives their context.

Firstly, Mary’s question is understandably emotionally fuelled by a mother’s anxiety and fear from searching for her eldest son – I can ‘hear’ controlled exasperation, fear and exhaustion braided with relief, love and adrenaline when she says, ‘Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you’. However, let’s not miss that Mary, after a little time and probable reflection, treasured up ‘all these things in her heart’ – she grew from the experience and seemingly knew greater wisdom. Her approach saw her grow in awareness of Jesus, giving a deeper platform from which the passage says she watched him grow in wisdom, stature and favour with God and people.

And secondly, we hear Jesus answering Mary with a question of inquiry, seemingly seeking to understand: ‘Why were you searching for me? Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?’ I don’t hear sass or rebuke – I hear a gentle reply, compassionate to his mum’s duress with controlled disbelief that there was even a question of where he’d be. I think Jesus is kind in his questioning – not using his questioning reply as a weapon but reflecting that he’s listening to understand and reply accordingly.

Now, the third lot of questions. Jesus had been sitting among the teachers in the temple, listening to them and asking questions. I think he also listened to understand them and asked questions to aid their

understanding. The next verse tells us that he amazed them with his insight and answers, so it seems they also asked him questions.

A personal reflection on this passage challenges me around how I question, if this grows my wisdom and insight in the things of faith and God, and how this then influences my living. Something for me to ponder – every blessing to you in your contemplations also.

Loving God, thank you for giving us the gift of asking questions for different purposes and needs. Please help us to be wise in how we use these, so it is for ours and our neighbour's good and your glory. In the name of Christ, Amen.

Monday 30 December 2024 **What a thing to be called!**

by Jo Corney

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

Read [1 John 3:1–10](#)

Have you experienced wanting to lavish love on another? Have you experienced love lavished on you? There are various relationships in which this can play out – usually in the space we feel is closest to us. The one in my mind is the parent and child relationship. In this, the extravagance of love, as appropriate, is overwhelming, richly empowering and all-consuming – even making our sacrifice for our children our default position. In this, we carve out and know love where we would give anything for the dear one to understand how precious and valued they are to us, how wonderful it is to share life with them, how selfless we feel toward them, and how we delight to gather with them. It's solid. Lavish love – if it's been our experience, it's tremendously precious.

But even this tremendous, precious experience is only a shadow of what we read here about God's love lavished on us. This passage offers many other points, but for our devotion today, how precious it is to take the time to sit with the Scripture that lavishes or abundantly pours out how uniquely loved we are by God. It's like no other love available – it takes our human experience of appropriate familial love and dials it up to complete perfection, without limit and fault, only able to be offered by God. I think it is this way so that we know who we are in this unique relationship – his children. And, in this completely unique relationship with

God as Father, we experience his love and other attributes of his heart up close – patience, kindness, gentleness and all the fruits of the Spirit.

In a family, there is usually some resemblance that, looking in from the outside, makes us think the members are related. So, amidst the experience of the avalanche in which God lavishes his love on me and calls me his child, I feel a little awkward about what resemblance I show of him in my heart. I see a resemblance in other Christians and am blessed and grateful that their actions remind me of God's love and Jesus in their generosity, faithfulness, humility, giving, patience and graciousness ... it encourages me in my faith journey and experience. But honestly, do I always show that?

Before I detour in my thoughts into what I can do in my strength to show a 'family resemblance' to the heart of God, I am again embraced by the lavish love – and grace – of God that makes my relationship possible with him. He pulls me back into the relationship that he makes work by all he does – how incredible to be reminded again as we come to the end of the calendar year that we are children of God – possible only by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Fellow Christian, 'See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!'

Every blessing to you.

Loving God, thank you for your love for us, which is like no other. Please help us accept and rest in it as your children. In the name of Christ, Amen.

Tuesday 31 December 2024

Lord, how majestic your name is! by Jo Corney

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! (Psalm 8:1) Read [Psalm 8](#)

This was our responsive psalm at Synod worship one year. I remember the experience of hundreds of us responding collectively, 'Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!' As is the opportunity for shared responses, it felt unifying and uplifting and was heard as one voice.

I remember the 'dance' as the stanzas were read and the collective response raised in reply – somehow, the response made the psalm's content all the more poignant for me that day. It is beautiful imagery used,

but even so, I found myself differently invested in the description of God setting his glory in the heavens (verse 1b), the prompt to consider the heavens and the work of his fingers, the moon and stars he set in place (verse 3), leading then to the inquiry of ‘what are humans that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?’ (verse 4). They are beautiful ‘wordscapes’ that make images easily imagined – the language opens up the opportunity for vivid imaginings for the remainder of the psalm. Perhaps, as you read it today, you may have had a similar experience.

Psalm 8 unpacks a summary of creation and the special space God gave humankind in it. He made it for us and then placed us as the pinnacle of his creation.

Yesterday, we saw what great love the Father lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. Today, we see his creation of the place we live in. Totally incredible love and totally incredible provision for humankind by God.

What a gift we are reminded of today as we prepare to farewell 2024 and welcome 2025! The words of Psalm 8 are ancient, but what a wonder that the author knew God in such a way that he could write as he did. What a comfort that God remains the same, and we also can be encouraged by his care for us as we also may marvel, like the author of Psalm 8, with hearts uplifted saying, ‘Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!’

Heavenly Father, thank you for the blessing of your creation. Thank you for the gifts in it, offered to us ongoingly. Please help us to experience and be reminded of your love for us endlessly offered in the majesty of your creation. Thank you for reminding us of your love and value for humankind through the universe and earth. In the name of Christ, Amen.

Wednesday 1 January 2025

Treasures of our hearts to ponder by Jo Corney

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2:19). Read [Luke 2:15–21](#)

Welcome to this new year! May you know a year of many blessings. Indeed, may many of your blessings be such precious experiences that they are treasured in your heart, encouraging you as you reflect upon them.

As I prepared to write this week's devotions, I have found my thoughts returning to the phrase, 'But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart'. Just three days ago, we also read that Mary 'treasured up these things in her heart' (Luke 2:51). Undoubtedly, the scholars among us will have deep and meaningful insight gleaned from the original texts and their subsequent meanings. I appreciate these and what they offer for context; however, for this devotion, I am reflecting on the 'treasuring' and 'pondering' of things in the heart.

The Cambridge Dictionary has been helpful with understanding these words: treasuring and pondering. These words were about 'doing something'; therefore, they will be classed as verbs. As such, 'to treasure' means to keep carefully or to take great care of something because you love it or consider it very valuable. 'To ponder' is to think carefully about something, especially for a noticeable length of time.

The mysteries of the divine that unpacked in Mary's life were beyond human comprehension, but she stored them as heart-held treasures. It says a lot about Mary's character. Luke's writings give clues to this – Mary was spiritually attuned, gentle of manner, deep and strong in faith, faithfully undertaking the specific role God gave her and graciously journeying with it. Considering what was ahead for her and her son Jesus (in his ministry, death, resurrection and ascension), Mary would benefit from the help of these treasures held in her heart from these experiences – they were a blessing.

So, as this new year begins, I take the lessons on board from Mary as related to my journey of faith and relationship with God. I won't spell these out for you, as they are unique for me. Perhaps you are also prompted to consider what you treasure and ponder in your heart. May the treasures of faith we hold in our hearts and what we ponder of God bless us as we journey through 2025.

Loving God, thank you for the blessings that have given us treasures to hold in our hearts. Thank you for the help it has been to ponder these as time has passed. Please continue to help us value the treasures you give us, remember them and know you are with us in our journey through these. In the name of Christ, Amen.

Thursday 2 January 2025 **Love, love, love** by Jo Corney

Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth (1 John 3:18).

Read [1 John 3:11–18](#)

Love – a word that is used in various contexts. In thinking through this devotion, my ears have been attuned to where I hear the word in use. While doing the shopping, I overheard a toddler tell his mum, ‘I love you so much, Mummy!’ During the same trip, I heard a person exclaim to their shopping partner, ‘I love this sauce brand!’ What contrasts! With the common broad use of ‘love’, I wonder if the word and the depth of what it means is served an injustice?

Thinking about love in human relational experience, we recognise different forms of it – familial, romantic, mateship, and the fatherly love of God for us and our reciprocal love for God. I am aware that we are instructed and reminded many times in the Scriptures to ‘love one another’. It’s obviously very important for us – perhaps we must be reminded often as we get distracted or forget. This passage reminds us of God’s love for us in Jesus and directs us to act on it.

In writing this devotion, I am particularly taken by John's tender address for his audience when he starts this directive sentence in verse 19. He is not using a big stick for what you must do! He addresses his letter’s recipients with care and tenderness as ‘dear children’. In this, I sense a heart of care seeking to remind its audience that love given and shown in ‘actions and in truth’ is the way to go.

But I am also curious about the power dynamic of giving by those with the resources to those in need. Pity is named in this passage – the feeling of sorrow and compassion caused by the suffering and misfortune of others (Oxford Dictionary) – it serves as the alarm within us to sense the need of another. I’ve had the experience of a significant need and the resultant pity, with no action but lots of words, and it has been humiliating.

However, I have also had great kindness and generosity, prompted by others seeing and having compassion for my need, resulting in actions to meaningfully help me, with no words offered (or very few). I have learnt how to show love in action from these experiences from my siblings in Christ. I have learnt to say little but offer what I can when my ‘pity alarm’ goes off.

Life has many chapters and overflows with varied experiences – perhaps you have been the one moved to show love in action, or, at times, you may also have been the recipient. From both perspectives, I am grateful

for John's tender direction: 'Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.' Every blessing to you in your journey.

Gracious God and Heavenly Father, thank you for knowing us and what is needed for our best. Thank you for reminding us of your love through your gift to us in Jesus to love one another and to do so with actions. Please grant us grace and wisdom as we respond to the needs of others. In the name of Christ, Amen.

Friday 3 January 2025

Actions and words – which is louder?

by Jo Corney

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 3:23).

Read [1 John 3:18–4:6](#)

This reading continues from our devotional passage yesterday. We continue our awareness of John writing to his audience with tender direction and counsel. We see four times the audience addressed as 'dear' in this passage. I am glad to have my attention focused again on the caring way these instructions are given, as it couches the teaching in a way that cuts through my potential reactions to the text – reactions like 'this is too hard'. It's offered to me in a way I can be open to. Perhaps it is similar for you.

In our devotional passages, we see the interconnection of experience, action, belief and obedience. This Scripture reminds me of what enables these – God's deep love for me, that I rest in and act in accordance with that love, and that as I believe Jesus is the Son of God, who died for me to save me from my sins, I have a restored relationship with God for always. For my good and the good I can offer others, I am also reminded of the commands of Christ and my opportunity to be obedient to these. Perhaps the Scripture calls to you in a similar way.

Today's reading commands us to love one another. Yesterday's reading showed us how we love each other in 'truth and action'. These combined show that we give something we have while paying attention to how it is given, and it has been given in response to a need. I am pondering what my resources really are for what I can give someone in need – material and otherwise. Perhaps you will also find yourself curious about this.

I think I'm starting to glimpse that in seeing the needs of others and offering action to assist, I am not only a giver but a recipient – blessed in giving, encouraged in faith and participating in the world around me. In so being and doing, it's possible that I, too, may find my needs seen and be blessed by others – something just done, on point, with few or no words. It seems like this approach offers a safe and sincere connection – it feels like God's love in action to me and by me.

How humbling to be part of God's care for others and possibly be cared for in the mix, too. I am grateful to be reminded: 'And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us' (verse 23).

Every blessing to you on this day.

Gracious and loving God, your plans are perfect and for our good. Please grow and preserve us in our faith by knowing you at work in our lives and world through our opportunities to offer to others from our resources and to receive the blessings of help from others in our need. In the name of Christ, Amen.

Saturday 4 January 2025 **Who loved who first?**

by Jo Corney

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10).

Read [1 John 4:7–21](#)

Here we are at the end of our devotional time together – I trust the daily devotions over recent days have encouraged you in God's love for you, for us and for all.

This verse is a personal treasure in my faith journey. My intention in sharing this is to encourage you and gently remind you of the liberation and certainty we have in faith because of what God first did for us – he loved us first and made the way for us to have a restored relationship with him for always through Jesus. From this space of being so uniquely and completely loved, we respond to him by wanting to know, please and serve him in our lives.

Coming into the Lutheran expression of Christian faith when I married from another conservative Christian religion, I grappled for some time with the classic Lutheran summary of faith 'by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith'. By grace was my issue. Works had been a real part of my previous

faith journey where I had to do something or be something better endlessly to feel I could continue in my relationship with God and the church community. I was so disheartened and exhausted from trying. There was no rest or gentleness in my faith – it was rules to keep and works to do to be in relationship with God. How do you think I went? I failed ongoingly, so I tried harder – it proved confusing as I would read or hear the ministry of God’s love and forgiveness, but both seemed unattainable. As a result, God seemed lofty and hard. Despite my various efforts (which were many), it didn’t feel like it came together – the older I got, the more difficult and isolating my understanding of the Christian faith became.

Coming into the Lutheran tradition was transformative for my faith journey, identity, peace, freedom and, subsequently, my service and worldviews. I am not saying it has been perfect or easy. But in a balanced and real way, I would share that over time (particularly through the shaping and influence of our worship liturgy, inquiry and informal study of Lutheran theology and engaging in my local and wider Lutheran church community), I’ve come to understand what this verse says – God loved us first, and it’s from there that we respond. Loving humankind first and showing how he values us by sending Jesus for all, God shows no-one is spare, but all are precious always.

How extraordinary and complete. As I grasped that God reached out to me in his love, I wanted to respond to him, and it became natural to respond to that in joy, gratitude, gentleness, assuredness, service and much more.

I offer you this verse, and I trust your experience of it blesses your faith journey. ‘This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins’ (1 John 4:10).

Every blessing to you this day and for the days to come.

Gracious and loving God, thank you for loving us first. In times of hardship in our lives, please help us know this. May we be held deep in your love for us always, no matter the life space. In the name of Christ, Amen.

Sunday 5 January 2025

Your words reveal your heart

by Pastor Stephen Abraham

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1).

Read [John 1:\(1–9\) 10–18](#)

A wise mentor once said something to me that forever changed how I interact with people. It went something like this: 'As soon as someone opens their mouth and speaks, they reveal their heart, identity, desires and what is important to them. So, beware of opening your mouth!'

To a degree, this revelation made me mindful of what I actually say in the presence of others, particularly those I first meet or don't know well! And it made me aware of how unmindful many of us are when we open our mouths to speak (or, in this age of social media, choose to write a comment!).

If this saying, 'Your words reveal your heart', is correct, then for me, it unlocks something special for us in today's reading.

Something that characterised the Israelite/Jewish faith as distinct from other Near Eastern religions of the time is that it wasn't a faith that used idols or images to access God. Instead, it was a faith based on words. God is not accessed through a golden calf, an Asherah pole or a carved idol. God's throne on earth – the Ark of the Covenant – is empty! God is too 'otherworldly' to view physically. The Israelites don't bow down to an idol. They bow down to the hidden God who speaks. The access point? God's name. In Genesis 1, this God who speaks creates everything with the power of his words.

Much wiser people than me have dissected, pondered and analysed the first chapter of John's Gospel. But what strikes me is that if spoken words embody a person's mind and will – something that reveals someone's true heart – then what is God's heart? What happens when God speaks to us in this New Testament, this New Covenant, this new epoch – what is revealed? What is God's final word to us, to creation, to the universe?

John calls us back to Genesis chapter 1 with these opening words, 'In the beginning ...'.

But there is just one word spoken, one verbal embodiment of the Living God, a word so powerful that the embodiment is more than just verbal: it's an actual physical 'person'.

One word: Jesus. ‘The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us’ (John 1:14). Want to see God? Look at Jesus. Want to hear God speak? Listen to Jesus’ words. Want to touch God? Jesus is with us ‘in the flesh’ each Sunday as we commune. God’s heart is revealed in the ‘Word made flesh’, the person Jesus Christ.

Almighty and ever-living God, thank you for revealing your heart to us in the person of your Son Jesus. Lord Jesus, thank you for coming to dwell with us and revealing the Father’s heart of love for us in your act of redemption on the cross. Holy Spirit, come and dwell within my heart and blow away the cobwebs of my brokenness. Speak to us, O Living God. We are listening. Amen.

Monday 6 January 2025

A radically inclusive epiphany!

by Pastor Stephen Abraham

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 3:6).

Read [Ephesians 3:1–12](#)

Well, our Christmas season has ended, and the Epiphany season has begun!

In this first week of Epiphany, we celebrate with wonder at God becoming manifest and living among us in the person of Jesus Christ. I’ve always found it fascinating that in this season, there seem to be two great ‘epiphanies’: God has come to earth as one of us, and Jesus is recognised as ‘King of the Jews’ by non-Jews, the Gentile Magi of the East. This second ‘epiphany’ ultimately resulted in the message of salvation through Christ Jesus coming to the whole world.

Just think about it. Pick up your Bible (physically or mentally) and look at the spine. In the first two-thirds of this great revelation of God’s will for the universe and its inhabitants, if you wanted to know the Living God, understand the great mysteries and be a part of the Great Plan, you had to be one thing: Hebrew/Jewish. No ifs, no buts. Until now ...

Read Ephesians 3:1–12.

It’s hard to comprehend with our 21st-century Western ideals of inclusivity just how profound this shift in thinking was – that you can be an heir to

the promises of that first two-thirds of the Bible (the Old Testament) without first being Jewish.

You don't have to be born an ethnic Jewish person. You don't have to marry into a Jewish family. You don't have to convert and be ritually circumcised and circumcise all the males in your household. You don't have to adhere to the ethnic Jewish practices or have a Jewish name or heritage.

This change truly was a paradigm shift in teaching and practice. Paradigm shifts are hard. When we read Acts 10 and 15, we realise it was difficult for the early church to navigate, especially the Jewish church communities (even Peter seemed to wrestle with his position in Galatians 2:11–13).

Ultimately, this radical inclusivity unlocked the rest of the world to having access to the gospel and being 'grafted into the vine' of God's promises of old (Romans 11:16–24).

Almighty Father, thank you for sending your Son into our world to save us and sit down at the table with sinners. Thank you for these epiphanies. Holy Spirit, help us share your welcome and acceptance with those we meet this day. Amen.

Tuesday 7 January 2025 **Jesus in the flesh: part one**

by Pastor Stephen Abraham

This is the one who came by water and blood – Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth (1 John 5:6).

Read [1 John 5:1–12](#)

Earlier this year, I was talking to some faithful Christian friends. They mentioned their next-door neighbours who deny one part of the Trinity being God but still fervently call themselves Christians. My theological ears pricked up when I heard that! What do you make of it? How would you respond? In our pluralistic society, these kinds of breakaway beliefs seem to be on the rise.

If the season of Epiphany celebrates the Son of God – God in human form coming and living among us, teaching, guiding and ultimately redeeming us – I find it fascinating that these subsequent two Bible readings are from 1 John. Why? Because John's letters were written directly to combat a breakaway group in the early church that thought the

Jesus who appeared wasn't really a human being! As I learnt in seminary, this breakaway group were followers of Docetism (Greek for 'appearance' because to them, Jesus only appeared to be human – see 1 John 4:1–3).

In today's reading, John doubles down on what makes a true Christian; it's someone who believes in both Jesus' divinity and Jesus' humanity. In my youth, when I was teaching a confirmation course, and I read these verses out of context, I thought, 'Wow – blood and water and Holy Spirit – what a great verse affirming the means of grace (baptism and holy communion)'. However, it's not really our baptism and receiving communion that John is talking about here. It's Jesus' physical life, born of a human mother, the start of his ministry at his baptism in the muddy Jordan River, his actual human lifeblood flowing out at his crucifixion – that's the point being made. For John, being a Christian means holding both that Jesus is fully human and fully God at the same time. And, as John shares, this is the winning formula that overcomes all that the world can throw at us, the formula that leads to eternal life.

Lord Jesus, we are grateful that you know what it is like to be truly human with its joys, hardships, aches and pains. Thank you for coming to experience our life and giving your life for us so that we may experience eternal life. Amen.

Wednesday 8 January 2025 **Jesus in the flesh: part two**

by Pastor Stephen Abraham

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

Read [1 John 5:13–21](#)

Yesterday, as we journeyed together in this Epiphany season, we explored the challenge of the erroneous teaching that threatened early church communities – namely, that 'Jesus wasn't really human' and that countering this threat was the purpose behind John's letters in the New Testament.

Here's a question for you: What do you do when you hear a friend or family member say something they hold to be true that is completely and factually wrong? Are you game enough to pull them up on it? Do you just let it ride? Most of the time, I think of a great response – only long after the conversation happened! But, sometimes, the error is important enough that I feel the need to follow up either in writing or in person (especially if it's a particularly egregious error that gets my dander up!).

And John does this as well, in two of his three letters! Today, in our reading, we hear how John concludes his first letter, warning against false teachings about Jesus not being fully human.

To John, these questions about Jesus not being fully human were not just bad, but they were soul-destroyingly bad ('sins that lead to death'). And yet couched around this rebuttal and calling out this bad theology, John gives such amazing hope to those who 'know the truth':

My purpose in writing is simply this: that you who believe in God's Son will know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you have eternal life, the reality and not the illusion (1 John 5:13).

The Jesus the disciples met is truly God in person, but he's also the sacrificial flesh and blood 'lamb who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29).

John points out that part of the eternal life we have means being in step with God's will, being confident that as we pray in Martin Luther's Morning and Evening Prayers, we can place into God's hands our 'body and soul and all that is mine', knowing that they will be safe. We are spiritually safe from the evil one and the evils of this world. How about we pray that right now?

I thank you, Heavenly Father, through your dear Son, Jesus Christ, you have protected me through the night from all harm and danger. I ask you to keep me this day, too, from all sin and evil, so that in all my thoughts, words and deeds, I may please you. In your hands, I place my body and soul and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the evil one may have no power over me. Amen

Thursday 9 January 2025 **Sing for the King!**

by Pastor Stephen Abraham

Sing a new song to the Lord! Sing to the Lord, all the world! (Psalm 96:1) Read [Psalm 96](#)

I have a confession to make. Although I'm a classically trained pianist, I am also a bit of a metalhead! So, when Extreme (one of my favourite bands) was touring Australia recently, I bought tickets, queued up, got excited, head-banged and sang my lungs out at their gig with a good friend. And as a few thousand voices sang the last words of their ballad 'More Than Words' in unison, guitarist Nuno Bettencourt exclaimed in awe, 'Wow, it's like a church in here!'

Psalms 96 to 99 are a series of royal songs celebrating God as King. Part of Psalm 96 is the specific psalm sung as King David brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, as recorded in 1 Chronicles 15 and 16. It is a psalm of excitement, victory and great joy. According to 1 Chronicles 16:5,6, the Levitical band rocked pretty hard with lyres, harps, percussion and brass. Even King David was dancing to the beat (1 Chronicles 15:29)!

Whether it is a rock concert, a stirring hymn or even a footy anthem, there is no denying that there is something powerful in communal singing – unifying psychology and a meditative quality of relaxed focus that is both uniquely human and even otherworldly. So, it's no surprise that in this Epiphany season, we remember one of the biggest Old Testament worship festivals of all time, as God's mobile throne – the Ark – appeared before the people and made its way to the tabernacle (the place of his holy presence on earth). As we read this psalm, knowing how things turned out, we harken back to the heart of the gospel message – the fullness of God's power and glory are no longer in this gilded throne – they are revealed in the Word made flesh – the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

The psalm begins with a call to sing a new song to the Lord. This 'new song' is not one of novelty but renewal. In Christ, we have a new song of salvation that the world desperately needs to hear: Emmanuel – God with us.

Lord Jesus, we rejoice at your appearance on earth and your continuing presence with us. Holy Spirit, stir our hearts to sing, proclaim to the world boldly, and share the magnificent message that 'God is with us' with our neighbours, friends and all who need to hear. Amen.

Friday 10 January 2025 **The next big reveal!**

by Pastor Stephen Abraham

The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice. Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne (Psalm 97:1,2). Read [Psalm 97](#)

Have you noticed how modern TV shows try to draw us in using the psychology of the 'big reveal'? It's usually a cliffhanger that baits us into watching the next episode because we long to know how the story ends!

Today's Epiphany reading sets the scene for God's reign as king. The Theophany (appearance of God) in the first half of Psalm 97 is full of

earth-shattering cosmic power, drawing on the imagery of the 'Shekinah' – the cloud of God's almighty presence from Exodus and the final reign of justice and righteousness, and this sense of finally 'setting things right'.

As time goes by in this 21st century, and as I watch tragic world events unfold, I sometimes feel like I'm in a cosmic reality TV show, waiting desperately for the innocent to be freed and restored and for the villains to be defeated and locked away for eternity. As the exiled people of God scattered among the Babylonian Empire sang this psalm, they, too, longed for the Messianic era – their restoration, God's kingdom to finally come, and for things to be set right.

As I write this, I'm lying here bedridden, so tired of fighting the debilitating chronic pain that has robbed me of so much in this life. I long for restoration! For the new era to come. For God to restore me and set things right. But although I'm weary and broken, I'm not giving up. I will keep singing and longing for the final Epiphany: the Son of God coming again in glory and setting things right in this world.

So, to you who are in Christ's righteousness and are suffering hardship, grief or loss, may these words be your song for today:

Light shines on the righteous and joy on the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, you who are righteous, and praise his holy name (Psalm 97:11,12).

Almighty God, Lord of the heavens and the earth, we long for things to be made right. Lord Jesus, we long for you to come again in glory to restore our world and restore our lives. Stir our hearts, Holy Spirit, to sing praise and bring your light to the dark places of this world. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

Saturday 11 January 2025 **Back to the future**

by Pastor Stephen Abraham

Honour the Lord, you heavenly beings; honour the Lord for his glory and strength. Honour the Lord for the glory of his name. Worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness (Psalm 29:1,2).

Read [Psalm 29](#)

Have you ever looked back on the story of your life and sensed that God was at work? Looking back now on those pivotal moments or difficulties that seem so insurmountable at the time, and now they are signposts that the Sovereign Lord has been steering your destiny?

Our last psalm for this first week of the Epiphany season is Psalm 29 – an enthronement psalm celebrating God’s sovereignty over the world: ‘The Lord reigns as king forever’ (Psalm 29:10b). It is a powerful hymn of praise to God, emphasising his supreme majesty and sovereign power over all creation. But as we read it with the Epiphany season in mind, we suddenly see a glimpse of God’s greater plan at work.

Twice in this psalm, we are reminded of things that happen centuries later in Jesus’ life and ministry. Firstly, we hear of these of the ‘heavenly beings giving honour to God’ in verse one and remember the Nativity with the angelic hosts singing the Great Gloria at Jesus’ birth: ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests’ (Luke 2:14).

Then, we hear the voice of the Lord, commanding all of creation (seven times, indicating perfection). We are reminded of the events of Jesus’ baptism (which we celebrate tomorrow), where we hear the commanding voice of the Lord from the heavens in Luke 3:22b, declaring: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’

God was at work in the life of the psalmist. God was at work preparing the way for the coming of Jesus. And God is at work in your life, too – even if, at times, it feels like a chaotic torrent of painful events pulling you under. Remember the last words of this psalm:

The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;
the Lord is enthroned as king forever.
The Lord gives strength to his people;
the Lord blesses his people with peace!

Heavenly Father, we praise you for your great power and majesty. You rule over all creation, and your voice is mighty in judgement and mercy. Help us to trust in your sovereign care and find comfort in your eternal kingship. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Sunday 12 January 2025 **Baptism saves** by Sal Huckel

... and the Holy Spirit descended on [Jesus] in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased' (Luke 3:22). Read [Luke 3:15–17,21,22](#)

A month ago, I had a rare Sunday away from my own congregation and attended the baptism of a friend's baby and the baptism of a large group of teens and young adults at another church. Neither church was Lutheran, and I felt the disconnect during both services.

Originally an outsider to Lutheran teaching, it took me a long time to understand what Lutherans mean when we discuss remembering our baptism or living out our baptism daily.

As we ponder the difference between John's baptism (merely the water) and Jesus' baptism, we must remember what we believe as Lutherans. If it's a while since you read the *Large Catechism* on baptism, or if you haven't read it before, it's a valuable thing to do to understand how we differ from other theology in the sacrament of baptism. Martin Luther reminds us that the water and word should:

... by no means be separated from each other and parted. For if the word is separated from it, the water is the same as the water that the servant cooks with. It may indeed be called a bath-keeper's baptism. But when the word is added, as God ordained it, it is a sacrament, and it is called Christ's baptism.

It is reassuring and encouraging to me as I ponder the fact that I cannot 'remember' my own infant baptism and that in the sacrament, I was indeed baptised into Christ's death and resurrection – despite the lack of any believers to raise me in the faith. While I cannot point to a 'believer's baptism' where I made a declaration of my faith like the young people I witnessed only weeks ago, I have the assurances of Scripture that God did the work in my baptism– and I did not need to. His grace is not dependent on my level of belief or efforts. Further, Luther reminds us to value our baptism as a daily dress (Galatians 3:27 – we are clothed with Christ) and walk in it constantly (*Large Catechism*). We start to realise what it is to walk in (and wear) our baptism daily.

Father God, you descended on your Son Jesus like a dove and declared your love for him for all to hear. Thank you that I am also baptised into Jesus' baptism and have received the Holy Spirit. Increase my faith as I remember my baptism daily, and help me to nurture the faith of others in my care as you work in their lives, too. In Jesus' name, Amen

Monday 13 January 2025 **Ancestry** by Sal Huckel

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1).

Read [Matthew 1:1–17](#)

Many Lutheran families have a family history book detailing the pioneers who came to Australia to avoid persecution and start their new lives in Australia. Not surprisingly, their families have been curious to research their heritage and keep records. Many are lucky enough to have a book to pull off the shelf thanks to their careful family historians. While I have very little family history of my own to read back on, I've had a go from time to time, too.

How many of us have paid that level of detail to the genealogy of Jesus? Perhaps the names and seemingly long lists of difficult-to-pronounce names put us off. We know a few of the main characters but will miss the details unless we read closely. There's plenty of scandal in there. I'm not sure it's a family history we would proudly pull out if we owned even a fraction of it ourselves.

However, it's important to note Jesus' lineage. We can find it also in Luke chapter 3. If we are studying the Bible daily, and this is the only reading we have for today, we might skip through this list and think, 'Well, how's God speaking to me through that? I'll skip the history lesson and get to the message'. We need to dig deeper. We will realise how important the story of the prostitute Rahab is in Joshua 2:1–21 and how she turned out to be the mother of Boaz, who we then read about in the Book of Ruth. There will be much, much more to discover.

Perhaps our obsession with family history is worth it after all. If we look at the genealogy of Jesus, we will find how the 'line of David' actually played out until the time of Christ's birth. We start to see how these obscure Old Testament accounts are relevant and can read them through a New Testament lens.

Lord, thank you for the privilege of the Scriptures, which are available to me to read daily and learn more about you, my faith heritage and those who you have called to be part of your story. I pray you will continue to teach me through your word, which does not return to you empty but will accomplish what you desire and achieve the purpose for which you sent it (Isaiah 55:11). In Jesus' name, Amen.

Tuesday 14 January 2025

Born of the Virgin Mary (The Apostles' Creed)

by Sal Huckel

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 1:20). Read [Matthew 1:18–25](#)

Joseph's obedience to the Lord in honouring his betrothal to Mary is the final piece of the puzzle that makes up Jesus' earthly genealogy. It's the action that causes Jesus to fulfil the prophecy in Scripture and brings Jesus' birth into the line of David.

We read in Isaiah 7:14: 'Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel.'

Joseph did not question the instructions given to him by the angel of the Lord, despite the fact it goes against all natural laws we are aware of. It all does, really, doesn't it?! Angel of the Lord – unusual. Virgin conception – impossible? Yet Joseph responds in faith to the message, and Scripture is fulfilled. We know this is not the only dream that Joseph has and acts on.

While we might think it was easy for Joseph, Mary and the Magi to heed the messengers sent to instruct or warn them about their next steps. When we see what was expected of them or what they were required to believe, we can hardly call it easy. Yet, thanks to their faithfulness, the Scriptures were indeed fulfilled, and we have all that followed laid out for us in the New Testament.

If we believe that Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected after three days, how is it any more difficult for us to believe the virgin birth even though we 'only' have it written down in Scripture?

Lord, you say that everything is possible for those who believe. I believe! Help me in my unbelief (Mark 9:24)! Thank you for the words of the Apostles' Creed, which we declare together regularly for good reason. As I speak those words, please help me to continue to believe them, protect and grow my faith, trust in the Scriptures, and teach me to walk in your truth. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Wednesday 15 January 2025 **Dream 1** by Sal Huckel

And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route (Matthew 2:12).

Read [Matthew 2:1–12](#)

As birth stories go, the story of the birth of Jesus (as told by Matthew) has less about Mary and Jesus and the familiar aspects of the Nativity and more about the *other* people involved in the fulfilment of Scripture.

Today, we read about Herod, the wise men and the prophecy that has Herod worried enough to seek out Jesus and kill him. Interestingly, the wise men were Gentiles, likely practising astrology and magic that did not honour the Lord. Nevertheless, they play a part in the fulfilment of Scripture, protecting Jesus from Herod's plans.

While nothing in Herod's words would have indicated to the wise men that he had very different plans for going to worship Jesus, they had no problem with being receptive to – and following – the instructions received in a dream to travel a different way.

It is sometimes comforting to think about how the Lord orders our steps – even the steps of others – to 'work his purpose out' in our lives. The wise men followed the instructions given to them in their dream, discerning that this was the necessary course of action, ignoring Herod. Through this obedience, Jesus was saved. We know this is not going to be the only brush with Herod's plans for Jesus' death. It is not the last time an angel of the Lord will intervene to save him – again, through human obedience to God's will.

Sometimes, we may find that we have no idea about what God wants us to do – or not do. Particularly where our choices do not clash with Scripture, we can find we have an open choice that perhaps doesn't matter one way or another. Yet, other times, we find that our instinct is not to listen to a certain person's advice or take a certain path. However we end up making our decisions, we know that God has a plan and purpose for our lives, and nothing can snatch us out of his hand (John 10:28).

Lord, thank you for the lessons we learn in Scripture. We read of the faith of those who have gone before us and followed your commands. We learn how you include those who do not even know you in your plans. We learn about your faithfulness. May we be encouraged to trust you and not lean on our own understanding. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Thursday 16 January 2025 **Dream 2 ... and 3!** by Sal Huckel

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream (Matthew 2:13a). Read [Matthew 2:13–23](#)

I smiled when I read this passage and saw that Joseph had two more dreams instructing him where he should take his family. We usually think of Jacob's son Joseph as 'the dreamer', yet Mary's husband Joseph seems to come a close second! Jacob's son Joseph's own life was saved through his dreams and ability to discern the dreams of others. Mary's husband Joseph's dreams saved the life of Jesus, Son of God!

We might wish we had dreams like this to make our decisions easy or give us a 'hotline' to God's plans. However, we must accept that we have all we need in Scripture, and we have the prayers that Jesus taught us to seek the Lord and his will for our lives. We have the promises of Scripture and new life in Christ through our baptism.

Yet still, the Scripture reading for today is full of tragedy and grief with the slaughter of the innocents. Jesus was saved so that we might all be saved – but many children were killed through the orders of Herod. Again, we are reminded of the sin in the world that Jesus came to redeem us from. Ever since the Fall, death and murder have never been very far away. When we are devastated by the news that we read about and think that we must be in End Times, we have much to look over in Scripture to show that people are still doing the evil things they were doing centuries and centuries ago. We have Jesus' promise of a new heaven and a new earth to look forward to – and today's reading and faithfulness of one man protecting his family and following the Lord's instruction is one part of that story.

Lord, thank you for coming into the world to save sinners. Help me to trust you and throw off the sinful nature daily, putting on my baptism clothes and walking in the freedom I have through your death and resurrection. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Friday 17 January 2025

Fruit in keeping with repentance by Sal Huckel

Produce fruit in keeping with repentance (Matthew 3:8).

Read [Matthew 3:1–12](#)

Today's passage invites us to the banks of the Jordan, where John the Baptist was preparing the way for Jesus' ministry. His humble lifestyle and calls to repentance were already bringing the people to respond to their sins and be baptised by John in the river. Not surprisingly, also came the conflict with the Pharisees and Sadducees.

John's reprimand and call to repentance is stark. We might feel that it was well deserved. After all, we do know much about the Pharisees and the Sadducees and their apparent hypocrisy. Paul himself was a Pharisee. While the Pharisees and Sadducees had doctrinal disagreements, they were united in their efforts against Jesus. Here, John's warning is for them all.

What can we learn here today? We can study the baptism John was bringing, how Jesus' baptism is the one we need and the meaning it has for us now to be baptised into Jesus' baptism. We can also ponder what it means to 'produce fruit in keeping with repentance'. How does that look? What do we need to repent of? We sometimes hear that Jesus simplified the Ten Commandments and that we don't need to worry about all of those anymore; we are not 'under the law'. However, Jesus said he did not come to destroy the law or the prophets but to fulfil them.

Unless we understand God's law, we cannot properly repent. We may feel the law is less prescriptive and onerous 'since Jesus', but if we begin to unpack the Ten Commandments and look at Martin Luther's explanations – the *Small Catechism* is very helpful on this – we will see that they go further than we might expect. It's a misleading idea that 'Jesus replaced them'. Helpfully, rather like the ways in which it is best to teach children, Luther offers positive instruction to further expand on the negatives.

Start today with commandment number one: 'You shall have no other gods before me.' We don't have to look very far to see the things that compete for our attention, love and trust. How can you fear, love and trust God above all things today? To produce fruit in keeping with repentance, we need to follow through with this.

Father God, help me to more fully understand the law written in our hearts (Romans 2:15) and produce fruit in keeping with repentance. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Saturday 18 January 2025

Moment by moment, hour by hour

by Sal Huckel

Continue your love to those who know you, your righteousness to the upright in heart (Psalm 36:10).

Read [Psalm 36:5–10](#)

Today's beautiful psalm follows our devotion yesterday, where we looked a little at God's law, particularly the First Commandment about having no other gods before the Lord. What better way to start our devotion today than a section of Psalm 36 praising God for his faithfulness, righteousness, priceless love, safety and being the fountain of life? If you ever find it hard to get in that place of worshipping God in this way in your own words, head to the Book of Psalms and use the wonderful Scriptures already recorded for this purpose!

This is our God, who must come first in our lives above all. Daily: moment by moment, hour by hour. It's difficult – we are human! We fail – but he never does. We talk about loving God and loving others – we also have a reminder here to be 'upright in heart'. We have grace, the forgiveness of sins – and the responsibility to respond with repentance and daily devotion to the Lord.

Thank you that your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the highest mountains, your justice like the great deep (Psalm 36). Help me to worship and revere your holy name daily, putting you first before all else. In Jesus' holy name, I pray, Amen.

Sunday 19 January 2025 **To serve, or not to serve**

by Pastor Tim Klein

And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come' (John 2:4). Read [John 2:1–11](#)

How human is that? 'My hour has not yet come.'

'Not yet, Mother!' said Jesus. We do it, too: 'I am not ready yet. It's too soon. I'm not prepared to go. Try me again later', and so on.

But, for Jesus, this is a case of saying one thing and doing another. He might not have been ready in himself as a human being to reveal who he was, yet he did! He served their need – with great blessing.

Why do we sometimes stall and backpedal from both responsibility and opportunity? Are we afraid – scared of what might happen? Are we concerned we might not really have what it takes? Do we find it easier to 'allow someone else the privilege of serving'? Could it be that we are concerned that once that ability or service is 'let out of the bag', we might be saddled with it for the foreseeable future?

If you are a leader in any form, you are likely aware of how difficult it can be to engage volunteers in service. People are reluctant to commit. We are wary of other people having a call on our time and resources. I'm in the middle of seeking a new small team of people to do a 2025 monthly Saturday afternoon bread pickup. It's not easy. But I'm living in hope. God will move some people to see the need and meet it.

I'm also encouraged by Jesus' ultimate response to his mum when she simply overrides his reluctance. Next thing you know, her son has performed his first public miracle! She served the need at that time. I have hope and positively expect that there will be enough people to take up the bread run in my retirement next year.

I'm also hopeful more and more people will be willing to take up the call to follow Jesus as he goes about his mission of seeking out and saving lost people!

It's sins that hold us back from serving. But even Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, despite pleading with his Father to take back the cup of sacrifice he was about to fill, ultimately served us with his life's blood, and he offers us all this miracle of forgiveness.

He has given us a wonderful example of trusting in the Lord. The outcome is a great blessing. Can we follow his example?

Dear Father, give us the boldness to get out there to follow and serve in the opportunities you place before us. In the name of Christ. Amen.