

## Advent Resource 2013

### Welcome to our Advent gift to you!

Following the enthusiastic response to the 2013 CTM Lent Resource, this Advent Resource has been prepared by the CTM as an aid to assist individuals, households and small groups in their journey through Advent. Whether you use it in an individual or communal context, we trust that you will find it engaging, stimulating and helpful as you wait, watch and pray through Advent.

This Advent Resource combines two distinct elements:

Firstly, there are individual daily reflections comprising a suggested Scripture reading, some words of reflection and a short prayer.

Secondly, there are ideas that can be used in the household or multi-age contexts. These can be found at the end of each week and can be engaged in at any time during the week. The text/day they specifically relate to is marked “\*”.

Whilst the production of this resource has been a team effort, the contributions of...

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...have been especially appreciated.



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### Monday November 25

#### Matthew 24:36-42

Does anyone remember Larry Norman? Go on admit it, you do! He was a long blond-haired Christian singer in the 70's and one of his BIG hits was "I wish we'd all been ready". It was actually a pretty disturbing song, when it's all said and done, based on these verses from Matthew's Gospel. I found it rather frightening hearing I might be whipped out of my bed one night by God because of the rapture. To be honest I was also pretty sure I might even be left behind because I found being a 'good' Christian pretty hard work. I think Mr. Norman might have sold us short in his evangelical zeal.

We are actually invited in this passage to not worry about knowing our future fate but more focus on the present, yet always with an eye on the future call of God. The question is more - are we ready to live a life in Jesus today? - striving for integrity, honesty, justice and faithfulness?

This is the first day in Advent. Spend some time reflecting on new beginnings and also on the year that has past. Identify those moments that held joy for you and those moments where forgiveness is being called for.

*God of Grace, we give thanks for new beginnings. As our hearts and minds turn to a new year, help us to leave behind what needs to be left behind, make amends where we need to and know when to hold our silence.*

### Tuesday November 26

#### Matthew 24:43-44

Today we hear a familiar refrain. "Watch and wait!". But this is not the jiggling up and down on the spot with excitement, waiting-for-a-treat sort of waiting. This is the sort of watching and waiting where we are called to pay attention and "take care". The imagery used by Matthew is that of a thief potentially breaking into your home whilst you sleep. It conjures up a sort of nervous anxiety. If we do not take care and pay attention to what is happening around us we will miss Truth. It is often hard to be attentive because our distractions call us away from what may be of greatest importance.

What are the issues of truth facing you which you that you prefer not to face at the moment? Sit quietly for a while today, and watch and wait, and allow Christ's Truth to seep through the cracks. The Gospel writer warns us it is hard to keep that vigil, but ironically it is at that very moment that God will reveal God's self.



What do you feel you are being called to pay attention to this week? Is there a conversation you need to have or even a word of thanks to be given? It is these details that make up the fabric of our lives and require our full attention for grace-filled living.

*God of Truth, help me to face the continual promptings of your Spirit. Help me to attend to those moments at 3am when I am confronted with your Spirit's calling. And help me to have the courage to listen and act.*

### Wednesday November 27

#### Romans 13:11-12

Paul assumes the Romans share his view that history is reaching its climax. The familiar imagery of night and day, waking up from sleep, coming from death to life and putting on new clothes indicate that a new life is expected in Christ. A new life that will mean great change. We often think of the early Christians having got it "just right" and believe our attempts at faithful living and community life seem to be a little shonky by comparison. "If we could only live as the early Christians did all would be well" we hear it said. Well now, the horrible truth is, they were just like us! The early Christian communities also needed to be reminded of their frailty as human beings and to find ways to restore their relationships and community life. It is Christ's love that is the basis for community life. This is the gift of new life and light for all of us as we try to live in the Spirit of Jesus.

What are you looking forward to? Spend some time dreaming and imagining a new life lived in Christ for you

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and how that may take shape in the coming year. How do you think you might make some changes and new contributions to your community life?

*We pray for our communities of faith. We pray for their frailty and give thanks for their strength. Give us the strength to love the unlovely and treat one another with grace and integrity.*

### Thursday November 28

#### Romans 13:13-14

Paul loves lists. There are the good lists – the fruits of the Spirit and the marks of generous community life. And there are the squirm worthy lists - the immoral things that “bad people” do. Some of us just breathe a sigh of relief after a quick tally that we don’t fall too short on the ‘good’ list nor shape up too shabbily on the ‘bad’ list. We hear a recollection of Romans 1 in these verses today. Perhaps what is more important is not so much finding a moral job description for Christians or a test for them to pass, but more a pointer to a knowledge that life in community means that our actions will affect other people’s lives. Western culture is so very individualistic we can miss the central calling to the community life of Christian faith. Our reading today calls us to look up! and realise we are part of the body of Christ. Maybe reserving judgement of others and spending some time deeply reflecting on our own actions in our own communities of faith will deepen our understanding of truth.

Do you tend to live life with a mental list of debit and credit, almost giving yourself and others little scores on the ledger of life for how they are performing? Put the list away. Try to cut yourself and others just a bit of slack today. Notice how liberating it is!

*God of Grace, help me to let my “lists of judgement”, both for myself and others, go. Create in me a clean heart. May my gestures and actions today be ones of love and gracious acceptance instead of judgement.*

### Friday November 29

#### Isaiah 2:1-5

Passages from Isaiah will be followed through Advent, Christmas and Epiphany. Isaiah 2:1-5 is a later addition to the text probably written after the time of Exile. These are familiar verses for us. Many a fridge magnet and cross stitch plaque has borne Isaiah’s words of peace. The imagery is comforting, calling for changing of weapons of war into instruments of authentic pastoral care. Christmas is a time when the cards drop into our letter boxes and our inboxes are filled with well wishes of peace. At times it feels like our attempts at peace seem futile and insignificant. As we move through the Advent season we are reminded that the vision we have of the future is one Isaiah assures us anticipates a life lived in the future house of God. We are not alone. Our actions today join with the God of peace, striving for authentic living that reaches forward in time beyond time.

Spend some time reading today about specific places in the world where peace is called for. Even in your own family there may be specific need for God’s peace. Sit in the silence and name them before God.

*Gracious God. Emmanuel. Peace among us.  
Grant peace and reconciliation in the places and communities we name today.*

### Saturday November 30\*

#### Psalms 122

Psalms 122 is closely centred on Jerusalem as a particular place and location for God’s people. It is a specific place and the temple is sacred. I don’t know about you but I find the Prayers of Intercession the hardest element of the worship service to create. Sometimes the Prayers of Intercession just seem such a grand generalised sweep of the world’s problems. It almost seems we are alerting God to where God had better get cracking with general slip-ups and disappointments that need attending to. Psalm 122 reminds us to be specific when we pray. Name names when we pray. Have knowledge about what is happening in our world so we know how to craft words of hope and call for truth and reconciliation. For it is in naming the specific petitions before God that we are changed. We are drawn into a wider conversation within the community of



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faith. Psalm 122 calls us to consider the wide expanse of God's love when we pray for all human struggles.

How are you preparing yourself for the Advent Season? It can be a time of endings in our western society at the close of the working year. Find a space each day so you can also reflect on what is to come. This is an opportunity for your spirit to be open to God's presence.

*We pray for our friends and families as they conclude their year's work. May they find some space for reflection as we wait on the birth of the Christ child.*

### Household/Multi-age suggestions

#### Psalm 122

*I was glad when they said to me,  
"Let us go to the house of the LORD!"  
Our feet are standing  
within your gates, O Jerusalem.*

*Jerusalem—built as a city  
that is bound firmly together.  
To it the tribes go up,  
the tribes of the LORD,  
as was decreed for Israel,  
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.  
For there the thrones for judgment were set up,  
the thrones of the house of David.*

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:  
"May they prosper who love you.  
Peace be within your walls,  
and security within your towers."  
For the sake of my relatives and friends  
I will say, "Peace be within you."  
For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,  
I will seek your good*

#### Building the city

Print out a copy of Psalm 122, making sure the verse numbers can be seen. If you divide a verse between two blocks, add a sub-verse number. Cut it into sentences. Stick the sentences onto wooden blocks.

Gather as a household, and divide the blocks between you. If you have very little pre-readers, team up with partners.

Say something like: 'The part of the Bible we are reading is from Psalms, and is a poem prayer for a city. We are going to build a city from the blocks as we read this poem prayer.'

'Reconstruct' the text reading each verse in order, and then placing the block on a stable surface, gradually building up the city.

Review the 'building' and 'city' language of the text together.

Note: house, gates, built, bound firmly, set up, walls, security, towers.

Read the text pausing on these words and use them as the catalyst for construction.

#### Imagine our cities

Find images of various cities around the world. National Geographic and Time magazines are a good source for these. Alternatively, create a slide show together from digital images. Take note together of the variety of urban landscapes, noting cultural and economic factors. Let your discussion include the ethical and political issues of urbanisation.

#### Pray for cities

Note Psalm 122:6. 'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem'.

Recognise that this is a call for us to pray for cities wherever they are, not a particular focus on Jerusalem. Use the beautiful prayer from vs. 7 as a basis for prayer for the cities of the world which you have images of. Extemporize prayers based on the needs of the city, and use the refrain between prayers for each city as something that everyone can pray together.

*"May they prosper who love you.  
Peace be within your walls,  
and security within your towers."*

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### Sunday December 1st (Advent 1)

#### Matthew 24.36–44

Advent begins with a promise and a warning. As he teaches in the temple, Jesus promises the disciples that they can be sure that the 'day of the Lord' (24:39) or the 'coming of the Son of Man' (24:37) will arrive. The context makes it clear that this tumultuous event will be marked by judgement and hope. It is equally clear that it is a day that cannot be predicted or controlled. The ambiguity is such that we are left wondering whether Jesus is talking about his own death and resurrection, the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, or a further future event. So, what comes through even more clearly than the promise is the warning. Keep awake (24:42), be ready (24:44), because God's advent will come at a moment and in a form that will surprise, astound and shock you.

Advent is a season of looking and waiting for God. Consider how the daily tasks and responsibilities of work, home and recreation might distract you from looking for God's coming. What might need to change in the next few weeks to make Advent a time of looking and waiting for God?

*God of Advent, warning and promise, come into our lives and the life of this world. Surprise us, transform us, and help us to be ready for you.*

### Monday December 2\*

#### Isaiah 11:1-5

Driven by strong winds and high temperatures, the recent fires in New South Wales have been devastating and widespread, destroying everything in their path...well almost everything. One striking visual symbol of hope remained in the otherwise blackened, ashen ground of the Blue Mountains – a single bright wildflower which had no right to have survived.

In the context of a ravaged Israelite nation, the prophet Isaiah forecasts the impossible: 'a shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse...' a promise that, in the midst of the devastation suffered by the people of Israel, God shall act in a decisive way for the renewal of the nation.

The church has applied that image of hope to the birth of Jesus, unexpected as it was in time and context, but bringing the gift and promise of renewal for a ravaged world.

Let us take the time to offer the devastation of our own lives and world to the God who knows only too well the



experience of devastation, the same God who gives birth to the gift and promise of a new beginning into and out of the very midst of ravage.

*O come, O branch of Jesse, free  
Your own from Satan's tyranny;  
From depths of hell your people save  
And give them victory o'er the grave (TiS 265)*

### Tuesday December 3

#### Isaiah 11:6-9

Have you ever considered how crazy the signs of the presence of God actually look in human terms? Things happen which seem impossible; radical; the stuff of dreams: wolf and lamb sharing the same space, leopard and young goat snuggling together in the same bed, a toddler playing hide and seek with a venomous snake. These are random scenes from God's world – a world where there is no hurt and no destruction, a world brought into being by the 'shoot from the stump of Jesse' upon whom the Spirit of God rests.

The church sees this gift and hope upon the shoulders of the child Jesus whose life, death and resurrection will bring the stuff of dreams within our reach: the reconciliation of enemies; new beginnings when all doors seemed closed; and; death, not as the end of but the beginning of life.

How might we give concrete expression in our own lives to the crazy presence of God?

*O come, O dayspring, come and cheer  
Our spirits by your advent here;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night  
And death's dark shadows put to flight (TiS 265)*

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### Wednesday December 4

#### Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

Kings and rulers in our time do not have much good press. The respect for politicians in our own country is at an all time low and what we hear often of foreign rulers is news of corruption, abuse of power and the silencing of critical voices. In Israel, things were very different - the king was understood to be the personal agent of God; it was expected that he mirror the way God deals with the world. Psalm 72 is one of a number of 'royal psalms' where the people of God pray for their king, requiring of him what they have come to know of God: a ruler of justice, especially alert to the poor; focused attention on the plight of the needy; the defeat of oppressive powers; a protector of peace.

In Jesus of Nazareth, the people have seen such a king in the line of King David; this king now calls us to reflect in our own lives this same way of life – 'made us kings with him to reign' say the words of TiS142.

How might we reflect the reign of God in our own spaces?

*Let us pray for the rulers of our own day, that they mirror the ways of God. Let us pray that our own lives are such that people see in them the kingly presence of God.*

### Thursday December 5

#### Romans 15:1-13

I wonder what words come quickest to mind when you think of God. For some it may be the word 'love' or 'friend', for others it may be the word 'judge' or 'creator'. In this passage from Paul, it is the word 'hope'. It was sparked for Paul by the coming of Jesus in whom God had been concretely present bringing tangible signs of liberation from all forms of slavery and death.

In our day, and in our church, hope has run dry for many people. In this season of Advent, let us pray for the renewing presence and power of the Spirit of God so that hope may run afresh in and through our own lives, and through the life of the church, so that when we think of God, the word 'hope' rushes to the surface and out of our mouths.

*With the apostle Paul, pray that the God of hope may fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

### Friday December 6

#### Matthew 3:1-6

For a long time, I thought that 'repentance' was about being sorry for what I had done wrong, and vowing not to do it again. This view was reinforced for me by prayers of confession which listed the sort of things for which I might need to repent – hurting other people, being selfish, and so on. One Advent, I heard a sermon on this passage and its message has remained with me ever since. Repentance means 'to think again', or more accurately, 'to turn around'. It is the sort of reaction which is prompted when the first rays of light poke through the curtains of a darkened room – something breaking into the dark which evokes our immediate and focused attention, requiring us to turn in its direction as it illuminates the whole room, leaving nothing untouched by its impact. So it is in the message of John the Baptist: repentance is invited, by an act of God breaking into our darkened world with a new reality (the kingdom of heaven), causing us to rethink the meaning and direction of the whole of our lives, discovering that they are now illuminated by the long-awaited arrival of the presence of God. Such is the impact of the coming of God in Jesus Christ, declares John; the whole of our lives undergo radical repentance. Our sin is to live our lives as if the kingdom of heaven has not broken into our world.

*You are the king of mercy and of grace  
Reigning omnipotent in every place  
So come our King and our whole being sway  
Shine on us with the light of your new day (TiS 198)*

### Saturday December 7

#### Matthew 3:7-12

The figure of John the Baptist has to be understood in the context of the hopes of the people of Israel for the fulfillment of God's promises to establish a final reign of peace and justice for the world. This hope, represented so powerfully in the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures, led to the expectation of the return of the prophet Elijah who would forecast the final coming of the servant of God. This explains the way in which John the Baptist's appearance and the message he declares is described, dressed as an Elijah-like figure, he is the one who forecasts the coming of the promised servant of God who will transform and renew the wilderness-like world we live in.



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In the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the church identifies the beginnings of this transformation, and hopes joyfully for the promised renewal of the whole world.

Reflect on what it might mean to see our lives as pilgrims ...not wandering aimlessly but journeying from the Easter event towards the promised renewal of creation.

*An Ancient Prayer:*

*God, you have declared the completion of your purposes of love in Jesus Christ your Son, therefore help us to live by faith, to walk in hope, and to be renewed in love, until the whole world reflects your glory and you are all in all; even so, come Lord Jesus, come.*

### Household/Multi-age suggestions

#### Isaiah 11:1-9

*A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.  
The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.  
His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.  
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide by what his ears hear;  
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.  
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.  
The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.  
The cow and the bear shall graze,  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.  
They will not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD  
as the waters cover the sea.*

#### Stick man (Isaiah 11:1-5)

As a household collect some sticks from your garden or local bushland. As you search for sticks, notice the way young shoots have grown from old stumps. Talk about the way families are often described by 'family trees', exploring the idea of branches and new growth, sharing a common life or heritage from a single trunk.

Take your sticks home and use string, wire or plasticine to create people from your sticks. Read the text of Isaiah 11:1-5, introducing the background that this passage speaks of on the branch of Israel's family tree, a branch which Jesus' family came from. Make a display of your 'stick-people' attaching a particular phrase from the passage to each one, perhaps drawing a background scene or 'positioning' your stick person to demonstrate the phrase.

If you can find the picture book 'Stickman' by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler in a library (or if you are an astute family you may already have this wonderful story in your home) enjoy reading the adventures of Stickman. In this story, Stickman is greatly mis-judged and misunderstood. Use this to idea to consider questions of how Jesus might be misunderstood. Note in v. 3 that the 'stickman' (Jesus) doesn't judge others (especially the poor) superficially, but with justice.

You can see a reading of 'Stickman' on Youtube at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sum-hUdtKok>

#### Crazy combinations (Isaiah 11:6-9)

Isaiah 11:6-9 gives us a picture of a time when things that we think can't belong together will, because the presence and wisdom of God will make it safe and good. This challenges our thinking about who can be included in the reign of God. Even the dangerous and scary are made safe.

##### • Isaiah's Zoo

Collect the following from a set of plastic animals: wolf, lamb, leopard, goat, calf, lion, cow, bear, lion, ox, child, snakes (x2) children (x2; Lego people would be appropriate). Place these in a pile in the middle of your table. Read Isaiah 11:6-9. At the mention of each animal, members of the household race to find the named animal in the pile.

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Line up the animals together in their pairs as friends. Go through the pairs and note that one of each pair was 'clean' (edible) and the other was 'unclean' (inedible). To the Israelites these were not just 'tame' and 'wild' animals, but ritually in different classes.

Consider what it is that restrains the hurt and destruction.

How can the 'full knowledge of the Lord in the earth' make dangerous things safe, reconcile enemies or make things 'clean'?

Is knowing God really that powerful and transforming?

### • Isaiah's Dessert Menu

For one meal of the week experiment with some crazy combinations of foods that we don't usually think of belonging together. Come up with a menu of combinations for dessert and challenge each other to enjoy from the list as you read the text together. Eg. Beetroot and ice cream, minted peas and lime jelly, scrambled eggs and strawberry jam, melon and prosciutto.

Not only does God seem to reconcile unlikely combinations of natural predators, God makes partnerships of these combinations.

What unlikely partnerships might God's peace and knowledge make possible?



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### Sunday December 8 (Advent 2)

#### Matthew 3:1–12

There is no avoiding John the Baptist. Although at times he is portrayed as little more than the warm up act for Jesus, his preaching in fact serves to remind us just what the ministry of Jesus is really about. His strong focus on God's judgement and the need for repentance is directed at those who presume to know who God is, and how God works in the world (3:9). But the ministry of Jesus takes an axe to all such presumption. Jesus comes with the fire of judgment but also with the gift of God's very presence (3:11), what John has earlier called the 'arrival of the kingdom of heaven' (3:2). And this new reality is so demanding that those who see it can only be drenched (baptized) in it. In the story of Jesus in the gospel of Matthew, we see the 'way of the Lord' in our world, transforming our understanding of God's purpose, and transforming us in the process. This is the truth of our baptism.

We can all be presumptuous when it comes to questions about where, how, and when God is present. Where have your presumptions hardened into prejudices?

*God of Abraham, John and Jesus, forgive us. Immerse us into the fire that refines us, and the Spirit who renews us.*

### Monday December 9

#### Isaiah 24:1-16a; 1 Thess 4:1-12

Be good or Santa won't come...these words as children, in jest or in judgement, have often been used as stick or carrot for good behaviour.

Today's passage from Isaiah is a prophesy of destruction. The demise of joy and satisfaction is seen as the consequence of breaking law and covenant (v 5). A warning with a big stick.

By contrast in Thessalonians the instruction on how to live is not accompanied by any external stick or carrot, simply the internal motivation to live 'to please God'. In the context Paul points out areas of behavioural concern, especially sexual morality, along with relationships within the community, and a lifestyle respected in the wider community.

How do we live consonant with the gospel call for love and justice, for worship and joy? The further promise of the incarnation is the indwelling spirit, empowering our love-oriented gospel living. Do we need a spiritual equivalent of speed cameras or can we simply live to please God?



*Clear shining light, Mary's child  
Your face lights up our way;  
Light of the world, Mary's child  
Dawn on our darkened day.*

### Tuesday December 10

#### Isaiah 41:14-20

'Do not be afraid,' is the message to Israel (also in vv 10, 13), whose self-assessment (perhaps) was as a worm; impotent and insignificant. Israel fears in the face the exile imposed by the superpower Babylon. Israel fears the desert journey of return (vv17-20). God as Redeemer is the one who mercifully and powerfully steps in to radically change the situation of exile (vv14-16) and change the desert (vv17-20): to change history, and change creation.

Centuries later the gospel message 'do not fear' was spoken to the group of shepherds; the 'worms' or despised ones of Jewish society were also told not to fear when given the good news of God's redemption.

How do the mercy and power of God, the 'do-not-fear' message of God's incarnation, speak to our current fears and uncertainties? How does the character of God who acts and says 'do not be afraid' give us confidence for the year ahead?

*'Fear Not' said he (for mighty dread  
had seized their troubled mind),  
'Glad tidings of great joy I bring  
to you and all humankind.'*

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### Wednesday December 11

#### Genesis 15:1-6

Which is the better question: can Abraham trust? or, will Abraham trust?

Abraham has waited impatiently for his wife Sarai to become pregnant with the promised heir and now he is making other plans. God's re-emphasis of the promise, the call to 'not fear', is not easily accepted by Abraham who argues his ground.

The impetus of the passage here is on the trustworthiness of God. The change in attitude of Abraham from questioning and doubt (vv 2-3), to the believing of v 6 is not based on any change of circumstance. Rather it is about the nature of the relationship that Abraham enjoys with God. He can trust, but on the basis of God's trustworthiness, will he trust?

The story of Israel waiting for the Messiah is again a waiting and a willing to trust. We bear the fruit of that trust as we now live in the time of the promise's long fulfilment, yet still wait for the final fulfilment.

Can we trust? Or rather, Will we trust?

*Joy to the world! The Lord is come;  
Let earth receive her king;  
Let every heart prepare him room,  
And heaven and nature sing....*

### Thursday December 12

#### Ruth 1:6-18

Naomi directs her daughters-in-law to follow the sensible, expected, culturally appropriate way of action; Orpah obeys. Ruth instead chooses the extraordinary and unexpected: Ruth takes on everything that seems to lead to a dead end – forgoing hope for marriage, children, family and cultural ties, and yes, accepting death in an unknown place. Yet in the midst of that she also affirms life: in claiming an oath, not in the name of her Moabite gods. But, in the name of the LORD, she affirms her fealty to the living God. Ruth enters a new adventure.

Jesus chose to leave his home and 'the glory he had before the world began' to come to where even his own did not know him.

As we face Advent, what hard choices do we make as individuals and as a church, when it comes to staying safe or

choosing to follow the extraordinary and unexpected?

*Like Mary let us ponder in our mind  
God's wondrous love in saving humankind;  
Trace we the Babe, who has retrieved our loss,  
From the poor manger to the bitter cross;  
Tread in his steps, assisted by his grace,  
Until in heav'n God's people take their place.*

### Friday December 13

#### Ruth 4:13-17

Ruth, who had risked so much in her loving faithfulness to Naomi and to the living God she came to serve, now receives back what she had given.

Naomi, whose story starts with such stark emptiness, now has fullness: a daughter-in-law worth seven sons and, through her, a son and heir.

In the story so far Boaz has been the kinsman-redeemer, but here the redeemer is the child just born, presaging even more joy and hope.

The child is of course one in a line of ancestors of David and so Jesus. Ruth and Naomi's faithfulness had a fruitfulness not just in its own time, but had ramifications going forward. Are you encouraged to think that the seeds of faithful discipleship you scatter may have undreamed of harvest in years ahead?

*Say shall we yield him, in costly devotion,  
Odours of Edom and offerings divine?  
Gems of the mountain and pearls of the ocean  
Myrrh from the forest or gold from the mine?*

### Saturday December 14\*

#### 1 Samuel 2:1-8

In contrast to the community and family focus of celebration of the birth of Ruth's son, Hannah's vision is global, as she praises God and leaves her precious son in Eli's care. Hannah, the humble, once-barren woman, speaks of God's care over the world and God's divine justice for the poor and the needy. The world does not, in the end, belong to the wealthy, the strong, the proud and politically powerful. The reversal of fortunes prophesied are lived out in the coming Kingdom of David, but even

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more so in David's greater son. Centuries later Mary rejoices using the words of this prayer and her child is welcomed by the humble poor (shepherds).

Are we infiltrated by the secular world's understanding of power and wealth and control? Or do Hannah's and Mary's altered perspectives govern our preparation for advent?

*True God of true God  
Light of light eternal  
Lo he abhors not the virgin's womb  
Son of the Father  
Begotten not created  
O come let us adore him....Christ the Lord*

### Household/Multi-age suggestions

#### Samuel 2:1-8

*Hannah prayed and said,  
"My heart exults in the LORD;  
my strength is exalted in my God.  
My mouth derides my enemies,  
because I rejoice in my victory.  
"There is no Holy One like the LORD,  
no one besides you;  
there is no Rock like our God.  
Talk no more so very proudly,  
let not arrogance come from your mouth;  
for the LORD is a God of knowledge,  
and by him actions are weighed.  
The bows of the mighty are broken,  
but the feeble gird on strength.  
Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,  
but those who were hungry are fat with spoil.  
The barren has borne seven,  
but she who has many children is forlorn.  
The LORD kills and brings to life;  
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.  
The LORD makes poor and makes rich;  
he brings low, he also exalts.  
He raises up the poor from the dust;  
he lifts the needy from the ash heap,  
to make them sit with princes  
and inherit a seat of honor.*

*For the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S,  
and on them he has set the world.*

#### Reversals

Hannah's song, like Mary's magnificent, responding to the news that she will unexpectedly bear a son, of God, is full of 'reversals'. The many 'reversals of fortune' show both God's justice in putting things right, but also God's unexpected ways.

Celebrate the 'reversals' of this passage by performing some reversals of your own.









- Try reading one line or phrase each in a circle, but 'reverse' direction if there is a 'reversal' in the text.
- Try reading the passage backwards, either by phrase, or by word if you are up for the challenge
- Try writing the passage out in 'mirror' writing, which reverses each letter.

#### Snap!

Hannah's song of praise in 1 Samuel 2:4-8 is structured in couplets around a succession of vivid images, with two corresponding lines for each image. To highlight the clarity of this structure, as a household make a set of cards, each card showing one line and the matching image (see examples that follow, but draw your own authentic images). To make sure you have matching images ensure the same person draws the picture on all of the cards for the one image. Work in pairs to help those who are graphically or artistically less confident and those who are less experienced readers. Make a double set of these so you will have 32 cards in all. Play a game of 'Snap!' with them, reading the matching or corresponding couplets



## Advent Resource 2013

Couplets	Image
The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength.	 warrior
Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil.	 Food
The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn.	 Mother
The LORD kills and brings to life; The LORD brings down to Sheol and raises up.	 Life and Death
The LORD makes poor and makes rich; The LORD brings low, and also exalts.	 Money
The LORD raises up the poor from the dust; The LORD lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor.	 Dust and Ash
For the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and on them The LORD has set the world	 Throne
	 Earth

### Music

Hannah's song is closely related in style to the song, which Mary sings (Luke 1:46-55), following the revelation that she also will bear a child. Mary's song, often called 'The Magnificat', has been set to music many times. Monteverdi, Vivaldi, Bach, Rutter, Rachmaninoff, Pärt, all have well known settings, and there are several more contemporary adaptations, like the syrupy work of David Haas, and the reliably charming but folksy John Michael Talbot.

Have some fun searching for some these on YouTube – be ready to love some, and laugh loudly at others. Nevertheless, reflect on the idea that for each of these representations of the song of Mary, someone at some point and in some context in history thought it was 'just right'. When they imagined the experience of a peasant girl hearing of how she was to be implicated in the story of a present and saving God, this was the 'feel' of her expression of response. It bears some thinking about.

So, try this:

Pick a version of the Magnificat – do a quick review of where it comes from historically/geographically/culturally – listen to a bit of it to get the feel, and then take turns reading parts of 1 Samuel 2 over the music, reflecting the style of the music as you read. The point here isn't to get a beautiful fluent reading, but to experiment with expressing the emotional possibilities of interpretation.

## Advent Resource 2013

### Sunday December 15 (Advent 3)

#### Matthew 11:2–11

We are back with John the Baptist, but now in prison rather than in the wilderness. Whereas John's work has been to direct people's attention to Jesus, here Jesus turns the attention back on John (11:7–11). His commendation of John as a 'prophet', and more (11:9), is explicitly contrasted with an implied and sarcastic critique of John's opponent, Herod Antipas. Antipas's emblem (especially on coins) was the reed. So Jesus seems to be suggesting that the real work of preparing for the way of the Lord happened in the wilderness of Judea, rather than any royal palace in Tiberias. And yet...anyone who is 'least' in the kingdom of God (see Matthew 25:31–46 for an explanation of the term) is greater than John. Our work, not least the work of speaking truth to power and enduring the suffering that may come as a result, is also the work of preparing the way.

Who are the equivalents to the 'shaken reed...dressed in soft robes in royal palaces' (11:8) in our own day? What is the truth they might need to hear? Who will speak it?

*God of John, Jesus and Herod, give us the courage to take our place in your kingdom and to speak the truth, whatever the cost.*

### Monday December 16

#### Isaiah 7:10–16

What is in a name? Where did your own name come from? Do you know other people whose names have been especially given to them for a reason? The name 'Immanuel' literally means 'God (-el) with (imma) us (nu)'. The season of Advent celebrates the fact that God is passionately committed to be 'with us' – God has been with us from the very beginning of creation, God is with us down through the generations, and God shall be with us until, in the end, we shall all 'be with God'. But the way in which God is with us is not always as we might expect. On the eve of the Assyrian invasion of Israel, the sign of 'God with us' was to be in the birth of a child to a young woman. This promise was seen to be fulfilled in a most startling way in the birth of Jesus, son of a teenage girl, Mary. In Jesus – his birth, life, death and resurrection – God is so vividly with us and for us that, as the apostle Paul says, 'there can be nothing in life or in death that can separate us from this God of love'.



Let us reflect on ways we might have become aware that God is with us and how we have seen this God through the lives of others.

*Come thou long-expected Jesus  
Born to set thy people free  
From our fears and sins release us  
Let us find our rest in thee. (TIS272)*

### Tuesday December 17

#### Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19

'Body language!' More than words, our bodies communicate a great deal, and most especially do our faces, our eyes. One of the limitations of using facebook is that we can only read the words people say – we cannot see their bodies as they say it. We can often tell from a person's body – especially their face - how they feel: joyful or sad, bored or interested, relaxed or in pain, for us or against us. A person's face also influences our response – if they are angry with us then we feel intimidated and may want to fight back or to run away, if they are hospitable towards us, we feel an invitation to draw nearer.

Three times in Psalm 80 (vv 3,7,19) the psalmist prays to God: O God; let your face shine that we may be saved. The season of Advent celebrates the fact that, out of an undying and irresistible love for us, God's face has shone upon us in an unforgettable way – in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus – and the face of God will continue to shine until the whole world shines in return.

An Ancient Blessing:  
*The Lord bless you and keep you  
The Lord make his face to shine upon you  
And be gracious unto you  
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you  
And give you peace.*

## Advent Resource 2013

### Wednesday December 18

#### Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

It can be impressive to see an old building from a previous era, restored to its former glory. Restoration can also be applied to people's lives – often the purpose of medical treatment is to restore physical health, and the purpose of counseling is to restore emotional or psychological health.

In our day, the cry for restoration is often heard from the mouths (and hearts) of people in the church – a deep desire for the restoration of former glory. More broadly, there is a cry (sometimes suppressed or silenced) in the hearts and lives of all people for the restoration of life.

The season of Advent reminds us that the Christian God is a 'Coming God': one who has come, one who will continue to come and one who, in the end, will come in a final way. And when this God comes, the purpose and the result is restoration and renewal – of human life, of human society, of the whole of creation. The foundation for this conviction is in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

In what ways do you cry out for restoration?

*Finish then thy new creation, pure and spotless let us be  
Let us see thy great salvation, perfectly restored in thee  
Changed from glory into glory till in heaven we take our place  
Till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder love  
and praise. (TiS 217)*

### Thursday December 19

#### Romans 1:1-7

Have you ever had the experience of searching through a stand of greeting cards and not finding exactly what you want. Even if the visual appearance is okay, the words inside are not. Sometimes the only thing to do is to find a card with no words at all and then write your own.

When the apostle Paul sends one of his 'cards', he has a particular way of doing it: he writes the words: 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' (Romans 1:7). It is a greeting which provides a concise and rich summary of the Christmas story, indeed the whole Christian faith, declaring that in the person of Jesus, God has acted in a way through which we discover the abundance of God's generosity towards us and through which God's peace

is accomplished for us. For the apostle, nothing is more important – which is why he begins his letters with these words. It is likely that he would write the same thing in a birthday, or wedding, or get-well card.

Ever since the days of Paul the Christian church begins its worship with similar words of greeting – of far greater meaning than simply 'good morning'.

Try beginning each day with a reminder of Paul's greeting

*We pray for the peace of God –for ourselves, for all  
those to whom we pen Christmas cards ...and those we  
don't.*

### Friday December 20

#### Matthew 1:18-25

'Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary' is how the early church creed summarized the birth of Jesus. It is one part of the creed which, for many people, doesn't make sense or is an obstacle to an intelligent faith. However, put together, these two statements about the birth of Jesus play a simple and special part in helping us know about the significance of Jesus. The words 'conceived' and 'born of Mary' define Jesus as one who shares the common lot of all human life – 'truly human' as some would have it. The words 'Holy Spirit' and 'virgin' indicate the uniqueness of Jesus – 'truly divine' as some would have it. In other words, the creed is declaring a 'theological' truth rather than simply offering a biographical account of Jesus' birth. It is another way of saying that, in Jesus, God has taken upon God-self the fullness of our human life in all its brokenness (truly human), and has acted in a decisive and unique way to bring the gift and promise of new life (truly divine).

As we approach Christmas Day, let us take the time to invite God into the brokenness of our human life ... planting the seed of the hope.

*Come to us O God, and give birth to your gift and  
promise of new life in our lives, and in the lives of our  
loved ones.*



## Advent Resource 2013

### Saturday December 21

#### Matthew 1:18-25

Unsung heroes: people who will never receive public recognition but whose deeds or lives have, even in the most insignificant way, been heroic. Do you know any such people? I've had the privilege of knowing many – a person who dies a painful death with serenity, another who gives her life in the care of a disabled daughter, one who toils away in isolation over many years pursuing a piece of medical research, elderly people who have faithfully served the church over decades.

In the story of the birth of Jesus, much is made of Mary, of angels, of wise men and of shepherds...but little is made of Joseph. In this passage of Matthew's gospel, take a moment to reflect on Joseph's situation, on what he must have gone through, and then ponder his response – one of costly and embarrassing obedience to the angel. Perhaps Joseph is really an unsung hero of the Christmas story.

As we approach Christmas day, let us take time to reflect on our own call to heroism.

*We give you thanks for Joseph, for all unsung heroes...  
and pray that we may be empowered by their example.*

### Household/Multi-age suggestions

#### Romans 1:1-7

*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle,  
set apart for the gospel of God,  
which he promised beforehand through his prophets in  
the holy scriptures,  
the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from  
David according to the flesh  
and was declared to be Son of God with power  
according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from  
the dead,  
Jesus Christ our Lord,  
through whom we have received grace and apostleship  
to bring about the obedience of faith among all the  
Gentiles for the sake of his name,  
including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus  
Christ,  
To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be  
saints:  
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the  
Lord Jesus Christ.*

#### One-letter summaries

This passage is like a greeting card message that encapsulates Paul's vision of the gospel.

Print or write out the words of the passage in large letters that can be read by a group.

Allocate each person one of the following letters: A, B, C, D, G, P, S, and the name 'Jesus Christ'.

If you don't have enough people for all of these letters, just choose some, then repeat later allocating other letters.

Give each person a different coloured highlighter, and work through the passage together giving time for each person to highlight the words that begin with the letter they have been allocated. (If you don't have 8 different colours, use two colours together to make new colours, further enhancing collaboration.)

Read the passage together, with each person reading the words they have highlighted, wish one member of the household reading all of the other words. Repeat as many times as you wish, switching letters.

On separate pieces of paper, invite each person to write out the words beginning with their allocated letter (not necessarily in a list or a straight line).

Look at each other's collections of words, and consider them as summary threads of the gospel.

Choose one thread and try to memorise it as a household.

On subsequent days, try to remember the thread, and also elaborate on it to make sense of the key words, using them as prompts.

A: Apostle Apart According Apostleship Among All  
Are  
B: Be Beforehand By Bring Belong Beloved  
C: Called  
D: Descended David Declared Dead  
G: Gospel God Grace Gentiles Jesus Christ  
P: Paul Promised Prophets Power Peace  
S: Servant Set Scriptures Son Spirit Sake Saints

## Advent Resource 2013

### Postcards

During this week, write some Advent greeting cards to each other in your household. Base your messages on your favourite phrases from Paul's opening to the Romans, copying them onto your own cards and decorating with picture or symbol.

For example:

"You are called to belong to Jesus Christ"

"Grace to you and peace from God"

"God promised the gospel beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures"

"Through Jesus we have received grace"

### Messages within Messages

Paul's letter to the Romans unpacks the good news of Jesus in lots of interesting layers. Make a 'Pass the Parcel' with a packet of Jelly Babies on the inner layer with the phrase 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.'

With each layer include a section of the text (as set out following). You can include a small item, like a sticker or lollipop if you think this will enhance your household's experience.

With your household introduce the idea of the 'unfolding gospel or good-news story of God'. Let the ideas of 'revelation' and 'the fullness of time' bubble to the surface naturally during the experience of pass the parcel. Depending on your household tone, choose some favourite Christmas music – the Bach Christmas Oratorio will do just as well as Colin Buchanan's Christmas album or our family favourite tree decorating classic, the cheesy 'Hooked on Christmas'.

Pass the parcel around, stop the music, open one layer, read the text aloud. As a group, repeat the section of text: develop your 'oral' memory skills together in this.

Along the way, review the layers of the text already uncovered to keep track of the narrative. When you arrive at the middle, celebrate with sharing the Jelly Babies, reminding each other of Paul's understanding of how the gospel included everyone, and was to be shared widely!

(Text from inside to outside, in reverse order!)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (inner layer)*

*To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints:*

*including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,*

*through whom we have received grace and apostleship*

*to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name,*

*according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,*

*and was declared to be Son of God with power*

*the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh*

*which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures,*

*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God*

## Advent Resource 2013

### Sunday December 22 (Advent 4)

#### Matthew 1:18–25

Much of this season is spent thinking about the ways in which God promises to come to us, and about the ways in which we wait, hope, and look for that advent. Today we hear not that God will come, but that God is here in the birth of Jesus the Messiah. By placing 'God with us' at such an emphatic point in his gospel, Matthew clearly intends it to be an important theme. In fact, the idea that God is actually present (not just close at hand) in Jesus provides the only secure foundation for the ongoing life of the church. Matthew makes it clear that the only rationale for the church to gather at all is connected to this idea (see Matthew 18:20). The gospel closes with a reminder that the presence of God through Christ is also the only basis on which the church is able to fulfil its mission in the world (see Matthew 28:19–20). In other words, the 'Emmanuel' theme is for life, not just for Christmas.

Where, in the coming days of Christmas celebration, will you see signs of God's presence with you? Give thanks for these things, and ask God to be present to others in need.

*God with us, may your presence sustain, enlighten and renew us, and all your people. May we build our lives and our life together on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ your Son.*

### Monday December 23

#### Luke 1.1–25

Many people are of the view that God's basic attitude towards us is one of disapproval. Images of God as severe parent, punishing judge, or harsh taskmaster are still prevalent in popular and (sadly) much explicitly religious imagination. It is worth dwelling, then, on the fact that the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth ends by emphasising God's favour. Luke uses several words in the birth narratives to indicate that God's 'view' of us is benevolent (see 1:25, 28, 30, 48, 68 and also 2:14). This notion, that God looks on us with loving attention and care, is related especially to those who are humble and lowly, but it extends to God's people more generally, and ultimately to the whole earth. This is the source of our peace and hope and joy. If Christmas is about anything, it is about celebrating and proclaiming that the favour of God which rested on Jesus himself (see 2:40, 52) rests also on us, through Christ.



How will your Christmas celebrations embody the good news of God's loving care for all people?

*Merciful God, look with favour on us, on those we love and care for and on every part of your creation. As you look with love upon us, may we grow in wisdom.*

### Tuesday December 24 (Christmas Eve)

#### Luke 2:1–7

Luke narrates the birth of Jesus with great simplicity. At one level it is the story of ordinary people going through an everyday experience: one birth among many on that day. However Luke connects this simple, small story to much larger, grander stories. The reference to the Governor and the Emperor invite us to reflect upon the ways in which the birth of this child will serve to challenge the claims of empire. The insistence on Bethlehem as the place of Jesus' birth connects him to Israel's story. The birth of this child therefore serves to fulfil the hopes of some, and will ultimately come into direct conflict with the authority of others. At the heart of the Christmas story lies the idea that this single, small event re-orders everything. Past, present, and future are now to be understood in the light of his birth. Human history and salvation history now find their central and crucial significance in the phrase 'she gave birth to her firstborn son'.

Many Christians have, quite rightly, used this passage to prompt thoughts about what it means to 'make room' for God in our lives. Perhaps, in the light of the past year, we might commit ourselves to making Australia a place that 'makes room' for the stranger and the refugee. How can you contribute to that goal?

*Refugee God, help us to welcome you into the world, and to welcome others into our land and our lives.*



## Advent Resource 2013

### Wednesday December 25 (Christmas Day)

#### Luke 2.8–20

Happy Christmas! Today is a day of celebration and rejoicing. However you are spending the day, we hope that you will know something of the 'great joy' (2:10) and 'peace' (2:14) that this passages promises to all people. Importantly, this peace and joy are connected to the good news of what God has done for all people in the birth of God's son. The story of the shepherds is essentially one of revelation. God has done this! God has made it known! To God be the glory! But the good news revealed to them, becomes a good news that they are able to hand on to others (specifically to Mary, see 2:17). Celebration leads to worship, to evangelism, and back to worship again. There would be no story without the human characters: Mary, Joseph, shepherds. But without God's promise and God's presence, revealed in the birth of the Christ-child, the story would become little more than a passing memory for those involved. With God at the centre, this story becomes good news for the whole world, and our calling is to praise God and tell others.

*Pray for a new confidence for God's people to take the good news and proclaim it throughout the world. 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those he favours.'*

