

ADVENT

A JOURNEY TO THE ARRIVAL

DAY ONE

The Invitation

Reading: Luke 2:19

Advent is one of those beautiful seasons in which we are invited to slow down and consider the wonder of the incarnation. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. The promised Messiah had arrived. The true light, which gives light to everyone had entered the world. The history of humanity was forever changed in this one moment in which God took on flesh, entering the world as a helpless baby.

It's right that we celebrate this amazing truth. It's right that our calendars are centred around this moment in history. It's right that we slow down and consider what a wonderfully loving God we worship.

Christmas Day is possibly the only day in our western calendars when most things actually stop. There are no work meetings, no emails to respond to, no classes to go to. I love driving to visit family on Christmas Day, knowing that almost every other car on the road is doing the same thing as me - going to spend time with the people who are our nearest and dearest. On Christmas Day the pace of life slows, allowing us to catch our breath, celebrate, stay as long as we would like to, knowing we don't need to rush on to the next thing in the diary.

But we often arrive at Christmas Day, knowing that we need to catch a breath because the run up to that day has been exhausting. Our attention has been consumed by deadlines, parties, shopping, decorating, catch-ups, family gatherings, and even things like church services. And while all of these can be good things in themselves, it's important to acknowledge the invitation we are given to slow down in the lead up to the day the Saviour was born.

That's what Advent is about. It's not about chocolates or sales or devotionals. It's about slowing down and following the example set by Mary, who as the events of that first Christmas began to settle, "treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."

The hope is that this devotional for the Advent season will help you to do the same. Each day will include a reading from Scripture, a short thought or invitation to a spiritual practice, and a page for you to write down your thoughts. Each week we will follow along with the theme of the sermon from the previous Sunday, thinking about the Messenger, the Seed, the Journey, and the Arrival.

As you enter this Advent season, why not take some time now to have a conversation with the Lord about what you would like him to reveal to you this Advent. You can write this on the page opposite so you can come back to it at the end to see where you started and where the Lord took you over the course of these 25 days.

DAY ONE

DAY TWO

The Preparer

We begin this Advent season by thinking about the Messenger. The word for messenger in Greek is 'aggelos', from which we get our word 'angel'. The Christmas story is full of angelic visitations in which angels appear and give a message from God, and we'll look at a different one each day this week. Today we will look at part of the angelic visitation which Zechariah received in which it was revealed to him that his wife, Elizabeth, would give birth to the one who would testify about the coming Messiah and prepare the way for his arrival.

Reading: Luke 1:5-17

Zechariah found himself a place where he was well positioned to have an encounter with the Lord. He had been given the privilege of stepping into the temple - the place in which God's Glory was believed to dwell. In that moment of encounter he received an angelic visitation in which he was told that he would have a son who would be the one who would prepare the way for the Lord's coming. Much of the circumstances which led to Zechariah finding himself in such a place had been taken out of his hands, but Zechariah also ensured he had a willing posture and a heart which was open to hear from the Lord.

As we step into this Advent season, take some time now to come before the Lord and let him know about the posture with which you are entering this time. Are you hungry for His presence? Do you want to be hungry for His presence? Or are you in a moment when your desire for His presence is as low as it's ever been? Thankfully the Lord already knows, and regardless of which of those postures aligns most closely with your own, the invitation the Lord gives is always the same - "Come". With that in mind, have a conversation with the Lord about the posture of your heart and let him know that you accept his invitation.

DAY TWO

DAY THREE

The Silence

Today we're going to look at the second half of the interaction between the angel Gabriel and Zechariah.

Reading: Luke 1:18-25

I imagine that this period of silence which Zechariah experienced was challenging at first. And honestly, that's many people's first experience of intentionally spending time with the Lord in silence. When silence is enforced, the urge to communicate with others is heightened. Thankfully, we aren't forced to be silent, so can communicate with others. That's going to be something which will be helpful to do through this Advent journey. Think about who you could invite on this journey with you as you pray, process and practice.

Despite what was probably a challenging start, I also think this period of silence transformed Zechariah as an individual, and I would be shocked if he didn't seek moments of silence with the Lord for the rest of his life. Something happens when we spend time with the Lord in silence. It forces us to slow down and listen. At first it will feel like a struggle, but with time it will become a life-giving practice.

Take a moment now to sit in silence and listen for the Lord's voice. If this is a new practice just try to set aside a couple of minutes. If it's a regular practice for you, take as long as you would like to. Use the page opposite to record what he has said or to reflect on the process of spending time in silence.

DAY THREE

DAY FOUR

The Mother

The Annunciation has been depicted in carols, movies and nativities more times than we can count. As a result, it is one of the most recognisable stories in the entire Bible. Often with the most familiar stories in Scripture, however, we can skim past the account without slowing down, sitting with the text and asking the Lord if there is anything (new or old) which he wants to reveal to us at this moment in our lives.

Reading: Luke 1:26–38

Slow down and sit with this familiar passage of Scripture. Read through it slowly at least three times, each time pausing to ask the Lord if there is anything (new or old) which he wants to reveal to you today.

DAY FOUR

DAY FIVE

The Husband

In Luke 1:31 the angel Gabriel told Mary the name which was to be given to her child. It's interesting that in our reading today we will see that Joseph is told that he is to give the child in Mary's womb the same name.

Reading: Matthew 1:18-25

Often when we believe we have heard the Lord speak to us that can be followed by moments of doubt, as we question whether we have heard the Lord's voice at all. But when we find ourselves in that moment of questioning and another person reveals to us that the Lord said the same thing to them, it dispels all doubt and gives way to thankfulness that the Lord would choose to speak to us.

Has there been a moment in your life when this has happened to you? What did it do to your relationship with the Lord? Ask the Lord whether there is anything about that time which he wants to remind you of today.

DAY SIX

The Heavenly Host

The next angelic visitation we are told about comes at the moment the news of Jesus' birth is first announced to the shepherds in the fields.

Reading: Luke 2:8-16

As the shepherds were in the fields, they were probably just doing their jobs rather than intentionally carving out a time of silence in which they were expecting the Lord to speak to them. While carving out time to intentionally listen for the Lord's voice is vital, we need to be careful that we don't restrict hearing God's voice to those moments only. The shepherds had their normal routine interrupted (albeit in a very dramatic fashion).

As you enter the next 24 hours, are you willing to allow the Lord to interrupt your normal routine? Bring your schedule before the Lord and invite him to interrupt. As an act of devotion to the Lord commit to setting alarms to force you to stop in the morning, at noon and in the evening to pray. Then as you go about your day, try to maintain a posture in which you are attentively expecting the Lord to speak at any moment.

DAY SEVEN

The Flight

The final angelic visitation in the Christmas story is one we will spend some more time looking at later in our teaching series. Joseph was visited in two dreams in which he was given the message to move.

Reading: Matthew 2:13-23

This passage includes the account of three of four dreams which we are told Joseph had (the other being the dream in which he was urged to take Mary home as his wife). Yesterday we thought about inviting the Lord to interrupt our routine. Today, why not invite the Lord to interrupt and direct your dreams?

As we come to the end of our first week of Advent in which we have been thinking about slowing down and listening to the Lord's voice, there is another lesson we can learn from the life of Joseph. Matthew 1:24, 2:14, and 2:21 all tell us that Joseph's response to hearing a message from the Lord was to do what the Lord asked him to do. As you have spent time this week listening to the Lord's voice, has there been anything he has been asking you to do?

DAY SEVEN

DAY EIGHT

The Man

Over this week we're going to continue to follow the theme of our teaching from this morning. The seed of promise doesn't only refer to the moment of Jesus' conception in his mother's womb, when the Word became flesh. Over this week we're going to trace how this seed of promise has been present right from the beginning as we look at different prophecies which pointed towards the coming of Jesus Christ. We'll see that each of these prophecies builds to give a very specific picture of what the fulfilment of this promise would look like.

Reading: Genesis 3:15

Right back at the beginning we already see the presence of this seed of promise. In the immediate aftermath of the Fall, the details of God's redemption plan were already beginning to be disclosed. The seed of the woman was going to crush and defeat the enemy. But in that act of crushing, the enemy was going to strike one final blow.

Now read Psalm 22.

Finally, read Matthew 27:32-56.

Notice how the details of Psalm 22 direct our attention forward to Matthew 27. While Christmas is ultimately a celebration of birth, we cannot forget that this was always a story which began with the end in mind. Right from Genesis, through the Psalms, and up until the fulfilment of those words at the moment of Jesus' death, God's story of love was being revealed.

DAY EIGHT

DAY NINE

The Son of Abraham

Reading: Genesis 22:15–18

The word which is translated as “offspring” in many English translations of the Bible is actually the Hebrew word, ‘zera’, which can be accurately translated as ‘offspring’ or ‘seed’. Here we see that there is an increased specificity given to the heritage of this seed of promise. They were going to be a descendant of Abraham, and therefore Jewish.

Now read Matthew 1:1–17

While it’s easy for us to quickly skim over the list of unfamiliar names, perhaps stopping briefly at the few which we do recognise, consider the fact that with each name which is listed, we are shown that Jesus does in fact meet the genealogical criteria of this seed of promise. Each name is further evidence of God’s faithfulness to his promise. Take some time now to create your own list of names. Who have been the people God has used in your life to demonstrate His faithfulness? Perhaps there are some of those people who are unaware of the role they have played in your life. Why not reach out to them to let them know about the way God has used them to impact others?

DAY TEN

The Son of David

Reading: 2 Samuel 7:11b-16

With the promise the Lord made to David here, progressive revelation allows us to see that words which initially appeared to refer to Solomon also point to another one of David's descendants whose throne would be established forever, and who would build a house for the Lord's name which would be built with something other than bricks and mortar.

Now read Matthew 20:29-21:11

In *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, Craig Keener explains that Jewish tradition records that there were some genealogical records which were kept in the temple before its destruction in A.D. 70. It is therefore possible that prior to the destruction of the temple an individual could have checked the authenticity of Jesus' claim to be a descendant of David. Again, we see that the pool of those who could possibly be this seed of promise is reduced again. We also see that there was a belief among Jesus' contemporaries that he was in fact the descendant who had been promised to David.

The cry of the blind men has become one of the most ancient prayers of the Church. It is sometimes referred to as 'the Jesus Prayer', which is "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of David, have mercy on me a sinner." Take some time now to slowly repeat this prayer. As you repeat it, consider each of the words individually and allow them to shape your own words of prayer.

DAY ELEVEN

The Mighty God

Reading: Isaiah 9:6-7

In this familiar passage from Isaiah 9 we see the different layers to this seed of promise.

The seed of promise would be a child who was born (and therefore human), further pointing to the fulfilment of the promise made in Genesis 3:15.

The seed of promise would reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, further pointing to the fulfilment of the promise made in 2 Samuel 7:11-16.

The seed of promise would be a son who was given, and therefore not only a child born of a human, but also a Son given by God.

The seed of promise would be one who would be worthy to bear the names, Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.

Take a moment to take each of these names and churn them over in your mind, and as you do, thank Jesus for the ways in which he has displayed that he is worthy to bear that name. Those could be examples from Scripture or from your own life.

Wonderful Counsellor

Mighty God

Everlasting Father

Prince of Peace

DAY ELEVEN

DAY TWELVE

The Virgin

Reading: Isaiah 7:14

This prophecy is a significant one because without its fulfilment, the previous prophecies which we have looked at would be impossible to fulfil. The only way that this seed of promise would be able to be a man and also God is through a virgin birth. The wonderful mystery of the incarnation, which we celebrate at Christmas, is that Jesus was fully God and fully man.

Now read Mark 4:35-41

Consider the way in which this story shows us Jesus' humanity and his divinity. Take some time to place yourself in the scene as one of the disciples present in the boat. Your friend and teacher who you've seen eating, accepting help, and sleeping has just ordered the wind and waves to cease. What do you think it would have been like to have that moment of realising that Jesus, who you know was undoubtedly human, was no mere man?

DAY TWELVE

DAY THIRTEEN

The Town

Reading: Micah 5:2

Given what we know about the birth of this seed of promise, it's incredible to think that Micah was written 500 years before Jesus' birth.

Now read Luke 2:1-7

Consider the number of different circumstances which needed to line up in order for the prophecy in Micah 5:2 to be fulfilled. How wonderful that God continues to care about the seemingly insignificant details of our lives. Take some time now to reflect on the last 24 hours. Where have you seen God's hand in your life? Also take time to ask him to show you the moments when you were previously unaware of his interest in the detail of your life.

DAY THIRTEEN

DAY FOURTEEN

The Shoot

Reading: Isaiah 11:1-11

In the Hebrew language the original text was written with only consonants, with vowels being later added to the text in the form of points and dashes above or below those consonants to aid with pronunciation. The word translated 'shoot' is the Hebrew word 'nezer', which shares the same consonants, or root letters, (nun, zayin & resh) as the town of Nazareth. Some have suggested that this is no coincidence, and that Jesus being called a Nazarene (Matthew 2:23) was further evidence of Jesus being the seed of promise and the fulfilment of the prophecy about the shoot which would come up from the stump of Jesse.

If you look back to what comes before today's reading, you'll see that the reason Israel has been reduced to a stump was due to the unfaithfulness of God's people. However, Israel's reduction to a stump did not mean death. The emergence of a shoot from the stump shows us something we see again and again in Scripture - God remains faithful despite the unfaithfulness of His people.

Yesterday we took time to reflect on the previous 24 hours. Today, spend time thinking about the entirety of your life. Where have you seen God's faithfulness? Make a list on the page opposite and give thanks to the Lord for his faithfulness to you.

DAY FOURTEEN

DAY FIFTEEN

The Relative

Over this week we're going to again follow on with the theme from our Sunday teaching, as we think about some of the journeys which different people took in the days around Jesus' birth. As you read through each passage this week think about the detail of the journey undertaken. Why was it necessary? How did this journey change the people involved?

Reading: Luke 1:39-45

Notice the urgency with which Mary set out on this journey to visit Elizabeth. There was something about the relationship they shared which meant that Mary's first instinct was to spend time with Elizabeth. It's so important to have other people to journey alongside us on our walk with the Lord. Why not check in with the person who you invited to join you on this Advent journey?

Elizabeth means 'consecrated to God', and Mary is the one who uttered the famous words, "I am the Lord's servant, may your word to me be fulfilled". These were women who were wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord, and had been so long before their respective pregnancies. As we continue on our journey towards Christmas Day, when we will celebrate the birth of Jesus, this is an opportunity for us to follow the examples of Elizabeth and Mary, who lived in a posture of consecration to the Lord.

Take some time now to pray the words of Mary, "I am the Lord's servant." Slow down. Slow your breathing. Allow this prayer to become your breath. As you inhale and exhale, let these words slowly repeat with your breathing. Either sit or go for a slow walk and have a conversation with the Lord, using these words as your entry point. If you notice your mind has wandered, repeat the phrase, "I am the Lord's servant." Lord, we invite you to speak. Your servant is listening.

DAY FIFTEEN

DAY SIXTEEN

The Magnificat

The Magnificat is the name given to the song Mary sang in response to Elizabeth's exclamation in Luke 1:45, "Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!"

Reading: Luke 1:46-56

Mary's song is given the name 'the Magnificat' as a result of the opening line: "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour..." This song was Mary's response to the world-changing event which she had been selected to be an integral part of. This journey which Mary undertook to reach Elizabeth's house would have taken somewhere between 3 and 5 days and on her journey Mary would have had space to pray and process what the angel Gabriel had just told her. As Mary prayed she was reminded that this moment was always going to arrive because God is faithful to his promises.

We often talk about our walk with the Lord in reference to our relationship with him. While there is a metaphorical aspect to that language, there is also significance to the physical act of moving from one place to another and inviting the Lord on the journey with us. Today take some time to go on a journey in order to have a conversation with the Lord. That could involve going for a walk to specifically spend time with the Lord, or it could mean doing what Mary did and allowing a journey you're going to make anyway to become a moment of prayer. In order for that to happen you'll need to slow down and give yourself more time than you would ordinarily. It will be almost impossible to do if you're rushing from meeting to meeting.

DAY SIXTEEN

DAY SEVENTEEN

The Salvation Song

Our reading today is the song of Zechariah. Before we read the song, it's important to remind ourselves of the life journey of the one who sang this song of salvation. Zechariah was a Jewish priest who was "righteous in the sight of God" and observed "all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly." (Luke 1:5-6) This means that Zechariah was someone who knew God's word inside out and would have memorised large portions of Scripture.

Reading: Luke 1:67-80

It's fascinating that Zechariah, a man who knew Scripture so well, connected the dots so quickly. Even before the birth of his son or the seed of promise, he could already see what the Lord had set in motion. He could see the fulfilment of the Davidic covenant (v. 69), and the Abrahamic covenant (v. 72-3). He could draw the connection between what was happening in his present with what had been spoken about in Isaiah 40:1-5.

One reason he was able to capture what the Lord was doing in such a beautifully accurate song was because of the journey of his life to that moment, and the time he had taken to memorise Scripture. It's a practice which we maybe did a lot when we were children, but most of us who walk with the Lord in our adult years have fallen out of the way of a practice which can be so life-giving.

Take some time to memorise a verse which has stood out to you this Advent, and if one doesn't come to mind then why not memorise the first line of Zechariah's song, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them."

DAY SEVENTEEN

DAY EIGHTEEN

The Census

Reading: Luke 2:1-5

The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem would have been a 70 mile trip. It was an enforced trip for Joseph because the Romans wanted to know how many people they should expect to receive taxes from. A journey like this would have been the last thing a teenage girl in the late stages of pregnancy would have wanted. However, as we have already seen, this journey of inconvenience was one which was essential in order for the prophecies around the Messiah's birth to be fulfilled.

Often our own walk with the Lord can look like a series of journeys of inconvenience. The life he invites us to live isn't one which we will naturally drift or float towards, but is one which will require obedience and discipline. One practice which requires obedience and discipline for many of us is the practice of giving. The journey Mary and Joseph took to Bethlehem was one which was forced upon them in an attempt to fuel human greed. Because of the birth of Jesus, and the reality of his Kingdom, we are invited to live differently.

Today, exercise the spiritual practice of giving. Ask the Lord to whom and how much he is inviting you to give as you obediently walk this journey of inconvenience.

DAY EIGHTEEN

DAY NINETEEN

The Manger

Yesterday we thought about the journey which Mary and Joseph took from Nazareth to Bethlehem, but crossing the threshold of the town of Bethlehem was just the first part of the journey.

Reading: Luke 2:6-7

Think about what it would have been like for Mary to have arrived in Bethlehem only to find there was no room anywhere. Imagine the frantic knocking of doors as they journeyed through the crowded town of Bethlehem. Imagine the feeling of utter desperation Mary and Joseph would have experienced, which culminated in them looking at an animal's feeding trough and thinking, "this will have to do."

A manger is also mentioned in Isaiah 1:3, which talks about the rebellion of God's people. They had become children who had deserted their Father and ignored his voice. This new manger, in which that very God was laid, was the first resting place of the one who had come to rescue those who had forgotten him.

It's sometimes easy for us to look back at those who were guilty of such forgetfulness, and arrogantly assume that we would never fall into the same trap. Yet if we're honest, in the final run up to Christmas, we can find ourselves doing exactly the same thing - forgetting the one who the decorations, presents, and gatherings should all celebrate. Take some time today to remember the Lord and listen for his voice. Bring your heart before him and ask him to highlight anything which could lead towards forgetful rebellion.

DAY NINETEEN

DAY TWENTY

The Shepherds

While we will probably be familiar with the story of the shepherds in the fields and their arrival at the manger, we're going to spend some time thinking about the journey the shepherds went on between those two places.

Reading: Luke 2:15-16

While we aren't given the detail of that journey within Scripture, try to imagine the scene play out in your mind. As you do that ask the Lord to reveal details to you which you've never thought of before - he did watch it play out after all. How many shepherds were there? How fast were they moving? What expressions did they have on their faces? If it's helpful for you, you could even draw the scene on the page opposite.

As I picture the scene the word which comes to mind for me is excitement. If an angelic visitation proclaiming that the long awaited Saviour of the world had arrived didn't leave them excited, then I don't know what would! But I also wonder if there was any indication of guardedness in the shepherds. These were big claims which came with big expectations, and a common human reaction to such situations is to try to lower our expectations to ease the fall in case our exceptions crash down around us.

While that's a very human thing to do, it can also be something which can limit what the Lord wants to do within us. Have you allowed your expectations of what the Lord can do be limited? If you have, bring those things to him now in an honest conversation.

DAY TWENTY

DAY TWENTY-ONE

The Magi

The longest journey undertaken to visit the newborn King was by the “Magi from the east.”

Reading: Matthew 2:1-10

It's so interesting to consider that the Magi were non-Jews. The expectation around the seed of promise was something which had been woven through the entirety of the Jewish Scriptures, and we could be excused for thinking that only those people who were practicing Jews would have had any interest in the arrival of this seed of promise. But we see here, right at the beginning of Jesus' life, that others outside of the Jewish faith were eagerly anticipating the coming King.

I wonder if you ever fall into the trap of thinking that people who aren't part of the Church are totally apathetic to the true meaning of Christmas? Do you ever find yourself thinking that our friends and family who don't yet know Jesus must have no desire to get to know him? What we have seen happening over the last 6 months in CFC is the opposite. People who don't yet follow Jesus are hungry for him. There is a growing tiredness with the false promises which the world offers. People are finding themselves saying, “there has got to be more than this”, and they are finding that the cry of their heart is correct - there is more than what the world can offer. They are turning to Jesus and discovering that he is true to his promised offer of life to the full, peace, hope and love.

Who are the people in your life who you believe have no interest in entering the life-giving journey of following Jesus? Bring them before the Lord today and allow your expectation of what he can do in their lives grow.

DAY TWENTY-ONE

DAY TWENTY-TWO

The First Visitors

In our Sunday teaching today we will be looking at 'The Arrival'. The long awaited Saviour has come, but not in the way most people expected. The humblest of beginnings for the eternally exalted one.

Reading: Luke 2:8-20

Have you ever thought about the fact that the shepherds arrived empty-handed? The first people to visit the newborn King didn't come with gifts or prepared words. They didn't even come and try to rectify the rugged surroundings in which Jesus was brought into the world. Instead they arrived with the expectation that they were about to see the one they had been told about in their childhoods. They were filled with anticipation about the fact that they were about to meet the one who had been promised for centuries.

While the shepherds arrived with empty hands, they departed with full hearts. And their hearts were full, not because they had presented gifts which had been well received, or brought profound words of comfort or encouragement. Their hearts were full despite the fact they had done nothing at all except lay their eyes upon a baby lying in a manger.

Isn't it amazing that God still does the same thing for us today as he did for the shepherds that night? He simply invites us to come and be with him. The invitation God gives us to experience his love and intimacy is less about doing and more about being.

Today take some time to again practice silence. Be intentional about entering your time of silence with no agenda. You don't need to bring anything. You don't need to perform. You are simply invited to be with the Lord. And he is so excited that he gets to spend time with you, his child.

DAY TWENTY-TWO

DAY TWENTY-THREE

The Wonder

Reading: Matthew 2:11

Some English translations of the Bible say that the Magi “bowed down and worshipped him.” However, a more accurate translation is that “they fell down and worshipped him”, or even, “having fallen down, they bowed to him.” This wasn’t a rehearsed and measured action, but a visceral response to coming face to face with this young King. Awestruck wonder to a measure that even these well-travelled and learned men struggled to fathom. These Magi were men who had recently had an audience with king Herod in his ornate palace in Jerusalem. Herod was known to be an immensely impressive ruler; wealthy, intelligent, gifted, and a man who got jobs done. Yet, in the eyes of the Magi he was no match to the young Jesus.

When we gaze on the face of Jesus, awestruck wonder is still the result. Take some time now to gaze at him in your mind’s eye. Hold a passage of Scripture in your mind in which you can imagine Jesus’ face. Now, simply take some time to silently sit and gaze. Look into his eyes as he lovingly looks into yours. Experience the wonder which filled the Magi.

DAY TWENTY-THREE

DAY TWENTY-FOUR

The Word

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

(John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

John 1:1-18

DAY TWENTY-FOUR

DAY TWENTY-FIVE

The Lord

As we conclude our Advent series, it's important for us to remember that the story didn't end in a manger. The manger was simply another step of the rescue plan which had been in motion for centuries - a plan which we were included in and invited to be partners in all because of the wonderful love of our Jesus.

Reading: Philippians 2:1-11

The story of Christmas isn't just one which is supposed to make us feel good and festive. Instead, it's a story which should change us and change the way we live. It should impact our attitudes, behaviours and relationships. Read through Philippians 2:1-11 again, but this time allow the words turn into prayer. Allow worship, thankfulness, confession, desire, intercession to all flow out of these beautiful words about our Saviour.

Just like the story didn't end with the manger, the journey we have been on over the last 25 days doesn't end with the last day of Advent. You've established, re-established, or continued a rhythm in which you've spent time in Scripture daily. You've also engaged in a variety of spiritual practices. Spiritual practices should never be an end in themselves, but should be seen as tools to allow us to experience the Lord's presence. Some of those will have felt like a better fit than others, but now you will hopefully have a few more tools in your tool belt when it comes to spending time with the Lord.

My prayer is that you step out of Advent with a burning heart, a renewed sense of hunger for intimacy with the Lord, and a belt of tools which will help you continue to pursue and experience the Lord's presence.

DAY TWENTY-FIVE

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