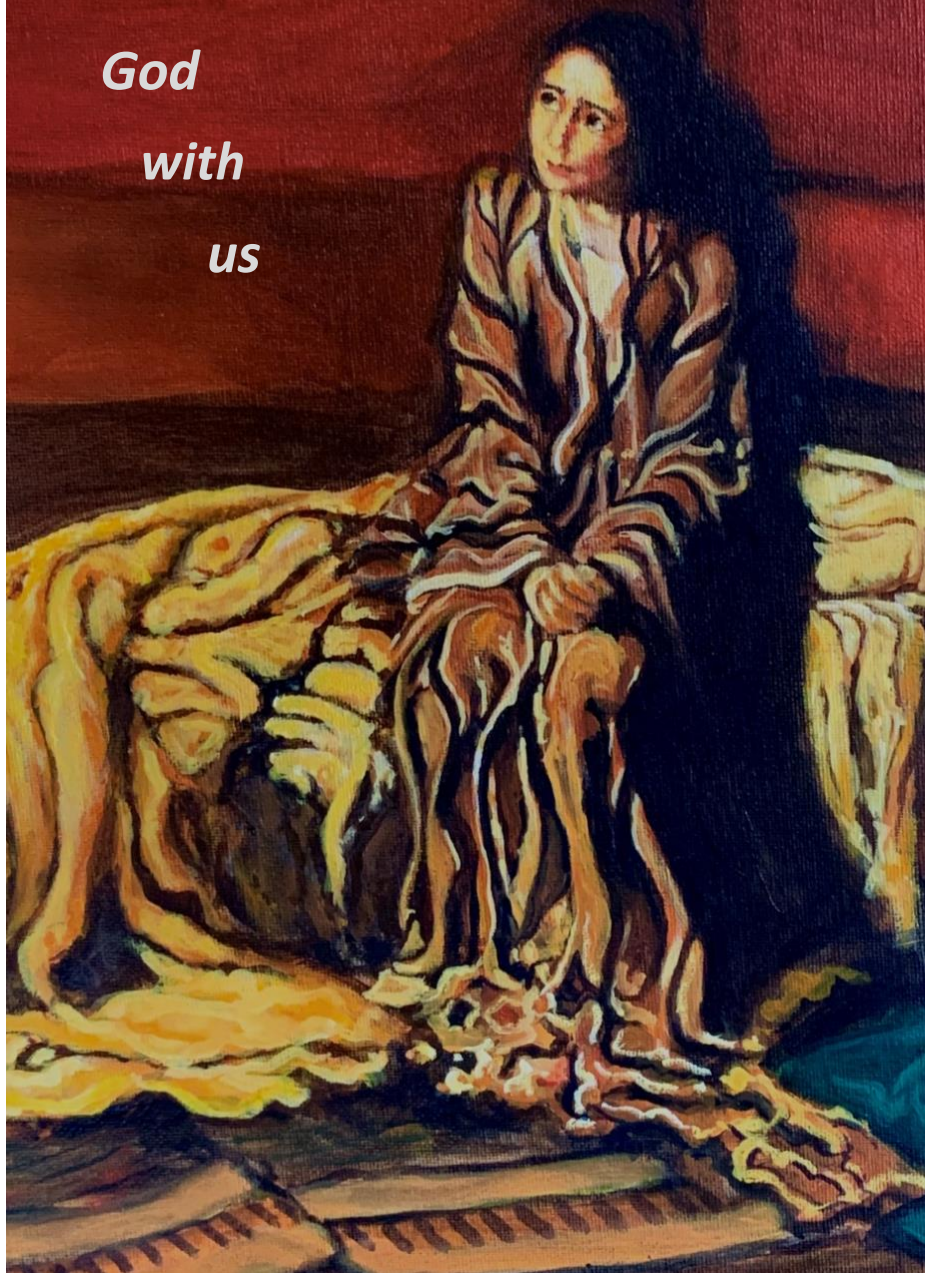


ADVENT EVERYDAY 2022

*God
with
us*



Message from the Editor

For the second year running, our young congregation of Southside Uniting Church has produced a set of daily reflections for the season of Advent. Contributions came from congregation members (aged 13 to 80-something), the ministry team, and a guest contribution from our Presbytery Minister, Rev. David Busch. 30 people contributed to the production of this resource, and share personal insights, stories and memories that witness to the beauty of Christ and God's world. We are blessed!

Coupled with the written reflections are visual reflections by three Southside UC artists: Narelle Richardson, Flora Woodward, and Peter Kennedy.

Narelle produced a beautiful pencil drawing inspired by prophecies of a righteous branch springing forth from the house of David (Jer. 33:14-16), and from the stump of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1).

Flora created a series of fun and imaginative digital works inspired by three stories in the book of Daniel.

Peter's work 'After Tanner' is a stunning replica of Henry Tanner's 'The Annunciation' (1898). It is re-presented in this booklet but is worth seeing in person.

The theme for this year's reflections was taken from Matthew 1:23, 'God with us.' May you know the presence of God in the trials and triumphs, loves and losses. May the gift of faith be yours this Advent.

Thanks to all our authors and artists who made this possible, including Rachel Manton, our amazing Administrator, who helped format this production to look fabulous.

Rev Jock Dunbar

27 November 2022

Habakkuk (1:1-7; 2:1-4; 3:3b-6, 17-19)

“How long, Lord must I call for help?”

The cry of Habbakuk is the cry of us all, and for all the same reasons.

Justice is not seen. Violence is rife. Why?

Why should I continue to have faith in God?

“Have faith” is an expression I have learned to dislike. I once had a friend who died of cancer saying “I HAVE faith. Why doesn’t God heal me?”

The NIV translation of Habbakuk 2:4 is “the righteous person will live by faithfulness”. My New Testament lecturer gave us a definition of faith which I find much more encouraging. “FAITH is our faithfulness to God in response to God’s prior faithfulness to us.” This is exactly what Habbakuk is talking about. God is and always has been faithful. God’s timing is not our timing. God’s ways are not our ways. But God is faithful. Praise God!

And we are called to be faithful in season and out of season - when the fig tree blossoms and when it doesn’t; when there’s fruit on the vine and when there’s not.

*Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father
There is no shadow of turning with Thee
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be.
Amen*

Heather Griffin

28 November 2022

Jeremiah 7: 1-15

God saw that Israel had broken the Covenant and He was angry. He called the prophet Jeremiah to proclaim that God was giving them a choice: change your ways and I will keep my promises made with your fathers (v3, 7) or be cast out of My sight (v15).

Jeremiah urged the people to hear God's word. "Hearing" invokes a response in the person who is listening - from within: faith, trust, and understanding; and outwardly: obedience and repentance. We cannot call Him our King and then live just as we want. We are obliged to surrender.

With the birth of Jesus Christ, God 'changes tact'. They shall call His name Emmanuel, which means 'God with us' (Matthew 1:23). No longer was He a 'distant' God but He walked with us, felt what we felt and developed personal relationships with us.

Jesus said in Luke 11:28, 'But even more blessed are all who hear the word of God and put it into practice.' Will you listen and allow Jesus to come into your life?

Lord, we thank you for understanding our weaknesses and offering your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to be our Emmanuel, your Word in flesh. May we grow hungry to read and hear Your Word and allow our hearts to be transformed by your Holy Spirit. Come and dwell in our hearts. Amen.

Beth Bolt

29 November 2022

Jeremiah 31: 15-25

As I reflect on the second half of this bible reading, I think about Joseph and Mary travelling to Bethlehem. I imagine them walking along the road looking for signs and guideposts to aid their journey. I also remember the bright shining star that served as a guidepost for the Three Wise Men travelling to Bethlehem. Have I seen, and used, the guideposts that God presented in my life this year?

I draw strength from the final verse of this reading. As 2022 draws to a close, we may feel stressed and tired. This reading reminds us that when we seek refuge in the love of our Lord we will be blessed and refreshed.

Let's pray – Lord, I rejoice that you are with us, and I give thanks for your guidance in my life. Help me to seek, and follow, the guideposts you create for me. I pray for the safety and wellbeing of everyone that is travelling throughout the world this Advent season. As we look forward to Christmas, remind us to reach out to you when we need to restore our strength and refresh our energy. Amen

Kathryn Arthy

30 November 2022

Jeremiah 32:1-15

In the midrashic tradition, an elderly man spends time tending a tree, knowing he will never sit in its shade. His faith assures him that the tree will nourish future generations.

In the story of Jeremiah, he spends precious silver on real estate in occupied territory. God assures him that future generations will buy and sell again.

In the story of Jesus, he sacrifices his life on the cross. He does this to save every generation.

The stories are the same, on a different scale according to the needs of the day.

In Jeremiah's darkest hours God was still there, speaking directly to him. For Jeremiah's part, he still trusted in God.

If we expect that Jeremiah would be rewarded, that reward was never going to be a field – it was the hope that future generations wouldn't suffer the same way that Jeremiah suffered.

I don't know where this leaves us. I'm hopeful that if we plant trees, that's enough. But God would be with us if we had to dig deeper to nourish future generations.

God, grant me a heart that plants trees for the future. Let me trust that people will grow vineyards again. Amen.

Brendan Evans

1 December 2022

Jeremiah 33: 14-16

The excitement, the anticipation, the expectation; and so many more emotions and imaginings associated with being told that a promise will be fulfilled. Who among us has not experienced the excited anticipation of receiving a much longed for gift, particularly at Christmas.

Imagine, then, how these words from Jeremiah would have been received by the people of Judah. They were a desperate people; the remnant of a nation in a desolate and seemingly hopeless situation between the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and its restoration decades later. But as with all of God's dealings with humanity, the fulfilment of His promises far exceeds all that we may think or imagine.

While the Jews were looking for a Redeemer, they never imagined he would be a Servant King. And while at Christmas we celebrate the wonder and joy of Emmanuel, God with us, what inconceivable masterpiece will herald the advent of His Kingdom yet to come.

Loving God, we thank and praise you for your extravagant grace, mercy and love for all, as we await the further fulfilment of your promises in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen

Alan Neill

2 December 2022

Jeremiah 29: 1-14

Written to the Israelites in exile, Jeremiah is giving the people the gift of God's wisdom. How appropriate for us now! We too, are living in a strange world, that has taken unexpected turns. With Covid we live with the challenges of high inflation, and a shortage of workers in critical services.

What was God's advice to the people in exile? Essentially to not pine for what was but make the most of what is. God let them know that they were there for 70 years – a long time. How do we cope with 70 year time frames today? Not very well; we want everything yesterday. I guess this is all part of the swift changes of the age of technology. Do we make the most of the circumstances around us? Probably not.

God clearly suggested that the people in exile, marry, establish homes and settle. He is suggesting to us that we accept, remembering always that God will not desert us: he will guide us. We need to engage with him to find a way forward and the peace that comes from knowing he is in charge.

Dear Lord, be with me and help to accept what is happening in my life: guide me and show me the way forward so that I may be an effective member of the community. Amen.

Alison Sample



18

3 December 2022

Psalm 137

Music has a great power. Music can reflect our moods or change our moods. I remember fondly two U2 concerts, where the atmosphere and the selection of songs just connected me with God in a special way. Music can help us in the hard times. I remember a number of times at Easter camp another youth worker and I would just look at each other and say “It’s just a moment, this time will pass.” (a quote from U2’s Stuck in a moment).

The people of Israel find themselves in Babylon and they can’t sing the songs of joy. Sometimes we need to change the songs which we sing about God. In the hard times we might need to sing those songs which remind us of his faithfulness, or we might need to sing songs of pain and frustration. As a lecturer at college pointed out, it isn’t always “a happy day”, we need those songs that speak to other seasons of life.

In this advent season when we are surrounded by the familiar carols. What are the songs which connect with you this year? Is there a song which you need to be written?

Loving God, fill our lips with songs about you, that we may speak into our lives and the lives of those around us. Help us to connect with you and to connect others to you. Amen.

Richard Moors

4 December 2022

Esther 4:1-17

Today we consider the fascinating story of Esther. Although this book doesn't specifically name God, the presence of God is felt all the way through, as God is able to save the Jewish people despite dire threats against their life. Esther surprisingly has found herself to be queen, married to a foreign ruler who has conquered the Jews. She must have wondered how she came to be in this exalted position a long way from her Jewish homeland.

I encourage you to read the whole story. In today's reading, Mordecai reaches out to Queen Esther to speak to the king in order to save her people. While Esther may have questioned why she got to be in this position, Mordecai says to her:

"Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this."

Although in fear for her own life, Esther is able to be an instrument of God's desire to free the people one more time in their stormy history. We may sometimes wonder why we are here, but God's presence empowers us to rise above the (sometimes gloomy or unexpected) circumstances to follow God's calling.

God of Esther and many other biblical heroes, strengthen us with your loving presence to enable us to rise from our circumstances to serve you faithfully.

Mal Coombes

5 December 2022

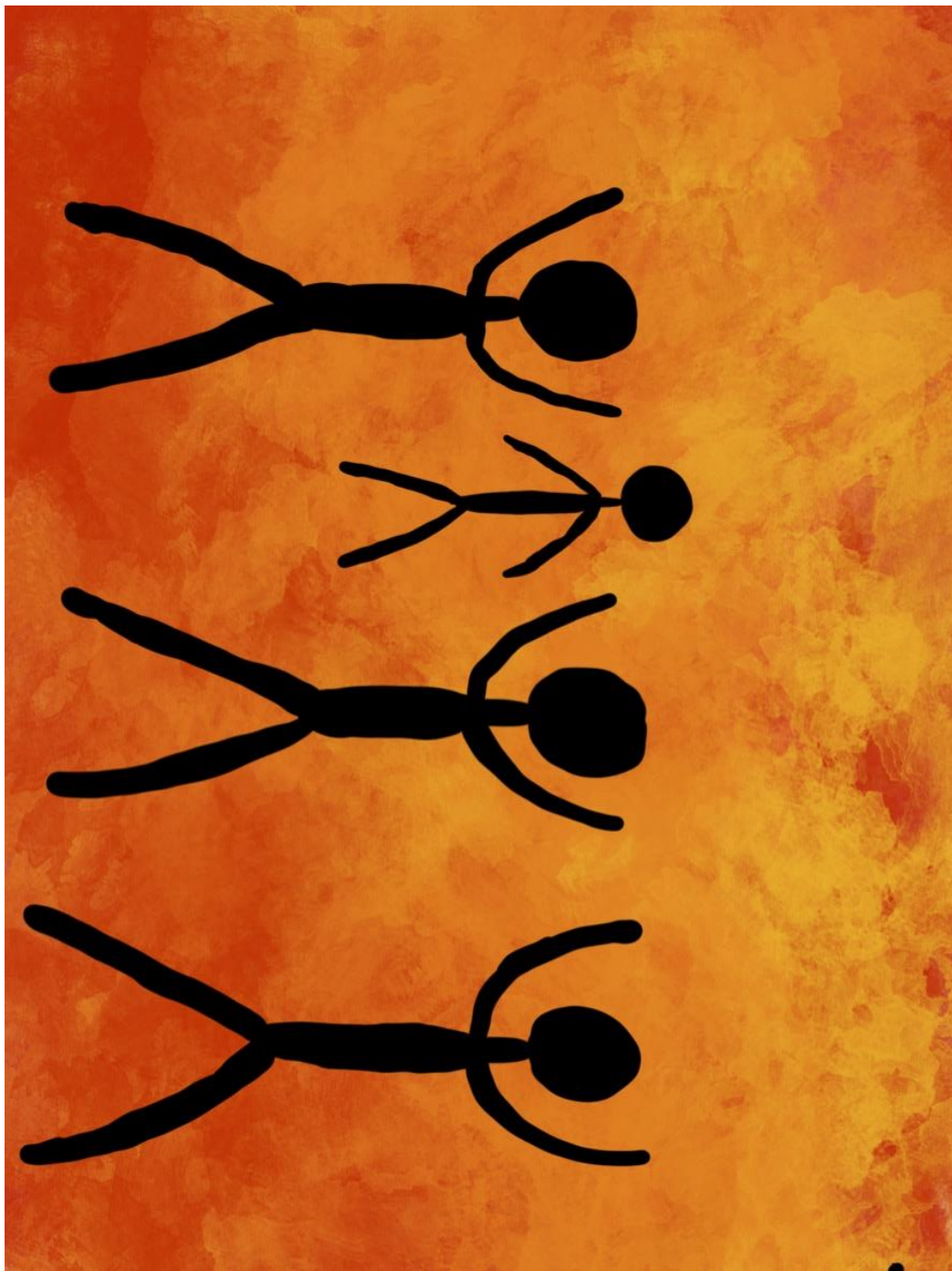
Daniel 3:1-12

Daniel 3:1-12 alerts us to three young refugees under threat in a strange land. Like their fellow Israelite Daniel, in the chapters that surround this one, the three young men refuse to bow down before the king and forsake their God. Amidst very difficult circumstances, they remain faithful to their cultural and religious identity as Jews in the diaspora.

This story of old can challenge us as Christian believers in at least two ways. How do we relate to refugees or migrants to our country today? How interested or respectful are we of what they have left behind and what hardships they suffer in adjusting to the challenges of dislocation and loss of all that was familiar and dear to them? What might we be able to do, to “stand with them” more compassionately in their adjustment to our country? The reading also offers us a challenge to reflect on our own faith and vulnerability to be tempted to put more emphasis on acquiring prestige and popularity in the secular world, at the cost of our integrity and faith.

Lord Jesus strengthen our faith and resolve to be instruments of your peace and love in our world today.

Jenny Fitzgerald



God with Us: In the Fiery Furnace © Southside Uniting Church (2022)

6 December 2022

Daniel 3:13-30

This passage of Scripture paints a very vivid image for us. King Nebuchadnezzar was so furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego for not worshipping his gods or the gold he had on display that he was going to kill them. But, these men trusted God so much that they knew they would be saved from the fiery furnace. They did not need to justify to Nebuchadnezzar that they would be saved – they knew that God would be with them in that furnace. Once they had been saved, King Nebuchadnezzar and all the people of the land also believed.

“Actions speak louder than words” is a phrase I find particularly appropriate when thinking about this passage and compare it to our own lives. Sometimes we don’t share God with others through our words, but rather, we share Him with our actions. We can show people how He will protect and guide us when we are walking with Him. We can show people that God is with us by the way we treat them, and the way we conduct ourselves in the world.

Dear God, we thank you that you walk with us every day, and protect us from the dangers of the world. We thank you that we can share you with others through our actions. Amen.

Thalia Bielenberg

7 December 2022

Daniel 5:1-12

In this passage King Belshazzar has made God VERY angry by partying with a thousand of his admirers. Then he encourages his mates to join him as he worships inanimate Idols of Gold, Silver, Bronze, Iron, Wood and Stone instead of worshipping God. God was NOT happy!

As we prepare our homes for Christmas during Advent, let's not get caught up in the hype of Christmas as did Belshazaar at his party. Instead let us prepare our hearts and minds, worshipping God as our Emmanuel: our God who is with us always.

So as we hang our Advent wreaths, let's worship God for His eternal (circular) Kingdom.

Whilst lighting our Advent candles may we praise God for the many years of peace that we've enjoyed.

As we open our Advent calendars, consider thanking God for the many blessings we enjoy each day of our lives.

And as we put up our Christmas Trees and decorate our homes, let's be sure to sing with gusto and give glory to God for the wonderful gift of our Lord Jesus at Christmas Time.

*Loving Lord, please help us this Advent to worship you and only you, and to prepare ourselves to receive your gift of love in our Lord, Jesus Christ.
Amen*

Josie McKenzie

8 December 2022

Daniel 5:13-31

Before Daniel interprets the mysterious writing on the wall, he declines the gifts of symbolic status, authority and gold offered by King Belshazzar. I imagine this allowed Daniel the freedom to faithfully interpret the writing and its meaning without the inner conflict of needing to please this benevolent and generous King.

I wonder how this informs the relationship between church and state, or with other powerful groups from which the church receives support. Is this 'support' a two-edged sword? Does it steer the church from faithfulness to Christ?

Surprisingly, King Belshazzar is good to his word and rewards Daniel for his less-than-pleasing interpretation. But how did the King know Daniel gave an accurate interpretation? What confirmed Daniel's interpretation? Did the King 'just know'? Was it a moment of self-awareness, a light-bulb moment, and a willingness to accept the truth of himself, his kingdom, and therefore his fate?

Daniel's wisdom, knowledge and understanding were highly regarded in the land of his foreign ruler. But these were trumped by his faithfulness and surrender to God, and it was this priority that shaped the wisdom, knowledge and understanding he gave to the foreign kings and rulers of his days.

Gracious God, may our surrender yield a space for faithfulness through your Spirit, to love Christ and bless others. Amen.

Jock Dunbar



God with Us: The Writing on the Wall ©Southside Uniting Church (2022)

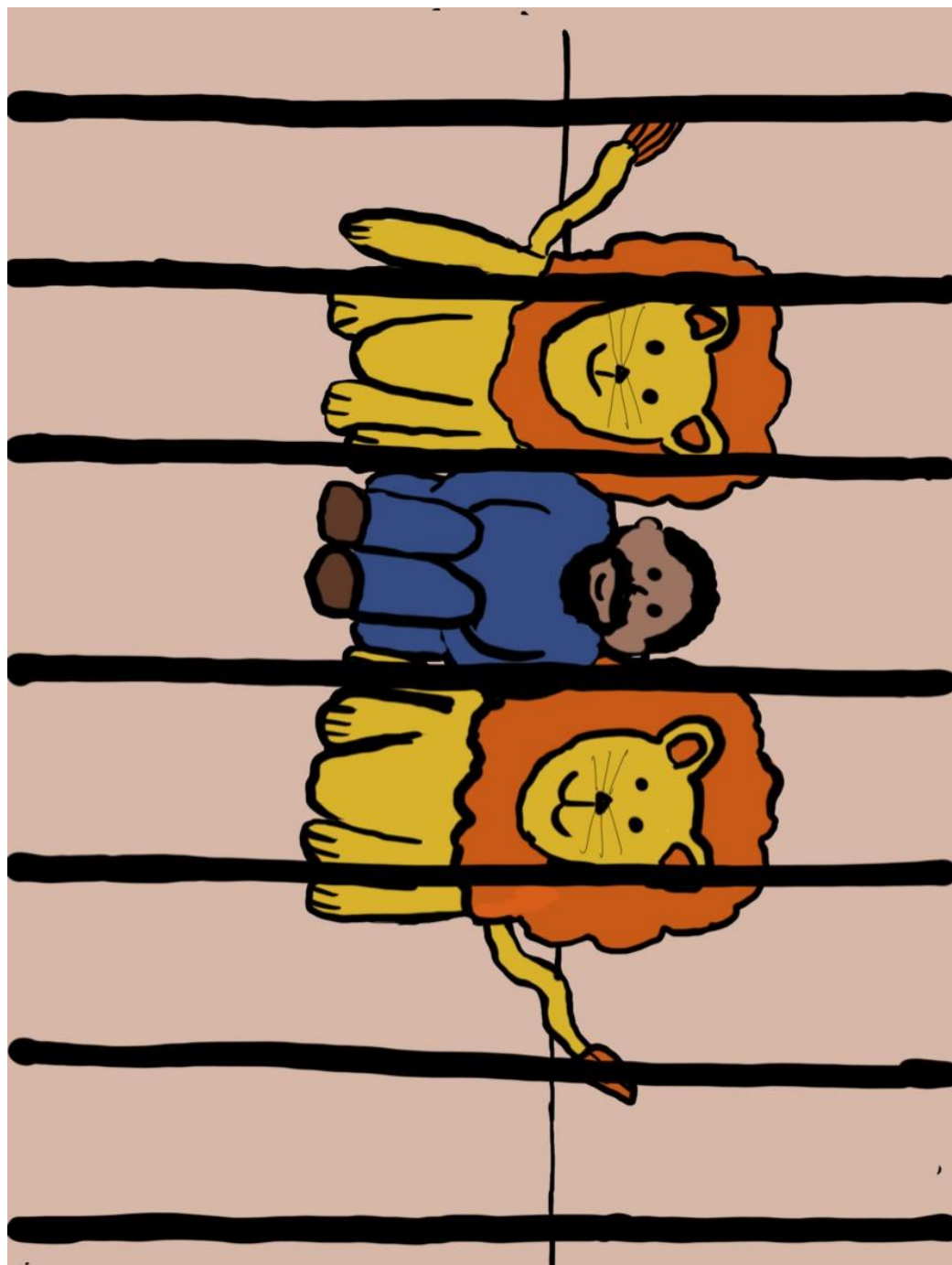
9 December 2022

Daniel 6:1-13

Daniel is in exile, away from his place of worship, brought to Babylon to serve the King. Daniel abides by his faith in God and serves these foreign authorities with an honourable spirit. This integrity is a spiritual jewel in any era. Daniel also fearlessly prays three times a day near an open window, towards Jerusalem in spite of the edict against any religious practice which does not worship Darius, the Babylonian king. There are conspirators against Daniel but he stands by his faith and his morality. His loyalty to his God is a beacon of hope for him, his people and for us today. Daniel's truthful, faithful spirit – in spite of terrible obstacles in an unknown land - leads us to celebrate the presence of Jesus, "Emmanuel - God with us". Jesus gives us the courage to pray, to reach for his guidance at all times and to be joyous in the blessed assurance he brings in spite of any obstacles we may experience.

Loving God, we pray for courage and faithfulness as we look to Jesus who brings the spirit of justice and love to us all.

Florence Spurling



God with Us: In the Lion's Den © Southside Uniting Church (2022)

10 December 2022

Daniel 6:14-28

This is such a well-known story. Daniel lived “in the lion’s den” 24/7! He was faithful and trusted God, praying openly in a foreign, pagan country whose King was worshipped. Surprisingly, Darius liked and respected Daniel and was very distressed when he had to carry out the “unchangeable” law.

Daniel wasn’t left alone and we wonder who the “angel” was? Paul likens his mission to Daniel’s experience, “The Lord stood at my side...and I was delivered from the lion’s mouth.” (2 Tim 4:17)

In v26-27, we find Darius’ inspiring and insightful, psalm-like declaration of reverence for an unknown but mighty, saving God. The impact of Daniel’s miraculous deliverance was massive - the whole, vast kingdom must fear and honour Daniel’s God – amazing!

We have all been in situations that threaten to “eat us up” – danger, fear, anxiety, loneliness, illness and perhaps death, especially during COVID. The blessing of faith is that Jesus has walked the path of suffering and ultimately death before us and has conquered it. Like Daniel’s experience, He’s there as we encounter every challenge and we can say with confidence that He is Emmanuel – God with us.

Living God, thank you that You rescue and save and have promised to never leave us or forsake us, especially in the darkest and scariest times of our lives. Amen

Julie Darveniza

11 December 2022

Isaiah 42:1-9

This is the first of four 'servant songs' in Isaiah (the others are at 49:1-6; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12). The texts are not clear whether the 'servant' in each is an historical figure, the nation of Israel (actual or as God intends) or a coming Messiah. But there is no doubt that Jesus exemplifies and fulfils much of what Isaiah revealed and promised, as a sign of hope to the exiled people of God six centuries earlier.

But beyond 'who is this?' we might ask, 'what does this reveal about the character of God's servant?' Isaiah reveals a divine leadership of tender empathy. God's justice (restoration) comes through the servant, not by force, but by mercy, carefully tending the bent reed, cupping hands around the quivering flame. God's servant protects what is vulnerable and weak, frees the prisoner, gives sight to the blind, leads people out of darkness into God's new vision (v.9). Hope indeed for a broken, disconsolate people.

This echoes the New Testament's 'servant song' in Philippians 2:5-11, honouring Christ who emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming a servant, even submitting to death on a cross. God becomes the broken reed, the extinguished flame, the weakest of all! Yet this is how God's purpose is achieved. How might we live out divine servanthood in our lives and our church?

We are amazed, compassionate God, that you kneel to embrace our weakness and vulnerability, and to guide us to your vision of a broken world being made new. Hallelujah!

David Busch

12 December 2022

Isaiah 43:1-7

Do not be afraid, for I am with you.

The focus for our Advent reflections this year is Matthew 1:23: "They shall give him the name Emmanuel, which means 'God with us'."

In today's reading, we see that Isaiah already said that: he said that God is *already* with us – so why did God need to send *Jesus* to be with us? Is it some kind of spiritual overkill, just to really hammer the point home in case we missed it the first time?

It's not that. It's something far more precious than that. Jesus is *God with us* in an even more intimate way: God as fully human, living in a human's body, yet also fully divine. Jesus knows what it's like to be human, to be vulnerable and powerless, to feel fear and grief, to escape danger as a refugee, to be hungry and alone. The ultimate outcome of this is Jesus's death: tortured and killed on a cross. Because Jesus is also fully divine, this is not the end of the story, but if Jesus hadn't allowed himself to be fully human also, he would not truly be Emmanuel. We don't worship some sort of abstract idea of God, but someone who understands human suffering because Jesus, fully human, suffered too.

Lord Jesus, help us to remember that you understand human suffering because you were fully human just like us. Amen.

Rebekah Woodward

13 December 2022

Isaiah 44:21-28

This passage reminds me of the 'footprints' prayer, of God carrying us in our time of trouble when life is hard.

The sound of God calls to the people of Israel and Jacob, and lets them know God is present, but also gives them direction. The sound of God is like a shepherd with his sheep – the sheep hear the voice of the shepherd and move toward it. The sound of God, the word of God, tells Israel which way they need to move.

God wants them to move toward Jerusalem. Not that the ancient city is in a good way – it is in ruins. All the city needs to be rebuilt. Who will rebuild the homes? The people will, the people of Jacob in exile. How will they go back to Jerusalem? Cyrus the Great, the King of Persia, will send them. God calls Cyrus, "my shepherd, and my servant." This was the will of God.

God is always with us, in every step. He will never leave us. God is with the people of the Middle East and will never leave them too.

Lord Jesus, we thank you for the peace, safety and grace we have. We pray for the lost sheep to hear your voice and come towards you to live in your grace. Amen.

Youssif Doumat

14 December 2022

Isaiah 52:13-15

At first, this passage seems like it's about the world being turned on its head. The astonishing elevation of the lowliest to be the source of blessings.

But, read closely, it signposts a deeper truth – that we are all created in the image of God, the weak no less than the strong.

Jesus shows what this truly means. Jesus, who humbled himself by being obedient to the point of suffering a criminal's humiliating death. Jesus, designated the Son of God through His resurrection from that death, the reflection of the Father's glory.

We can put on Jesus by repenting of human pretension, acknowledging our weakness, and trusting in God's grace as the source of all love and purpose in our lives.

This can be difficult – it means taking up our cross, and sharing in Jesus's suffering and death. But it's also the way of truth and life, of God's promise that those who trust in Him will share in His resurrection and glory.

Understood this way, this passage is not about the world being subverted at all. It's about the world being returned to its proper order as the creation of a Father whose power is made perfect in weakness.

May we, who have put on the Lord Jesus Christ, show Him in all things we do, and know Him in all people we meet. Amen.

Ryan Robertson

15 December 2022

Isaiah 53:1-12

When read as part of the Good Friday service, we see Jesus as the fulfillment of the suffering servant. However, it's historic context is the post-exilic period, when Cyrus, king of Persia, allowed some Israelites to return to Jerusalem, and they started re-building the temple. (see Ezra 1-4) Conflict and rebellion emerged and it wasn't until the reign of Darius that the work was completed. Along the way there was suffering, even the death of innocent people. Darius seems to accept that the death of innocent people is sufficient punishment to atone for the charge of rebellion.

Some universal truths present themselves:

- The punishment the people deserved for their sin, came through the suffering servant, in effect bringing peace and healing (verse 5). During Advent we celebrate God sending Jesus to bring us release from our sin and offering to the world peace and healing.
- Good came from wrong. This is only possible when all parties acknowledge their wrong doing and are prepared to move forward together. Verse 8b strikes a chord: "Yet who of his generation protested?" This passage not only calls us to acknowledge our wrong but to protest against injustice. God's justice looks backwards and forwards, toward deliverance, restoration and fellowship. We see this time and time again in the way Jesus dealt with people. This is the 'long term' Christmas we celebrate!

Faithful God, may we seek your justice and receive your peace. Amen

Lyn Burden

16 December 2022

Isaiah 55:1-5

Born and bred in an isolated, hot, dry area of Central-Western Queensland, I was brought up to respect the value of good water. Our sheep, cattle, horses all needed water every day, not to mention the plants around the house which struggled to survive. I knew from an early age to never start out on a short or long trip without a supply of water in the car.

When I was a newly married 20-something living in my new home (a huge old Queenslander), I was surprised one hot day by an unexpected visitor. I answered the door to find Stan on a 45-degree day, in the prime of life, an experienced bushman and as tough as any man in the area.

But ... Stan's vehicle had broken down and walking just a few miles to the homestead, he was nearly dying of thirst. He could not have gone much further without that precious water. He soon recovered.

There are so many words to describe the wonder of water: refreshing, life-giving, and essential, to name a few, and the good Lord provides it for us.

We thank you, dear Lord, for the water in our country and especially for the wonder of our Artesian Basin supplying underground water in a dry land. What a true wonder in a continent often beset by droughts. Amen.

Jenny Starky



Isaiah 55 (2021) by Peter Kennedy © Southside Uniting Church (2022)

17 December 2022

Isaiah 55:6-13

This year has brought great joy to our family: two grandchildren within six months. Through these babies, I have rediscovered peace. The worries of the world recede when a baby is asleep in your arms.

We have delighted in watching these little ones unfurl: from curled-up newborns with a primal need for nourishment and comfort, to wriggling babies with inquisitive eyes, and arms that stretch out to explore the world around them.

Our tiny granddaughter delights in discovery - the sweet tang of juicy orange, the many greens of leaves, the rhythm of music, the silky fur and quick reflexes of a pet cat.

How it would be, if a child's sense of wonder and awe was restored to every adult in the world? Would we take better care of each other, and our environment? Would we go out in joy and peace this Christmas? Would we thank the One who made it all possible?

Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of Creation. For the vastness of the universe, for people to love and care for; for all the creatures, plants and rocks; for sunshine and water. May we bud and flourish as your Word rains down upon us.

Bronwyn Boyce

18 December 2022

Matthew 1: 18-25

Matthew's narrative of the birth of the Messiah, is preceded by that long genealogy, familiar to Jewish readers, in the Scriptures they knew.

Today's passage begins the Life that is the foundation of the belief and hope for all Christians since its Birth. It follows that long genealogy, which is an evidence for Matthew of Jesus' genuine lineage of God's chosen people.

Joseph, obediently responded to God's prompts that came in his dream, not to shun Mary but to marry her, to claim the expected child, and to give him the name "Jesus" "for he shall save his people from their sin".

Matthew's account is reflective of God's repeated intervention to communicate through the Holy Spirit, prophetic announcement and revelation in dreams. In Jesus' birth, God's purpose is being worked out to recreate the Divine Relationship that brings "all mankind" back to Himself.

Sit quietly now with this passage; meditate on the grace-filled action that is God's design, in the amazing gift of life which this event reveals for us. Jesus is the One, who brings God's truth to us all: God is with us.

Ever present God, may we, with open hearts and minds, be attentive to the prompts of Your Holy Spirit, as we share the Good News of Salvation through Jesus, that You offer to all. Amen.

Janet Franklin

19 December 2022

Isaiah 2:1-4

Isaiah 'sees' this word, a compelling vision of a mountain raised above all others where the nations *stream* like water up to it, against gravity. From the mountaintop flows instruction, teaching that all the nations will learn, which are the paths and way of the Lord. This way is one where war becomes irrelevant, to the point that the instruments of war (swords and spears) find a new creative purpose as they are adapted into plowshares and pruning hooks.

The 20th century lived through some disastrous global wars, where many nations fought and killed each other taking the death toll into the tens of millions.

Is Isaiah's vision a foretelling of the future, or is it perhaps a call to action? Isaiah might be asking: what kind of future do you want? Choose the future by the actions you live out each day. Will the Israel of Isaiah's day anticipate this future by living as if it were real now? Will they fashion their tools of war and violence into instruments of life as a demonstration of working for peace?

Isaiah's word challenges me to ask: 'what kind of future do I envision for our local community and city'? Will I dare to ask this, and wait in anticipation for the response of God's Spirit? Does the Christ reality (God-with-us) benefit our neighbour or only those who hold to a Christian faith?

Magnetic God, may all peoples find their way to you to learn and live the Way of Love... and start with me. Through Christ, Amen.

Jock Dunbar

20 December 2022

Micah 5:2-5a

The people of Micah's age (about 700 years before Christ) were longing for a decent ruler, a descendant of King David (hence the reference to Bethlehem). They were soon to have someone, King Hezekiah, who would bring great reforms, who would know how to shepherd and feed the people, who could govern with true justice and who sought to draw people back to the ways of the Lord. Unfortunately, even he was not perfect, and so Micah's hope continued until the time of Jesus, born in Bethlehem. Jesus as truly God-with-us, is able to uphold the long-held hope of Israel and is able for us too today to rule in our hearts with care, peace and mercy. Christ the great shepherd still stands and feeds his flock in the strength of the Lord.

Great God, our Shepherd Ruler, may you rule in our hearts, and in the hearts of those we hold dear, as we pray for your Kingdom to come to the whole world.

Mal Coombes

21 December 2022

Luke 1:5-25

Holding a new-born baby is a profound and emotional experience. I can remember an overwhelming sense of love and thinking of the immense potential of such a tiny bundle of life.

Sadly, we all know of couples who desperately want to have children but are not able to. In the reading from Luke, we meet Elizabeth and Zachariah who were childless.

Zachariah was a priest and while on duty in the Temple, Gabriel, an angel of God spoke to him saying that God had heard his prayers, and that Elizabeth would have a son. Their son, John, was destined to do great things for God, preparing the way for the Messiah, Jesus through the Holy Spirit, who was with him before birth!

While adults can point children to God (in the way we make promises at a baptism), children can also point adults to God. Children know love and are not interested in theological debates – just authentic relationships.

The most important way to point children or adults to Jesus is not with words, but by modelling Jesus' behaviour. Easy to say!

Lord, we pray for couples who cannot have children. May we adults, like John, point the children in our lives to Jesus, including our nieces, nephews, students, and friends. And may we, adults, see and hear God through children. Amen

Dick Copland

22 December 2022

Luke 1:26-38

Mary must have felt many emotions from hearing she would give birth to the Son of God. I imagine she felt troubled and feared for her safety, to sceptical and confused about the angel Gabriel's announcement she would become pregnant outside of her own volition. Later there was acceptance too, and faithfulness to the will of God, as well as joy, gratefulness and hope (Luke 1:39-56). Her faith was bolstered by the history and promises she inherited through her heritage, the lineage of David.

This contrasts with a later account of Jesus' encounter with the Centurion (Matt 8:5-13), in whom Jesus recognised an unexpected but incredible faith. Essentially a Roman warrior and commander of at least 100 other Roman soldiers, the Centurion had a faith that was not bolstered by any heritage and lineage to David. Instead, he simply heard about Jesus and His healing abilities. The Centurion's faith was a pure belief that Jesus had the power to bring healing to one in his household, who was paralysed.

What influences might form our faith and trust in Jesus?

Loving Lord Jesus, whether we are part of your spiritual family historically through our own families, or through your personal invitation, we recognise and thank you for your immense and never-ending love for us. May our lives be an honour to you and a helpful witness to those around us. Amen.

Peter Choy

23 December 2022

Luke 1:39-56 with Micah 5:2-5a

We read of troubled times for the people of Israel. God, however, gives them a promise of one who will bring peace. It is also a reminder that God can, and does use the unlikely, ordinary and unexpected to fulfill God's promises; the lowly town of Bethlehem, a ruler who is a descendant of the least tribe of Judah, and a humble young woman. That young woman Mary said "yes" to God, and, in Jesus, gave birth to Peace, Love, and Hope.

We too feel that we live in troubled times, longing for peace in our world and lives. God can, and does use ordinary people, like me and you, to fulfill God's purposes. Like Mary, we are given the gift of choice to say "yes" to God.

If I want Peace in the world, I must practice peace in all my relationships.

If I want the world to be a more loving place, then I have to love more abundantly, even the unlovely.

If I want an end to despair, then I am called to be a voice that offers Hope.

As the 13th century mystic, Meister Eckhardt, said, "We are all mothers of God, for God is always waiting to be born in us."

God who surprises, give me and all who follow Jesus the courage of Mary to say "yes" to you, so that Jesus can be born again in a troubled world. Amen.

Hazel Eivers



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24 December 2022

Luke 2:1-14

My God, Immanuel

*Strangely, strangely,
Baby, Godly
in a grubby manger sleeping.
Is this Kingly?
Seems unseemly.*

*That's wrong, we say
This is not God! Where is
the God in burning bush we know
that called the man of God - unshod,
and brought the mighty Pharaoh down.
Did that same God (there's only one)
Forego a lacy christening gown for
Swaddling cloths in Bethlehem town?*

*God showed the world He loves so much
That, contrary to our thoughts of power, law,
God loves us all,
including poor.*

*Softly, gently, baby Jesus
From God's Realm of Love was born
Embodying the God of ages
in his tiny human form.
I, estranged from you Lord Jesus,
Drawn to you who loves so well,
Pray your sacred heart live in me
Lord, my God, Immanuel.*

Rosemary Trevaskes

25 December 2022

Luke 2: 8-20

During Israel's subservience to the Roman Empire, everyone lived with the expectation that God would provide a Messiah, a Saviour to free them. But shepherds, ordinary country folk, minding their own business would not have expected to be visited one night by a dazzling angel giving them a personal message of good news that the Messiah, even the Lord, has now been born nearby.

It has been said that "in their time, shepherds were known as people who were honest and straightforward. Their words did not mean authority, but meant truth". These shepherds respected the message of the angels, confirmed its integrity and broadcast the news to all who would listen.

So why should the shepherds be the first to be told? God has used shepherds before as his messengers:

1. Moses, who announced God's message to Pharaoh, 'Let my people go!'
2. David, who brought all the tribes of Israel together under one rule
3. Amos, who demanded justice and declared judgement

So the continuing challenge for us as Christians is to share the good news of God in Jesus by example, through the presence and power of God by the Holy Spirit.

Loving God, thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit to help us courageously live out and share the love and joy you have shared with us in the person of your Son Jesus. Amen.

Bruce Rowe

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