

## Introduction to *Anticipate Christmas* Daily Readings

One of the highlights for our church each year is the annual celebration of Jesus' birth at Christmas. For many Christians around the world it's called Advent. It is a season of patient waiting, hopeful expectation, soul-searching, and calendar watching marked by many churches, Christian families, and individual followers of Jesus. There's no biblical mandate to observe Advent. It is an optional tradition that developed over the course of church history as a time of preparation for Christmas Day, the anticipation of celebrating Jesus' coming. That is why our theme at Mountain View is "Anticipate Christmas."

At Mountain View, we'll observe this season starting the fourth Sunday before Christmas and it will climax with our Christmas morning candlelight service. Each Sunday we will look at the celebration of Jesus' first and second comings through these four words and themes: *Light, Grace, Truth* and *Glory*. Each week we will light a theme candle to remember and anticipate His coming.

The daily readings were written by the pastoral staff at Mountain View to complement and correspond with the four weekly topics. We encourage you to use this time of reading, individually or as a family devotional time, to help prepare your hearts and minds to come and adore Him this season. Together, we will "Anticipate Christmas" while looking forward to Jesus' coming for his Church.

Our prayer is that our daily reading times together might help us, as a forever family, keep Jesus as our focus during this season; that we'll make Him preeminent even in all the rush and busyness that surrounds the season. Let's together anticipate the birth and coming of Jesus – "O Come, Let Us Adore Him."

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 27 November

### God is Light!

*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.*

[John 1:6-9]

One of John's favourite depictions of God is as light. Such is evident in his first epistle as well as the gospel that bears his name. *Light* emphasises the holiness of God, a holiness untainted by the effects of sin's darkness. It is not surprising the prologue to John's gospel would employ that figure of speech to illustrate the deity and holiness of the Lord Christ.

He was with God in the beginning, in fact he was and is God. He became flesh and dwelt among us yet as a perfect human free from the blemish of man's sin.

Tragically, men love darkness rather than light. Shunning the light, they seek the refuge of darkness to hide their sinfulness and evil deeds. However, those who welcome the light become partakers of the light as the glorious gospel shines into their hearts. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Light dispels darkness, however, it also destroys disease. It reduces crime and diminishes evil. It provides warmth, minimising the chill. It warns of danger and points the way to safety. Those physical realities are fitting to observe from a spiritual point of view. Jesus, the Light of the World is all those things.

Christmas is often referred to as the Season of Light. But Christmas is more than lighted symbols of the season. It is an opportunity for the light of Christ to radiate from the lives of those who are his.

*Is Christ's light visible in you?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 28 November

### Light vs Darkness

*“The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil” [John 3:19]*

Do you know the feeling of being in a dark room or outside on a dark night, groping around trying to feel your way through the darkness? It's not pleasant. You feel helpless, not having all your senses working and in that moment there's nothing you feel you need more than light.

Scripture uses this analogy of light and darkness when referring to our lives. It reveals that our natural, sinful state is darkness. And it's awful. Everyday we are faced with overwhelming evidence of our brokenness, death, and pain. We need a Light that will take us out of the darkness!

The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus is that Light. He came to free us from the darkness, take us out of that natural, sinful state where we struggle and experience all these terrible things, not the least of which is our own sinful nature. With an offer like that, one would think that people would be clamouring to escape the darkness. But no. Scripture says that man loves the darkness. We relish our sinful state so much that even when presented with the life-giving Light, people will reject it and choose to stay in the horrible darkness.

Christmas is an intentional time to remember the Light, the Light who is Jesus Christ. He stepped out of Heaven, assumed the form of a man, and came to die for the sins of the world. He provided the way for everyone to be saved from the darkness if they will trusting in him in his work of salvation for us.

So, think about that today. Are you still living in the darkness? Have you trusted Jesus and accepted his free gift of salvation? That is the only way to escape living and dying in the darkness. Have you trusted Jesus and accepted his free gift of salvation?

*Are you still living in the darkness?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 29 November

### Light of the World

*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” [Luke 2:11-12]*

As a child, I acted in several Christmas Sunday School plays and always found it immersive to be a part of the nativity scene. There’s something profound about seeing the shepherds, and Mary and Joseph standing next to you. Even if it is just a group of 9-year-olds from school. Being there helps to visualise the gravity of what played out in the stable over two thousand years ago.

There were lots of lights surrounding Christ’s birth. A host of angels lit up the night sky when they appeared to the shepherds, heralding the good news. A while later, a large bright star appeared in the Eastern sky beckoning to the Magi to come and visit where the Christ child was. But all these lights in all their splendour, were like dim candles being held up to the midday sun. They were sign posts to The Light, the Saviour of the World.

In that dark, smelly, cramped stable that night, God took on the form of a human and was born to Mary and Joseph. Imagine the delight of his parents! Imagine the wonder of the shepherds and later the Magi who would come to visit this glorious Christ child. I am sure that all of them sensed that this was no ordinary child. And the rest of His life proved that. Jesus, the God man had come as The Light, the beacon in a dark and dying world. bringing salvation to all who would receive it.

Today, celebrate Christ as the Light of the World. Celebrate His goodness in stepping into the timeline to save mankind. Celebrate His sacrifice that made it possible. May The Light be our delight.

*Is God’s Light your delight?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 30 November

### Light that Distracts

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. [Hebrews 12:1-2a]*

Growing up in Somerset West, the highlight of the beginning of the Christmas season was taking the first drive to see the Christmas lights in the main road. My earliest memory was when we drove down Lourensford Road in the early 2000's. As we rounded into the main road, we caught our first glimpse of the vibrant lights colouring the whole main road. My brother's response summed it up perfectly; "Wow!"

The Christmas season, and our lives in general, are full of things competing for our attention. Whole industries and algorithms exist to figure out ways to attract your attention and make you desire the latest, greatest, shiniest thing. From phones and clothes to jobs and status, there are lots of lights shining along the dark road that is our lives and we need to choose which ones we are going to fix our eyes on.

For many, Christmas is when we fix our eyes on gifts, time off from work, time with family, and lots of food! These are good things, even God-given things to enjoy. But what a tragedy if our eyes are drawn to the light of these gifts rather than the Light, the giver of gifts.

It's a delicate and tricky balance to maintain, so let me suggest that we need to be intentional. We don't naturally keep our eyes on Christ, especially in this season. So, decide on how you are going to do this. You could have a time of thanksgiving and prayer in the morning, a family devotion working through these short devotionals around the dinner table or meet up with a friend or colleague once a week to challenge each other and encourage one another to remain focussed on the Light. Whatever you do this Christmas, keep your eyes fixed on Him.

*Does Christmas attract you to Christ or distract you from Him?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 1 December

**Let your light shine!**

*“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” [ Matthew 5:14-16]*

Christians are people who have seen The Light. Christians are people who have The Light living in them. Because of that, Christians should be people from whose lives that light shines.

In Jesus’ teaching on being light (see today’s passage above) Jesus used the common image of putting a candle where everyone can see it. Up until recently this would have seemed like an outdated illustration for many of us, but load-shedding has had a way of making it very relatable again! We understand the madness of being in a dark room, lighting a candle to give us some much needed light, and then carefully putting it under a bowl once again plunging the room into darkness. It makes no sense!

And yet, Jesus is saying that is exactly what we are doing if those around us cannot see the Light in us. In other words, has trusting in the Gospel changed the way you live? A believer’s life is characterised by the Holy Spirit’s work in them. There is an observable renewal taking place where He changes our sinful selves into new creations modelled after Christ himself.

Christmas is a season where it can be easier to share this Light with others. Our culture is generally aware of the true meaning of Christmas and many even prioritise going to church on Christmas Day. So, let’s be bold and brave, living in a way that places The Light on a stand for all to see. Through our actions and our conversations let’s invite others to come and behold the Light with us this Christmas.

*Does the Light shine from your life, showing the way to Christ?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 2 December

### Walking in the light

*This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all... If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. [1 John 1:5, 7]*

God is Light. In all His perfection, his holiness, his glory, his perfect love. There is no darkness in Him. Man on the other hand, lives in darkness by default. But John says we can walk in the Light as he (God) is in the light. That's wonderfully good news! How do we do it though? How can you and I walk in the light?

Only through Jesus. As sinful people who naturally gravitate towards darkness, we need to rely fully on Jesus' blood that cleanses us from all our sins and enables us to reflect God's character and perfect Light.

When we believe the gospel and trust in Christ alone for our salvation the Spirit works in our heart to change it no longer to pursue darkness, but rather light and righteousness. It is a marvellous renewal that takes place.

But it doesn't end there. A key phrase in this passage is: "if we walk in the light..." Our salvation is not something that only happens inside of us, it is a transformation that changes how we live, and it is one people can observe.

So, this Christmas, let us focus on living in the Light. Pursuing truth, righteousness, and holiness, looking to model Jesus in all we do. And as we do that, we have the privilege and the responsibility of being Christ's ambassadors to the world by the way that we live. "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16).

*Are you walking in the Light or wandering in the darkness?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 3 December

### The Light of Life

*“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” [John 8:12]*

Good news. Is there such a thing? Oftentimes it seems hard to come by in a world where doom and gloom news sells best. But there is good news. Christmas is a time to remember the Best News that Jesus came to die for the sins of the world, purifying all those who believe in Him from their sins and providing fellowship with God and other believers.

This past week we've seen that Christ is the light, that He frees us from the darkness and that we need to fix our eyes on Him and live out that Light that lives in us. Today, I want to encourage you by reminding you that if you have the Light of Christ in you, you can look forward to eternity with Him.

When we read some of the genealogies in the Old Testament (you know, those lists that tell you how long someone lived and how many children they had) we discover that some people like Methuselah lived for over 900 years! That is unthinkable for us today. But, the truth is that for believers that will seem like nothing when we are given new bodies and get to live for eternity with Jesus in the Father's presence.

Are you walking with Jesus? Have you trusted Him for your salvation and living in a way that pleases him? If so, we have life to look forward to. We look forward to this life where we get to live for Him knowing that we have a righteous standing before a Holy God. And we look forward to the next life knowing that we will get to have perfect fellowship with Him where the presence of darkness is completely gone and we get to bask in the Light of His Glory forever... and ever!

*Does your life light up your world?*



## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 4 December

### Grace upon Grace

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

[John 1:1 & 14]

The commandments given on Mt. Sinai introduced Israel to Yahweh, the true God, who himself is truth. He speaks truth and in him there is no lie. While the golden thread of grace is woven throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites stumbled over the truth.

The exacting demands for preparing and offering the sacrifices became a distraction as they were preoccupied with the *letter* of the Law rather than the *spirit* of the Law. The Law was intended to expose man's sin and welcome Yahweh's mercy. However, Israel distorted it to be a works based salvation by which one could earn his favour. They failed to realise grace does not *pay* a debt; neither does it *incur* a debt.

Time and again they exchanged the truth of God for the lies of idolatry, the essence of which was the expectation that one must do works to *please* a deity so as to curry its favour or *appease* a deity so as to avoid its wrath. Over and over they abandoned the revealed truth of the Mosaic Law for the pleasures of sin and the forfeiture of grace.

Jesus came to fulfil the requirements of the Law for every person. The Law of Moses demanded death for those guilty of certain sins. And, of course, the curse of death ended everyone's earthly existence after which sinners would be judged by the righteous and holy Yahweh. Jesus paid the price though he himself knew no sin. He did not set aside the Law, he met its judicious requirements. "And from his fulness we have all received grace upon grace."

*Does your holiday celebration include gratitude for his grace?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 5 December

### Grace: Missing the Mission

*So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: "This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."*  
[Matthew 15:7-9]

Like their forefathers, the Pharisees of Jesus' day completely missed the purpose of his mission: to personify grace and truth. So steeped were they in their religious traditions they actually added laws in attempt to help people keep God's Laws! Jesus confronted them saying when they made a disciple they made that convert twice as much a child of hell as they were previously. Their error, in Jesus' words: making their traditions more binding than the Mosaic Law.

No doubt their intentions were noble. They were familiar with the failures of their forebears; they were aware the years following the return of the Jews from exile really didn't change their attitudes toward Yahweh. But Matthew 26 provides insight into Jesus' condemnation of their external religiosity. It was, in fact, idolatry dressed in legalistic finery.

Many Christ-followers today are similarly trapped into thinking their fleshly efforts can somehow make an impression on God. Their carnal attempts to curry his favour or avoid his wrath govern their slavish adherence to man made rules. Some include using the right translation of Scripture, dress codes, church attendance, tithing, etc. Absent is reference to the Holy Spirit and his endeavour to give wisdom, insight and guidance as to how one ought to live. Paul warned the Colossians, "These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh."

The Law of Christ governs a life of liberty. Let's not distort his mission or his message.

*What is the source of your desire to please God?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 6 December

### Grace: Experienced and Enjoyed

*For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. [Galatians 5:13]*

Christ-followers are aware one is saved by grace not works. However, like the Galatians, Christ-followers can be deceived into thinking once one is saved by grace they must now adhere to some kind of legislative list prescribing personal preferences and behaviour. Paul confronted the Galatians for such thinking, warning them they were following a gospel of a completely different type than the one he had preached among them.

They had been freed from sin and from the Mosaic Law by the power of the Holy Spirit—changed by grace; kept by love; rewarded with liberty. To substitute personal efforts to somehow add to the finished work of Christ was a betrayal of the gospel, the gospel of grace.

On the other hand, believers are reminded freedom from the Law does not mean a life of permissiveness and abuses of freedom. Such thinking cheapens grace to nothing more than an allowance to do what is right in one's own eyes. Such thinking is the other extreme of legalism. The King James Version uses the term *licentiousness*. Note the root word: "licence." Liberty is not its synonym. A life of grace is one that exhibits love (the Law of Christ/John 13:34, 35); forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32); graciousness (Philippians 4:5) and patience (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

Christ challenged his disciples to let their light shine before men that the observers could/would "glorify the Father." Such does not mean to glow in the dark! Rather it means living in such a way that observers may form a right opinion of God. Peter expressed the same concern for his readers (1 Peter 2:12).

Legalism and law-keeping are self-oriented and self-serving. Love and grace are others-oriented and Christ-honouring. Such is the heart of the gospel of grace and bear resemblance to our Father.

*Does your life exhibit God's characteristic of grace?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 7 December

### Grace: Sometimes it hurts!

*My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord nor be weary when reproved by him.... For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives. [Heb. 12:5, 6]*

The term *grace* appears 122 times in the Bible, 102 of those times in the New Testament. The various contexts in which the term is used refer primarily to the saving and keeping features of God's grace. Our redemption, reconciliation, salvation, security—indeed all of our eternal hope—is a result of God's gracious intervention. Similarly Paul told the Romans our justification gives us access by faith into the grace in which we stand; the writer of Hebrews forwards God's invitation to come boldly before the throne of grace that we may find grace to help in time of need.

Although the word, *grace*, does not appear in the context from which the above verse are taken, its golden thread glistens in the dark fabric of God's discipline. First, grace is defined as God's unmerited favour. We don't merit the time or attention God expends in disciplining us. However, as a Father who loves us, he takes the time and makes the effort. The writer makes clear it is because of his love for us. Second, the context reveals he disciplines us not to punish but to make us partakers of his holiness. In other words, God's command to his people to "be holy as he is holy" necessitates his intervention to confront sin and to correct his wayward children. Be assured, everything we are commanded to be or do is fortified by the discipline of a holy and caring Father.

If one wonders if/how grace can hurt one only need to look at the cross. In Hebrews 2, verse 9, the writer notes: "...so that by the grace of God he [Christ] might taste death for everyone." I once read an acrostic of grace: God's Riches at Christ's Expense. Ultimate pain, ultimate hurt... undeserved, but suffered in behalf of those who did deserve it.

*Is the phrase "no pain, no gain" appropriate for recipients of grace?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 8 December

### Grace: The Flip Side of Works

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

[Ephesians 2:8, 9]

The contrast between grace and works is highlighted throughout the New Testament, however, nowhere more succinctly than this familiar scripture. In actuality grace is a part of the fabric of the Old Testament as well as seen in Yahweh's condemnation of idolatry. Service of false gods always involve human effort for acceptance or avoidance of wrath. Such is the subtext of Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal. Not only did they cry out to their God with loud voices and desperate pleas, they sought his response by personal activity to the point of cutting themselves to shed their own blood.

The contrast between human effort and grace is also suggested in John's words, "The Law came by Moses; grace and truth by Jesus Christ." He is not suggesting those under the Law were saved by their works, however, the persistent demand for sacrifices for sin allowed no opportunity to rest from human efforts. The sacrifices were meant to demonstrate man's willingness to admit sinfulness and lack of success in living up to the Law's demands. Similarly, the writer of Hebrews notes the sacrifices could never take away sin; they could only serve as a reminder of continued failure.

Jesus' personification of grace, in part at least, brought the promise of rest from works. As Joshua and Israel's conquest of Canaan brought rest from war, even so Christ's conquest of sin and death brought rest from works, not works to be saved but the constant demand for impotent sacrifices and persistent failure and sinfulness which made the mandatory.

As Paul reminds us, "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy..." The one who personified grace has rescued us and rests us.

*Are you resting in or resisting God's grace.*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 9 December

### Grace: Mercy's Biblical Sibling

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— [Ephesians 2:4]*

If you're around our church for any given amount of time you will no doubt hear the quote from the late Dr. Warren Wiersbe: "Grace is God's giving us what we don't deserve; mercy is God's not giving us what we do deserve!" I don't know if that comment was original with him or not. But it's a significant and accurate distinction between the two terms and a reminder of theological realities. His words summarise the purpose of the incarnation and its pricelessness in terms of our eternal future. In his sovereignty God can do whatever he pleases however he pleases to do it! "Paul, in Romans 9, quotes Yahweh saying to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." Jeremiah declared, "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faith-fulness." [Lamentations 3:22, 23]

But there is more. God's grace and mercy are not limited to those who are a part of God's family. They are virtues of our God that extend to the entire human race. **Grace:** "...he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Theologians refer to this as "common grace." God's unmerited favour is seen in his governing the elements and overseeing creation to sustain the lives of earth's inhabitants.) **Mercy:** "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." The last phrase indicates God's wrath "hovers over" rather than "crashing down" on the disobedient.

Mercy then is the sovereign act of a compassionate God in behalf of those he loves. John said—and we are compelled to remember, "God so loved the world...."

*Are you generous or selfish with grace and mercy?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 10 December

### Grace: Amazing, Abundant, Available

*Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

[Hebrews 4:16)

Generations of believers and unbelievers alike are familiar with both the words and the tune of John Newton's hymn, "Amazing Grace." Movies and TV programs that include congregational singing often use that hymn. Bagpipes drone its melody at funerals, especially for fire fighters, police personnel and first responders. The tune is haunting; the words are daunting. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound; that saved a wretch like me."

John Newton's career was that of captain for ships transporting slaves from Africa to North America, a wretched occupation indeed. It was during one of those trips his vessel encountered a violent storm. He survived, and the storm proved to be divine intervention resulting in Newton's life being saved from wretchedness to righteousness. Like Jonah, the power of the storm was evidence of the power of creation responding to the will of the creator.

The words of the hymn testify to God's response to the plight of sinners who need to be rescued from their sinfulness. Not all have the career or lifestyle of a John Newton, however, Paul reminded the Romans that, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." [Romans 3:23] Hence, all are wretched, all are blind, all are dead in trespasses and sins. And all need a Saviour.

God's amazing grace was evident in the stable in Bethlehem that first Christmas. The incarnate Christ was born to be the Saviour of the world. God provided his own son as the sufficient sacrifice for man's sin. Grace took the form of a servant, "born in the likeness of men...obedient to the point death, even death on a cross." [Philippians 2:5-11]

Try this: stand in front of a mirror and recite or sing the words of the hymn. Realise the mirror reflects the image of one who has been changed by God's amazing grace.

*Does your lifestyle evidence wretchedness or righteousness?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 11 December

### The Necessity of Absolute Truth

*I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.... For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.... Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” [John 17:4, 8, 17]*

Our current culture evidences the effects of departing from the truth. Though this is descriptive of the race since Adam and Eve’s failure in the garden, it seems to have worsened. Postmodernism with its philosophical arrogance proudly declares there is no absolute truth. One only has to read the newspaper or watch the news to be made aware of the price of such thinking. Paul would surely dub it “empty deceit.” He would warn us, as he did the Colossian believers, against being taken captive by it.

Jesus, the personification of truth, was rejected as was the truth of God’s word. He confronted the Pharisees’ substitution of their teachings for the truth of Scripture. In turn they plotted to take his life for exposing the emptiness of their religious practices.

Zeal and passion are not acceptable substitutes for truth. The reiteration of a lie does not make it true. Insanity is defined as doing the same thing over and over expecting the outcome to change. Thus one could say preferring the lie while rejecting the truth is insanity. Worse it evidences man’s sinfulness.

The religious practices of faith systems may promote a social ethic, but they stand condemned by absolute truth to be absolutely *untrue!* No matter how earnest one’s efforts or morally acceptable one’s good deeds, only Jesus, the truth, can set one free.

Jesus declared he is the truth. He came to reveal the truth (John 1:18); he came to impart the truth (John 17:8); he died and rose again that mankind may know the truth. He himself declared, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” And that’s the absolute truth!

*Has the truth set you free?*



## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 12 December

**Truth is God's revelation; God's revelation is Truth!**

*"...For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world - to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"*  
[John 18:37b,38]

Tragically, the ungodly and unrighteous cannot comprehend the truth having suppressed the obvious and plain truths of God by their wickedness. Sin-corrupted and blinded minds along with wickedly-twisted and darkened hearts, have exchanged the truth about God for *the* lie (Romans 1:18ff). Rather than seeking truth in God and celebrating true righteousness in Him (which they know but do not acknowledge), they are self-seeking, celebrating and obeying unrighteousness leading to wrath and fury on the day of judgment (Romans 1,2).

Pilate's response to Jesus' personification of truth expresses the utter confusion of the twisted minds and the lostness of the darkened hearts of the unregenerate. Pilate's question reveals his suppression of the truth in his inability to accept and acknowledge Truth incarnate standing right before him. He dismissed and exchanged Truth and Righteousness in the flesh for a lie.

In his statement, Jesus confesses the purpose of his birth and entry into the world. As many celebrate and remember this special season for a variety of purposes, look at what Jesus Christ said himself. May there be no debate or question about it. In John 18:37, Jesus clearly states the purpose of his Incarnation: "to bear witness to the truth." In other words, Jesus' very purpose is to testify to, confirm, demonstrate, evidence, prove or reveal the truth!

Upon such a revelation of Truth the race is faced with two choices; one can either accept or reject the claim. A truth claim is either to be received and believed, or denied. There is no "neutral zone" regarding truth. There is belief and unbelief. John writes in chapter 20, verse 31: "...these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." What will you do with the truth of God's Word and the Incarnate Truth, God's Son?

*Have you accepted and responded to the truth?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 13 December

### Jesus: Incarnate Truth

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth... For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. [John 1:14,16-18]*

With parallels to the first chapter of the Bible, Genesis 1 and the creation account, John opens his gospel account in a magnificent way. There he introduces the Word who was with God, was/is God and who created all things in the beginning. John describes the Word as the life and light of men to all who receive and believe in his name. John then reveals the Word put on flesh and lived among us. He is the only Son of God, the fullness of grace and truth, Jesus Christ. And while no one has seen God, we know God because Jesus has revealed and explained God to us!

With John's reference to Moses, and description of Jesus Christ as the fullness of God's grace and truth, he draws our mind to Exodus 33 and 34. There Moses had pleaded to see the glory of God. The LORD admits that to see the glory of His face would destroy Moses, but He could pass by Him and proclaim His name. After hiding and protecting Moses in a cleft in the rock, the LORD passed him and proclaimed his name in chapter 34:6,7. There He reveals Himself as a God of steadfast love and faithfulness. This is likely the Hebrew expression behind Jesus' revelation as the fullness of God's grace (steadfast love) and truth (faithfulness).

Jesus Christ was born into this world in human flesh with the purpose of revealing the Truth of God (John 18:37). John introduces Him to us as the Truth of God, once revealed to Moses in part, now revealed to us in the flesh in His fullness (John 1:14-18). And now the fullness of the Truth of God can be seen and known completely in Jesus Christ. If you, like Pilate, question truth, where it can be found and its relevance to you; look to Jesus Christ, the complete revelation of Truth, for your answers.

*Are you seeking the Truth?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 14 December

### Acceptable Worship involves God's Truth

*But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."*

[John 4:23-26]

As we continue to mine references to truth in John's gospel, we soon discover the gem noted above. In this passage, Jesus is conversing with a deceived woman regarding how one can honour, respect and please God. The woman wanted to know where to worship God. The answer she received was much more than what she had asked.

Jesus revealed not *where* one should worship God, but *how* to worship God. Essentially, He says true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth because that is who He is. The true worshiper honours God in the spirit by the Spirit of God who indwells him. The posture of the spirit before God is the concern, not the place of one's body in worship. False worshipers focus on the physical rather than the spiritual.

The true worshiper also honours God by the truthfulness of his worship. God has revealed how He desires to be worshiped in His Word. False worshipers do not know nor follow God's regulations and commands. Yet Jesus acknowledges his purpose and again saying he has come to declare the truth of how we can please and honour God in worship. First, in order to please God in worship, we must be guided by the Spirit of God to worship God properly in the spirit. Second, we must listen and follow the words of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Word of God, the Scriptures, to know the truth of God and worship Him accordingly.

We honour and celebrate God the Father for the gift of his Son. Worshiping in the Spirit and according to the word is the kind of worship our Father seeks

*Is your worship that which Jesus says the Father seeks?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 15 December

### Abiding in and Living Out the Truth

*So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free... So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” [John 8:31,32,36]*

Jesus Christ revealed his word is the truth and can provide freedom from sin. True disciples of Jesus abide, remain, continue to believe in, follow and obey His words. Disciples of Truth follow the truth because they know him who is Truth. These followers have found true freedom from their slavery to sin!

Many others have said it better, but Jesus seems to have many “fans,” but few “followers.” He speaks often in the gospels about not simply being hearers of his word but doers. There are grave warnings for those who seem to know much about Jesus, but who do not obey the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21-23). The Truth of God in Jesus Christ is authoritative and demands a response. It is more than information and is more than simply interesting. It is sovereign and no one is saved and free from sin apart from it. As Jesus says, one must *abide* in it, not simply *admire* it. Jesus’ word must to be followed to experience the freedom he promised. This is the authority of the Truth of Jesus.

Paul makes clear that the consequence of sin against God is eternal death, but the gift of God is freedom from sin and eternal life in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:22, 23). This freedom and salvation from sin comes by God’s grace, through faith (Ephesians 2:8,9) in hearing and responding to the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). In other words, one is truly free from the power and punishment of sin if they know and remain in the Truth of Jesus Christ.

Jesus’ words are Truth and in them is freedom and life. He came that we may have life in the Truth and have it abundantly (John 10:10). Do you know the Truth? Are you continuing to trust and follow the Truth that is Jesus Christ? The truth will set you free. Jesus said so!

*Are you a Jesus fan or a Jesus follower?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 16 December

### The Way to God is by God's Truth

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."*

[John 14:6-7]

Our next discovery regarding the Truth of God's full revelation in Jesus Christ is this bombshell statement. Here we are left without a doubt as to Christ's identity as the Truth of the Father and the exclusivity and authority of Christ as the only means of reconciliation with Him.

As Jesus anticipates his crucifixion and endeavours to assure the troubled hearts of his disciples, he reminds them precisely of his identity. He is the exclusive and only way to the presence of the Father. Access to God is possible only through Jesus Christ. He is the fulfilment of all the Old Testament symbols and teachings (the curtain in the Holy of Holies, the Levitical priesthood, the purification rites, offerings and sacrifices). Jesus is also the Truth of the Father. He is the fullness of the truth of God revealed in the Old Testament and the very revelation of the True God Incarnate (John 1). Paul reveals the source and origin of Truth is divine; the truth is in Jesus (Ephesians 4:21) Finally, Jesus declares that he himself is the life. John revealed in his introduction that the Jesus is the creator, sustainer and is the life-giver (John 1), he is thus our source of eternal life. Peter declared "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Here Jesus Christ makes it clear that Truth is divine and found only in Him. Truth is also absolute and objective. There is but one singular universal Truth, Jesus is THE truth. His revelation is clear, specific and completely aligns with all of the Truth of God as he is the fullness of the True God. That Jesus is Truth is true everywhere, all the time, and without exception. It is true for every generation and gender, every culture and society. Jesus is THE way, THE truth, and THE life. All questions about purpose, meaning or value in life find their answer in Christ. And there is no question about it.

*Are you a truth believer and truth follower?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 17 December

### Sanctification Incorporates God's Truth

*Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.... [John 17:17-20]*

Our final stop on the "Truth tour" through the gospel of John is Jesus' high priestly prayer on the evening of his betrayal and arrest. As he prayed in anticipation of his crucifixion, the Saviour prayed to the Father for his disciples to be sanctified, set apart or made holy in the truth. Scripture reveals this process of sanctification to be a lifelong endeavour. It is a continual rejection of our old, sinful nature which has been crucified with Christ and an ongoing renewal of holy living in thought, word and deed. Sanctification, or the process of being made holy, occurs as we live in the Spirit and walk in the truth.

The next phrase is another truth bomb. "Your word is truth." This adds additional clarity as to how disciples of Jesus grow in holiness and Christlikeness: through God's Word. John has already identified Jesus, the Son of God as the Word of God. Jesus is the truth; his words are truth, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. He bears witness to and guides Jesus' disciples into all the truth (John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13). Our perfect Triune God is one singular, absolute and universal God of Truth.

The truth of God is trustworthy and unchangeable. It is as reliable, dependable and sure as its source is faithful. The truth of God has no errors or faults and has never failed as God cannot be separated from His Word. It is true because God is true. God's Word and Truth cannot be changed as it is fixed in the heavens (Psalm 119:89) and His Word endures forever (Isaiah 40:8). God is immutable, and his word, the truth is similarly so is his Word. As the times and seasons change, one thing that never changes: Jesus is the fullness of the One True God, Truth Incarnate, whose words are ever true.

The songwriter puts it this way: "Ancient words ever true, changing me, changing you...."

*Are you being changed by the truth?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 18 December

“And we beheld his glory...”

*Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”*  
[Matthew 1:20b-23]

God’s glory is often interpreted or assumed to mean some brightness or unapproachable light. Certainly that is sometimes the case, however, most often it refers to God’s reputation. (This is true in both testaments.)

When John writes, “We have seen his glory,” he was not suggesting Jesus had a halo over his head, an eerie glow or was clad in garments of light. He is declaring the incarnation was the reality of God among men; Jesus taking the form of a man but possessing and revealing the attributes and perfections of God. The writer of Hebrews makes reference to Jesus being the full disclosure (revelation) of God and the He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature....” [Hebrews 1:1-3]

He gave up the glories of heaven but did not give up his identity as God. He lived among sinners but committed no sin. He listened to the lies men told but personified truth. He fulfilled the demands of the Law and died to redeem those who failed to keep its precepts. He was obedient to his Father’s will; he only spoke his Father’s sanctioned words. He was generous with grace but impatient with the greedy. He forgave much including those who wrongly accused him and those who nailed him to the cross.

His reputation among men was that of God himself: holy, righteous, loving, gracious, sinless. He was, in truth, Immanuel. God with us. And he has left the mission to us. We are to be as he was, exhibiting God’s glory (*i.e.* manifesting his reputation) in a world alienated from its Creator. He was God *with* us; we are to manifest evidence of God *in* us.

*Are observers of your life aware God is in you?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 19 December

### Moses' encounter with God's glory.

*Moses said, "Please show me your glory." [Exodus 33:18]*

One day, Moses was on Mount Sinai talking to God after the dreadful golden calf incident. He asked God to teach him His ways so that he "can know Him and continue to find favour with Him." This happened in the context of Moses wanting to know more about the One who will be traveling with them on their exodus to the promised land. God's reply is awesome: "I will show you a tiny part of my glory so that you know who it is that is going with you."

God called Moses to a place near Him where he could stand in a crack in a big rock. God then covered Moses' eyes and passed by him. After He had passed, God uncovered his eyes so that he could just catch a glimpse of God's 'back'

This gives us a sense of God's glory. God is so wonderful, so powerful, so glorious that because of the limitations of our sinful body, we cannot even look at Him. Moses was someone who found favour with God and even he could only catch a momentary, partial glimpse. God is, in a sense, unknowable, completely transcendent.

And yet, those of us who know Jesus, know God. The disciples who walked and talked with Jesus through the towns or sat in the fishing boat with Him, had seen God.

Part of the wonder and beauty of Christmas is knowing that the infinite, transcendent God became a man so that all could come to know Him. Think about that. We who have a saving relationship with Jesus can say that we 'know' God. And one day we will be able to stand in His presence and look into His face. No rock required.

This week's devotionals are chosen to give us a glimpse into several people's encounters with the glory of God. I hope that each one deepens our reverence for The Holy God but that each will also excite and encourage, reminding us that we too will one day get to witness it for ourselves.

*Have you beheld his glory?*



## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 20 December

### Isaiah's encounter with God's glory,

*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole Earth is full of His glory!*  
[Isaiah 6:3 NIV]

Boom! Just like that, Isaiah found himself in the Lord's presence, seeing Him seated on the throne. He saw the heavenly creatures and the world rattling and shaking around them. It's a scene of indescribable magnificence and uncontainable vastness.

Isaiah looks at all this and is completely overwhelmed. We can almost picture him taking all of it in and wishing the ground would swallow him up. He responds: "Woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips," [Isaiah 6:6] This is a common experience when people are confronted with the presence of God. They become acutely aware of God's holiness, their sinfulness and the vast difference between them.

And that's true. God is infinitely holy, and perfect and righteous. We are worms in comparison: sinful, wicked, with no desire to even know him. But you know what? God looked at us in our sinful state and loved us. He looked at us and declared that He wanted to have a relationship with us. And to prove His love for us, He was willing to pay the most precious price in all the universe, the blood of Jesus Christ.

This means that even though we are still sinners, if we've trusted Jesus we have been redeemed. God has birthed us into His family of faith and given us a purpose: to live for His glory (1 Cor 10:31). That's quite something though, isn't it? While we live on this earth, we get to bring Him glory, making His name great.

And then one day, you and I will get to stand in the same place Isaiah found himself thousands of years ago admiring the glory of God's presence and worshiping Him for all He accomplished for us through Christ. What a day that will be!

*Are you living for this day or that day?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 21 December

### Daniel's glimpse of God's glory,

*As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. [Daniel 7:9-10]*

I've never been in a courtroom, but if the legal dramas on television shows and Netflix episodes are anything to go by, it looks like it can be a very intimidating place to be. Especially for someone like me who is terrified of doing something wrong and ending up in trouble.

Put yourself in Daniel's shoes. While having a vision, he saw a heavenly courtroom scene unfold. Who's the judge? The Almighty Creator of the vast Heavens and Earth... gulp! If an earthly courtroom wasn't scary enough, imagine being in this heavenly courtroom! In this description, we see God's glory on display as the Righteous Judge of the universe.

Scripture often uses legal imagery in describing our relationship with God. We were guilty sinners deserving of death, but God sent Jesus to pay our fine in full thus satisfying God's requirements on our behalf. Because of that we are legally set free and declared guiltless in God's sight.

If God were to call you into His courtroom, what would be your response? I'm sure we'd be filled with a reverential fear for God. But if you are a believer, you do not have to fear being handed an eternal death sentence. Scripture comforts us with this good news, explaining that God sent Jesus into the world to save all who believe in Him. That means that those who believe need no longer fear judgment. Believers know their rescue is Jesus and his redemptive work on their behalf not their own. And ultimately, that's the gift for which we should be most thankful this Christmas.

*Are you thankful for this indescribable gift of mercy?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 22 December

### John's glimpse of God's glory

*You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being. [Revelation 4:11]*

What is your response when someone talks about the book of Revelation? For some it is a big, scary book of the unknown. Perhaps among all the other books of the Bible it seems safer to leave it alone to gather dust. Or maybe you love spending time marvelling at the otherworldliness of it all. Either way, it is in our Bibles for a reason, and it contains some very important revelation.

The human author of Revelation is John. He writes this while he is on the Island of Patmos as a prisoner. While he is there, God allows him to glimpse several scenes in heaven and on earth. There are strange beasts covered in eyes. There are angels carrying scrolls and bowls. There are incredible, mind-numbing scenes of the glory of God that cannot be contained, let alone described. Even those who live in Heaven with God are constantly crying out "Holy, Holy, Holy who was and is and is to come" [Revelation 4:8]

From his vision, John describes a throne room surrounded by a rainbow. There are peals of thunder and flashes of lightning. There are fire and exquisite precious stones, glass, and gold. Can you imagine being John trying to relay what he saw? Putting something as great as the Glory of God into words... that's impossible!

And that's just it. God's glory is uncontainable. It is undefinable. It is immeasurable. Tomorrow, we'll look at how this is true, but also how God made a way for us to see and one day experience His glory. Today though, let's focus on the immenseness, the height and breadth and depth of God's glory. The same glory that led the host of angels to appear to the shepherds that first Christmas night declaring "Glory to God in the highest!"

*Are you overwhelmed by God's glory?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 23 December

### The Glory of God in Jesus

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

[John 1:14]

Yesterday we looked at the immeasurable riches of God's glory. Today, I'm going to turn that on its head and show you that we can see God's glory and that he has fully revealed it to us. How is that possible? Through His Son, Jesus Christ. Why? Because Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Jesus "is the radiance of the glory of God."

During Jesus' public ministry, Philip comes to Jesus, asking him to show him God the Father. Jesus replies and says: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" [John 14:9] Think about that. The very person he wanted so desperately to see was standing right in front of Him! Now I'm sure many of us wish we could be in Philip's shoes for just a moment and look into Jesus's face. But, in a sense we can do that by immersing ourselves in God's Word where He has revealed all that He wants us to know about Him.

Throughout these precious pages we see God who has control over all and who fears nothing. We can see His character and observe His compassion, his love for the downtrodden and outcast. We can witness his forgiveness for those whom society had deemed dirty because of their sin. We also glimpse his power in turning water into wine, driving demons into pigs, raising Lazarus from the dead, and walking on water. Most importantly though, we see his sacrificial love that meant dying on the cross for the sins of world.

So, remember that Christmas isn't just about a weak helpless baby. Christmas is about the God of Heaven and Earth who took on the form of a man so that His creation could see His glory. Christmas is about Jesus who is the "radiance of the glory of God".

*Does your life radiate his glory?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 24 December

### The believer's eternity in God's glory,

*No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servant will worship him. They will see his face..." [Revelation 22:3-4]*

Have you ever been separated for a long time from someone you love ? I remember the desperate longing to look into the eyes of someone I love and just see their face. There's so much we miss when we can't see someone's face.

After a week of looking at glimpses of God's glory and seeing how he even had to protect people like Moses from fully seeing his glory, it seems a bit odd to conclude here by saying that we will see his face. Really? "Won't God have to hide us behind a rock or cover our eyes?" No. We will get to stand in His presence and behold His glory and look into his face.

The only reason we can do this is because of Jesus. As we remember Jesus' birth during this season, remember that He also grew up and lived a sinless life. Then in His early thirties He was arrested and died on a Roman cross, carrying the full weight of all the sins of the world. He was buried. Then, three days later he rose to life again giving power and authority to his claim that whoever believed in him would have life in his name.

If you have trusted that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again in your place and that there is nothing you can do to be made right with God except believe in Jesus, then you are saved. You can begin now to experience your salvation. But one day it will be made complete. With a new, sinless body that can live forever, we will be called up into heaven to bask in God's glory and look into his face. All because of what Jesus did for us.

What a joy! What a glorious reality! What a day to look forward to!

*Are you eager to see his face?*

## ANTICIPATE CHRISTMAS - 25 December

*In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.... And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee...to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem...to be registered with Mary, his betrothed who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

*And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.*

[Luke 2:1-11]

The time had come. The end of Mary's pregnancy but more: Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem as predicted by the prophet. She and Joseph were instructed to name him "Jesus," the long-awaited son of David.

The angel announced he was Christ the Lord. The term, *Christ* is the New Testament equivalent of *Messiah*—the anointed one; the focus of prophecy, the Son of Promise.

Peter would later declare he was the *Christ*, "the Son of the Living God." Jesus commended him for his insight and noted God had revealed it to him. Paul reminded the Corinthians the gospel was the message "*Christ* died for our sins and rose again...." To the Romans he wrote "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, *Christ* died for us. Further, "the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus *Christ* our Lord."

So, too, had the angel announced he was *Christ the Lord!* He was more than the son of David, he was and is the Son of God. And "To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (Acts 10:43) Jesus Christ, Messiah, Lord, Saviour, Redeemer and coming King. One day every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

*He is Lord of all the earth. Is he Lord of your life?*