



*“Behold, the virgin
shall conceive and bear
a son, and they shall
call his name
Immanuel”*

~ Matthew 1:23

*Cruxifusion
Advent Devotional
2016*

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*Requests for information regarding
Cruxifusion should be addressed to:*

*Cruxifusion
PO Box 20054
2211 Brant Street
Burlington, ON L7P 0A4
1-888-510-0329
www.cruxifusion.ca
info@cruxifusion.ca*

*Versions of quoted scripture are from the
New Revised Standard Version
unless otherwise indicated*

About the Authors

Rev. Michael Goodfellow (November 28-December 4)

Michael has been in ministry in the United Church for 15 years, and currently serves the Hartland-Jacksonville Pastoral Charge in rural New Brunswick. Just a simple country preacher, he loves his Lord, his wife Sarah and his cat Jenny, in that order. He has great interest in the writings of the 17th century English Puritans, and loves to read while listening to Bach (or any baroque composer). His main prayer is for a Holy Spirit revival in the church.

Rev. Lorraine Hill (December 5-11)

A former flight attendant, Lori was ordained in 2005 and is now the minister at Home United Church in Caledon, ON. She lives in Toronto with Chris and her 4 cats. She enjoys running and watching all things ballet!

Rev. Nick Phillips (December 12-18)

Ordained in 2009 after a short career in the high tech industry, Nick serves as minister of Carman United Church in Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia with his wife and two children. As chair of Cruxifusion, Nick hopes to share the love of Christ across Canada by connecting and inspiring churches, clergy and members who seek Christ in their midst.

Rev. Debbie McMillan (December 19-25)

Graduating from McMaster University, Debbie intended to become a middle school social studies teacher. God had other plans. Through “seismic shifts” in every area of her life: financial, familial, physical, professional and spiritual. Debbie finally realized what God was calling her to ordained ministry, and she surrendered her life to Jesus. She was ordained in the United Church of Canada in 2009 and has served in every level of its governance. She is also an award winning writer. This Advent Debbie begins to live out her call to the Cayuga Pastoral Charge just south of her hometown: Hamilton, Ontario.

Using this devotional

We encourage you to find a quiet place where you may be with God while you read your daily devotional. Remove any distractions and allow yourself a time of silence to turn your focus to God before you read the suggested Scripture reading and the words offered for contemplation.

You may also want to have a journal with you, to jot down any words, pictures, or ideas that come to you as you read, contemplate, and pray. If you have chosen to print this document, we have tried to allow some space on the page for you to make note of these things, but we do encourage you to make use of a prayer journal where you can keep track of these moments with God over time, allowing you to return and remind yourself of the things God has shared.

May you be blessed in your relationship with God this season of Advent, as we seek to draw closer to the Christ child, Immanuel, God with us.

Day 1 – November 28

Read: Romans 6:1-11

To truly appreciate the fact that Jesus came into the world, it is important to know the reason why he came. His birth in Bethlehem is only the first step in a life that led to a cross and an empty tomb, showing the ultimate victory over sin and death.

It is to the whole of Jesus' life that we, as Christians, must attach ourselves. Paul writes "Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

Each year as we gather to celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ into the world, we seek that "newness of life." The presence of

Jesus in the world does not allow us to remain in our comfortable routines. He arrives each year into a sinful, misbegotten world that needs to be remade. Each year the hope of the cradle leads to the tragedy of the cross to the victory of the empty tomb. And if we are in Christ, our tragedy can be turned into victory, our death into newness of life.

Prayer

Lord God, let us find our way to that newness of life promised in Jesus. Let us not be jaded by the same old Christmas stories, but find Christ's call within each one. Amen.

What things for you need to be buried with Christ this Advent season? In what ways do you need his newness of life?

Notes

Day 2 – November 29

Read: Hebrews 11:32-40

New. Improved. Bigger. Better. These are the buzzwords of marketing. The promises of something you need to make your life more enjoyable. Why have an iPhone6 when you can get an iPhone7? But does the reality live up to the promise, or is it just one step in a long line of products and services we think we need?

In Hebrews 11, the faith “heroes” of the Old Testament are in possession of God’s promise, but never live to see the fulfillment of that promise. For Abraham, for Moses, for David, for the prophets, the promise is always future. Hebrews 11:39-40 tells us why. God has something better in mind. The reality of his promise is found in hope, not just for the OT patriarchs and prophets; not just for the NT apostles and teachers, but for all who come after. The promise of God is a community promise. God’s perfect plan is not solely about individual conversion. God’s promise in Jesus connects the hope of the OT, the glimpse we see in the NT, and the fulfillment when the Lord returns for his Kingdom. God’s promise is still that there is better to come.

Prayer

God of the promise, give us the eyes to see where your hope lies. Give us the knowledge of your promise in community. Make us willing to share our faith with those around us. Amen.

How does thinking of God’s hope as communal transform how you seek his promise? In what ways can your individual hopes be broadened?

Notes

Day 3 – November 30

Read: Isaiah 54:1-10

I had a mostly dead tooth that was cracked and unsightly. I had it for at least a decade, and then it started bothering me more and more. My dentist spoke those two dreaded words. Root canal. I thought of the moments of pain spread out over two separate visits. But I then I figured out what it would mean if it worked. I am now pain free, and sometimes I can't even remember which tooth it was.

Isaiah 54 is like that. It shares the reality of those times when God appears to be absent, when God seems invisible. That is something which each of us can say we have experienced. God can be far away. We are in darkness and despair. We seem alone. But the scripture also claims that this absence is only for a moment (v.7-8). And that moment transforms into something greater. Those moments are nothing compared to the everlasting love and compassion which God shows.

This reality has such an impact in the way we live as Christians. In the midst of our setbacks, Christ continues to go ahead. In our moments of weakness, we look to Christ's strength. In our tragedies, we find ourselves in Christ's victory. Temporary absences...everlasting God.

Prayer

Ever-loving God, be near to us even in those times when you seem to be absent. Let your promises tell us of an everlasting compassion. Amen.

Do God's promises change how you respond to moments of his perceived absence?

Notes

Day 4 – December 1

Read: Isaiah 4:2-6

There is a story that tells of Augustus Toplady finding shelter in a cleft rock during a terrible storm. That led to his writing the famous hymn, “Rock of Ages.” The truth of the story may be doubted. But the meaning behind it is clear. We all seek a safe place, away from the ravages of the world.

Isaiah 4 speaks about the presence of God. God is there in forms familiar to his people from the exodus, the cloud by day and the fire by night. And then God’s familiar form provides a canopy, a pavilion. That form gives protection: shade from the heat of the day, a refuge from the storm, a shelter from the rain.

Advent celebrates the Son of God coming into the world in a familiar form, the form of an infant who will grow into the man Jesus of Nazareth. And the man Jesus lives and dies, and is raised to show that what God provides us is safe. Jesus suffers, but is victorious. Jesus dies, but lives forever. Jesus is buried, but the stone rolls away. His work seems finished, but continues to this day. His spirit seems broken, but that Spirit fills his followers on Pentecost. Familiar forms, but God uses them in unfamiliar ways.

Prayer

Eternal God, let us find safety in the shelter you provide. Be our refuge in these days. Amen.

In what familiar forms do you see the presence God? In what ways can these forms protect God’s people in today’s storms?

Notes

Day 5 – December 2

Read: Isaiah 30:19-26

The direction of the Christian life is not always a straight line. Each day our encounters and our relationships cause us to make decisions. We ask, what does this mean for my faith? What does God want me to do? How can Jesus' message be best shown?

God does not leave us alone in such situations. Isaiah 30 says clearly in verse 21, "And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'" In some ways that is really vague. But the passage tells us clearly what it means for us when we hear the voice of God.

It tells us our idols will be cast down and scattered. Whatever human institutions we put our trust in, those will be no more. It tells us our night will be as day, that the moon will shine as the sun. It tells us our injuries will be bound, and our wounds will be healed by the Lord himself. It tells us God's grace will respond to our cries, and our tears will be dried. Then you will know it is the voice of God that you hear. Then you will know it is the way of God you follow.

Prayer

Lord God, let us hear your voice as we go in your way. Let your grace respond to our hurts and pains, and heal them.

In what direction does God's voice call you in this time of preparation?

Notes

Day 6 – December 3

Read: Isaiah 40:1-11

Thomas Hobbes said in the state of nature there was no such thing as an unjust law. Might makes right, they say. If you can get it done, then do it. This is what power means in most of the world today. Power is a tool wielded for self-interest or for revenge. Power is difficult to attain, and even more difficult to give up.

As believers we know God is powerful. Isaiah 40 demonstrates that power in remarkable ways. Valley exalted. Hills made low. The crooked straightened, the rough made plain. All examples of God and his almighty power. But what does Isaiah 40 say God uses his power for? Is it a power for oppression, for tyranny? Is it a power that dominates? No, God's power is good news, glad tidings. God's power comforts those who weep. God's power feeds those who hunger. God's power speaks tenderly to the broken-hearted. God's power gathers together, instead of driving apart. God's power does not speak from the capitols or the boardrooms. God's power is prepared by a voice in the wilderness, crying out that the Lord is coming. He is coming indeed.

Prayer

Eternal God, let us be mindful that you are the comforter of your people. You accept our brokenness and seek to heal. You tend us as lost sheep, and straighten our crooked paths. Amen

What rough places in your life need to be made plain by the power of God? Where will you show God's comfort to those around us?

Notes

Day 7 – December 4

Read: Matthew 3:1-12

John the Baptist is one of the most fascinating characters in Scripture. He bursts on the scene, a shining light in the wilderness. He lives a simple, ascetic lifestyle. He proclaims a message of repentance, claiming that God's anointed one is coming. He calls for action, for those seeking forgiveness to be baptized, a visible sign that they are waiting for God's new covenant. He recognizes that he is only preparing the way for someone greater than himself. And he gives way when that greater one, our Lord Jesus Christ, arrives on the scene.

Why did people go out to see John the Baptist? Some might have been curious. Some sought to condemn this new thing.

Some might have gone out to mock the weirdo in the wilderness. But some were genuinely interested in the message he had to proclaim. And the foundation of that message was REPENT. Repentance means a turning away from one way of life, and a turning into another. Sins were confessed. Sins were forgiven. Baptism was a public sign of a new commitment. It was an opportunity for transformed lives, where Jesus can offer his greater baptism of fire, his Holy Spirit.

Prayer

Gracious God, let the example of John the Baptist be ever before us. Grant to us the strength to proclaim the message that Christ is Lord. Amen.

Remembering the coming of Jesus this advent, what do you need to turn away from in your life?
What then do you need to turn toward?

Notes

Day 8 – December 5

Read: Psalm 21

By now, maybe you've started your Christmas shopping. Maybe you're starting to think about all the gifts you're hoping to receive for Christmas this year as well! Don't you wish sometimes you could still send a letter to Santa?! It would be so much easier than dropping not-so-subtle hints around the house to our loved ones!

In this Psalm, David praises God for the number of blessings and gifts that he has received from God, recognizing and praising the giver of all gifts. In verse 6, though, he acknowledges that it is the presence of God's very own self that gives him the greatest joy.

In the midst of all the gift buying, giving and receiving I will certainly give thanks to God for those gifts I receive from thoughtful friends and loved ones. The most wonderful gift, though, is the constant and unfailing presence of God.

Prayer

O Lord, in you we rejoice, in you we find our peace and joy. Fill our hearts with the joy of knowing you, and with gratitude for the gift of your son, that by our very lives we sing and praise your power every day. In the name of your Son, we pray. Amen.

What things in life give you joy?
Have you thanked God for those good things?

Notes

Day 9 – December 6

Read: Romans 15:14-21

Today is the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. It seems like just yesterday when fourteen young women were shot and killed, just for being intelligent, hard-working women. I was also a young woman in my first year of university at that time, so the event felt deeply personal to me.

Since that day, many organizations and government agencies have continued to work hard for a day when victims of violence will be remembered, but no longer created. Many others work to bring healing and hope to those who have been victims of abuse and violence. Those who work for this goal represent people of all faiths or no faith, but their work certainly serves Christ's gospel of peace; and like Paul, God works through them to bring good news to the world, the good news that hope and not violence will have the final word and that God's Kingdom is close at hand.

Prayer

God of peace, you came to proclaim God's Kingdom on earth, and we long for that day when your love would reign in every corner of the world. Come, Lord Jesus; renew the face of the earth. Amen.

Where do you find hope in the midst of stories of violence that permeate the headlines? How can you share that with others?

Notes

Day 10 – December 7

Read: Genesis 15:1-18

Advent is a time of waiting, for sure, but we wait, not with uncertainty or fear, but with hope in the one who is faithful to fulfill all His promises. The story of Abram is one of the greatest examples we have of God's faithfulness to those who wait on the Lord.

When Jesus was born, Israel had been waiting for centuries for the one God had promised would come to redeem them.

I'm sure many had lost hope, because the wait was so long.

But God was faithful

When God makes a promise to us, we know that He is always faithful to fulfill that promise, even though we may have to wait, and the waiting may feel unbearable if we're in a challenging or painful situation. But we have the stories of faith to cling to, so that we don't lose hope while we wait.

(Listen to "While I'm Waiting" by John Waller on YouTube)

Prayer

Faithful God, Father of Abraham: we thank you that you never forget your promises. Help us to wait with trust and patience, that our faith may grow and be a beacon of hope to others.

Through our Coming Saviour, we pray. Amen.

Has God made a promise to you that you're waiting to see fulfilled? What helps you to cling to hope as you wait?

Notes

Day 11 – December 8

Read: 2 Peter 3:1-10

I bought a “24 Days of Tea” Advent Calendar from David’s Tea this year. As the name implies, it is intended to begin on December 1st, NOT on the actual first day of Advent. I couldn’t wait for December 1st, so I made the first few tins of tea stretch over a couple of days, so that I wouldn’t have to wait even one single day in Advent!

“...with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness...” Sometimes as we wait for good things to happen, for God’s promises to be fulfilled, or for a problematic situation to be resolved it feels as though God doesn’t understand the urgency of our situation. If I can’t even wait to drink my tea, how much more impatient I’ve become when I’ve had to wait for God to help me with a problem or situation that felt overwhelming to me.

Prayer

Patient and faithful God, we thank you that you never forget us or your promises. Help us to see your constant presence in our lives, even as we wait, that we would experience your peace.

Amen.

If you are waiting for a situation to improve or be resolved, can you see any ways that God is working in your life while you wait?

Notes

Day 12 – December 9

Read: Psalm 146:5-10

Most parts of our enormous country have experienced at least a few snow flurries by now, if not a downright blizzard. Maybe you're buried under a pile of snow right now, as you read this!

It's hard to remember sometimes that the God who made Heaven and Earth also made snow and ice!

I've always held, though, that nobody experiences the glory of springtime like Canadians (and other Nordic country-dwellers) who have had to endure a cold, slippery winter.

The greatest celebrations of our faith – Christmas and Easter – come after long stretches of waiting. Part of the joy of these holy days is knowing that the waiting is over.

As we celebrate that our wait is over, may we remember and pray for those who continue to wait – to be freed from prison and oppression; to be rescued from war; to have equal human rights; and to have education, medicine and food for their children.

Prayer

God of Jacob, you set the prisoners free. As we wait, and as we celebrate, open our eyes, that we would not be blind to the needs of others. Through our Lord Jesus, who came to set the captives free, we pray. Amen.

Have you and your family planned a service project for Advent?
In what way is your church remembering the oppressed?

Notes

Day 13 – December 10

Read: 1 Samuel 2:1-8

Leonard Cohen's song "Hallelujah" still makes me cry every time I hear it, since it was sung over five years ago at my brother's funeral. Even if I get through most of it without tears, it's all over for me when he comes to the part that says, "...and even though it all went wrong, I'll stand before the Lord of song with nothing on my tongue but Hallelujah." My brother's story all went wrong...could I still sing Hallelujah?

The prayer of Hannah is the prayer of one who praises God's holiness and power, even though she has yet to see the answer to her prayer. With the privilege of hindsight, we know that Hannah eventually bore the son she was praying for, but what if it had all gone wrong? What if she remained childless forever? She wasn't waiting to find out. She praised God, regardless of the outcome. Whether things go "right" or "wrong" in our eyes, "there is none holy like the Lord."

Prayer

God of holiness, you work in very mysterious ways, and often we don't understand. Help us to praise you, even as we wait, even if things don't go as we hoped. Help us to trust in your goodness, and to give hope to those who wait. Amen.

Have you ever tried to praise God in the midst of pain?
How did it affect you?

Notes

Day 14 – December 11

Read: Luke 1:46b-55

The Magnificat – spoken by the mother of Jesus before he was even born - foreshadows Jesus' own ministry of proclaiming the coming Kingdom of God. Jesus would turn everything people thought they knew about life upside down. We celebrate that now, and we rejoice in Mary's song. But Mary spoke these words in the midst of a situation that would have caused fear and uncertainty in many people, and it's possible she sang her song despite her own feelings of trepidation.

God turns everything we think we know upside down. Some days it feels as though our whole world is being turned upside down, and it can cause us fear as we wonder how things will all turn out. But this is God's world, and things are unfolding according to God's plan. "His mercy is for those who fear him, from generation to generation." Fear only God, the God who is merciful and faithful.

Prayer

*My soul magnifies you, O Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in you,
my Saviour. Amen.*

Is anything causing you fear in the world right now?
Do you trust that God is in control?

Notes

Day 15 – December 12

Read: Psalm 42

This time of year is so incredibly busy. There are parties, dinners, shopping trips, family gatherings, church gatherings, church services, school concerts, to name a few. And if you're like me, you're tired and possibly overwhelmed by it all.

Maybe you're at the point where you are asking,
“Can it just be over and done with now?”

This is a great time, as we're about half way through the season of Advent, to pause and reflect on what the true gift of this season is.

Psalm 42:2 says, “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”

In the midst of all the busyness, our soul thirsts for a sign of God. We need to remember, that among all the feeding of our bellies that happens so frequently this time of year, we need to remember to feed our souls.

Prayer

God of all, I invite you to speak into the busyness of my life today. I invite you to feed my soul, to quench my thirst, and help me find the peace you wish to offer. Amen.

How can you take some extra time today to sit with God and take a break from the whirlwind of this season?

Notes

Day 16 – December 13

Read: Jude 1:17-25

In November we begin to hear about the “war on Christmas”. It’s led by people insisting on using “Merry Christmas” over the increasingly popular “Happy Holidays”. The war is really not a war. We are seeing the decreasing influence of the church.

More and more we are seeing the church targeted in popular media, such as music, television and news. We might identify with those words in Jude, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.” (Jude 1:18 ESV)

Is this a time to worry? No, this is a time for “building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit...” (Jude 1:20 ESV) which then gives us the strength and passion to share our faith with others.

May we learn to watch our steps in faith so that we may not falter in our efforts to be one with Jesus Christ, the One we wait for this Advent season.

Prayer

Lord, may I be closer to you who guides my footsteps, ever growing in my faith and becoming more faithfulness in my words, actions and deeds this Holy season. Amen.

What can I do today to share my excitement of coming Messiah with those who are struggling to find hope?

Notes

Day 17 – December 14

Read: Matthew 8:14-17

Tired? Weak? Sick?

This is a season that can take a lot out of us physically.

Yet is this really what Christmas is about?

Is it really meant to be the race we have made it to be?

In Advent we spend time getting ready for Christmas. That is, the birth of our Saviour. Our Saviour who grew to be a great healer and bringer of hope to many thousands of people. Our Saviour who seeks to bring healing and hope to us as well. This is our season of hope, peace, joy and love, the things Jesus has offered to all from his Father, our Father, in heaven.

May you find rest in him who reaches out to you to lift you up and help you see the love of God which Jesus has come to share with all of the world.

Prayer

God, in this season of peace, hope, joy and love, may these things be found in me as I put my trust in you. Amen.

Is there something I need to entrust to God so that I may receive the healing he offers?

Notes

Day 18 – December 15

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

Those times when we feel far from God are often the hardest times to be a Christian. We feel like we've been forgotten and don't know where to turn. Meanwhile, the world keeps on going with its happy hum. The problem is, the hum is out of tune. It's not in the key of God.

What can we do when we find ourselves trapped in the tune of the world feeling far from God?

We get back to the basics. We seek God more intently. And we ask Him back into our lives. We ask God to reveal Himself to us so that we no longer feel alone.

“Restore us, O God; let your face shine,
that we may be saved!” (Psalm 80:3)

Prayer

*Lord, you are the one who strengthens me and guides me.
Help me to see a glimpse of your face today
so that I may know you are near. Amen.*

When I feel alone, where do I often turn?
If it's not to God, how might I turn to Him more?

Notes

Day 19 – December 16

Read: Galatians 4:1-7

I live in Cape Breton where a common question when meeting someone is, “Who's your father?” When you live in a community defined by relationships, it's sometimes hard to be a “come from away”, being born elsewhere and moving there later in life. Now Cape Breton hospitality is still second to none, and I am very much part of the community. But there was still a transition period.

There is one relationship we need not worry about being accepted in, that is being a child of God.

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.” (Gal 4:4-5)

Jesus has come for you,
so that you may be a child of God.

Prayer

*Jesus I thank you for welcoming me into your family.
Help me to receive the full love of my Father. Amen.*

In what ways do you still feel like an outsider from God?
Are you extending a welcome to others into the family?

Notes

Day 20 – December 17

Read: John 3:31-36

When Jesus speaks in the Bible, people listen. But they don't always understand. Often they are left with questions. Yet, the words of Jesus bring truth. Sometimes people are angry with what he has said because his truth opposes their actions and practices which they feel are justified.

“He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.” (John 3:34)

When we let the words of Jesus penetrate our hearts, the Spirit of truth, God's truth, gives us new life through the power of his Spirit.

Prayer

God, help me to hear the truth you send through your Son, Jesus Christ. May I hear this truth and be renewed in you.

Amen.

How does God's truth challenge my own understanding of the world around me? Might I need to ask God to show me more of his truth?

Notes

Day 21 – December 18

Read: Matthew 1:18-25

This is the last Sunday before Christmas. Children are bubbling with excitement, the decorations light our streets and our homes. This is a beautiful season, a joyful season. It is a season of promise. A promise from God that we are not alone.

In a message to Joseph, the angel said,
“She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus,
for he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21)

This is the gift of Christmas, one which has come directly from God so that we may be His children. So we may experience His hope, peace, joy and love in all our lives.

As we walk through this final week, may we eagerly
accept this gift from our God.

Prayer

*You are the great Father, O God.
May I cherish the gift you have given for me. Amen.*

Are you ready to receive the gift of God,
a gift to be shared with others as we are all children of God?

Notes

Day 22 – December 19

Read: 1 Samuel 2:1-10

I used to take swordplay classes. I was terrible at it. One thing I learned is that armour is heavy. A full suit can add anywhere from 70 to 80 lbs to your own weight. That weight doesn't include the sword. Moving is difficult. Real sword fights are slow—not like what you see in the movies or on television. As awkward as it can be to move in armour, I wouldn't want to be without it in battle. After all, swords can leave deep wounds to exposed skin. Human flesh is too weak to withstand those kinds of injuries.

The arrival of Samuel heralds a new phase in the relationship God has been building with the world. The child born to Hannah is –himself- a sign that God is going to fulfill a promise: a promise to break the weapons of the strong and strengthen those who are weak. That promise was renewed in the announcement of Jesus' birth and fulfilled in His life, death and resurrection. In Jesus the Christ, we are given the confidence to face our foes with courage feeling protected and strong.

Prayer

Holy One, show me my weaknesses. Strengthen them by the power of your Holy Spirit.

(Use this prayer as your journaling topic)

Notes

Day 23 – December 20

Read: Genesis 21:1-21

As a minister, I am prone to seriousness. I spend hours alone in silence reading books written by dead people. My sins are constantly before me so I remain humble—and perhaps neurotic, but that’s another story. I answer humiliating, personal questions because I am a racialized, childless woman who is also a clergy person. I’ve been called “empty-headed” and “shallow” because I believe that Jesus Christ is my Saviour.

Remaining angry or becoming embittered tempt me. I confess, I yield to them occasionally. I have discovered another option: laughing. To laugh is to say, “This situation is ridiculous.” When I laugh at something that hurts, it takes the power of the pain away. It’s a coping mechanism.

I also laugh to acknowledge my own incompetence and ignorance. I will never fully understand how or why God does the things He does. When set against the vastness of God’s wisdom, I am a total, clued-out dork. Sarah laughed when she found out she was pregnant because she was post-menopausal. It’s hilarious! And, it’s miraculous. Only God could do something so bizarre to show that new life in all situations is possible through Him. Good one, God.

Prayer

God, help me be awed by you while laughing at myself. Amen.

When did God bring you laughter?

Notes

Day 24 – December 21

Read: Matthew 1:1-17

While you go get your Bible for today's reading, get a caffeinated beverage so you'll stay awake. Scintillating, reading isn't it? Name after unpronounceable name scrolling on--like credits at the end of a movie.

But this isn't the end of the gospel of Matthew. It's the beginning. Like the credits in a movie, all these names belong to someone who matters in the Biblical narrative. If you Google them, you'll see what roles they have to play in the story leading up to the birth of Jesus.

If you'd rather not do that, here's something else to do. Think about this: some of the people listed in the Genealogy of Jesus have done some pretty terrible things; yet, God worked through them to bring about the greatest event humanity ever experienced: Love Incarnate. The fully human DNA that was in Jesus' fully divine body (or however you want to work out that Holy science) was passed on to Him through THEM: through flawed human sinners just like us.

When you think God can't work through you because you are imperfect, remember these people.
When you think God can't work through difficult circumstances remember these people.
Remember that God chose to take on flesh –in Jesus– to redeem it.

Prayer

Father, thank you for the gift of Jesus.

Notes

Day 25 – December 22

Read: Isaiah 33:17-22

I'm biracial. Sometimes, I struggle with the idea of "submission." As someone who is racialized, the language of "submission" conjures up images of slavery and oppression in my head—not in everyone's head—but most definitely my own. Slaves were often "beaten into submission" so that they could carry out the wishes of their master. My first degree is in history so I can't pretend that didn't happen.

It becomes less of a struggle when I think about how God is depicted in the breadth of Biblical witness.

The judgments of God are fair,
even if we don't understand or agree with them.
The sovereignty of God is compassionate; it is love itself.
God –through Jesus Christ– acted in history to save all
humanity: regardless of colour or creed. That sacrifice was an
all-embracing act of deliverance with an impact felt in both this
life and the next.

Submitting to God is not about being beaten: it's about being led. It's about listening to His voice and responding with obedience. It's about being humble enough to say, "I don't have the power get through life alone. God, help me."

Prayer

(Please use the last sentence as both prayer and journal topic)
"I don't have the power get through life alone. God, help me."

Notes

Day 26 – December 23

Read: 2 Samuel 7:1-18

Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and said, “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? ~ 1 Samuel 7:18

I don't know why my Jesuit Priest Uncle blessed me when I was days old: everyone said “The Roman Catholics don't do those things for Protestants.”

I don't know why the minister of my childhood church took a risk and baptized me: I was biracial and was born to a single Mum—some members of the congregation were outraged and appalled.

I don't know why I had food, shelter and a loving family during my formative years: many of my classmates didn't.

I don't know why I had the drive to excel in school at an early age—why I saw education not just as a way up in the world but also a way out of my community.

I do know social services described me as an “at risk child.” When I was old enough to know what that meant, I understood I was expected to fail at life. I have had failures in my life: but I haven't failed at life. I think the only reason I haven't is because of God's grace. I don't deserve it. But I live because of it.

Prayer

O God, thank you for the gift of this life.

What graces have you given me, God?

Notes

Day 27 – December 24

Read: Isaiah 52:7-10

The words of Isaiah echo in Luke 2.

Shepherds heard about the birth of Jesus first: not the rich in the villas; not the king in the palace; not the merchants in town or even the fishermen in huts on the shores. In ancient times, most shepherds didn't own the land upon which they worked. Laws prevented them from building permanent or semi permanent-structures on that land; leaving shepherds exposed to weather and predators. Shepherds abided in the fields—keeping watch over their flocks at night.

During their watch, an angel appeared to the shepherds.

After overcoming their fear, the shepherds followed the angel's direction and ran to Bethlehem. There, in a manger, they saw what the angel had described: a swaddled baby with His parents. A baby who would grow up to be the Saviour, the Redeemer—not just of Jerusalem but of the whole world—rich and poor. It's no wonder they shouted for joy as they praised God for the gift of that child.

Prayer

Holy God, show me how to share my joy.

Use this prayer as you listen for God's voice.

Notes

Day 28 – December 25

Read: John 1:1-5

2016. First it was David Bowie and Alan Ryckman: two celebrities whose work I admired, dead within a week of each other. Later in the year Prince, Muhammad Ali and Natalie Cole all passed away too. In the midst of celebrity deaths came a cancer diagnosis for my Mum. She received treatment in hospital for three months. At the same time, my partner John's mother was moving towards death in Winnipeg. She passed away as my mother was being released from hospital. The soundtrack which seemed to play in the background each difficult day was the surrealistic vitriol of the American election campaign. It was like being engulfed in never-ending darkness.

A long time ago, God saw a world made dark by mortality and by sin. God could have let his creation languish in the shadows of its suffering. Instead, God called light into being—as He had done at creation—and it shone. He named the light Jesus the Messiah, the Christ. In Jesus, God poured the fullness of Himself into human flesh—choosing to live with and minister directly to His beloved people; bringing the light of healing and hope directly into the darkness they knew.

Prayer

God, thank you for the gift of light and the hope it brings.

Show me places within my soul in need of your healing light.

Notes