



TLM Daily Devotions

December 2023



Intro to the month of December

As far as I can remember back into my childhood, there was no Advent or Christmas sermon without the preacher referring to “the darkness of today’s world” into which Jesus came. As a preacher myself, too, I also naturally place His coming into such a context.

The world is always dark. Not only these days when news bring loads of immeasurable darkness into our homes. Believers of all ages have experienced and will experience the same.

But the light that comes with Jesus is the same, too! The privilege of The Leprosy Mission is that we can experience on the daily basis in the lives of people affected and, through them entire communities what it means when the light of Jesus starts shining! We have real experience how walls fall down, obscurity disappears, darkness dissipates where the light of Jesus appears in the life of a person!

This is the inexhaustible basis of our hope for tomorrow and the day after!

Blessed reading!

Marta



What is your name?

This week I have been thinking about Hagar, the servant of Sarai, the wife of Abram. I want to think particularly about Hagar's encounter with God in Genesis 16:7-13. In the earlier verses of this chapter, Abram and Sarai talk about Hagar but do not call her by her name. When ill-treated by Sarai, Hagar flees and has an encounter with the angel God whose first words to her address her by her name. That was really special for her, to be called by her name. It is special too when we are called by our name. It meant that she was recognised for who she was.

Sometimes we find God changing someone's name – for example: Abram became Abraham, Sarai became Sarah and Saul became Paul.

I was thinking that the angel of God told Mary, and Joseph, what they were to call their child and why. Throughout the Bible, there are many names or titles attributed to Jesus. I have a book on my shelves called "At The Name of Jesus" which contains 365 meditations on the Name of Jesus – yes one for each day. While some are not directly "names" they all relate very specifically to Jesus (for example, *Jesus is Merciful*). Many times over the years I have turned to that book and found a name of Jesus or a special promise that is just right for me. I think of a time when I was at a real crossroad in my life, not sure about the next step. The next page to be read in that little book reminded me that Jesus is our Intercessor – "Hence, also, He (Jesus) is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them", Hebrews 7:25. Jesus was praying for me even as I was praying that God would show me the next step in my life – and He did quite amazingly the very next day.

At Christmas we think of many of the names given to Jesus in the prophecies about Him – **Isaiah 9:6** calls Jesus *Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace*.

"What is your name?" As I have travelled around the world, I have met many people with names which seem strange to me, but not strange to them or those around them, and not strange to God. I am not at all good at remembering names. I don't know why but sometimes I don't remember the name of someone I met yesterday, last month, last year, even many years ago (to those of you who know me, that is not an age related thing – I have always been like that). In my mother's family there were many people called Christine or Christina but all of them that I knew growing up were called by an abbreviation, for example there was Chrissie, or Tinie. I remember my grandmother telling me when I was very young that my name was Christine and I was not to let people shorten it to other versions. Yes, my name is Christine and my name is written on God's hand, He knows me by my name – isn't that wonderful?! The minister of one church I attended had a wonderful gift from God, he could remember everyone's name even if he was just given their name briefly as they shook hands at the door of the church.

Whatever your name (even if I can't recall it), remember that you are very special to God – so special that your name is written on His hand, He knows your name and He calls you by it. **Your name is special, you are very special to God.**

Father, God, thank you that you know me, that you know every person reading this reflection, that you know each person by their name and they are special to You. I pray that whatever situation each person finds themselves in today, that they will be reminded of how special they are to You and will be encouraged and their hope renewed.

Amen



Comfort for God's People - 1

Isaiah 40

1 Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

³ A voice of one calling:
"In the wilderness prepare
the way for the LORD;
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.

⁵ And the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

⁶ A voice says, "Cry out."
And I said, "What shall I cry?"

"All people are like grass,
and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall,
because the breath of the LORD blows on them.

Surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God endures forever."

⁹ You who bring good news to Zion,
go up on a high mountain.
You who bring good news to Jerusalem,
lift up your voice with a shout,

lift it up, do not be afraid;
say to the towns of Judah,
"Here is your God!"

¹⁰ See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,
and he rules with a mighty arm.

See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.

¹¹ He tends his flock like a shepherd:

He gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young.

**ADVENT 1****Comfort for God's People – 2***Isaiah 40*

¹² Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,
or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens?

Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket,
or weighed the mountains on the scales
and the hills in a balance?

¹³ Who can fathom the Spirit of the LORD,
or instruct the LORD as his counselor?

¹⁴ Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him,
and who taught him the right way?

Who was it that taught him knowledge,
or showed him the path of understanding?

¹⁵ Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket;
they are regarded as dust on the scales;
he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

¹⁶ Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires,
nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.

¹⁷ Before him all the nations are as nothing;
they are regarded by him as worthless
and less than nothing.

¹⁸ With whom, then, will you compare God?
To what image will you liken him?

¹⁹ As for an idol, a metalworker casts it,
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold
and fashions silver chains for it.

²⁰ A person too poor to present such an offering
selects wood that will not rot;
they look for a skilled worker
to set up an idol that will not topple.

²¹ Do you not know?
Have you not heard?

Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood since the earth was founded?

²² He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,
and its people are like grasshoppers.

He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,
and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

²³ He brings princes to naught
and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

²⁴ No sooner are they planted,
no sooner are they sown,
no sooner do they take root in the ground,
than he blows on them and they wither,
and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

²⁵ “To whom will you compare me?

Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.

²⁶ Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:
Who created all these?

He who brings out the starry host one by one
and calls forth each of them by name.
Because of his great power and mighty strength,
not one of them is missing.

²⁷ Why do you complain, Jacob?

Why do you say, Israel,

“My way is hidden from the LORD;
my cause is disregarded by my God”?

²⁸ Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.

²⁹ He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.

³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;

³¹ but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.



Diet sheet # 11 - Let Us encourage one another...

Preamble to the “Let us” Diet series.

Let’s talk about going on diet!

- Have you ever felt the need to go on a diet? There are multiple reasons for dieting, you need to loose a few kilos, as a spiritual discipline or even to change an eating habit.
- Namely slowing down & less activity because of age, disability or circumstances.
- That’s the physical aspect of life

What about our spiritual life?

- Have you got bored “doing” by doing the same routine every day?
- Have you listened to too many forwards from others, podcasts, prophetic words...
- Given your attention to different conspiracy theories?
- Have you lost a few spiritual kgs, put on unnecessary spiritual ideas?

The book of Hebrews has a “**Let-us**” diet!

Hebrews 10:24-25 AMP

“and let us consider [thoughtfully] how we may encourage one another to love and to do good deeds, not forsaking our meeting together [as believers for worship and instruction], as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more [faithfully] as you see the day [of Christ’s return] approaching.”

The focus has moved for me to others. The big question is:

- How can we find ways and means to help each other to love more and act in beneficial charitable ways?

By nature we as believers love gatherings because this is where we receive instruction, encouragement, motivation, interaction and purpose. It’s fun gathering together as the family of God.

- This is why meeting together is so important for us.
- As time draws nearer to the end, that means Jesus **could** return soon, we need to be here or there for each other.
- It’s can be called “touching base” with one another.
- This requires encouragement one to another.
- Visits when possible.
- Whatever we can do to keep the bond of fellowship alive.

let us consider [thoughtfully] how we may encourage one another

How can you make a difference in someone’s life today by being an encouragement?

Dan Izzett - Zimbabwe. Retired pastor. I was diagnosed with lepomatous leprosy in 1972. Served on TLMI board for eight years and on the Zimbabwe board for 15 years. I now serve on the ALM board and do advocacy for ALM and TLM. We have relocated to the UK to live with our children.



Diet sheet # 12 - Let Us throw off!

Hebrews 12:1-3 NIVUK “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, **let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles**. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, **so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**”

Time for a “spiritual spring clean”. The challenge is to become more agile, faster and more effective in our Christian life.

Hebrews 11 is the Faith chapter. This chapter records to mighty exploits that the saints of old kept pressing in by faith. They allowed **nothing** to slow them down.

Not even a no answer stopped them!

Hebrews 11:13, 39-40 NIVUK “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.

...These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”

The biggest hindrance to faith is **doubt!** They **never doubted!**

The next hindrance in this race of faith is **sin**.

- Doubt and sin are weights we carry that prevent spiritual growth.

Let us:

Press forward:

- Faithful people don't sit still in comfortable places.
- And they certainly don't go backward, reverting to a comfortable past.

With confidence:

- Faithful people are sure of better things to come.

It's always rewarding:

- There is every reason in place to have this sort of faith.

...we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses,

Hebrews 10:38-39 NIVUK “And, **But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back. But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.**”

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A chaplain in Zambia

I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.' (John 1:23)

He was the chaplain for the 200-person leprosarium and 250 bed hospital when we arrived in Zambia in 1968. We quickly got to know and respect him for the maturity that had developed over a lifetime of ministry. He would organise Sunday services, one in the hospital chapel, the other in the church attached to the leprosarium. As we were doing a round we would hear him doing weekday morning prayers in the next ward. He would be around when food rations were distributed to patients resident in the leprosarium - and be willing to relay complaints if there were any. He dedicated our firstborn; he buried our second child just a few days after he was born. He would be there when things went wrong, supporting bereaved families or staff themselves upset with an accidental death. On occasions they needed protection. He was there!

He was available as a guide and counsellor on what was appropriate behaviour for newly arrived staff. I spoke to him shortly after we arrived, confiding in him our anxiety as to how the people would accept us, coming as we did from apartheid South Africa. 'We do not judge you on where you come from,' he told me, 'It's who you are and what you do that matters. We will watch you,' he continued. I thought that a good principle to apply to all, especially when we were working for acceptance and respect for people with leprosy.

Most of the time his role was as a priest; he ministered pastorally to patients and staff. But there came a time which must surely have exercised his heart and mind to the limit. There was growing discontent with denominational leadership at national level. Awkward and uncomfortable tensions had arisen. He had received complaints from colleagues and he felt things needed to change. Things had to be made straight! Eventually the issue became headlines in the national press. He was identified as the source. Some labelled him as ambitious and 'anti-missionary', but he stood his ground. As a result the change and need for greater cultural sensitivity he had called for took place.

Not every prophet lives to see the results of their ministry. He did, even if his action led to a degree of alienation and loneliness. He must have felt he was in the wilderness.

Please Lord, grant wisdom and courage to those engaged in challenging activities and even leaders for the sake of the values of your kingdom.

Although spending much of his working life with The Salvation Army, **Dr Paul du Plessis** has been involved in a variety of honorary roles with The Leprosy Mission.



God Gives Good Gifts

There are seasons in our life when we are more discouraged than encouraged. It is inevitable that all of us will experience those moments, and it is often in the face of insurmountable grief or negative experiences that this happens.

But *Romans 15:5* reminds us that there are three things that God gives to those who believe in Jesus. **The first is that God gives endurance.** When we begin to grow tired of doing good things, or living our life for God, it is often because we are living with the wrong motivation.

True motivation comes from living for God, not for ourselves. It is God who gives us the endurance through the Spirit to make good choices and live for Him.

The second thing God gives us is encouragement. In seasons of discouragement when we feel let down by people, God gives us lasting encouragement. He reminds us that we are loved. He reminds us that we are being transformed. We don't need to strive for approval or acceptance because we're already sons and daughters of God.

The third thing is that we can pray for God to give us unity of mind toward each other. This means that we consider others in the way Jesus would consider them. Instead of seeing their flaws or mistakes, we see them as people loved and cared for by God. We should work towards unity with each other rather than division.

All three of these things are worthy of spending time in prayer, asking God for: **endurance, encouragement, and unity** with each other. If you're feeling tired and want to quit, ask God for the endurance to continue doing good for those around you.

If you're feeling discouraged and down, ask God for encouragement that only He can give. And above all, ask God for the same heart and mind of Jesus that brings us together in unity rather than division.



Surround yourself well

“These the leaders of David’s mighty men” 1 Chronicles 11.10

To succeed in any business, you need to surround yourself with the right people. Ask God to show them to you. Rehoboam should have listened to the advice of the small, wise and experienced circle of his father Solomon. But he preferred to listen to those who shared his opinion, which proved fatal. David, on the other hand, chose people who helped him grow. The Bible says: “These are the chiefs of the mighty men of David, who, with all Israel, helped him...that he might become king according to the word of the Lord concerning Israel.” Here are four important things:

- 1) David builds a solid inner circle in advance, well before being crowned.
- 2) He attracts people with varied gifts. He solicits them, rewards them, and does not let himself be impressed by those who have skills other than them. With these “valiant men” David feels ready for anything.
- 3) He cultivates loyalty, attracts people and shares their lives. In exchange, they are willing to risk their lives for him.
- 4) He delegates responsibilities based on skills. Because David is sure of his identity and his vocation, he is not afraid to entrust responsibilities to those around him. At first, some of his valiant men are misfits, but he transforms this motley group into a winning team (see 1Sa 22:1-2). David made those around him powerful, and in return, they made him strong. So here is your word of the day: you must seek to surround yourself well!

Prayer of the day:

Lord, help me find the right people who can surround me

BIEN S’ENTOURER

« Voici les chefs des vaillants hommes de David » 1 chroniques 11.10, nbs

Pour réussir dans une entreprise, il faut s'entourer des bonnes personnes et demander à Dieu de nous les montrer. Roboam aurait dû écouter les conseils du cercle restreint, sage et expérimenté de son père Salomon. Mais il a préféré écouter ceux qui partageaient son avis, ce qui s'est avéré fatal. David, quant à lui, a choisi des personnes qui l'ont aidé à grandir. La Bible dit : « Voici les chefs des vaillants hommes de David, ceux qui, avec tout Israël, lui prêtèrent main-forte [...] pour qu'il devienne roi selon la parole du Seigneur au sujet d'Israël ». Voici quatre choses importantes :

- 1) David se bâtit un cercle intime solide en amont, bien avant d'être couronné.
- 2) Il attire des personnes aux dons variés. Il les sollicite, les récompense, et ne se laisse pas impressionner par ceux qui ont d'autres compétences que lui. Avec ces « vaillants hommes » David se sent prêt à tout.
- 3) Il cultive la loyauté, attire les gens et partage leur vie. En échange, ceux-ci sont prêts à risquer leur vie pour lui.
- 4) Il délègue les responsabilités en fonction des aptitudes. Parce que David est sûr de son identité et de sa vocation, il n'a pas peur de confier des responsabilités à son entourage. Au début, certains de ses vaillants hommes sont des marginaux, mais il transforme ce groupe hétéroclite en une équipe qui gagne (voir 1S 22.1-2). David a rendu son entourage puissant, et en retour, celui-ci l'a rendu fort. Voici donc votre parole du jour : il faut chercher à bien s'entourer !

Prière du jour :

Seigneur, aide-moi à retrouver les bonnes personnes qui peuvent m'entourer

Reverend Elie FOFOLO - Born on August 5, 1964, son of a Baptist Pastor, both parents died. I am a pastor of vocation and formation, in 2001 I had my degree in Theology at the Protestant University in Congo (U.P.C). After working as a Pastor in the local Church of Kingabwa 1 from 2004 to 2011, I had a meeting with Angelika Piefer who headed the Coordination of the Mission against Leprosy in the Democratic Republic of Congo, from where I had this passion for people affected by Leprosy and I invited Angelika to come to World Leprosy Day in our church on Sunday 29/01/2012, in Kingabwa. This work led us to discover two girls from the same family with signs of leprosy, and their brother ended up being infected, but all three were treated and in good health. This sparked this passion to work as a volunteer in raising awareness, mobilization and the relationship with the local churches of the platform "Church of Christ in Congo" (E.C.C in acronym). - In July 2019, I obtained the Master in Psychotrauma, at the University of Kinshasa, at the Faculty of Medicine. Training that allows me to better listen to and accompany people who suffer trauma and stress for biopsychosocial care. - I am married to only one woman, Madame Espérance since 16/10/1988. From this union God gave us five children including two girls and three boys. Just like Abraham and Sarah, my wife and I, are willing to give up everything and go where the need for the Mission is felt. - Elie Fofolo is currently pastor at the local church of Masina 3, the 15th Congo Baptist Community in Kinshasa



The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

Luke 1,5 - 25

⁵In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. ⁶Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. ⁷But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

⁸Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, ⁹he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

¹¹Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. ¹⁴He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. ¹⁶He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

¹⁸Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

¹⁹The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. ²⁰And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

²¹Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple.

²²When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

²³When his time of service was completed, he returned home. ²⁴After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. ²⁵"The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."



The Birth of Jesus Foretold

Luke 1, 26- 38

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called^[b] the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail."

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.



Christian Eternity - Revealed in Resurrection – Part 2

In our obedience is our destiny

Man's destiny has been revealed in the resurrected Jesus. Death has been defeated. It no longer holds sway over the believer (1 Corinthians 15:55). Satan, the ruler of this world no longer controls us through his deceptions of possessions, position or power. He tried but failed to lure Jesus with these allurements when Jesus returned after spending 40 days in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11). We have an assured destiny. We are not aimless wanderers in our lives. We have a goal in life (Philippians 3:14).

"My home is in Heaven. I'm just traveling through this world" said Billy Graham. How true it is. Life in this world is transitory. When the body ceases to exist at death, the spirit reunites with God (Matthew 27:50, Acts 7: 59-60). Realization of this truth makes us not to crave for bodily desires. When the body fulfils the mission of God, unto the dust will return what is made from the dust and what is breathed into man by God (Spirit) will return unto Him.

Eternal life starts the day one is saved by accepting Jesus as the personal saviour. The spirit of man is dead, and the Spirit of God (Holy Spirit) is born in one's soul. Jesus said that He is the way, the truth and the life and whoever believes in Him will have everlasting life (John 14:6, John 11:25). So, in Jesus we have eternal life, an eternal relationship with God, His eternal presence (1 John 5:11, Romans 6:23).

Salvation moment is the start of my journey of eternal life. I can be at rest/peace in my soul; God is in charge of my life, from now on and in eternity. As one who God has redeemed to Himself, a Christian lives an eternal spiritual life in the physical body with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus speaks to us through the Holy Spirit, the Counsellor (John 16:14) to guide us through our life.

In this (eternal) life in the world, we experience the fullness of Christ in our soul by continually growing into His likeness. As the workmanship of God, we continue to be moulded by Him to reveal His will in and through us. After the physical death, our Spirit will be where Christ is. Its location changes from within the physical body to the heavenly realm. Body came from dust and it will return there. Body is perishable, spirit is eternal. Physical body is to do the good works in the world which God has planned for us (Ephesians 2:10). They are for His glory and edification of the believers.

The scriptures reveal that at Jesus' second coming, the believer would be raised in a glorified body unto the presence of Almighty God (John 14:2-3, 1 Corinthians 15:51-54). A Christian's eternal destination is in heaven in spirit and in a glorified body, through Jesus Christ. We grow into His likeness in this world and be raised in a glorified body to heaven at the appointed time. The final destination for a Christian is the presence of Almighty God, forever worshipping the Holy One.

Man's destiny is where it all started in the beginning, in fellowship with God in the Garden. Disobedience of Man broke his bond with God; obedience of Jesus has restored it. Our origin was in fellowship with God, our eternity will be in fellowship with God. From fellowship to fellowship the full circle comes true for the

believer. God has never stopped pursuing Man to return to His presence. That was the mission of Jesus Christ. This gives us hope for our destiny after physical life.

For a believer who has unwavering faith in the person of Jesus, the journey is defined, the destination is revealed. There is no ambiguity. To be on that journey is a personal choice. The reward for putting faith in the Son of God is eternal life (John 3:16). God has poured out His grace unto us through Jesus on the cross at Calvary. God's grace compels us to choose our destiny wisely in Christ and experience the joy of eternal life in His presence here (now) and in heaven (later on).

In our obedience is our destiny!

In gratitude for His grace

Dr PLN Raju - Former Director (Resource Mobilization) The Leprosy Mission Trust India New Delhi



What kind of Saviour do you want?

In you, LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness.

²Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me.

³Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me. Psalm 31¹⁻³

When I taught in India the main school holidays ran from November to early February.

One holiday a group of us went travelling around southern India.

We had stopped over, for a few days, in Madras (Chennai).

The morning before we moved on, we were on the beach at Mahabalipuram, south of the city.

The walk along the beach was noisy, as huge breakers rolling in from the Bay of Bengal, crashed on the shore.

Two young men came toward us, one with his hand on the shoulder of the other.

They stopped and one asked why we weren't swimming.

We looked at the waves and said it was far too rough.

"You should swim. Have no fear. My friend here is the number one lifeguard. He will save you."

At which point we turned and looked at the friend who looked back with milky eyes.

A blind saviour!

Seeing the bewilderment on our faces, the friend added,

"No worries, he has first class hearing also."

We all want a saviour who hears our cries for help when life is physically threatened.

But throughout life, I want a saviour who hears my barely audible whispers, my unspoken doubts, my shouts of praise, my cries of frustration, my groans of pain, my gasps of exasperation, my whimper of loneliness, my gasps of awe and amazement.

A saviour who hears my voice whatever the time, the place or the circumstance.

And a saviour who hears all who call his name.

David wrote of such a Saviour.

I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy.

² Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.

³ The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came over me; I was overcome by distress and sorrow.

⁴ Then I called on the name of the LORD: "LORD, save me!"

The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion.

⁶ The LORD protects the unwary; when I was brought low, he saved me.

Psalm 116¹⁻⁴

In Jesus we have the complete Saviour

A Saviour who not only hears and knows our voice but a Saviour who sees us as we truly are, who understands us fully, who knows us inside out, who's promise is to be with us always, who guides us, who teaches us.

A Saviour who knows what it is like to live in our skin.

And perhaps most importantly a Saviour who has promised,

"I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." John 14³

John Twynam – Perkins - Formerly chair of TLM Scotland



A chaplain in south-east London

'In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.' (John 16:33)

She'd heard I was joining the staff of the hospice. A mutual friend had told her and he had warned me that she would be looking for support. She was. Within days and more than once she shared with me that she and all in the chaplaincy department were under threat. She herself was ordained; she was married to an Anglican vicar, but she had chosen to be a chaplain.

'Please do what you can to help us save the status of the department,' she pleaded as she described the roles that ranged from simple bedside listening to administration of the sacrament of 'last rites' when the end seemed imminent.

And she was not the only one. Also not long after my arrival the founder of the hospice and indeed of the modern palliative care movement invited me to share lunch with her. The medical director joined us. Conversation was cordial but it was obvious she wanted to be sure of one thing.

'You've not come here to try and get people converted before they die, have you?' she asked.

I assured her that was not my purpose, and was not my intention. I was here because I was a Christian, not to make others Christian. 'But if it comes up as a natural part of conversation I'm willing to share my faith,' I told her. She seemed satisfied. But then she continued:

'We need people like you here.'

I was surprised and somewhat taken aback as she expressed her concerns. Christian principles had undergirded her efforts in founding the hospice. Now she saw those being eroded as secular forces were gaining the upper hand in decisions. I assured her I would do what I could.

But the battle, if that's what it was, was lost with closure of the chapel and with incorporation of the chaplaincy department into Psycho-social Services.

Disregard, side-lining, contempt, opposition and even hostility to Christian faith are common in Britain today. But that does not mean it has lost out. The church's mission is often more effective in a situation of opposition. It thrives on powerlessness.

Please Lord, give us a clear vision of your purposes for us even when facing opposition.

Although spending much of his working life with The Salvation Army, **Dr Paul du Plessis** has been involved in a variety of honorary roles with TLM.



'Expecting and seeing God's grace'

Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!" Acts 12:13-14

Poor Rhoda! Sent to answer the door in the threatening climate under which Christians gathered secretly, she must have gone fearfully. Possibly it was an outer door to a house-compound, so perhaps she peeped round the corner of the building. She was so surprised by what she saw that her emotions overwhelmed her; she didn't open the door but rushed back in hysterical joy, only to be told *"You're out of your mind"* (v.15). Maybe it was said in a dismissive, demeaning way, 'she's only a servant girl; she's showing off, don't listen'.

But Rhoda kept insisting (thank God!) and Peter kept banging. Didn't they expect an answer to their prayers? What a blessing she wasn't silenced while Peter waited in danger of re-arrest any second.

I wonder how often I, perhaps you, have received some blessing, some answer to prayer, without being *"overjoyed"* like Rhoda, without pausing to consider that God has answered, or to be profoundly grateful and give Him the glory. All too readily we attribute something to more earthly causes: medication, surgery, or 'nature', -or luck! I'm often reminded of this when I remember seeing leprosy surgery and supporting therapies restoring function in a paralysed eyelid or a powerless hand. Not only has God shared with medical science the wonder of physiology, but the physical body He made (Psalm 139:13-16a) can heal its wounds; the brain can re-learn the changed physical function to complete the healing. We must not deny the God-given and the miraculous, even when we know how things work and we can help them on the way!

Back to Rhoda and the prayer meeting! Did they actually pray for Peter's release? Acts 12 doesn't say so, but may we assume? If so, did they *expect* God's answer to their prayer? Should we? The story goes of a drought-stricken community gathering to pray for rain; one child brought an umbrella.

The matter of answered and unanswered (or *differently* answered) prayer is deep and mysterious. We cannot assume God's 'automatic' answer, as if He were a 'slot machine' (as 'prosperity theology' might suggest: 'put this in and you'll get this out'). We may have been saddened when sincere prayers for something that felt so 'right' weren't answered as we hoped. We are troubled by verses like Matthew 21:22, James 1:6 and 4:3, and ask, -is it *my* fault when prayer is 'unanswered'? Did I lack faith? But equally have we been *"overjoyed"* like Rhoda at an unexpected answer? Those are topics for another day!

What I learn from Rhoda and the group praying in Acts 12, is that there are many examples of answered prayer, -even if unexpected; and all around us are the gifts and works of God from which we constantly benefit, but may not attribute to Him. Am I *"overwhelmed"* with God's provision; and if I *"exclaim"* it, as Rhoda did, do I seem *"out of my mind"* (vv.14, 15)? When Rhoda saw the answer to their prayers she

struggled to believe what her eyes were telling her, and the others struggled to believe that what she was saying could be true. Do I all-too-easily *not* expect and *not* give credit where it is due?

Father God, today, open the eyes of my heart to see you at work all around me.

God bless,

David Beazley began involvement with The Leprosy Mission in 1992 when he came as Minister to a Church near the International Office in Brentford. He acted as an informal 'chaplain' to the Office, and served on the International General Council for some years. At the same time he became a member of TLM England and Wales Board, serving as Chairman for six years and on various committees. He chaired the Spiritual Ministry MAWG, and is also able to serve TLMI by leading retreat days and other such things as opportunity allows. He has recently retired from the pastorate but continues as a volunteer speaker for TLM



Peace only to those whom God's favor rest!

*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, **and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests.**" Luke 2:13 -14 (NIV)*

At this season of Advent, we are reminded of one of God's promises to His people on earth - His peace. This peace of God, celebrated by the angel at the birth of Jesus was God's initiative of coming to the world to reconcile us to Himself.

The birth of Jesus and his death brought this promise of peace into fruition in the life of every believer. *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Rom:5:1 (NIV).* The peace of God is exclusive. It is for those who believe in Christ Jesus and are justified by faith. It is the peace that came on those 'on whom God's favour rest' as proclaimed by the Angel when Christ was born.

As we all know, our present world is going through war, there are crisis and insecurity in almost every region/continent (example, is the ongoing war in Ukraine, Palestine, and Israel), even where there is no war, there have been disasters and all manner of chaos, because the world has ignored the Prince of peace, unfortunately every effort made by the world system to seek and pursue peace has led into more war which is a sign that human beings have no capacity within themselves to seek and maintain peace.

It is in the midst of all these situations of chaos that Christ said *'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled. John 14:27 (NIV). I have told you these things, so that in me you will have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart (be courageous)! I have overcome the world John 16:33 (NIV).*

The peace that Jesus promised is not defined as the absence of war, but it is the peace that surpasses human understanding (Phil 4:7). It is the calmness of heart in the midst of challenges, the reassurance of God's faithfulness to grant us victory by faith even when situations around us or the future seem uncertain. It is the peace that makes Jesus sleep in the boat when the storm is buffeting. The peace that gives us assurance that everything is working for the good of those who love God.

At this season of advent, may that peace of God guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The One who calls you is faithful and he will do it. 1 Thess 5:23*

And the God of peace be with us all!

Amen!



Mary Visits Elizabeth

Luke 1, 39 - 45

³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"



Mary's Song

Luke 1,46 - 56

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me—

holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him,

from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;

he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones

but has lifted up the humble.

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things

but has sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,

remembering to be merciful

⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever,

just as he promised our ancestors.”

⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.



The gift of a lifetime

In the early 1980s, Frank and Maureen Wentzel joined the Leprosy Mission Southern Africa, where they threw themselves into establishing a leprosy outreach programme in what was then the province of Natal.

Their legendary commitment to their work rapidly transformed the lives of many neglected patients. In addition to her nursing work, Maureen delighted in sewing and was renowned for equipping patients with all manner of assistive devices. [Proverbs 31:10-31]

Most of their patients were unemployed, and so Maureen turned her hand to teaching patients skills that would help them earn a living. One of those people was Qhelile Z.

A few weeks ago, I received a report from Elena, who runs the leprosy clinics in KwaZulu Natal, to say that she had been to visit Qhelile. Qhelile is very busy with her sewing, making school uniforms for the children in her community who will be starting school in January 2024 [the South African school year runs from January to December]. Elena gave her fabric off-cuts which Qhelile says she can use. She asked Elena to look for fabric that she needs to make more school uniforms.

Elena says:

“The course Maureen sent her on many years ago really gave her a purpose in her life. In a community with a lot of poverty and hopelessness she is really a shining light of self-dependence. She also has a great concern for other people with leprosy. She is always encouraging her fellow patients and motivates them to comply with their treatment.”

As we head towards Christmas, I am sure many of us are thinking of last-minute gifts for friends and family. As we do so, can we think of gifts that we can give to the people around us that will bless them for years to come?

In the case of Qhelile, the investment that Maureen made in her is producing good fruit, forty years later, very much in the spirit of Acts 18:1-4. That’s the sort of gift I would love to give to someone.

We get a glimpse of this idea in Proverbs 22:6:

“Train up a child in the way he should go: And when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

We’re all children of God, and as such, never too old to receive [or give] a character-shaping gift that will enrich our lives and the lives of people around us.

May the Lord richly bless you and those you love this Advent season and throughout 2024.

Peter Laubscher - Country Leader, Southern Africa. Peter and Elizabeth Laubscher have worked with the Leprosy Mission since 1981. They are blessed with three children. Peter cruises the waters of False Bay when he’s not trying to polish scratches out of telescope mirrors.

My Knees

Lord I fall on my knees
It's my strongest position in life
It's my closest position to Your heart
It's where I need to be

On my knees my heart
bows before You
On my knees I give You
honour and glory
On my knees You become
the focus of my life

Down on my knees
I learn to stand
Down on my knees
I learn to hear Your voice
Down on my knees there is peace,
strength and joy

DI



A chaplain in Kent

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5:2)

Hospice doctors get a view of all kinds of people, and all kinds of chaplains in the course of a day - some good, some not so good, and some almost perfect. They can pick up opinions from distressed patients. There was the rabbi who insisted on doing an anatomical inspection on a man who'd not been a practising Jew but claimed the funeral rites of his heritage. And the pastor who pestered a patient to confess her sin in order to be healed.

But there are also opinions coming from a heart of gratitude. Like the patient who overheard a catholic priest visiting one of his parishioners in the next bed and beckoned him to see him. As a result he experienced a peaceful end. He had returned to his childhood faith.

But there was also the part-time chaplain who came in to spend time with patients in the day hospice, just chatting or sharing a table game and then conducting the weekly communion service in the room set aside as a chapel. She'd go from bed to bed, not sermonising, usually just greeting, but sometimes lingering. She seemed to know. And there was always time for coffee in the staff room.

'I believe in constructive loitering,' she once told me.

The staff loved her. She helped them by listening, often not saying much.

And the doctors seemed to know when to call for her. They wondered whether she might help the couple facing a difficult decision about withdrawing a ventilator to support difficult breathing in motor neurone disease. The patient wanted it off, knowing he would die. The wife wanted it kept on. The doctors were uncertain. The chaplain dropped in for a routine visit. Nobody knows how the conversation progressed or how she managed to get them to be of one mind. But she left them in contented agreement. The ventilator remained, though the patient died a week later - at peace.

Here was my ideal chaplain: modest and unassuming, gentle and approachable, truthful and confidential. There was a presence about her; her demeanour conveyed it. She had a heart of compassion. One wonders where it came from. I'm inclined to say that if I need a chaplain near the end of my time, I'd love it if she were around.

Thank you, Lord, for the gifts of the Spirit that you give to those who ask.

October 2023

Although spending much of his working life with The Salvation Army, **Dr Paul du Plessis** has been involved in a variety of honorary roles with TLM.



The Timelessness of Christmas

I was wondering what I could write about this Christmas. I was watching some program on TV where someone remarked that Christmas Trees were part of the timeless tradition of Christmas. That got me thinking about what really is timeless about Christmas – the reminders of the birth of our Saviour. We all have different traditions depending on where we live, our family history and situation. I have listened to discussions and have been consulted on whether the Christmas Tree should have a star or an angel at the top? Somehow, I feel that the real story and message of Christmas is easily lost in the modern rush and tumble of shopping, or spending, or parties that seem to put so much pressure on families. Christmas shopping and preparations seem to start so early now – I was in London at the end of September and after admiring the lovely flowers in the park, I went to meet a friend for coffee and there were Christmas trees all decorated and twinkling, Christmas food to be ordered or bought, etc.

When we think of the events of that first Christmas, some people did have a long time to prepare – Mary, Joseph, even the wise men. Others were taken by surprise – the shepherds, even Herod. Recently I came across a retelling of the Christmas story – I am not sure where I read it or who wrote it, but it certainly brings Christmas to us.

*“Those wise men were led to follow the star,
Bringing gifts of great meaning, they came from afar:
To greet the Messiah.*

*The innkeeper was busy, his rooms all full,
Still, he has compassion to provide some shelter:
To greet the Messiah.*

*The shepherds kept watch in the darkness and cold,
But the news has them running, leaving the sheep in the fold:
To greet the Messiah.*

*Angels descended from the heavens above,
To sing the great chorus of God’s gift of love:
To greet the Messiah.*

*Both Mary and Joseph were quick to obey,
The call from God’s angel to walk God’s new way:
To greet the Messiah.*

*Each group was present to give God the glory,
They were knit together to form one great story:
To greet the Messiah.*

*His story, a tale which we still celebrate,
And He calls you to join Him before it’s too late:
To greet the Messiah!*

We need to celebrate this Christmas wherever we are, whatever our plans, we need to find our own way
To greet the Messiah!

Mary gave Jesus the gift of His humanity – fully human and fully God.

God bless you all as you celebrate and as greet the Messiah this Christmas



The role of shepherds in the birth of Jesus

Luke 2nd (8-20)

Out of the four Gospels, only one Gospel **Luke** tells us about the role of Shepherds during the birth of Jesus. These verses give the full details of their role. There are no clear and definite prophecies in the Old Testament regarding their role in the time of birth of Jesus Christ.

As per the culture and traditions during those days in the land of Palestine, the flocks of sheep were kept out in the fields by night and the shepherds used to take care of them.

The question comes to our mind why God chose to give the good news of the birth of Jesus first to the Shepherds. To understand the very purpose of God, we have to understand some ideas about the shepherds of that land.

- a. Shepherds were very simple people with no educational and special skills background.
 - b. They are very hard workers and they perform their duties very carefully and sincerely.
 - c. Mostly they are of low income groups and hold low positions in their own society.
- Shepherds were first to receive the good news about the birth of Jesus. They were very faithful and sincere to their work. They were seriously and carefully watching the flocks of their sheep in the cold winter night.

Jesus came to this world for the simple and ordinary people. Therefore it looks like God wanted to give the good news of the birth of Jesus to people who were simple, ordinary but honest and hardworking.

Later we see in the Gospels Jesus gives many illustrations and examples in His teachings of shepherd and sheep. Two important sayings....I am the Good Shepherd and later, He tells Peter in John, Feed and take care of my sheep.

The angel gave the full details of Jesus' birth in the message to shepherds. Let recollects what happened.....

- They were frightened as Angel appeared suddenly.
- They listened very carefully to the message of Angle.
- They all believed what was told to them by the angel. There was no doubt, no disagreement on this message among them.
- They took immediate action and started their journey to Bethlehem to see baby Jesus.
- They were the first to witness and worship Baby Jesus.
- They rejoiced seeing Baby Jesus.
- They returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.
- We are sure that they had shared the good news of Jesus' birth with others on their return journey.

Some things to learn from Shepherds as we keep reading this passage during Christmas time.

- a. **Listening carefully:** Like shepherds, we must also listen very carefully to the word and message of God. They listen to each thing that the angel told them. We must also pay attention to what God is telling us.
- b. **Believing in the message:** All of them believed in the entire message given by the Angle. They had no doubts, no arguments on this message. We must also believe completely in every word of the message of God. We must not have any doubts and arguments on the message of God. We must also not add our own opinion and our own views on the word of God.
- c. **They at once took the action:** They did not waste time and at once started their journey to reach Bethlehem to see the baby Jesus. We must also take action on what God tells us to do. Shepherds decided

to go to Bethlehem as soon as the Angels left them. They did not count their profit or loss to visit Bethlehem to see the baby Jesus. They all agreed to their one decision to go, there were no discussions or arguments about this. We must also not waste our time to calculate our loss or profit to follow Christ, we must also follow Christ as soon as we receive the message from God.

d. **The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God** for all that they had seen as it was good to them: We all must glorify and praise God for all he has done in our lives

Finally let us also meditate on this Christmas time on the last part of the message of Angels (verse 14)....." **and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased "**.

We all want peace in our lives and we do many things so that we have peace in our life. Sometimes we have all the riches and pleasures of the world with us but we do not have peace in our lives. It becomes important that we must check our lifestyle. **Am I living a life as per God's Will and His Plan? Am I following the commands of Christ in my life?**

Probably we are pleasing ourselves only and not following His commands, therefore we have no peace in our lives.

Let us pray to God that in this Christmas we receive peace in our lives by following His commands in our daily lives. We must make every effort to please God by our actions.

Pradeep & Sarah Failbus - Worked for 39 years and 29 years with TLM(most at Anandaban,Nepal) Now retired and settled at: Kathgodam, District Nainital Uttarakhand, India



The Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah - 1

Matthew 1,1-6

This is the genealogy¹ of Jesus the Messiah² the son of David, the son of Abraham:

- ²Abraham was the father of Isaac,
Isaac the father of Jacob,
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,
- ³Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,
Perez the father of Hezron,
Hezron the father of Ram,
- ⁴Ram the father of Amminadab,
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
Nahshon the father of Salmon,
- ⁵Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,
Obed the father of Jesse,
- ⁶and Jesse the father of King David.



The Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah - 2

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,

⁷Solomon the father of Rehoboam,
Rehoboam the father of Abijah,
Abijah the father of Asa,

⁸Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,
Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,
Jehoram the father of Uzziah,

⁹Uzziah the father of Jotham,
Jotham the father of Ahaz,
Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,

¹⁰Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,
Manasseh the father of Amon,
Amon the father of Josiah,

¹¹and Josiah the father of Jeconiah[Ⓢ] and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

¹²After the exile to Babylon:

Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,
Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

¹³Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,
Abihud the father of Eliakim,
Eliakim the father of Azor,

¹⁴Azor the father of Zadok,
Zadok the father of Akim,
Akim the father of Elihud,

¹⁵Elihud the father of Eleazar,
Eleazar the father of Matthan,
Matthan the father of Jacob,

¹⁶and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

¹⁷Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.



The Birth of Jesus

Luke 2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while^[a] Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.



The Word Became Flesh

John 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵ (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.



Family likeness

'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father... Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me'... John 14: 9 and 11 (New International Version)

One of the many stories surrounding school nativity plays is the one in which the small shepherds, in dressing gowns and tea towels, and leading sheep covered in hearth rugs, stumble onto the stage to kneel around the baby Jesus.

The shepherds, encouraged by their teacher in rehearsal to use their own words to act out the story, are quiet for a moment. They shuffle and look at each other.

Then they look at the baby. One speaks. "Oh! He does look like his dad," he says.

A phrase he'd heard his mother say as she admired a neighbour's new baby. The audience smiled, but behind the fun and the giggles there was a real truth.

Jesus did look like his dad.

His whole life, his words and actions, were meant to show us what God was like.

To tell us that God isn't way above the clouds in some divine shopping centre, which is as near to heaven as some of us can imagine, but is down here on earth with us, waiting to enter our lives.

Looking at Jesus we can learn a lot about love and forgiveness, and a complete commitment to other people. And when we change the looking at to following, he offers us the strength to live more positively and become more 'like his dad'.

Extract from Slower than Butterflies, first published 1997.

Eddie Askew (1927-2007) devoted half a century to leprosy and its consequences. In 1950 he and his wife Barbara set sail for India. Eddie's first placement was in Purulia, West Bengal. In 1965 Eddie took up the post of executive secretary at TLM's office in London. His first overseas visit in this new role was to Ethiopia, where he learned of plans to set up a leprosy training centre that would benefit patients and medics throughout Africa. He offered to become a founding member and signed TLM up to support what was to become ALERT (All Africa Leprosy and Rehabilitation Training Centre). The following year, the organisation now known as the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations (ILEP) was set up. In 1974 Eddie became general director of TLM. He was keen to develop TLM's work elsewhere, and took a team into the closed land of Bhutan in response to a request from its government. - Inspired by his travels and his Christian faith, Eddie found an outlet for his creativity in painting and poetry. He retired in 1987. From 1998 until his death he was TLM- vice-president, and in 2000 he was awarded an OBE. (Fiona Spence)



Weighty words from James' epistle

Martin Luther, the champion of Romans, Galatians, etc., assessed this letter as 'straw' in comparison. Take a few minutes now, to chew on some of James' choice insights:

James 1:12- "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him."

James 1:17b- "...let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger."

James 1:22- "But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

James 2:26- "For as the body apart from the Spirit is dead,
so also faith apart from works is dead."

James 3:18- "And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

James 4:5b- "God yearns jealously over the spirit that He has made to dwell in us."

James 4:6b- "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

James 4:8a- "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you."

James 4:10- "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you."

James 4:17- "Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."

James 5:12- "...do not swear...but let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no',
so that you may not fall under condemnation."

James 5:16- "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another,
that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous person has great power."

James 5:20- "...whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering
will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." -Amen.



Invitation and Warning

Revelation 22

¹² “Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

¹⁴ “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. ¹⁵ Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

¹⁶ “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you^{pl} this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.”

¹⁷ The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

¹⁸ I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. ¹⁹ And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.

²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

²¹ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.



Psalm 45

For the director of music. To the tune of "Lilies." Of the Sons of Korah. A maskil. A wedding song.

- ¹ My heart is stirred by a noble theme
as I recite my verses for the king;
my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.
- ² You are the most excellent of men
and your lips have been anointed with grace,
since God has blessed you forever.
- ³ Gird your sword on your side, you mighty one;
clothe yourself with splendor and majesty.
- ⁴ In your majesty ride forth victoriously
in the cause of truth, humility and justice;
let your right hand achieve awesome deeds.
- ⁵ Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's enemies;
let the nations fall beneath your feet.
- ⁶ Your throne, O God,^[c] will last for ever and ever;
a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.
- ⁷ You love righteousness and hate wickedness;
therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions
by anointing you with the oil of joy.
- ⁸ All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia;
from palaces adorned with ivory
the music of the strings makes you glad.
- ⁹ Daughters of kings are among your honored women;
at your right hand is the royal bride in gold of Ophir.
- ¹⁰ Listen, daughter, and pay careful attention:
Forget your people and your father's house.
- ¹¹ Let the king be enthralled by your beauty;
honor him, for he is your lord.
- ¹² The city of Tyre will come with a gift,
people of wealth will seek your favor.
- ¹³ All glorious is the princess within her chamber;
her gown is interwoven with gold.
- ¹⁴ In embroidered garments she is led to the king;
her virgin companions follow her—
those brought to be with her.
- ¹⁵ Led in with joy and gladness,
they enter the palace of the king.
- ¹⁶ Your sons will take the place of your fathers;
you will make them princes throughout the land.
- ¹⁷ I will perpetuate your memory through all generations;
therefore the nations will praise you for ever and ever.



Psalm 46

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. According to alamothe. A song.

¹ God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.

² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,

³ though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.

⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.

⁵ God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.

⁶ Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.

⁷ The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

⁸ Come and see what the LORD has done,
the desolations he has brought on the earth.

⁹ He makes wars cease
to the ends of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.

¹⁰ He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."

¹¹ The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.



A new year – with the same Lord!

Psalm 90

A prayer of Moses the man of God.

- ¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling place
throughout all generations.
- ² Before the mountains were born
or you brought forth the whole world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
- ³ You turn people back to dust,
saying, “Return to dust, you mortals.”
- ⁴ A thousand years in your sight
are like a day that has just gone by,
or like a watch in the night.
- ⁵ Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death—
they are like the new grass of the morning:
- ⁶ In the morning it springs up new,
but by evening it is dry and withered.
- ⁷ We are consumed by your anger
and terrified by your indignation.
- ⁸ You have set our iniquities before you,
our secret sins in the light of your presence.
- ⁹ All our days pass away under your wrath;
we finish our years with a moan.
- ¹⁰ Our days may come to seventy years,
or eighty, if our strength endures;
yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow,
for they quickly pass, and we fly away.
- ¹¹ If only we knew the power of your anger!
Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due.
- ¹² Teach us to number our days,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
- ¹³ Relent, LORD! How long will it be?
Have compassion on your servants.
- ¹⁴ Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,
that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.
- ¹⁵ Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,
for as many years as we have seen trouble.

¹⁶ May your deeds be shown to your servants,
your splendor to their children.

¹⁷ May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us;
establish the work of our hands for us—
yes, establish the work of our hands.

Blessed new year, TLM!

Authors in ABC Order**Country****Textuaries in Canonical Order**

| | | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Bunmi Oluloto</i> | <i>15 December</i> | <i>Niger/Nigeria</i> | 1 Chron 11,10 | 8 December |
| <i>Christine Osman</i> | <i>1, 21 December</i> | <i>Scotland</i> | Psalm 31,1-3 | 12 December |
| <i>Dan Izzett</i> | <i>4-5, 19 December</i> | <i>Zimbabwe/UK</i> | Psalm 45 | 30 December |
| <i>David Beazley</i> | <i>14 December</i> | <i>UK</i> | Psalm 46 | 31 December |
| <i>Eddie Askew</i> | <i>27 December</i> | <i>UK</i> | Psalm 90 | 1 January |
| <i>Élie Fofolo</i> | <i>8 December</i> | <i>DR Congo</i> | Proverbs 22,6 | 18 December |
| <i>Isaiah, prophet</i> | <i>2, 3 December</i> | <i>Israel</i> | Isaiah 9,6 | 1 December |
| <i>John Twynam-Perkins</i> | <i>9 December</i> | <i>Scotland</i> | Isaiah 40 | 2, 3 December |
| <i>Luke, evangelist</i> | <i>9,10, 16, 17 December</i> | <i>Israel</i> | Matthew 1,1-6 | 23 December |
| <i>Matthew, evangelist</i> | <i>23, 24 December</i> | <i>Israel</i> | Matthew 1,7-17 | 24 December |
| <i>Otto Kingsley</i> | <i>28 December</i> | <i>Southern Africa</i> | Luke 1,26-38 | 10 December |
| <i>Paul du Plessis Dr</i> | <i>6, 13, 20 December</i> | <i>UK</i> | Luke 1, 39-45 | 16 December |
| <i>Peter Laubscher</i> | <i>18 December</i> | <i>Southern Africa</i> | Luke 1,46-56 | 17 December |
| <i>Pradeep and Sarah Failbus</i> | <i>22 December</i> | <i>India</i> | Luke 2,1-20 | 22, 25 December |
| <i>Raju PLN Dr</i> | <i>11 December</i> | <i>India</i> | Luke 2, 13-14 | 15 December |
| <i>Sons of Korah</i> | <i>30, 31 December</i> | <i>Israel</i> | John 1,1-5 | 26 December |
| | | | John 1,23 | 6 December |
| | | | John 14,9 and 11 | 27 December |
| | | | John 16, 33 | 13 December |
| | | | Acts 12,13-14 | 14 December |
| | | | Romans 15,5 | 7 December |
| | | | Galatians 5,2 | 20 December |
| | | | Hebrews 12,1-3 | 5 December |
| | | | Hebrews 12,24-25 | 4 December |
| | | | Revelation 22, 12-21 | 29 December |