

RESPONDING TO  
**HIS COMING**



**MCG**  
**Study Guide**  
**Advent 2018**  
**November 28<sup>th</sup> – December 25th**

**Wednesday November 28<sup>th</sup>** - The reign of Jesus

**Reading** Revelation 12:1 – 6

*“...a son... who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.”*

I would imagine that for many people, their first impression of Jesus, especially this time of year, is that He is an innocent baby. Perhaps most people simply think of Jesus as being a nice man, but how many would actually describe Him as a king? Royal, noble, stately, ruling?

On the game show *Family Feud*, hosted by Steve Harvey, contestants are asked to guess how 100 people responded to various survey questions. On a 2012 episode, a contestant had to provide the top answers to the following survey question: "When someone mentions 'the King,' to whom might he or she be referring?"

The number one answer to this question, with 81 respondents, was... Elvis Presley. "God" or "Jesus" took home the number 2 position with 7 answers. Positions 3 and 4 were Martin Luther King Jr. and Burger King.

It's good to know that Jesus was on the board but what is meant when people say Jesus is king? When we talk about Jesus ruling, what is it we are talking about? Is He reigning over the disasters on our globe? Is He reigning over the violence in our streets? What are we talking about when we say that Jesus rules?

Essentially when we say that Jesus reigns we are referring to how, *ultimately*, He will put all things back together - that no plan or scheme of humanity will ultimately thwart His work to redeem all of creation back to Himself.

Imagine a renovation project with a foreman. At first it seems that chaos is reigning, the house is a mess. Rather than everything being put together things are being torn apart. Workers are running from here to there and it seems that with every wall that needs to come down a new problem is discovered. Does this mean that the foreman is not doing his job? No. Ultimately the renovation will be completed. The chaos is part

of the process. The unexpected problems may slow the work, but it will not hinder the project.

So too, Jesus is reigning in our world. The chaos, the mess the problems are all part of the process and in the end all things will be put back together, reconciled to God!

### **Meditation/Application/Reflection**

Are there messes in our world or your life which you are waiting for Jesus to make new? Take some time to bring them to Jesus in prayer.

The word “advent” has to do with waiting. Just as the world waited for the Messiah to come to the world, so too we wait for Him to return a second time, to rule. What kind of posture, what attitude and way of living is appropriate as we wait?

### **Optional Reading Plan**

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 1:21- 34

1 Corinthians 2

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 74

Joshua 6-7

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

### **Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Pray for the church banquet & for the Kids presentation on Sunday; for those who will be visiting with us

## **Thursday November 29<sup>th</sup> - Satan's mission**

### **Reading Revelation 12:7 – 12**

*"...Satan, who leads the whole world astray."*

Satan's mission is to move humanity farther and farther from God! He does not care that you have prayed a prayer and given your life to God. He wants you to stray. It does not help that people are often compared to sheep in the Bible, as sheep have a determined tendency to stray.

This is why sheep have shepherds, because it is the nature of sheep to stray and get in harm's way, whether that be from hungry wolves or steep canyons. For centuries, shepherds have used various methods - from staff to dog - to keep sheep from straying from the safety of their care.

In recent times, shepherds have turned to other, more sophisticated methods. One method is a metal, hoof-proof grid that is built into the ground around the sheep's territory. The animals cannot walk over the grid, which is eight feet wide. This works well in keeping sheep in the protection of the pen.

Early in 2006, shepherds in Yorkshire, England, found that they had a group of sheep to care for that were not only stubbornly prone to stray, but also crafty. One of the sheep figured out a way to transgress the boundaries: it laid down and rolled over the grid. The other sheep in the herd followed the example of the stray leader, and soon the sheep had spread over the countryside and found their way to neighbourhood gardens, where they ate the food and flowers of local residents.

The shepherds eventually gathered up the troublesome sheep and returned them to their pen but again they escaped and got into trouble. And again. While the special knowledge of escape of this entire herd of "black" sheep may have seemed like an exciting adventure, it actually

placed the animals into harm's way, as several sheep wandered onto nearby roads, or were accosted by local residents' dogs.<sup>1</sup>

Satan uses our straying tendency to his advantage. If we are wise we will make it our habit to stay as close to the shepherd as possible and curb the curiosity that makes us prone to wander.

### **Meditation/Application/Reflection**

Are you finding yourself prone to wander or tempted to stray? Take time to confess your weakness and vulnerability to God, asking Him for grace.

Why do you think that Satan would have you stray from God?

### **Optional Reading Plan**

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 1:35-45

1 Corinthians 3

Read through the Old

Testament in a year:

Psalm 75

Joshua 8-9

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

### **Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

**Join us tonight for Prayer Gathering Online ([freeconference.com](http://freeconference.com))**

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<sup>1</sup> Jason Bellows, "The Great Sheep Escape," BBC Online (1-30-06),

**Friday November 30<sup>th</sup>** - Nature - our ally

**Reading** Revelation 12:13 – 17

*“But the earth helped the woman...”*

When we talk about the Kingdom of God we are talking about more than just the church. Within God’s Kingdom are allies with whom the church is in alliance to overcome the darkness of our age; angelic beings as well as nature itself. Nature aids humanity. It nourishes us and it points people to God.

In his book, *Star Struck: seeing the creator in wonders of our cosmos*, David Bradstreet writes:

When the summer Sun is beating down, do you ever wish you could store some of that heat in a jar until wintertime? Perhaps that's one of the reasons God created the oceans, which cover three-fourths of the surface of our planet at an average depth of more than two miles. The oceans help regulate our planet's temperatures, turning dramatic highs and lows into averages that are just right for us.

Like oxygen, water is essential to life, and while almost every other planet we've studied lacks flowing water. Our world is awash in the stuff, some 352,670,000,000,000,000 gallons, according to the National Ocean Service.

Like convection - the process God uses to circulate our air and keep it fresh - our planet's water cycle constantly circulates water, which evaporates from the ocean, rains down on the land, and then flows back to the ocean to do it all over again.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, we are told that a garbage truck's worth of plastic enters the world's oceans every minute of every day. All told, humanity dumped up to 14 million tons of plastic pollution into the seas, and bits of it can

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<sup>2</sup> David Hart Bradstreet, *Star Struck* (Zondervan, 2016), page 51

be found from the water's surface to its most extreme depths. You wouldn't know it looking over the side of a ship, since much of the waste has been broken down by waves and ultraviolet light into microplastics, but in 2015, when researchers analyzed more than a million pieces of trash in the Pacific, 99 percent of it was plastic. By 2050, according to the World Economic Forum, there will be more plastic, by weight, in the ocean than fish.

Satan is manipulating humans to destroy one of our Kingdom allies. Pollution is not merely an ecological or even economical concern, it is a Kingdom concern that the church should be concerned about.

### **Meditation/Application/Reflection**

Perhaps Christian concern for the environment is not something you have thought much about. Take some time to explore the Christian environmental organization, A Rocha Canada at: <https://arocha.ca/>

Think of a verse that relates to the environment that you can share at your MCG.

### **Optional Reading Plan**

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 2:1-12

1 Corinthians 4

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 76

Joshua 10-12

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

### **Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- *Pray for Judy Ryan and Martin Lewis who are mourning*

## **Saturday December 1<sup>st</sup>** - Scriptural reliability

### **Reading** Luke 1:1 – 4

*"...I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning."*

Unfortunately, many people assume the Bible is an unreliable document. The truth is, that of all ancient literature, the New Testament is the single, most well-authenticated document, with an overwhelming amount of evidence supporting its reliability. There are more New Testament manuscripts, copied with greater accuracy, at earlier dates than from any secular classic from antiquity such as Herodotus, Plato or Aristotle.

Some charge that there are grievous errors in the Bible. Actually, scholars who have examined the thousands of manuscript copies discovered 150,000 "textual variants." These variants are slight, involving a missing letter in a word. For example, note the variants in the following: *You ha\*e jus\* won a million dol\*ars*. My guess is that you would not have any problem making out this message in spite of the variants. In more than 99 percent of the cases of textual variants in the New Testament, the original text can be reconstructed to a practical certainty.

In October 2003, Odyssey Marine Exploration recovered a ship's bell off the coast of Georgia. They believe it is from the ship called the TENNESSEE, which sank back in 1865 with a cargo of up to \$180 million in gold. They aren't absolutely certain because the bell's inscription is partially obscured. Only the letters "SSEE" are visible. The rest of the inscription won't be legible until it's cleaned.<sup>3</sup>

With \$180 million at stake, do you think they will allow this fragment of a word to hinder their search?

Luke knows that the story he is about to tell is incredible. This is why he lets his readers know that he has personally, carefully, investigated everything. Yes, it sounds too good to be true, but it absolutely is! A few

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<sup>3</sup> *"Salvaged Bell May Be Key to Riches," USA TODAY (10-15-03)*

variants in letters by scribes that were recording everything by hand shouldn't make us throw out the whole message. The prize is too great to take that kind of risk!

### **Meditation/Application/Reflection**

The Bible is one of God's greatest gifts to humanity and yet many Christians have yet to read book in its entirety. As we approach the New Year why not commit to reading through the Bible in 2019. Find a friend to do it with you, and hold each other accountable.

Why do you think so many people assume the Bible is inaccurate?  
How might we give them cause to doubt their reasoning?

### **Optional Reading Plan**

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 2:13-17

1 Corinthians 5

Read through the Old

Testament in a year:

Psalm 77

Joshua 13-14

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

### **Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Pray for tomorrows Kids Presentation; may God be evident in the message and in us, as we meet new people

***Sunday December 2<sup>nd</sup> – Children’s Pageant*****Reading Luke 1****Sermon Notes:****Meditation/Application/Reflection**

As you think about today’s sermon what is one action point that you are taking away?

**Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Give thanks to God for children; those in our church, families & neighbourhoods

## **Monday December 3<sup>rd</sup> - Answered prayer**

**Reading** Luke 1:5-25

*“Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard.”*

In today’s reading we are told that Zechariah’s prayer was answered but we aren’t told what his prayer was. What was Zechariah’s prayer?

Scholars offer different theories:

- One commentary says: “Doubtless for offspring, which by some presentiment he even yet had not despaired of.”
- Another says: “The words imply a prayer on the part of Zechariah; not that he might have a son (that hope appears to have died out long before) but that the Kingdom of God might come.”
- Another commentary suggests: “Your Prayer is heard” - it will surely be the prayer Zechariah offered at the time of the incense... he prayed for the redemption of Israel.”

As you can see, even the scholars don’t agree, but perhaps if we asked the question, “What prayer was answered?” then we might discover what Zechariah had prayed, but I’m afraid this doesn’t help. You see God answers the prayer of Israel for the redemption of Israel, by explaining that Zechariah would have a son who would prepare the way for the messiah who would usher in the Kingdom of God. What prayer was answered? All of them.

Here is the mystery of God’s answers to prayer. He often answers the deeper prayers of our souls which may not be the prayers of our lips.

Chicago-area pastor Lee Eclov tells the following story about a woman named Cathy who had a profoundly developmentally disabled son:

When Nicholas was eight or nine years old [Eclov writes] Cathy came to me and asked if the elders of our church would anoint and pray for Nicholas in keeping with James 5:14-16. Cathy said she wasn't thinking that God might heal all Nicholas's disabilities, but she simply felt that

God wanted her to have the elders pray for him. She didn't know why. So one Sunday she brought him to church in a wheelchair and after the service we met in my office, anointed Nicholas with oil, and prayed for him.

When Cathy called me that night all those years later Nicholas was now 25 years old. Every week for 25 years Cathy had visited him. In all those visits Nicholas never communicated with her except for laughing sometimes as she entered the room. It seemed that nothing ever changed.

Cathy had just had her annual consultation with the team of professionals who care for Nicholas. In the course of that meeting the speech therapist said, "I think Nicholas is making some progress. We've been using green and red cards for "yes" and "no." He is learning to point at the right card in answer to some questions. Would you like to see?" "Of course," Cathy replied, her heart pounding. So they went to Nicholas's room.

The therapist held up the green and red cards, and asked, "Nicholas, is your mom with us today?" Nicholas pointed at the green card. Cathy could hardly believe it. Other questions convinced her that it wasn't an accident; he really understood.

She called me in tears to tell me her good news. "All these years I'd visit him," she said, "and I never knew if he even knew who I was. Now I know. He knows I'm his mother and he is excited to see me." Then Cathy asked, "Do you remember when the elders prayed for Nicholas? This is God's answer."

God hears and is answering the prayer of your soul. Keep trusting.

**Meditation/Application/Reflection**

Have you given up on a prayer, confusing the silence of God as Him answering “no”? Take time to remind God of your prayer and boldly ask Him for grace to keep asking until He gives an answer, even if that answer is no.

Take time to pray for your MCG group and the requests that they have shared.

**Optional Reading Plan**

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 2:18-28

1 Corinthians 6:1-11

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 78:1-39

Joshua 15-17

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

**Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Pray for Mark Zammit who is back in prison
- Pray for those who wrestle with ongoing health issues

**Tuesday December 4<sup>th</sup> - Submission****Reading** Luke 1:26 – 38

*"I am the Lord's servant... May your word to me be fulfilled."*

Perhaps what makes the example of Mary so profoundly inspiring is her willingness to submit to God, even when that submission would surely result in hardship, shame and embarrassment.

Submitting our wills to another is among the hardest lessons to learn in the Christian life. In his sermon, John Ortberg compares submission to Jesus to driving a car:

"When it was time to take our first child home from the hospital, we put her in the car seat in the back of the car, and then I got in the front seat to drive. She was so small, even the baby seat was way too big. She looked so fragile to me that I drove home on the freeway going 35 miles per hour with the hazard lights flashing the whole time."

That first day, when your kid is in the car with you, is a scary day. Does anybody want to know what the next really scary day is with your kid in the car? It's when they turn 16, and now you're handing over the keys. Now they're moving from the passenger seat, from the ride-along seat, into the driver's seat. That's a scary moment.

It is a big moment in your life when you hand someone else the keys. Up until now, I've been driving. I choose the destination. I choose the route. I choose the speed. You're in the drive-along seat but if we are to change seats, if you're going to drive, I have to trust you. It's all about control. Whoever is in this seat is the person in control.

A lot of people find Jesus handy to have in the car as long as he's in the ride-along seat, because something may come up where His services are required. Jesus, I have a health problem, and I need some help.... I want you in the car, but I'm not so sure I want you driving. If Jesus is driving, I'm not in charge of my life anymore. If He's driving, I'm not in charge of my wallet anymore. If I put Him in control then it's no longer a matter of

giving some money now and then when I'm feeling generous or when more of it is coming into my life. Now, it's His wallet. It's scary. If Jesus is driving, I'm not in charge of my ego anymore. I no longer have the right to satisfy every self-centered ambition. No, it's His agenda. It's His life. Now, I'm not in charge of my mouth anymore. I don't get to gossip, flatter, cajole, deceive, rage, intimidate, manipulate, exaggerate. I get out of the driver's seat and hand the keys over to Him. I'm fully engaged. In fact, I'm more alive than I've ever been before, but it's not my life anymore. It's His.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus never takes control, He never forces Himself on us, He invites us to offer Him control. In this way Jesus shows His character and patience towards us. The challenge is that we sometimes take back that control, especially when we don't understand why He allows certain things or presents us with difficult challenges. Mary's default identity was that she was God's servant. Her life was His and because she trusted Him she has been honoured above all other women.

### **Preparing for your MCG**

As you come for you MCG be prepared to share:

- POTLUCK: Be mindful about a story you might share regarding the importance of MCG regular group meeting together. (ie. What it means to you, or how the group has seen God work through them or in them)
- STUDY: Share from your time of Meditation/Application from each day's study. What made an impression on you or what confused you?
- PRAYER WALK/ACTIVITY: be creative and intentional as you pray/work together.

### **Prayer Request:**

Record the prayer requests that are shared at your MCG to inform your prayers this coming week.

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<sup>4</sup> [John Ortberg, "True Freedom," sermon on PreachingToday.com](#)

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## **Wednesday December 5<sup>th</sup>** - When life starts

By NBBC's Blair Clark

**Reading** Luke 1:39 – 45

*"...the baby in my womb leaped for joy."*

As one witnesses in any debate about abortion, the question as to when life starts can be incredibly technical. Whether approached on the basis of science, philosophy or religion, each of these three spheres have valid contributions to make to the discussion. One biology professor, writing from the science perspective, identifies some 15 different possible answers, of which I will highlight just a few.<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, conception (a fertilized ovum) is # 3 on her list. When the embryo attaches itself to the uterine lining, around day 7, is # 7. Around day 16, when specific body parts begin to form, is # 8. # 10 is when the heart begins to beat around day 18. At the end of week 8, when in biological terms the embryo becomes a fetus is # 12. Around week 14 when the mother begins to feel movement (quickening) is # 13. At week 21, the point at which, in the event of a premature birth, life is reasonably possible is # 14. And finally, # 15 is at the actual birth. For pro-life people, the general consensus is that life begins at conception. In the pro-abortion community, the answer would vary from # 12 to # 15.

In the account of newly-pregnant Mary's visit to her 6 or 7-month pregnant Aunt Elizabeth, we are given a glimpse into just how alive her baby was at that stage. Elizabeth recounts how, upon hearing the greeting of her 'pregnant-with-Jesus' niece Mary, her six or seven month developed son John the Baptist leaped for joy in her womb. For Elizabeth, the fetus John was very much alive, and she took great joy and comfort from his response to Mary's greeting.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://blogs.plos.org/dnascience/2013/10/03/when-does-a-human-life-begins-17-timepoints/>

Interestingly, in Canada today, both Elizabeth and Mary would be considered poster girls for the abortion (pro-choice) cause. Elizabeth because she was too old to possibly give birth to a healthy child, and because it would be embarrassing to be a first-time mother at her age. And Mary, because as a young, unmarried teenager with school to finish and with so much of life ahead of her, to have a baby at this stage would be both embarrassing to her family and inconvenient.

A related question is when does spiritual life begin for the believer. We could identify a number of similar starting points for the beginning of spiritual life. Jesus stated to Nicodemus the need to be born again (John 3:3) an equivalent to natural birth. Even though we identify and recognize natural life beginning long before the actual birth, are we as attuned to the beginnings of spiritual life in those around us, even though they have not yet reached the point of being born again? When we encounter spiritual life in embryonic or fetal stages of development, does our spirit “leap for joy” in recognition?

### **Meditation/Application/Reflection**

Who in your circle of influence might be in “pre-born” stages of new birth? Share with your MCG how we might pray for them.

### **Optional Reading Plan**

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Mark 3:1-19
- 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 78:40-72
- Joshua 1-19

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

**Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Give thanks for new baby Wyatt Lauer
- Pray for those who are working through infertility or other issues around new birth (adoption, fostering, medical)

**Thursday December 6<sup>th</sup>** - God's mercy

**Reading** Luke 1:46 – 56

*"His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation."*

The mercy of God would not be possible to know apart from our sinfulness. Mercy is the attribute of God that does not repay us for our sin. It is His willing love which does not treat us according to what we rightfully deserve as people who have done what is wrong.

After suffering a string of thefts at his organic farm, Melvin Burns made an unusual offer. He offered the thief a job if he would just return the tools Burns needed to take care of his animals. Burns says burglars are targeting properties near his Moo Nay Farms in Cooks Brook, Nova Scotia, which has been robbed twice in as many months. Most recently, they stole \$1,000 worth of tools, but prior to that they took \$5,000 worth of animals, including six pigs and 40 chickens. He took to Facebook to offer two rewards. If anyone comes to him with a tip that leads to the recovery of his tools, he will give that person "five pounds of my best Berkshire bacon."

The fact that the perpetrator took food led Burns to his second proposal: If the thief turns himself (or herself) in, Burns will give a job on the farm and teach agricultural skills. Burns' personal training will make that person more employable and bring "respect." Burns wrote:

*Please, if you need money and are close to our farm, offer your labour, offer your time constructively. It can earn you money, respect and a future in the community as opposed to behind bars ... I will offer you much for free and better things to do with your time, and that's no bull.<sup>6</sup>*

Of course the challenge of receiving mercy is that it requires us to admit our guilt and sin. Just as the thief was offered a job and forgiveness – an

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6 Rev. Ben Johnson, "To Recover His Stolen Tools, This Farmer Is Offering Bacon And Work," Acton Institute Powerblog (8-10-17)

act of mercy – if he simply turned himself in and admitted the error of his ways.

Mercy is an attribute of God we are meant to share with others. It is an act where we pay the price for the sake of someone who has wronged us. The promise of God is “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” (Matthew 5:7)

### **Meditation/Application/Reflection**

Can you remember a time when you were shown mercy and did not receive a punishment you deserved? How did it make you feel?

As you pray today, ask God if there is someone in your life to whom He is asking you to show mercy.

### **Optional Reading Plan**

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Mark 3:20-35
- 1 Corinthians 7:1-16

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 79
- Joshua 20-21

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

### **Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Pray for the ESL program that is increasing in size
- Join our Worship Gathering tonight @ 8-9pm

**Friday December 7<sup>th</sup>** - Sharing in joy  
By NBBC's student intern Ben Froese

**Reading** Luke 1:57 – 66

*“Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.”*

Let's put ourselves in the shoes of this woman Elizabeth for a moment. She was said to be “righteous in the sight of God” (Luke 1:6) yet things had not gone so well for her up to this point. She was very old and still childless, living in a culture where a woman's value was largely tied to her ability to have children.

Imagine the disappointment she would have often felt. She had served God so well, yet her dreams and desires did not seem to be coming to fruition.

Then one day, the Lord breaks in to work a miracle in Elizabeth's life. Elizabeth exclaims that the Lord has “taken away her disgrace” (Luke 1:25). She becomes pregnant in her old age and will give birth to a child – and not just any child, but John the Baptist.

When she gave birth to her son, we read that Elizabeth's neighbours and relatives “shared her joy” (v. 58). They would have known about her disappointments. I'm sure some of them had their own disappointments in life as well, but at this time, they could rejoice in what God was doing in someone else's life.

In Romans 12:15 Paul writes, “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” When we think about showing “empathy,” we usually think of the second of these two commands. However, sometimes rejoicing with those who rejoice can be even more difficult. It's easy for us to be so consumed by our own lives that we don't celebrate with others in their times of joy. Sometimes we might even feel jealous when we see life go well for others and wish that we could experience the same.

To rejoice with others, we might need to hit the “zoom out” button on our own lives. Let’s see our lives as little stories wrapped up in a much larger story of what God is up to in the world, then we can rejoice when we see God doing something special in someone else’s life, even if we don’t seem to be personally benefitted ourselves.

### **Meditation/Application/Reflection**

Do you know people who are succeeding in life in ways you wish you could succeed? How do you feel about this? Do you need to shift your perspective in order to rejoice with them?

Do you, like Elizabeth, have dreams and desires that have not yet come to fruition in your life? Submit your requests to God, but also pray that God would help you to see how He is at work through a much larger story.

### **Optional Reading Plan**

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Mark 4:1-20
- 1 Corinthians 7:17-40

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 80
- Joshua 22-23

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

### **Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Praise God for the joy we experience together as a community of believers

**Saturday December 8<sup>th</sup>** - Holiness and righteousness

By NBBC's Bob Wilkins

**Reading** Luke 1:67 – 80

*“...to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”*

The birth announcements and narratives associated with the coming of the Messiah, namely those of John the Baptist and of Jesus, evoked the key players, Mary and Zechariah, to break out in song. How fitting that is at a time of great joy and expectation. It seems that it is often the case when God brings great blessing and deliverance that the experiences are captured in song. Mary's Song, known as the Magnificat, based on the first words of the song in the Latin translation, is very similar to Hannah's Song at the birth of Samuel (1 Samuel 2) as well as echoing many of the Psalms. Zechariah's Song, known also as the Benedictus, based on the opening words of the song in the Latin translation, is very similar to many of the prophetic utterances in the Old Testament (See Jeremiah 30:9-10 as an example).

Zechariah's Song can be divided into two parts. The first part is verses 67-75 and is a song of praise to God for coming and redeeming His people through the promised Messiah, and in His mercy fulfilling the covenant to Abraham. The second part is verses 76-80 which describes the role of his son John who is to prepare the way for the Messiah.

The focus of this study is upon the goal and purpose of the coming Christ. His purpose is not only to redeem and save His people, be a shining light in the darkness, lead us into the path of peace, rescue and save us from our enemies, but also to enable us to live lives of holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.

It could be thought that Zechariah's understanding of the enemies of God's people are political. In fact, the general expectation of the role of the coming Messiah, among 1st Century Jews, was to deliver Israel from their Roman overlords. No doubt Zechariah shared some of those ideas of the Messianic Kingdom, as did the disciples of Jesus. However, the

Kingdom that Jesus came to establish was primarily spiritual and not political. He came to save and transform people's lives, and to deliver them from the spiritual enemies of sin, self and Satan. Our role as members of His kingdom is to be enabled by God's mercy to serve Him without fear. in holiness and righteousness. In some ways these two words could be viewed as synonymous but holiness seems to be more focused on likeness to God, or godliness, whereas righteousness seems to focus on right living or right actions. In any event they are both found in our relationship and likeness to God.

Ephesians 4:17-32 is a great commentary on fleshing out the meaning of righteousness and holiness. It is descriptive of those who are children of light and who have by God's grace put on the new self "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (the only place other than Luke 1 where this Greek word for holiness occurs in the New Testament).

### **Meditation/Application/Reflection**

Reflect on what it means for you to serve Christ in righteousness and holiness.

How might a group living holy and righteous lives be perceived by those who observe them?

### **Optional Reading Plan**

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 4:21-41

1 Corinthians 8

Read through the Old

Testament in a year:

Psalm 81

Joshua 24

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

**Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- *Pray for those who mourn and our upcoming Comfort & Joy service*

***Sunday December 9<sup>th</sup> - Herod's Response*****Reading** Matthew 2**Sermon Notes:****Meditation/Application/Reflection**

As you think about today's sermon what is one action point that you are taking away?

**Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

## **Monday December 10<sup>th</sup> - The Magi**

### **Reading Matthew 2:1 – 8**

*“...Magi from the east came to Jerusalem.”*

To many people the story of Jesus birth is, by and large, fictitious. They doubt that there is much substance to the story, and this is certainly true of their doubts regarding the Magi.

Who are these wise men known as the Magi? We know from Matthew's account that they were from the east. The Greek historian Herodotus, writing in the fifth century BC, identified the Magi as a caste of Medes who had a priestly function in the Persian empire. They were men of great learning and wisdom and able to interpret dreams. In the Old Testament the word was translated astrologer or magician.

There are two Biblical sources of teaching that could very well have been part of the teaching and tradition of the Magi. It was of this caste that Daniel was made a part when he was serving in the Persian court during the exile. If we consider the greatness of Daniel's reputation and the accuracy of his predictions, then it would not be unreasonable that his foretelling of the time of the Messiah's coming in Dan. 9:24-26 would have been part of the legacy he left to this caste of sages.

However, there is quite possibly another piece of wisdom that had been passed on in the teachings and traditions of this ancient caste by another 'magi' character that we read about in the bible. In Joshua 13:22 we are told that there was a man named Balaam who practised divination and was known as a magician or soothsayer. Perhaps one of the earliest of the Magi caste.

In one of his predictions recorded in Numbers 24:17 we read ; "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel." Isn't it possible that the teaching of these two wise figures was passed on in the Magi's teaching - that this ancient caste had sacred traditions that they were waiting to see fulfilled? If you were one of these wise men and had access to Daniel's

prophecy telling the time of the Messiah's coming wouldn't it be possible that you would have checked the conditions of the prophecy as the time drew near?

In Daniel 9:24 it says: "now understand this; from the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven sevens and sixty-two sevens" In other words there would be 7 seven-year periods and then another 62 seven-year periods. In total, 483 years after the decree to rebuild the temple until the ruler of the Jews would be revealed.

In 444 B.C. there was a decree by Artaxerxes to rebuild the temple. Isn't it reasonable that the Magi looking for the Jewish king would reason that his birth must take place soon and so they would look for the star predicted in Balaam's prophecy?... especially since we know that Magi were Astrologers who took stars very seriously.

The story of the Bible may be foreign, but this does not mean it is not true. More often it is our ignorance and assumptions that keep us from appreciating just how amazingly accurate and historical God's Word is.

### **Meditation/Application/Reflection**

In Romans we read, "And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." (13:11) We too are to observe the signs in anticipation of the Messiah's coming. Meditate on Romans 13:8 – 14 and list how we should live in anticipation of His coming.

**Optional Reading Plan**

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 5:1-20

1 Corinthians 9:1-12

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 82

Judges 1-3

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

**Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Pray for our students who are pushing through this semester
- Pray for our young adults who continue to meet together and grow in Christ with us

## Tuesday December 11th - The Star

Reading Matthew 2:9 – 12

“...the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them...”

There have been several theories about the star and what it was. The word for star in the Greek was a much more general term than our English word star. It can refer to any kind of heavenly body – a star, a planet, an asteroid, a comet or a meteor.

One plausible explanation that was first put forward by Kepler in the 1600s, was the triple conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn. This extremely rare phenomenon happens every 800 years. Jupiter and Saturn are two of the brightest lights in the sky and they would come within one moon diameter away from each other three times around the time when Jesus was born. Another interesting point to this conjunction is the astrological significance of these planets aligning.

This is not to suggest that astrology is something we ought to believe in, practise, or follow, but the Magi would have. In ancient astrology Jupiter was the ruling planet, the king's planet. Saturn was the shield or defender of Palestine. So now if you have Jupiter approaching Saturn three times in that period you would have a message that basically says “ a king is coming to Palestine, a king is coming to Palestine, a king is coming to Palestine” So if the Magi were already looking for a star to guide them to a king who needed to be born soon, this would certainly get their attention. Not knowing where in Palestine to go, it made sense for them to go to the king's palace and ask him where the king of the Jews was to be born? That is when the Jews were called upon and told the Magi to go to Bethlehem.

To modern ears the stories of the past seem incredible, but probably no more incredulous than our stories would seem to them if we were transported to their time and told them about germs, air flight, the internet and radio. Yet just because they seem outlandish, even impossible, wouldn't we encourage them to investigate before they reject what they were being told?

So too. I imagine the ancients would tell us the same thing. Investigate before you reject what is being told. We may not know with absolute certainty what the Magi saw or why they thought it would lead them to the Messiah, but there is enough evidence to suggest that the story is reasonable, and the account is trustworthy.

### **Preparing for your MCG**

As you come for you MCG be prepared to share:

- POTLUCK: Be mindful about a story you might share regarding the importance of MCG regular group meeting together. (ie. What it means to you, or how the group has seen God work through them or in them)
- STUDY: Share from your time of Meditation/Application from each day study. What made an impression on you or what confused you.
- PRAYER WALK/ACTIVITY: be creative and intentional as you pray/work together.

### **Prayer Request:**

Record the prayer requests that are shared at your MCG to inform your prayers this coming week.

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## **Wednesday December 12<sup>th</sup> - Fulfilled prophecy**

By NBBC's student intern Ben Wimmers

### **Reading Matthew 2:13 – 15**

*“And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet...”*

It would be impossible to pass through the Christmas season without talking about prophecy. As we move through Advent, there is a sense of expectation building. Each week, candles are lit, chocolate calendars opened, and Christmas carols are sung with increasing intensity. We know what is coming on December 25<sup>th</sup>. There is no sense of mystery, but that does not dull the feeling of expectation. We are looking forward to the celebration of Jesus's birth.

The situation of God's people prior to Jesus's earthly life was similar. They also had a sense of expectation. They eagerly awaited the coming of the Messiah, or Saviour, into the world to deliver them from sin and the evils of the world. The prophets of the Old Testament, most memorably Isaiah, spoke to His coming into the world and the salvation He would bring, and so the people of God waited. In the coming season, we will reflect on these prophecies and how they were fulfilled in Jesus. We often cite Isaiah 9:6

*“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...”*

The prophecy was fulfilled by the birth of Jesus. All the aspects of Jesus' life were prophesied. His birth, death and resurrection can all be found in the Old Testament. God had a plan for the salvation of His people, a promise he made in Genesis 3:15 when God tells the serpent in the Garden of Eden that the offspring of the woman will crush his head, and all of this was fulfilled! Jesus came to earth, died and rose to fulfill God's plan of salvation.

It doesn't end there. Jesus promises His disciples that He will return. Another prophecy from God to His people. And here we wait. This is why Christmas (and Easter) are so important to our Christian lives. They

remind us that Jesus was foretold, and that God fulfilled that promise. The promise of a saviour. As a result of this fulfillment, can we trust that God will keep all the promises He makes to His people? Absolutely! We were promised eternal life through Jesus, so that we can dwell in heaven with God, and we know that God keeps His promises. Therefore, we can be confident that God will bring us in to eternal life.

This Christmas season, it is important to take time to remember the promises of God to us, to His people. To celebrate the ones that have been kept and look forward to the ones we are still waiting on. As we remember Christ's first coming, in the meekness of an infant, we can begin to eagerly await his second coming in majesty. It has been nearly 2000 years since Jesus's early life, and that is a long time to wait, but we can be confident that He will come back because it has been prophesied and we know that God will bring about fulfillment.

### **Meditation/Application/Reflection**

Are there promises in your life, that God made, that you have seen fulfilled? Take some time to celebrate those!

What are you still waiting for?

### **Optional Reading Plan**

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Mark 5:21-43
- 1 Corinthians 9:13-27

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 83
- Judges 4-5

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

**Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Pray for God to reveal His will and purpose for us in our changing culture
- Pray for the last night of kids club until the New Year. Thank Him for the leaders and their commitment

## **Thursday December 13<sup>th</sup> – Herod**

By NBBC's student intern Ben Froese

### **Reading Matthew 2:16 – 18**

*"...Herod... gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under..."*

In Rwanda in 1994, Hutu nationalists sought to wipe out the minority Tutsi ethnic group from the country. During a period of three months, about 800,000 people were slaughtered. This is one of the most infamous genocides in human history and clearly a horrific display of human depravity.

Although the number of people killed in Bethlehem after Jesus' birth would not have been as significant as this, what Herod initiated, was also a kind of genocide. He ordered that all the boys in Bethlehem two years old and under be killed. He wanted Jesus dead, and this was the way (so he thought) that he could assure the "Jesus problem" would be dealt with. How horrific!

*That* was Herod's response to Jesus' coming. Why would he do such a thing?

Herod would have seen Jesus as a threat to his power and honour. If Jesus is "King of the Jews," then Herod is not the ultimate king. That would mean that Herod is not the one whom the people will look to, and that would mean that he is not the one in control.

Herod's rejection of Jesus and the way he responds is clearly quite extreme. However, like Herod, each and every one of us is broken by sin and naturally desires to be "king" of our own lives. Our self-centredness results in other people getting hurt. Our desire to be our own "kings" and "queens" is what's gotten the world into the mess we're in today.

Jesus makes a much better king than any earthly king, and He also makes a much better king of our lives than we ever could.

So let's not respond to Jesus like Herod did. Let's let go of our desire for control and power. Let's let go and let Jesus be king of our lives.

### **Meditation/Application/Reflection**

In what areas of your life do you tend to try to maintain a sense of control?

What might it look like for you to give those areas to Jesus and let Him be king? Pray about that today.

### **Optional Reading Plan**

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Mark 6:1-13
- 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 84
- Judges 6-7

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

### **Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Pray for our Cogeco Production and the ears & eyes it can meet & influence
- Pray for our financial situation as 2018 ends

**Friday December 14<sup>th</sup> - Weeping in Ramah**

By NBBC's Bob Wilkins

**Reading Matthew 2:19 – 23**

*"A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning..."*

When Herod felt that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was filled with rage and ordered all the male children 2 years old and under in Bethlehem and environs to be killed. Matthew says that this tragic event was a fulfillment of what the prophet Jeremiah spoke in Jeremiah 31:15

"A voice is heard in Ramah,  
weeping and great mourning  
Rachel weeping for her children  
and refusing to be comforted,  
because they are no more.

This seems to be one of the characteristics of Matthew's Gospel, to show how the life of Christ, and the events during his ministry, fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures. There are some 16 such references to Old Testament fulfillment in Matthew, more than all the synoptic Gospels combined. When the New Testament cites the Old Testament, it is not just the verse or two that are actually quoted that have importance but the whole Old Testament passage and context are intended to be referred to.

There is no doubt that there was a lot of weeping and great mourning in Bethlehem and environs when Herod had the infants 2 years old and under slaughtered. The whole region in and around Bethlehem was not that large, so it is estimated that the number of infants killed may have been about 12 to 20, so it wasn't a large-scale massacre, but it might as well have been for the families who were affected. Their lives were forever changed. Yet there had been weeping in Bethlehem before. It was where Rachel, Jacob's favourite wife died in giving birth to Benjamin. She was buried as her husband mourned his loss – in the very vicinity where Jesus was born. Similar tragedies can and do happen anywhere. One can only think of the ongoing Rohingya genocide in

Myanmar and the senseless shooting in the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh which left 11 dead - simply for being Jewish. Christians have also experienced such mass killings at the hands of ISIS over the last few years.

Is there any hope for those who experience such terrible events? This is where the citing of Jeremiah 31:15 becomes very helpful. Yes, there was weeping in Bethlehem, but there was also weeping in Ramah. Ramah was a small community about 5 miles north of Jerusalem. When Jerusalem fell to the Babylonian armies in 586 BC, those who were taken captive would go through many small towns like Ramah on their way to Babylon. The Babylonians would have killed many along the way, including in Ramah. Jeremiah the prophet depicts the mourning that would have taken place as Rachel rising up, as it were, from the dead and mourning for her children, the descendants of Benjamin and Joseph.

Is there hope for such mourning? When you read the context of Jeremiah 31, the weeping of verse 15 is to be brought to an end, in spite of the captivity and the deaths associated with it. God is still in charge of the future of God's people. He is in the habit of turning tragedy into blessing. The greatest example of this is the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Meditation/Application/Reflection**

Reflect on how God turned weeping to joy in Jeremiah 31 and how He has often done so in your life. Use Romans 8:28 in this regard.

One of the ways God has provided for our comfort in times of weeping is by putting us in community. If you are weeping over loss, consider sharing with your MCG so they might pray for you.

**Optional Reading Plan**

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Mark 6:14-29
- 1 Corinthians 10:14-33

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 85
- Judges 8

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

**Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Pray for the PACT (Preschool & Adult Coffee Time) ministry that meets weekly
- Pray for the marginalized and homeless in Burlington

**Saturday December 15<sup>th</sup> - Rooted in History**

By NBBC's student intern Ben Wimmers

**Reading Luke 2:1 – 7**

*“Quirinius was governor of Syria.”*

Luke goes to great lengths to describe the current political situation surrounding Jesus's birth. The world in which Jesus lived was vastly different than the world we live in today. Caesar Augustus was the emperor of the newly established Roman Empire. Rising from the fires of civil war, Augustus consolidated his power from Rome across his vast territories from Spain to Palestine. Delegating regional responsibilities to local governors, such as Quirinus in Syria, was a necessity for Augustus to ensure peace and stability in all his provinces. This was not a democratically elected government - a dictator ruled the 'known world'. The people of Israel found themselves under the heel of another foreign power.

Our current situation is vastly different than the Jews who lived under the Caesars. 2000 years and the Atlantic Ocean separate us from them. When we approach the Bible, we must take into account this distance in time and geography. The gospel of Jesus has the ability to transcend all cultures in any era, but we risk losing some aspects if we are bound to our own time.

How different might the Gospel according to Luke if it began in this fashion:

*“In those days Justin Trudeau issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire country of Canada. (This was the first census that took place while Doug Ford was premier of Ontario).”*

The centre of the gospel would remain unchanged, as would the grace and compassion Jesus showed to everyone he met. I would wager that the images used in Jesus' parables would be different, but the message the same. The political and social situation that surrounds the gospels is a necessary component in the interpretation of Scripture.

We live in a fast-paced, techno-centric, western society. People consume information at an intense pace while fighting through endless distractions on television or the Internet. We are removed from the farming and herding parables that Jesus so often used.

But...

The need for Jesus remains the same. There will never be a time where people can live without Jesus. There will never be a place where a group of people do not need the love and compassion that Jesus gave to everyone. There will never be a moment in history where a nation does not need salvation through grace.

### **Meditation/Application/Reflection**

In our current culture, how can we best share the good news of Jesus with our neighbours?

What media can we use?

How might we tell His story?

How can we make people curious to listen?

### **Optional Reading Plan**

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 6:30-44

1 Corinthians 11:1-16

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 86

Judges 9

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

**Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- *Pray for the Sunday morning teams that help serve week in and week out: Coffee, Greeters, Welcome Center, Ushers, Worship Teams, Audio/Visual, NBBC Kids, Counters, Pastoral Prayer*

***Sunday December 16<sup>th</sup> - The Priest's Response*****Reading** Luke 2**Sermon Notes:****Meditation/Application/Reflection**

As you think about today's sermon what is one action point that you are taking away?

**Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Pray for our staff and families as they pour into this community and outside of it as well

**Monday December 17<sup>th</sup>** - An ordinary sign

By NBBC's Blair Clark

**Reading** Luke 2:8 – 12

*"This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

We live in a time when extraordinary signs are used to get our attention for what are often very ordinary things. Our kids used to love to see the lights that would be rented to shine high into the night sky for some special event, often reaching so high that they would reflect back off the clouds. When we would drive by to see what it was all about, they would usually be disappointed to discover that it was just the opening of a store - hardly an extraordinary event.

For Jesus' birth, an unbelievably extraordinary event, there was the angels' initial sound and light show that was both spectacular and fear-inducing for the shepherds, but when they were given a sign that would enable them to go and worship the newborn Saviour, it was distinguished by its sheer ordinariness. A newborn baby, wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger! Apart from the angels' stunning announcement, who would have ever guessed that this was a special child? Born in such humble circumstances, it is little wonder that humility would be a hallmark of his life and ministry.

Had this baby been born in a palace, the shepherds would know without a doubt that they would not be permitted entry to see the baby. Nor would they have even been comfortable going there, as it would be an intimidating and unfamiliar place to them. But a manger, in a stable, in a cave, on a bed of straw - that was a place that shepherds would be familiar with, that they would be given access to, and where they would be completely comfortable....but why shepherds, and why these particular shepherds?

William Barclay believes that these shepherds were not ordinary shepherds, but that they were tasked with looking after the flock from

which the temple priests selected the lambs that were sacrificed morning and evening in the temple in Jerusalem. They shepherded the lambs that were presented to God, and so they were the ones to welcome the Lamb of God who would be sacrificed for the sins of the world.

God continues to delight in using the ordinary to accomplish the extraordinary. Will you allow him to do that in your life?

### **Meditation/Application/Reflection**

What ordinary things can God use in you to demonstrate to others the nature of His kingdom?

Is there something ordinary that your MCG might do in your neighbourhood to bear witness to God's love for them?

### **Optional Reading Plan**

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Mark 6:45-56
- 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 87
- Judges 10-12

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

**Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Pray for our MCG's that the vision continues to be known & grabbed a hold of
- Pray for our new Mayor and the government is in our Halton area

**Tuesday December 18<sup>th</sup>** - Objects of favour

**Reading** Luke 2:13 – 15

*"...on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests."*

It is a stunning realization when you come to it, but the Bible is clear that God's favour rests upon humans. We are the objects of His affection. This is why David prays in Psalm 17, "Keep me as the apple of your eye," and in Zechariah 2, God has this solemn warning for those who harm His people, "for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye - I will surely raise my hand against them..." We are the apple of God's eye.

People in early Israel were well acquainted with the apple. It was so familiar that they applied its name to the human eye - which is shaped quite like a round pippin - so they often spoke of "the apple of the eye."

It has come to be understood figuratively. It is something, or more usually someone, cherished above others. Something upon which a person's gaze is fixed.



In their book *Next Door As It Is in Heaven*, authors Lance Ford and Brad Briscoe discuss the profound loneliness people are regularly experiencing in our world—and the subsequent (and sobering) sense that they have very little value at all. Sadly, many of us contribute to this loneliness and lack of self-worth as we move throughout our day, rarely even lifting our heads to offer a simple greeting. Ford and Briscoe contrast our relational aloofness with the daily practice author Peter Senge noticed among the tribes of northern Natal in South Africa:

*The most common greeting, equivalent to "hello" in English, is the expression: Sawu bona. It literally means, "I see you." If you are a member of the tribe, you might reply by saying Sikhona, "I am here." The*

*order of the exchange is important: until you see me, I do not exist. It's as if, when you see me, you bring me into existence.*

"A deep truth resides in this cultural practice," Ford and Briscoe observe. "When we merely move throughout our days without seeing people as people, then as far as it matters to us in that moment, they really don't exist. ... [But] being conscious of how we approach people we encounter through the normal routines of our day is a step toward bringing ... heaven here on our patch of earth."<sup>7</sup>

As you walk in your neighbourhood, or through your day at work or wherever you find yourself, try to look at people as God sees them and acknowledge them as seen.

### **Preparing for your MCG**

As you come for you MCG be prepared to share:

- POTLUCK: Be mindful about a story you might share regarding the importance of MCG regular group meeting together. (ie. What it means to you, or how the group has seen God work through them or in them)
- STUDY: Share from your time of Meditation/Application from each day study. What made an impression on you or what confused you?
- PRAYER WALK/ACTIVITY: be creative and intentional as you pray/work together.

### **Prayer Request:**

Record the prayer requests that are shared at your MCG to inform your prayers this coming week.

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- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>7</sup> Lance Ford & Brad Briscoe, *Next Door As It Is In Heaven* (NavPress, 2016), page 76.

**Wednesday December 19<sup>th</sup>** - Spreading the word

By NBBC's student intern Ben Froese

**Reading** Luke 2:16 – 21

*“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen...”*

Sometimes we might think that we're not competent to share our faith with others. We might think we're not smart enough. We might think we don't know the Bible well enough. We might feel like we have too many unanswered questions ourselves, or perhaps we just assume that people won't be interested in what we have to say.

The beautiful thing we see in today's passage of Scripture is that some of the very first evangelists were *very ordinary* people. They were shepherds. They probably weren't very educated. They wouldn't have had much money. They wouldn't have been very well-respected either. As a matter of fact, these people were from a despised class, yet these things didn't seem to prevent them from being used by God.

The shepherds had experienced an angel telling them about the Messiah and then they got to see baby Jesus for themselves. I'm sure they still had a lot of unanswered questions, but what did they do in response? They "spread the word" (v. 17). They had experienced something that was worth telling others about – and so that's what they did!

Perhaps we sometimes put too much pressure on ourselves when it comes to sharing the gospel. Having lots of knowledge and having answers to difficult questions are certainly not bad things, but these things are not necessities in order for God to use us. The shepherds sure wouldn't have known it all.

However, there's something we do see in the shepherds that, I think, had a tremendous impact on their willingness to talk about Jesus: their hearts were captivated! They were thrilled about what they'd experienced. How could they not talk about it!? This was incredible!

This begs us to ask the question - are our hearts captivated by Christ as well? I know it's easy for the gospel to start to sound like old news to us. It's easy for us to lose our sense of joy and excitement about it.

Pastor Jonathan Dodson writes the following: "We all need fresh encounters with Jesus, opportunities for the gospel to awaken our hearts with fresh love for him. Then our evangelism will ring with authenticity."<sup>8</sup>

### **Meditation/Application/Reflection**

What are some of the things that might prevent you from sharing the gospel?

If you've lost the desire to share Jesus with others, pray that He would re-awaken your heart with a fresh love for Him.

### **Optional Reading Plan**

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Mark 7:1-23
- 1 Corinthians 12:1-13

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 88
- Judges 13-15

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan K. Dodson, *The Unbelievable Gospel: Say Something Worth Believing* (Zondervan, 2014), p. 170.

**Thursday December 20<sup>th</sup>** - Blessed are the poor

By NBBC's Veronika Bankuti

**Reading** Luke 2:22 – 24

*“...a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”*

When Jesus was 8 days old it came time to consecrate him to the Lord, as written in the Law of the Lord. God is no respecter of persons. He regards all people equally and has made provision for those who are materially poor to be able to offer a sacrifice; not a bull or a spotless lamb, which was too expensive for poor people, but a modest gift: a pair of doves or two young pigeons.

Although Mary was visited by an angel of the Lord who told her about a son she was to conceive, and Joseph who was also told in a dream that the son in Mary's womb was from the Holy Spirit – this did not change the fact that they were materially poor. When they presented Jesus to be consecrated to the Lord, they brought the gift prescribed to poor people.

They may have been looked down on, considered inconsequential and negligible by the people in their town, yet they were carrying into the temple the one who created the world, who was the living Word of God, who was God with us – Jesus, who will save his people from their sins.

There is a message here for all who believe. Your material status here and now does not in any way preclude the inexpressible and abundant riches you have in Him who loved you and gave himself for you - HERE AND NOW! Feeling impressed by the wealth and status of others, the less privileged are amazed to learn how special they are to God and embrace this message as good news.<sup>9</sup>

When you grasp the wondrous fact that you are loved and fully accepted by God – all your feelings of inadequacy and shame wash

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<sup>9</sup> [www.biblehub.com](http://www.biblehub.com)

away and you indeed become a new creation, who is able to internalize the meaning of “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” This is the freedom we have in Christ and this is what being a Christian means! Our shackles have been removed and we are now the people God can use for His glory!

Do you have this assurance? Are you living in this wonderful freedom? When we do, there will be something about us, something very attractive and comforting, which will draw people to us. Mary and Joseph did not personally know Simeon or Anna; they were not what we would call friends, but just as soon as they saw them carrying Jesus, Simeon and Anna knew exactly who He was, and they gave verbal testimony. In Simeon’s case he prophesied about Him and the effect He would have on all who believe in Him.

Simeon also prophesied about Mary in particular. Even though both Mary and Joseph were told by angels who Jesus was, yet “The child’s father and mother marvelled at what was said about him.” (Luke 2:33) They marvelled that they were not the only ones “in the know”. When we have the mark of Jesus on us, others will know, and they will want to find out what we have! We have the opportunity to share our riches with others!

**Meditation/Application/Reflection**

What are some of the “riches” that we have, that those who are only materially rich do not?

What advantages do the poor, who are blessed, have over the wealthy?

**Optional Reading Plan**

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Mark 7:24-37
- 1 Corinthians 12:14-31

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 89:1-18
- Judges 16

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

**Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself,

Please remember these prayer requests:

- Pray for those who have little or no family this time of year; maybe God will direct you to a name or person to connect with
- Pray & be aware of your neighbours their needs and gifts they offer you & your community

**Friday December 21<sup>st</sup>** – Jesus

By NBBC's student intern Ben Froese

**Reading** Luke 2:25 – 35

*“...the glory of your people Israel.”*

In 2016, the Chicago Cubs won the World Series after a 108-year drought – the longest such drought in all North American major league sports. After waiting so long, I can only imagine how overjoyed fans would have been on that day. One story became well-known of a 108-year-old woman who had been a Cubs fan all her life and passed away not long after the victory. Her son said that she died a happy woman.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, the people of Israel had waited a long time for the Messiah to come. They longed for the day God would deliver His people. With Jesus' coming, that day had come, and in this text, we see that Simeon, after finally seeing the Messiah, was now ready for death. His life was now complete. His longings had been fulfilled.

Simeon recognized Jesus as “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of [God's] people Israel” (v. 32). I find it interesting that unlike many other Jews of his day, Simeon recognized that the Messiah hadn't just come for the people of Israel, but for the Gentiles too. Jesus is the “Saviour of the world” (John 4:42).

To Simeon, seeing Jesus was the most beautiful and glorious thing a person could ever wish for. After seeing Jesus, he knew that his eyes could never see anything greater.

Perhaps our eyes can sometimes get fascinated in other “beauties” of this world. Money, sports, fun experiences, clothes and fashion, even family, are all things that can fight for our attention and our hearts' longings. There are many wonderful things in this life that God gives us

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<sup>10</sup> <https://abc7chicago.com/news/108-year-old-cubs-fan-died-a-happy-woman-son-says/1602508/>

for our enjoyment (1 Timothy 6:17) but let's remember that Jesus Himself is the most beautiful and glorious thing we could ever have.

Let's love Jesus first and foremost. Let's have our hearts set on Him. Let's focus our attention on Him and His beauty.

### **Meditation/Application/Reflection**

Psalm 63 speaks of God's love as being better than life itself. Read and meditate on Psalm 63:1-5. Pray this Psalm to God today.

### **Optional Reading Plan**

Read through the New Testament in a year:

Mark 8:1-13

1 Corinthians 13

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

Psalm 89:19-52

Judges 17-18

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

### **Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Pray for our Christmas Eve Gathering that it would be meaningful to each who attend

**Saturday December 22<sup>nd</sup> - The Maker****Reading John 1:1 – 8**

*“Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”*

When it comes to the creation of the world Biblical scholars are divided regarding the details, but there is one detail that all of them agree on – God created all things, and it is the God of three persons who was present at the creation: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jesus was part of the creation, and what a creation it is! In his book *Star Struck*, Christian astronomer Dr. David H. Bradstreet writes:

Our planet is home to some 10 to 14 million species of living things. Consider the lowly dandelion. Found on all the Earth's continents, these tenacious plants seem to flourish anywhere and everywhere (particularly where fussy gardeners wish they wouldn't). Dandelion flower heads are perfectly designed for maximum seed creation and dispersal. Each yellow, flowering head can disperse 50 to 175 seeds to the winds. One single dandelion plant can create more than two thousand seeds.

Or consider the power of plants. A recent column in the New York Times hailed them for being "as close to biological miracles as a scientist could dare admit." As Douglas Tallamy writes, "After all, they allow us to eat sunlight ... and plants also produce oxygen, build topsoil and hold it in place, prevent floods, sequester carbon dioxide, buffer extreme weather and clean our water."

Or consider the way God has made life thrive even in the deepest and darkest regions of the ocean floor, where no sunshine ever permeates the gloom. Strange plants grow 20,000 feet below the surface, surviving on chemical nutrients emerging from vents in the ocean floor.

It's this kind of mind-blowing biological diversity that I think about when I'm singing "For the Beauty of the Earth," one of my favorite hymns.

There are some who try to suggest that science and the Bible are in tension and contradict one another. The reality is that the more we learn through science the more we ought to stand in wonder of our Triune God who made it all.

### **Meditation/Application/Reflection**

Often nature can move us to worship. Can you think of a time when creation tugged at your heart and inspired you with awe?

How do you understand the creation story? If you have time check out Merv's past blogs at [mervbudd.wordpress.com](http://mervbudd.wordpress.com) and search the blogs called "The Genius of Genesis" to see some of the key theories regarding creation.

### **Optional Reading Plan**

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Mark 8:14-21
- 1 Corinthians 14:1-25

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 90
- Judges 19

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

### **Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- *Pray for those who are blessed to give generously*
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***Sunday December 23<sup>rd</sup> - The Magi's Response*****Reading** John 1**Sermon Notes:****Meditation/Application/Reflection**

As you think about today's sermon what is one action point that you are taking away?

**Prayer Points:**

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Pray that the next few days of travelling, family conversations & the enjoyment of table time would represent the heart of Jesus

## Monday December 24<sup>th</sup> - Among us

By NBBC's Bob Wilkins

### Reading John 1:9 – 14

*“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”*

As Christians there are some things about which we may differ. For example, we many not agree on some of the details surrounding the second coming of Christ but there are some things which are absolutely critical to our Christian faith. To deny them is to deny the very essence of Christianity. Some of the things included would be the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, His death on the cross for our sins, His resurrection from the dead, and that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ.

This is also true of what has come to be known as the incarnation. This does not mean to say that we understand the incarnation, or that we have all the right words to fully grasp it, but without it Christianity falls apart. The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith says, “Christ, the Son of God, became man, by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin.”<sup>11</sup> Leon Morris says that John 1:14 is “... the most concise statement of the incarnation.”<sup>12</sup> Over the centuries volumes have been written to help us grasp its significance, but no matter how helpful these volumes are, the incarnation still remains a mystery.

“The Word became flesh.” The eternal Word, God Himself, the Creator, entered creation, became a man, and yet remained fully God. We seek to understand it, but it is more than a theological concept or idea. It was an historical event in which God made His dwelling with us. One of His names would be “Immanuel” – which means, “God with us.”<sup>13</sup> This

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<sup>11</sup> *The Shorter Catechism with Scripture Proofs*, p. 7. The Banner of Truth Trust, P.O. Box 621 Carlisle Pennsylvania, 1713, U.S.A.

<sup>12</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 102. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1971.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 1:23

is the great message of Christmas – Christ residing with us, Christ identifying with us, Christ condescending to be among us and in us.

In the Old Testament, God’s presence was symbolized and known in the Tabernacle. It is of interest that the word for dwelling as used here in John is the same word for tabernacle. In the incarnation God made His tabernacle with us. John says, “We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”<sup>14</sup> The imagery of glory in the tabernacle was the Shakina glory on the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. It is clear from John’s use of this language and imagery, that he understood that the incarnation of Christ fulfilled all this Old Testament typology.

We as God’s people are now the temple or dwelling place of Christ. Sometimes this is understood personally and individually,<sup>15</sup> and at other times it is understood corporately - as the total people of God.<sup>16</sup> So Christ is not only among us, but He is also in us, all because of the incarnation.

#### **Meditation/Application/Reflection**

Reflect on what it means to you to have Christ living in you and to have Christ among us as His people.

Think through the activities of the day ahead and imagine doing them as if Jesus was actually physically present with you. How might that change how you worked.

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<sup>14</sup> John 1:14

<sup>15</sup> 1 Cor 6:19

<sup>16</sup> 1 Cor 3:16

## Optional Reading Plan

Read through the New Testament in a year:

- Mark 8:22-30
- 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

Read through the Old Testament in a year:

- Psalm 91
- Judges 20-21

Questions about your reading? Jot them here to discuss with our MCG:

### Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Pray that the idea of consumerism would pale in comparison to knowing Jesus intimately and together as a community
- Pray for tonight's gathering

**Tuesday December 25<sup>th</sup>** - Knowing God

By NBBC's Blair Clark

**Reading** John 1:15 – 18

*“No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son... has made him known.”*

“Seeing is believing” is a saying that most of us would generally agree with. Remember how, after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to most of the disciples when Thomas wasn't with them. Then later, when told about it, Thomas' response was that until he saw the nail marks in Jesus' hands and put his finger in the holes and in the spear hole in Jesus' side, he would not believe (John 20:24-29). For Thomas, seeing was believing. When Jesus later gave Thomas that opportunity, he concludes the encounter by saying to Thomas, *“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

There are three things that verse 18 tells us about Jesus. First, Jesus is unique. As God's one and only son, there is no one like Him, but as the only son, he is deeply loved by his Father. He also has a unique role, in both revealing God to us and in restoring us to a relationship with God.

Second, Jesus is God. This does not mean that Jesus is identical with God, but it does mean that in mind and character and being, Jesus is exactly like God. As the writer of Hebrews states, Jesus is “the exact representation of his (God's) being” (Heb. 1:3). That means that to see Jesus is to see God, to know Jesus is to know God. God, who is spirit, took all of his essence and put it in human flesh in the person of Jesus. That is the meaning of the incarnation, literally ‘God made flesh’.

Third, Jesus is one with God. The exact wording here is that Jesus is “in the bosom of the Father”. That is, he is in such intimate relationship with God that it is as close as a baby in the womb of its mother, or as close as the deepest intimacy that a husband and wife can experience. Between Jesus and God there is complete, total and uninterrupted intimacy.

So even though we cannot see God, we can know Him through Jesus, and in knowing him can therefore believe in Him. The great message of Christmas is that in the person of Jesus, we are able to know God in a way that was impossible prior to his birth.

### **Preparing for your MCG**

As you come for you MCG be prepared to share:

- POTLUCK: Be mindful about a story you might share regarding the importance of MCG regular group meeting together. (ie. What it means to you, or how the group has seen God work through them or in them)
- STUDY: Share from your time of Meditation/Application from each day study. What made an impression on you or what confused you?
- PRAYER WALK/ACTIVITY: be creative and intentional as you pray/work together.

### **Prayer Request:**

Record the prayer requests that are shared at your MCG to inform your prayers this coming week.

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## **Missional Community Group (MCG) Covenant**

We desire to grow as followers of Jesus who represent Him and His Kingdom well in all of our life. We recognize that God's plan is for us to grow in and through relationships with other like-minded disciples. As those who identify as neighbourhood missionaries we enter into this covenant so that we might be transformed by God's grace and that together we might be transforming agents in our neighbourhood.

To this end, this year, we therefore covenant to:

- Meet regularly for weekly encouragement, accountability, and fellowship in our Missional Community Group and corporately with all of NBBC.
- Seek to grow in likeness to Jesus by engaging in NBBC MCG's shared practices.
- Nurture loving relationships within our Missional Community, accepting others as Christ has accepted us.
- Faithfully steward the resources that God has given us: time, abilities, resources and energy.
- Together discern where God is at work and join Him in His mission to bring the Kingdom of God to our neighbourhood.

In all that we covenant, we recognize that we are dependent upon the grace of God to enable us and so we joyfully enter this covenant in hope of what He might do in and through us.

## **Missional Community Group Shared Practices**

1. Daily engage in reading Scripture and pray for God to bless NBBC in its missional calling.
2. Weekly purposely and intentionally bless another person.
3. Monthly practise table fellowship with someone in your Missional Community.
4. Respond to the Spirit's prompting as you sense Him leading and directing.
5. Share with others the stories of what God is doing in your life as opportunities arise.