

A ADVENT

V E N T U R E



Daily Readings

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The Salvation Army is a Christian church and registered charity in England (214779).

Welcome to our 2022 daily advent reading booklet. Our theme 'An Advent Adventure'. We invite you to take time every day to and come join us on our Advent Adventure. We hope it will be a time of spiritual blessing and renewal.

For those who like to be 'ministered' to, then members of our church will be recording each day's reading and these will be 'uploaded' on to the internet.

You remain in our thoughts and prayers during this time of Advent.

With love

Colin & Nicola

Sunday, 27th November 2022

The Adventure Planned

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

It's the start of advent. I wonder how organised you are? Have you written your Christmas cards, wrapped your presents, prepared your Christmas dinner. Maybe you prefer to wait until Christmas Eve and quickly pop out to buy everything. I would suspect that most of us are somewhere in between. But whilst we know that we celebrate the birth of Jesus on 25th December every year, we are often unprepared for the occasion.

As we enter this time of advent and start our advent adventure by remembering that the birth of Jesus didn't happen by chance. It was divinely planned as part of God's blueprint for His people. Maybe at this busy time, we need to plan our advent to make sure that we are prepared and ready for the adventure that God has called us to this Christmas. Where would you like God's adventure to take you? What things can you do to help plan for this adventure? Remember the motto: proper planning prevents poor performance. God is planning your adventure, you need to be prepared.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you that you have a planned adventure for my life. Help me to make time to be part of that planning to realise that the things that I do today will affect the success of that adventure. Amen.

Where the Adventure would begin

Micah 5:2

*“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.”*

When Colin was younger the only modes of transport that his family had were bus, bike or shanks' pony (walking) or for longer journeys, a coach. They didn't have a phone or the internet and adventures were planned well in advance with a timetable. But whilst every adventure was planned well in advance the adventure would only start when they went to the bus stop. Waiting at the bus stop, looking to the horizon for the big red bus to come round the corner, the disappointment when it got closer realising that it was the wrong 'number', the eventual relief and excitement when it arrived – or frustration when it passed them when they had given up waiting and started to walk.

In Micah we read that the 'adventure' was to start in Bethlehem, the timetable was God's time, but the people had to be prepared for it to begin. Are we prepared for God's adventure to begin in our lives, are we filled with expectation, anticipation and excitement, or have we decided to start an adventure on our own without God? God has an adventure planned for you, but you need to be in the right place, the right place spiritually. This advent, make this a priority in your life.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help me to be ready and prepared for the adventure to begin in my life. Amen.

The cost of the Adventure

Isaiah 53:1-3

*Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
² He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
³ He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.*

So, the bus arrived, they all boarded and would bundle upstairs, hopefully to get the seat at the front so that they could watch where they were going. In the 'olden' days, the conductor would come round shouting, 'any more fares, please'. You'd raise your hand, tell the conductor where you wanted to go and pay your fare to go on your adventure.

When Jesus started his adventure, he was under no illusions at what that cost would be, it was foretold in Isaiah. The 'fare' that Jesus paid included the cost of our spiritual adventure. We have a free ticket, there is no cost. What does it say in John 3:16? '*For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.*' The cost of our spiritual adventure has been paid, an adventure, if we stay on the bus, that leads to everlasting life.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for paying the fare for the spiritual adventure you have called me to explore and live. Amen.

It's an All-Age Adventure

Luke 1:5-18

In 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. ⁶ Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. ⁷ But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

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

¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³ But 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. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵ for 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. ¹⁶ He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And 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."

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

Riding on a bus is a community activity involving people from all 'walks of life' who are journeying to different places for different reasons. Some going to work, others to school, hospital appointments, to visit friends, to go shopping. Some will be reading, others listening, engaging in social media, but some will start up a conversation with anyone who will sit with them. God has made us all unique and different, but for that journey we are travelling together. I wonder what kind of traveller you are?

In our reading today, we learn about Zechariah and Elizabeth who we are told are: 'old' and 'well on in years' (Luke 1:18). Despite their age, they were starting a new spiritual adventure. God calls people of all ages, of all

dispositions, of all abilities to join Him on a Spiritual adventure, and just like our bus, church consists of lots of different people, with different needs, but all on a spiritual adventure. We need to encourage and support each other.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for the diversity of church and the unity of our adventure. Help us to support and encourage each other as we journey on that adventure together. Amen.

Thursday, 1st December 2022

The adventure can leave you speechless

Luke 1:18-25

¹⁹ The 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. ²⁰ And 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."

²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. ²² When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realised he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

²³ When his time of service was completed, he returned home. ²⁴ After 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 favour and taken away my disgrace among the people."

An adventure can lead us to places with breath taking beauty. Maybe you've been on holiday and turned a corner and been faced with a site of outstanding natural beauty, of such magnificence that it left you speechless – something beyond words – can you think of something? The same thing can happen when something takes place that is beyond our comprehension. We're confounded and confuddled. Or to quote Victor Meldrew – I (or we) can't believe it!

Zechariah was startled and gripped with fear when the angel Gabriel appeared to him, and then confounded and confuddled when he was told that he and his wife would become parents. Zechariah's response – 'I can't believe it'. A response that left him speechless. On our spiritual adventure we will experience things that will leave us speechless. Maybe an encounter with the majesty of God, maybe a task that God has called you to do. Take some time during this busy time to be speechless and reflect on your adventure, both the exciting and the scary. Allow God to minister to you.

Prayer

Dear Lord, As I come before your presence help me to be speechless, to receive from you, to be ministered to, to be encouraged and to know that you are in control of our adventure together. Amen.

The adventurer is silent

Luke 1:57-66

When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. ⁵⁸ Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

⁵⁹ On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, ⁶⁰ but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."

⁶¹ They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."

⁶² Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. ⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." ⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁵ All the neighbours were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. ⁶⁶ Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

At this time of the year, there are many colds and viruses around, some of which affect our voices and we're not able to speak. Possibly a blessing for those we live with, but very frustrating for us when we can't speak. However, every cloud has a silver lining, and our enforced silence gives us an opportunity to listen. Listen to those around us, listen to creation, listen to God. Although many of us dislike the silence and soon learn new ways to communicate through sign language, text messaging, emails and even writing on tablets.

Zechariah had an enforced period of silence as he was waiting for his 'adventure' to be delivered, and one would hope that he took this time to listen – listen and appreciate those around him, listen and appreciate the wonder of creation, and listen and appreciate the majesty of God. Zechariah proved that he had listened to God's messenger and wrote on a tablet the name John. Adventures can be busy and we can quickly forget to listen, to listen to God. Take your tablet and write down some of the things that God has spoken to you during your spiritual adventure.

Prayer

Dear Lord, during this busy time, help me to remember to listen to you.
Amen.

Saturday, 3rd December 2022

John prepares the way for the Adventure

Isaiah 40:3-5

*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."*

Most plans are dependent on people to help us, to encourage and support us. England & Wales might be playing in the World Cup, but to get there, there have been hundreds of people working behind the scenes to get the team and the individual players ready for their World Cup adventure. From parents driving their children to matches, to coaches, to managers, to supporters, to back-room staff – the list is endless. The players on the pitch are just the tip of the iceberg of the people involved on the England & Wales World Cup adventure, an adventure that has been years, decades in the planning.

God's adventure of reconciling the world to himself in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19), needed a support team and one member of the support team was John. In our lives, God has placed around us a support team to help us in our spiritual adventure. Reflect on the team God has placed in your life to help you in your spiritual adventure. It may be family members, people in church, or friends. Give thanks for them and tell them how much you appreciate their support and encouragement. Give thanks to God for them.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for the support team that you have placed in my life to support and encourage me on the spiritual adventure you have called me to. Amen.

Sunday, 4th December 2022

Mary told about the Adventure – what is her response?

Luke 1:26-38

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 favoured! 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 favour 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 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.

Most of us like compliments. It might be about our appearance, it might be about an achievement, it might be about our character. When the angel came to Mary, Gabriel said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' Then he told her to, 'not be afraid.' As we commence our adventure or continue on our adventure, we need to remember that we are highly favoured. Why? Because God is with us. This in turn should give us both reassurance and confidence to, 'not be afraid.'

So, God plans for the adventure, but we have to be willing to engage in it. Mary's adventure was going to be uber difficult, but what was her response to Gabriel? 'I am the Lord's servant.' When God gives us the plan for our adventure, is this our response – 'I am the Lord's servant'. Or do we resort to 'plan me'? What do we read in Jeremiah 29:11, 'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.' Take this promise as your own today.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help me to have confidence in your plan – to believe that your plan is one to prosper, of hope and of a future with you. Thank you for being with me. Amen.

Mary goes on a mini adventure

Luke 1:39-45

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 favoured, 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 fulfil his promises to her!"

Most adventures do not take place in isolation. There are people around us who encourage and there are people who supply practical help and assistance. But there are also those who have gone before, to prepare the way and to whom we can turn to for advice, help and guidance. When on an adventure, it is always good to be able to go to people who have some experience who can give us assurance and assistance.

Mary went to visit Elizabeth an older relative (Luke 1:36), who was six months pregnant and who was also on an adventure. It would have been a time of encouragement for Mary and she shared with Elizabeth the adventure she had been called to undertake by Gabriel. Elizabeth would have shared her own adventure, and they would have been able to encourage one another. Sometimes we need to take time out to seek those who have been on similar adventures, to be encouraged and supported in our adventure. Maybe take some time today to 'phone a friend' for that time of encouragement.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you that there are people around me who offer support and encouragement. You have placed them there, help me to reach out to them. Amen.

An Adventurer's Song – my soul glorifies the Lord

Luke 1:46-53

*And Mary said:
"My soul glorifies the Lord
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
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.*

Do you have a favourite song or piece of music or artist? It might be something contemporary, something classical, something cheesy, something random. That go to artist or 'track' that lifts you up when you're down ... that motivates ... that consoles. Maybe you have a play list for different occasions: when you're exercising, when you're relaxing, when you're on a long journey, when you want to party.

In church we have a rich heritage of music and prose, music which praises, which testifies, which challenges. Our reading is a prose of testimony, of praise and of wonder. *My soul glorifies ... rejoices ... God is mindful ... is merciful ... He has done great things for me ... He is the mighty one ... he is merciful ... mighty ... compassionate.* It is as if Mary's heart is bursting in song. Spend some moments writing your adventure song. Reflect on the emotion in your heart, reflect on some of the characteristics of God, reflect on what God has done for you and those around you. Why not sing it out and send it in?!

Prayer:

Like Mary, my soul glorifies you dear Lord. I give you thanks for the spiritual adventure you have called me on and the blessing that you have given me. Thank you, Lord. Amen

The Adventurer's Genealogy

Matthew 1:1-17

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:

² *Abraham was the father of Isaac,*

Isaac the father of Jacob,

Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

³ *Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,*

Perez the father of Hezron,

Hezron the father of Ram,

⁴ *Ram the father of Amminadab,*

Amminadab the father of Nahshon,

Nahshon the father of Salmon,

⁵ *Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,*

Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,

Obed the father of Jesse,

⁶ *and Jesse the father of King David.*

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

⁷ *Solomon the father of Rehoboam,*

Rehoboam the father of Abijah,

Abijah the father of Asa,

⁸ *Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,*

Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,

Jehoram the father of Uzziah,

⁹ *Uzziah the father of Jotham,*

Jotham the father of Ahaz,

Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,

¹⁰ *Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,*

Manasseh the father of Amon,

Amon the father of Josiah,

¹¹ *and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.*

¹² *After the exile to Babylon:*

Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,

Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

¹³ *Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,*

Abihud the father of Eliakim,

Eliakim the father of Azor,

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

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

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

*¹⁷ Thus 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.*

'Who do you think you are?' is a popular TV programme. Each episode follows a celebrity who discovers more and more about their family history. By doing so, we learn about some of their less salubrious relatives. For some, researching their family tree is a passion now made easier through the internet. For some, a simple DNA test will let them know where their heritage comes from. For some, it is not of interest.

Genealogy, being able to trace your roots, was an important part of the Jewish culture, demonstrated by the fact that Jesus' genealogy is placed right at the start of the New Testament. Jesus' lineage can be traced back, through Joseph, to David, and was part of the prophecy of the Old Testament. Jesus' adventure was part of His roots. Whilst we might not be able to trace our genealogy back to David, when we become Christians, we are adopted into God's family. Being part of God's family brings with it a commitment to live like to children of God, and to join Jesus' adventure – to proclaim the Good News of God (Mark 1:14). How's that proclamation going on your frontline?

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for adopting me into your family, for making me part of your adventure. Help me to proclaim your Good News to those I meet.
Amen.

An adventurer has 'cold-feet'

Matthew 1:18-19

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

Whatever our adventure, whether short or long, there are always times when we have 'cold' feet. Times when we want to give up and go back to the familiar of the past. It's all too hard, too difficult, too complicated. At these times we need to ensure that we listen to voices of encouragement and not to voices of discouragement ... to voices of support rather than voices of opposition ... to voices that boost our morale rather than sap our energy. We need to listen to God and God's messengers not to those nagging voices of negativity inside our heads.

Joseph was having cold feet, he didn't want to be part of the adventure that Mary had been called to – he had been listening to voices of discouragement, voices of opposition, voices that were sapping his energy. His cold feet were going to give Mary the cold shoulder – in the nicest possible way. At times when we are having cold feet maybe, like Joseph, we should sleep on it, things look better in the morning – they did for Joseph.

Prayer

Dear Lord, there are times when I don't understand the adventure you have called me on. Help me not to have 'cold feet' but to trust that you have the way planned. Thank you. Amen.

Dreaming of an Adventure

Matthew 1:20-23

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

²² *All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").*

Things feel better in the morning, and after going to bed with cold feet, Joseph wakes in the morning and after dreaming that he was part of this divine adventure, he 'joins the programme'. In his dream, the angel told him that the son which would be born to Mary was to be called Immanuel, 'God with us.'

Sometimes when things are getting us down, when we are unsure, confused or confuddled (it's a good word), then we need to take time out. Mary went to see Elizabeth, Joseph slept on it, and for Joseph things were certainly better in the morning. We do need to take time out, to allow God to minister to us to remember that He is with us. God is with you on the adventure he has called you to embark on. If you're feeling overwhelmed, take some time to remember that you are not on your own, God is with you. God is with me. Repeat those words as a mantra if you are feeling overwhelmed today or when you feel overwhelmed. What a promise – God is with me. Hold on to that promise throughout your adventure. You are not on your own, you go with God.

Prayer

Dear Lord, I thank you for being with me on the adventure you have given me. Help me to remember this promise, especially when experiencing difficulties. Amen.

Saturday, 10th December 2022

A dream wedding adventure

Matthew 1:24-25

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

According to Google the average cost of a wedding in 2021 was £17,300, although with the cost-of-living crisis that we are currently experiencing, I would imagine that this will either decrease in 2022 due to a lack of funds or increase as everything is costing more! Either way couples are having to reassess their dream wedding. If you're thinking of getting married, rest assured, Nicola and Colin have decided not to put up their fees – they will continue to officiate for free.

After having cold feet and sleeping on it, Joseph took Mary to be his wife. It may not have been the marriage that Joseph and Mary would have wanted or dreamed about, but they had to bend and adapt their dreams to the spiritual adventure that they had been called to. We all have dreams, but when God breaks in with a spiritual adventure, we have to bend and adapt. Is there a disconnect between your dreams and your spiritual adventure? How are you going to reconcile them? Are you going to stay on the 'spiritual adventure' bus, or 'ring the bell' and get off at the next stop. What is the promise from yesterday – God is with me. Whatever your dream, remember God is with you on the spiritual adventure he has called you to.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help me to narrow the disconnect between my dreams and your adventure and to remember that you are with me on the adventure you have called me to. Amen.

The Angels (ad)venture on field trip

Luke 2:8-14

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 Saviour 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 favour rests.”*

The Gabriel and the angels were having a busy time of it, flying from heaven to earth to see Mary, then Joseph and now to a group of shepherds in the back of beyond. Did they ‘google’ the location before leaving or looked on ‘trip advisor’ to see what other things they could do while they were ‘in town’ or where they could eat. Maybe they didn’t need to if they stopped in the ‘services’ at the Milky Way before meeting the shepherds. Probably not. Their field adventure was to bring ‘good news’ of ‘great joy,’ not to get distracted with the ‘side’ issues of going on a trip.

One of the main goals of our spiritual adventure is the same as that of the angels, to bring ‘good news’ of ‘great joy.’ Their ‘field trip’ was planned and their message targeted – the angels’ ‘frontline’ was a field in the back of beyond. Our field trip adventure will take us to our frontline. Paul writes: *God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.’* Place your frontline before God today.

Prayer

Dear Lord, keep me focussed during this period of adventure, to target the ‘good news’ of ‘great joy’ to those on my frontlines. Amen.

The shepherds go on an adventure

Luke 2:15

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."

The angels went from heaven to earth, from God's presence to a cold field, from 'the red to the grey', to their frontline, which in turn turned the shepherds from grey to red. An encounter with God's messengers bringing 'good news' of 'great joy' left the shepherds wanting to know more. An encounter that enthused the shepherds to go on their own adventure to see, 'this thing that has happened.'

What is the name of the 'angel' who introduced the 'good news' of 'great joy' to you; the angel who enthused you to commence God's spiritual adventure for your life; the angel who inspired you to go and see, to find out more, to learn more, about the 'good news' of 'great joy'? Give thanks for that person or people today. Just like them, you are an angel, God's messenger and you can inspire someone to want to see more, find out more, to learn more. Pray that you will be able to share the message of 'good news' and 'great joy' today or this Christmas and help someone on your frontline to start their own 'spiritual adventure'. To turn someone on your frontline from the grey to the red.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for the 'angel' who introduced you 'great news' of 'great joy' to me. Help me to be that person, that angel, to someone else. Amen.

Tuesday, 13th December 2022

The shepherds tell everyone about their adventure

Luke 2:20

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Every day we are bombarded with hundreds and hundreds of adverts, telling us what presents we should buy for our loved ones, what we should eat for our Christmas Dinner and how we should decorate our homes – how we should enjoy our ‘festive adventure.’ Companies spend thousands and thousands of pounds promoting their ‘goods’, but come Boxing Day, the adverts will change, and emphasis will move from Christmas to summer holidays, telling us the best ways in which we can enjoy our summer adventure. Advertisers want to sell us products that they feel will enhance our social adventure whether that is at Christmas or in the summer.

One of the greatest advertisements for an ‘adventure’ is a personal recommendation. You can identify with the person, they can tell you about their experiences, they can share their top tips with you. The shepherds explored the ‘good news’ of ‘great joy,’ and we read that they, ‘returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.’ You are an advert for the joy of the Christian adventure. As people look at your life: how you cope with problems; how you live in the day-to-day; how you interact with your family, neighbours, work colleagues – they will either be attracted to or repelled by your spiritual adventure. This Christmas and beyond, aim to be the best advert for Jesus that you can be.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help me to be the best advert that I can be for you as I journey with you on our Spiritual adventure. Amen.

Some adventurers take a wrong turn

Matthew 2:1-2

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

When was the last time that you got lost? Where were you – you don't know because you were lost! When Colin & Nicola go on camping, they invariably get lost. They pitch their tent, and a member of the campsite team will tell them that if they walk through this field, take a couple of turns we'll end up at the beach. Being trusting people, they thank them, then off they go. After about 6 hours of trekking, through what feels like the Borneo Jungle, they stagger through the undergrowth to find that they have been walking round in circles and are back where they started. Is it just them?

On our spiritual adventure it is so easy to take a wrong turn, make a wrong decision, say the wrong thing, reach a wrong assumption, which results in our adventure going south (to fail). The Magi travelled from the east but made a wrong turn which resulted in them being in the wrong place with the wrong person. Are you lost today? Not physically, maybe not completely, but just a bit lost or tired or weary. Maybe you need to take some time to refocus – at this busy time, what is important spiritually, what is important emotionally, what is important communally (your family and friends). Take time to get your adventure back on track.

Prayer

Dear Lord, 'when I was lost you came and rescued me'. Whilst I might only be a little lost today, please rescue me to live in the 'full assurance of your love.' Amen.

Some try to halt the adventure

Matthew 2:3-8

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for

this is what the prophet has written:

*⁶ "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel."*

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

There is always someone who will pour cold water over any plans you have - the naysayer, the sourpuss, the killjoy. You know the one – it might be you! On our spiritual adventure we need to be wise about who we surround ourselves with, who we go to for advice and whose counsel we seek. The Magi made the assumption that the best place to find the 'King of the Jews' was in a palace and turned to King Herod to help them in their adventure. He wasn't that keen, although gave the impression that he wanted to join them on their adventure.

Jesus warned his disciples, when he was sending them on an adventure, that they should be: *'as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.'* (Matthew 10:16). We need to listen to good advice when we are on our spiritual adventure; we should seek good wisdom when on our spiritual adventure and we should pursue good counsel when on our spiritual adventure, but in that seeking we need to be as *'shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves'* – not all sheep are sheep, some are wolves! Who is encouraging you on your spiritual adventure? Who is trying to halt your spiritual adventure? Maybe you need to reassess your relationships and surround yourself with those who encourage.

Prayer

Dear Lord, please help me be as *'shrewd as a snake and as innocent as dove'* when choosing people to support me in my spiritual adventure. Amen.

Mary and Joseph (ad)venture to Bethlehem

Luke 2:1-5

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 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.

The distance of Mary and Joseph's adventure to Bethlehem was about 90 miles, and it wasn't an easy journey especially as Mary was expecting and would have taken days of uncomfortable and difficult travelling, rather than hours. These days we expect things to happen quickly. We expect our journey times to be quick, we expect our food to be served fast, we expect information to be at our fingertips, we expect our deliveries to be next day. We need to be careful that we don't transfer our fast, quick, next day expectations onto our spiritual adventure and expect everything to happen with a click of a mouse.

Peter writes: *'But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: 'With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise'* (1 Peter 3: 8-9). Mary and Joseph's adventure to Bethlehem was part of God's plan both for them and for us. It didn't happen overnight, but involved complete faith and trust in God, who had mapped out this moment over generations. But it did involve them stepping out, one step at a time on their adventure from Nazareth to Bethlehem. We need to approach our spiritual adventure in the same way – one step at a time – in the expectation that God is with us, because He has promised not to, 'let our foot slip' (Psalm 121:3). It will not always be easy, but we step out on our adventure knowing that God is with us.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help me to step out on the adventure you have mapped for me, one step at a time, in the full and certain knowledge that you are with me. Amen

Sleeping rough on the adventure

Luke 2:6-7

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.

We would like to tell you that your spiritual adventure will be easy, there will no problems and life will be a bed of roses. It certainly wasn't a bed of roses for Mary. Having travelled for days over the rough terrain from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the only bed Mary and Joseph could find was in stable, the only bed to lay their son, a manger.

There will be times when your spiritual adventure will be rough, but Mary carried, both physically and with confidence and faith – Immanuel, God with us. As much as we might wish that life was easy, we live our spiritual adventure in the assurance that God is with us. At times when life is rough we need to reach out to Him, to receive from Him, to have confidence in him. The Psalmist writes about his rough night:

*On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night
Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.
I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.*

Psalm 63: 7-8

It might not be rough for you today, but think about those in your friendship group, in your faith community. Is there someone you should be reaching out to today who is having a rough time? Send them a text, phone them, send a card to give them some encouragement.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help me to trust in you when life is rough. To know that you are with me and that 'your right hand upholds me.' Amen.

Sunday, 18th December 2022

The shepherd adventurers find Mary and Joseph and Jesus.

Luke 2:16

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

How good are you at losing things? Many people lose their keys and spend hours trying to find them. Have you lost your phone and asked another person to ring you in the hope that you haven't left it on silent. Then, there are those who wear glasses – you can't seem to find them and when you eventually do, they're on top of your head. Maybe you've gone to pay, and you can't find your wallet or purse resulting in a search through all your pockets and bags trying to find it as the queue behind you gets longer. Have you ever lost a child?! There is a relief when the lost is found and you vow to always put your keys, phone, glasses or wallet in the same place. That is until it happens again – we never learn.

Having been told by the angels the message of 'good news' of 'great joy' they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby. Our spiritual adventure is about finding. Initially finding Jesus, but then finding more and more spiritual gems as we continue our spiritual adventure. Finding out more about the glory of God. Finding out and experiencing more and more of the love of God. Are you still finding more or has your expectation diminished over your adventure. 'Hurry off' today to find out more, to learn more, to experience more in your relationship with God.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, create in me a desire to find out more about you as we adventure together. Amen.

The Eastern adventurers arrive with gifts

Matthew 2:9-11

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

How good are you at buying gifts? Some people have the knack of buying the right thing, others not so. What about receiving gifts? Do you prefer something that is practical or a treat? Can you disguise your disappointment if it is something not quite right? Maybe you have an unwanted present box which you delve into to regift, or you wrap a random present for that unexpected visitor.

Having taken a wrong turn our Eastern adventurers arrive with gifts for Jesus, extravagant gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. They were not random gifts, but gifts that would reflect Jesus' life and death – gold to reflect his kingship, frankincense to reflect his divinity and myrrh to reflect his death. As you come into God's presence what gift do you bring? Is it something extravagant or something from the regifting box? Our gift is our worship and should be of worth. It should reflect God's kingship, his divinity and his sacrifice. Take a moment to think about your gift to God today:

What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man, I would do my part;
Yet what can I give him – Give my heart.

Prayer

Dear Lord, please accept the gift of my worship today, may it be of worth and from my heart. Amen.

Tuesday, 20th December 2022

The Eastern adventurers return home a different way

Matthew 2:12

And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Very often Colin & Nicola drive home from church a different way to the way they came, mainly because their car is facing in a different direction. Also, Nicola and Colin have different preferred ways to travel to church and like to park in different places and can be a little perturbed if someone has parked in, what they think, is their place on the road. Which way do you travel to Church and where do you like to park?

When the Magi left Jesus they 'returned to their country by another route.' When we started our spiritual adventure, when we were converted, we changed direction, we turned away from self and turned to God. Whenever that was, the principle remains that when we meet with Jesus, it should create a change in us spiritually so that we continue our spiritual adventure in a closer and deeper relationship with Jesus. That turning is an ongoing process. What does Paul write (Philippians 2:12b-13):

... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.

As we return home, 'by another route,' our spiritual adventure should bring us into an ever closer and deeper relationship with God – this Christmas, continue to work out your salvation.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, help me to turn closer to you every time I come into your presence. Amen.

Wednesday, 21st December 2022

An unexpected adventure for the young family

Matthew 2:13-15

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

I wonder what your dream adventure would be – a safari, a skydive, swimming with dolphins? Whilst the last 9 months had been a rollercoaster of an adventure for Mary and Joseph, the visit from the Magi and Shepherd's, along with presents they received, should have given them some peace and reassurance as they prepared to return home. That wasn't to be the case and the dream of returning to Nazareth was replaced with an unexpected adventure to Egypt.

Many of us like routine, we eat at a similar time every day, we shop in the same shop on the same day every week, we do our washing or our cleaning on the same day every week. Our biggest adventure might be putting the bins out on the same day every week. Routine gives us security and peace of mind, but it can bring complacency. In Philippians 3, Paul writes:

¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

On our spiritual adventure we cannot be complacent, we need to press on. That brings with it unexpected adventures, which, like Mary and Joseph we need to embrace. Even if it does take us into the unknown, we know that God is with us.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help me to press on into the unknown adventure you have called me to, in knowledge that you are with me. Amen.

The Adventurer Shines in the Darkness

John 1:1-5

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

Yesterday was the shortest day of the year and last night one of the longest. From this point on, the days should get longer and the nights shorter. It won't be long before we see signs of new growth and then the summer will follow on. As the days grow longer, so many of us will feel more positive. Light certainly makes us feel better.

In our reading today Jesus is described as Light, and later in John's gospel Jesus himself refers to himself as the, 'Light of the World' (John 8:12) and goes on to say: 'whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.' When we come into a relationship with Jesus, we move from darkness to light, the light which illumines our spiritual adventure. However, this move from darkness to light, brings with it a responsibility to reflect that light to the people around us. What did Jesus say:

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

Matthew 5:14-15

Prayer

Dear Lord, as you illuminate the way for me, help me to reflect your light to others. Amen.

Mary ponders the adventure so far

Luke 2:19

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

For those who take photos on their phones, very often the following year you will receive a notification – this is what you were doing last year - encouraging you to look back and ponder your photographs and remember your experiences. This isn't a new thing. In the Old Testament, we find many examples where people put marks on the landscape at places where God has spoken to them – Abraham, Genesis 12:7; Jacob, Genesis 35:7; Moses, Exodus 24:4. These would be a reminder when they travelled back that way, that God had spoken to them, and would help them ponder the greatness and majesty of God.

On our spiritual adventure, we need to place markers, take 'spiritual photographs', of times when we feel close to God, when God has helped us, when God has spoken to us. This was important to Mary who, following the visit of the shepherds, 'treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.' Take some time to do some pondering – think about the times when you have felt close to God, when God has helped you, when God has spoken to you. Why? To give you encouragement, especially when your spiritual adventure isn't easy, or you are experiencing difficulties. Maybe write them down or consider starting a journal if you haven't already.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for those really special times when I have felt so close to you. Help me to remember and reflect and be encouraged by them. Amen.

Saturday, 24th December 2022

The Adventurer named

Luke 2:21

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

Names are funny things. Some are shortened, some are changed, some are forgotten, some we find difficult to pronounce and spell, some people are known by different names at work to at home, some grow into their names others not. What about your name, do you like it? Throughout this advent series, our theme has been 'adventure'. I wonder what name you would give yourself as a spiritual adventurer? Maybe it would be the brave; the timid; conqueror. Or maybe it would be something less complimentary – Jesus named James and John the '*sons of thunder*' (Mark 3:17).

Mary and Joseph named the child ... '*Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived (Luke 2:21) because he will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).*' If you have a Salvation Army Song Book there is a section called, 'The Name of Jesus.' Look at the songs between 73 and 97, read them through – what new 'truths' come to you to help you on your spiritual adventure? Maybe share the song and the reason with a friend. If you don't have access to a songbook, here is one to think on:

*Jesus, name above all names,
Beautiful Saviour, glorious Lord.
Emmanuel, God is with us,
Blessed Redeemer, living Word.*

Naida Hearn

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you that I can call on your name, name above all names, at any time on my spiritual adventure because you are with me. Amen.

The adventurer makes his dwelling with us

John 1:9-14

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.

During 'lockdown' many of us used our permitted exercise time to adventure around our local community. It was an opportunity to explore undiscovered roads, long discarded green areas, and path and alleyways that led to different communities. Community became important as we clapped for carers, shopped for neighbours, and arranged socially distanced 'street' events. Now, I wonder how many of us have stopped exploring the local area and stopped talking to neighbours? Have our communities, once again, become fragmented?

In today's reading, we read: '*the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*' – the adventurer, Jesus, makes His dwelling with us. For Jesus, community was His adventure. For many of us, our 'frontline, like Jesus, is our local community, the people who dwell around us. Our spiritual adventure is local, lively and loving. On this Christmas Day 2022, how can you offer your community, your neighbours, the people who you dwell with the gift of Jesus and the opportunity for them to start their own spiritual adventure. In this coming week, which is for many a holiday, try and find opportunities to engage with your local community.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for making your dwelling with me, help me to introduce you to those who dwell around me, my frontline. Amen.

You're never too old for an adventure

Luke 2:36-38

There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying.³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

It's a week since our last reading. Not only are you a week older, but it's the start of a new year. Do you feel older – any new aches and pains – last year (2021) Colin knew that he was getting older when he couldn't open the jar of pickle! Have you made plans for any adventures this year – holidays, family events, career changes? Maybe you feel too old to change - you haven't got the energy or the health or the inclination. In this, our last adventure reading, we find the account of Anna, who was 84 and '*worshipped night and day, fasting and praying.*'

In 1974, General Frederick Coutts wrote a book, 'No Discharge in this War.' For Anna, there was no discharge from her spiritual adventure, and despite her age she continued to press forward. Regardless of our age, God has a role for us to play in His church. It might be different to the role we played in the past, but it is still an important role that only you can fulfil. In this coming year look forward and give thanks to God for the spiritual adventure He has called you to.

Prayer

Dear Lord, in this coming year I commit my time, my life, my talents to you for the spiritual adventure you have called me to. Amen.

**Where will your Spiritual
Adventure take you in 2023?**

A ADVENT



V **Sunday 27th Nov. - 4pm**
Christmas Messy Church

E **Sunday 4th Dec. - 5pm**
Light Up A Life Service
Scan the QR Code to reserve your seat



N **Sunday 11th Dec. - 5pm**
Carol Service

T **Friday 16th Dec. - 7.30pm**
'The Miracle of Christmas'
Scan the QR Code to get your ticket



U **Sunday 18th Dec. - 10am**
Family Carol Service

R **Christmas Eve - 5pm**
Carols In The Square

E **Christmas Day - 11am**
All Age Worship

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The Salvation Army is a Christian church and registered charity in England (214779).