

# **“TREE BY STREAMS OF WATER”**

**(FLINDERS STREET BIBLE FELLOWSHIP)**



## **CHRISTMAS READINGS**

**WEDNESDAY 15 DECEMBER 2021**

## THE BIDDING PRAYER

*Beloved in Christ, let us at this Christmastide prepare ourselves to hear again the message of the angels, and in heart and mind go to Bethlehem, and see the babe lying in a manger.*

*Let us read and mark in Holy Scripture the tale of the loving purposes of God, from the first days of our disobedience, to the glorious redemption brought to us by this Holy Child: and let us make this place glad with our prayers and praise.*

*But first let us pray for the needs of his whole world: for peace and goodwill over all the earth; for unity and brotherhood within the Church he came to build, and especially in this nation of Australia.*

*And because this of all things would rejoice his heart, let us at this time remember in his name the poor and the helpless, the hungry, and the oppressed; the sick and those who mourn; the lonely and the unloved; the aged and the little children; all those who know not the Lord Jesus, or who love him not, or who by sin have grieved his heart of love.*

*Lastly, let us remember before God all those who rejoice with us, but upon another shore and in a greater light, that multitude which no man can number, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, and with whom, in this Lord Jesus, we for evermore are one.*

*These prayers and praises let us humbly offer up to the throne of heaven, in the words which Christ himself taught us:*

***Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.***

***Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.***

***Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those who sin against us.***

***And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.***

***For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,  
Now and forever, Amen.***

## FIRST READING

*Genesis 3 v 8 to 15: God tells sinful Adam that he has lost the life of Paradise, and that the woman's offspring will crush the serpent's head.*

<sup>8</sup> And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup> But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" <sup>10</sup> And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." <sup>11</sup> He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" <sup>12</sup> The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." <sup>13</sup> Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

<sup>14</sup> The LORD God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this,  
cursed are you above all livestock  
and above all beasts of the field;  
on your belly you shall go,  
and dust you shall eat  
all the days of your life.

<sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring;  
he shall crush your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel."

- *Look especially at verses 14 and 15, what God said to the serpent. What does it mean when he says "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring"?*
- *Who do you think is the woman's 'offspring'?*
- *What does "he shall crush your head" mean?*

## SECOND READING

*Genesis 22 v 15 to 18: God promises to faithful Abraham that in his offspring all the nations of the earth will be blessed.*

<sup>15</sup> And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven <sup>16</sup> and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, <sup>18</sup> and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

- *How would God’s words have encouraged Abraham during times of testing?*
- *Notice the word “because” (verses 16 and 18) – what had Abraham done?*
- *What qualities in Abraham did God commend, and reward?*

### THIRD READING

*Isaiah 9 v 2, 6 and 7: The prophet Isaiah foretells the coming of the Saviour.*

<sup>2</sup> The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shone...

<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

- *Why does Isaiah talk about a “great light” (verse 2)? What – or who – is that light?*
- *“Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (verse 6) – how do these titles describe Jesus’ character?*
- *What does Isaiah say about his future kingdom (verse 7)?*

## FOURTH READING

*Isaiah 11 v 1 to 9: The peace that Christ will bring is foreshown.*

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

<sup>2</sup> And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,  
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and might,  
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

<sup>3</sup> And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,

<sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

<sup>5</sup> Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

<sup>6</sup> The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,  
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,  
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;  
and a little child shall lead them.

<sup>7</sup> The cow and the bear shall graze;  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

<sup>8</sup> The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,  
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

<sup>9</sup> They shall not hurt or destroy  
in all my holy mountain;  
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD  
as the waters cover the sea.

- *How would you describe Jesus' character from verses 2 and 3?*
- *What can you say about Jesus' future reign in relation to society (verse 4), and creation (verses 6 to 9)?*

## FIFTH READING

*Luke 1 v 26 to 38: The angel Gabriel greets Mary and announces that she will bear a son, Jesus.*

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!" <sup>29</sup> But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

<sup>34</sup> And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

<sup>35</sup> And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God." <sup>38</sup> And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

- *What did Gabriel say about Jesus' mission and destiny (verses 32 and 33)? Has this happened yet? What did he mean by the "throne of his father David"?*
- *How do you think Mary felt when she saw the angel? How did she respond?*

## SIXTH READING

*Luke 2 v 1 to 7: Luke tells of the birth of Jesus.*

<sup>1</sup> In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup> This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup> And all went to be registered, each to his own town. <sup>4</sup> And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, <sup>5</sup> to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. <sup>6</sup> And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup> And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

- *Why did Joseph and Mary make the tough journey to Bethlehem?*
- *Why do you think the inn was full?*



## SEVENTH READING

*Luke 2 v 8 to 20: The shepherds go to the manger.*

<sup>8</sup> And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. <sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

<sup>15</sup> When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” <sup>16</sup> And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. <sup>18</sup> And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

- *The angel brought “good news of great joy” (verse 10). Who was the news for? Why was it good news?*
- *How did the shepherds respond? What did they do? Did they take their time (verse 16)?*
- *Why did God announce the birth of Jesus, complete with glorious sound and light, to unimportant shepherds?*

## EIGHTH READING

*Matthew 2 v 1 to 12: The wise men are led by the star to Jesus.*

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup> ““And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel.””

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” <sup>9</sup> After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

- *How did King Herod react to the news of Jesus’ birth? Do you think he really meant to worship him (verse 8)?*
- *The “chief priests and teachers of the law” seemed to know all about the situation. Were they keen to worship the child?*
- *How did the wise men react? What did they do (verses 9 to 11)?*

## NINTH READING

*John 1 v 1 to 18: John unfolds the great mystery of the incarnation.*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

<sup>9</sup> The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right [authority] to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. <sup>15</sup> (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) <sup>16</sup> For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

- *Who is Jesus? See verses 1 to 4.*
- *Why is Jesus called ‘the Word’ (verse 1)? How would you describe Jesus’ relationship to God?*
- *“The Word became flesh” (verse 14). Jesus came into the world, but the world “did not know him” (verse 10). Why not?*
- *Who does, and who does not, become a child of God (verse 12)? How do we become “children of God”?*
- *Life – light – glory – grace – truth... What ideas do these words suggest? How do they make you feel? Do you think they explain the purpose of Jesus’ coming into the world?*