

# This Christmas it's all about ... waiting

Christmas has been done to death. Every year, for the last 2000 years, it's just been the same old story told over again and over again and over again. So, forget everything you think you know about Christmas, we're going to travel back in time to get a sense of why this particular birth is the one we keep celebrating year after year.

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**BIBLE  
SOCIETY**

Live light

*Scripture taken from The Holy Bible: ESV*

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
1	Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.	2 Samuel 7:11b-15	<p>After David becomes king over all Israel, it suddenly strikes him that his house is more magnificent than the tent where God dwelled, so he decides to build a temple for God. His logic seems sound, but what David doesn't know yet is that God is the one who will be building something, and it will be an everlasting house of people who glorify his name. It sounds great, but how is he going to do this? And when?</p> <p><b>Does an everlasting kingdom seem too good to be true? Would you like to live there?</b></p>	Gracious God, help us to lift our eyes and long for your eternal kingdom. Amen.
2	And the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines."	Judges 13:3-5	<p>God's people in the Old Testament are very forgetful! They constantly need saving from wickedness of their own making. God always comes through, though not always in the way that they - or we - expect. This time, God is giving a barren woman a child, and it is this child who will rescue the Israelites from those who oppress them.</p> <p><b>Do you believe that God wants to rescue his people who are suffering? Think of one example where it doesn't seem true, and pray that it would be.</b></p>	O Great God, The suffering of this world is too much to bear. Save us! Amen.

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3	<p>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.</p> <p>You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil.</p> <p>For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.</p> <p>For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.</p> <p>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 Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.</p>	Isaiah 9:2-7	<p>One of the biggest problems in Old Testament Israel is that they keep forgetting God. Instead of honouring God, they are proud and arrogant, selfish, corrupt, and manipulators of their fellow Israelites. Sound familiar? They can't think themselves out of this problem, and even sheer will power cannot expel the darkness that surrounds. This burgeoning darkness in Israel can be banished by only one thing: the arrival of the light. But no one knows when the light will come, only that God has promised that it <i>will</i> come, one day.</p> <p><b>How hard would you find it to believe in the “someday in the future” promise of change?</b></p>	<p>Sovereign God, Thank you that you have sent the light of the world – Jesus Christ – to banish the darkness once and for all. Keep us forever in this light. Amen.</p>
4	<p>But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.</p> <p>Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel.</p> <p>And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace.</p>	Micah 5:2-5a	<p>After many years of injustice, the prophet Micah announces, “A new ruler is coming! And he is bringing peace.” Can you hear the sigh of relief among the crowd when they hear this announcement? And then the questions, “when is he coming? What do we do while we wait?” The answer is not immediately comforting: “he <i>will</i> come. In the meantime, you will be given up to the injustice and unrighteousness that has plagued you these many years.” Can you see their faces drop as the reality of waiting hits them?</p> <p><b>Do you ever wonder if God really knows how desperately we need peace? Do you think that peace would be worth waiting for?</b></p>	<p>Lord, We need peace. Fill our hearts with it, our world with it, and make us people who take peace to others. Amen.</p>

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5	<p>And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.</p>	Isaiah 7:13-16	<p>We are all, no doubt, tired of watching the world tear itself apart as humans abuse each other, both intentionally and not. God tires of it too, and he's seen much more than we have. In fact, God is so tired of it that he gives them a sign to look for, which will hopefully signal a change in their behaviour. A child will be born, but this is not just any child, <i>this</i> child will know the difference between good and evil.</p> <p><b>How eagerly do you think the Israelites would have looked forward to the coming of this promised child? Do you think it would have changed how they lived?</b></p>	<p>Lord God, thank you for the promise of a child. May we never take for granted how much it cost you to make this promise a reality. Amen.</p>
6	<p>There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.</p> <p>He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, 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.</p> <p>Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.</p>	Isaiah 11:1-5	<p>The "stump of Jesse" is the Old Testament nation of Israel. Because of their sin and wickedness, they will be almost entirely destroyed, with many carried off into exile. But though that stump looks dead, it is not! A small and tender shoot will grow from that stump, and will grow into something magnificent. This person, who comes from sinful Israel, will be wise and understanding, he will have the Spirit of the Lord, he will pursue justice and righteousness, and will cut down the wicked.</p> <p><b>If you were among the Israelites who heard this promise, how do you think you would react? Would you be excited or afraid?</b></p>	<p>Thank you God, that you didn't abandon Israel to her wickedness, but saw fit to bring forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse. Amen.</p>

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7	<p>Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the LORD.</p> <p>“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’</p>	Jeremiah 23:3-6	<p>The problem with the judgement of the Lord is that it is so effective. When he drives his people out of the land, he sends them to faraway lands, and separates them, so that they cannot contact each other. That kind of isolation must have been hard, and they didn't have the privilege of keeping in touch using the Internet like we do today! Alone and frightened, this word comes to them: “soon, very soon, a day will come when you will all be saved! You will be brought together, you will live securely, you will not have any reason to fear, and you will not be sent away.”</p> <p><b>Do you need to hear this message afresh today? Spend a moment thinking about what it might mean for you to truly believe that we are able to dwell secure in the presence of the Lord.</b></p>	Thank you God, that you have saved us, and given us the hope of eternal security. Amen.
8	<p>“For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.</p>	Ezekiel 34:11-16	<p>One hides under a tree trying to escape the storm. One sidles up to the corner of a fence, in a lame attempt to conceal its presence from the prowling predator. One, stranded in the middle of a field, desperately looks around for any others of its kind. The people of God are scattered and lost. But here is a promise of rescue. Sometimes it seems as though the promise should negate all the difficulties of being scattered and lost and weary. But the reality is that life in the world is hard, because we are pushed and pressed from every side. Yet it is still true that one day – <i>one day</i> – God will seek the lost, and will bring back the strayed, and will bind up the injured, and will strengthen the weak. We hope in <i>that</i> day!</p> <p><b>Do you feel weak, or lost, or injured? Take heart, God has come and is coming!</b></p>	Lord God, thank you that you have gathered your people together in the Lord Jesus. Reorient our eyes to him, who strengthens and heals us. Amen.

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9	<p>In that day, declares the LORD, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted; and the lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and forevermore.</p> <p>And you, O tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, the former dominion shall come, kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem.</p>	Micah 4:6-8	<p>Imagine standing far off from Everest, in the bottom of a valley, looking at the top of the world. One incredible tableau, your eye gliding up from your feet to the valley to the slopes to the summit. If you had to walk it, it would be daunting. But Micah is saying God will bring us to it, to a summit: 'the Lord will reign over them ... to you it will come ... kingship'. Along the way - as we go up the slopes - there will be gathering, and inclusion, and reconciliation, and strengthening. Those slopes can seem hard. No one in the middle of a journey always believes they'll get there. But when Christians see the baby Jesus, who goes on and dies to become the King in that kingship, we begin to believe God is taking us up to that summit, the Kingdom where Jesus reigns.</p> <p><b>What's hard in that journey for you now? What will that be like for you then, when the kingdom comes to you?</b></p>	Father God, take me to the summit, with you. Amen.

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10	<p>In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.</p> <p>In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.</p> <p>He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.</p> <p>The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, and those who harass Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim.</p>	Isaiah 11:10-17	<p>There are two hard things in this passage: First, all the hard place names. 'Ephraim' is the top half of modern Israel and 'Judah' the bottom half. They don't like each other much, back eight centuries before Jesus, and they should. They're the same people of God, estranged by sin and distance. A bit like some of our families this Christmas. All the other places surround these two. They don't like either Ephraim or Judah. A bit like the geography of the Middle East today. Or, a bit like the hostility a lot of Christians experience from others. Second, we might not like what happens. God will reconcile Ephraim and Judah, which we like, and wipe out all their enemies, which we don't. And, God will bring his lost people back home (on this we may be undecided: it's nice to find a home, and no longer to be a refugee; but it's threatening, maybe, then to have to change our ways to fit into the new reconciled people of Ephraim and Judah).</p> <p>None of us can sort out a broken Middle East, or know who to 'judge' and how, or reconcile estranged brothers and sisters. But Christians long for Jesus to be that 'root of Jesse' (an old-time name for someone better than King David), to be The One. The one to whom everyone ('the nations') to come to 'enquire' the way forward. The One in whose glorious place we may all find rest, from estrangement, from conflict, from sin.</p> <p><b>In your world, who is estranged? Where is there conflict? Who are your enemies? Can you take these to Jesus to 'enquire'? Can you hope for glorious red with him?</b></p>	<p>Lord Jesus, thank you that there is rest in you. Amen.</p>

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11	<p>“Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.</p>	Ezekiel 36:22-27	<p>Particularly at this time of year, it is easy to mortally offend your in-laws, to spend a little too much while Christmas shopping, to crack and lose your mind after hearing Jingle Bells for the 476th time. The reality is that all these things happen when we get so sidelined by the world that we forget it is our job to proclaim the glory of God's holy name. It is, of course, possible to enjoy the family/shopping/carols without cracking under the pressure, but in this season when temperatures run high, perhaps it is today—a little more than any other—in which we need to remember that God's people have been given a “new heart and new spirit,” that enables us to proclaim God's holy name.</p> <p><b>How does the call to proclaim God's holiness make you feel? What stops you from doing it?</b></p>	Loving Father, give us courage and kindness as we proclaim your goodness today. Amen.
12	<p>“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.</p> <p>And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.</p>	Daniel 7:13-14	<p>Imagine living in a land that was hostile to you and your beliefs, like those Christians trapped in the Middle East. Imagine feeling forced to acquiesce to the demands of those close to you, like those Christians who forego Christmas with their church so that they can go to their family Christmas. These, along with many others, are impossible situations to navigate, requiring the greatest amount of wisdom to know how to both obey God and love those who only feel loved when you do what they demand. It is easy to think that the answer is just giving up and running away to some faraway land for the holidays. Obeying God and loving people are two of the hardest things to keep in tension, but we persevere because we belong to the kingdom of God that will never be destroyed.</p> <p><b>Which part of the tension are you finding hard right now? What does it mean to you to know that you are part of a kingdom that will never be destroyed?</b></p>	Loving Father, we pray you will speed the day when we will live in your never-ending kingdom. Amen.

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13	<p>She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:</p> <p>“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).</p>	Matthew 1:21-23	<p>It's here! It's here! Finally, after all the years, the promise is fulfilled. God made so many promises to Israel that he would save them, that he would make it possible for them to be whole again, that he would reconcile all the world to himself. And now, in this baby, it has finally happened. Yet so many of us feel like God is distinctly absent from the world because of the monstrous argument that broke out over Christmas lunch, or because the bad news from around the world never stops, not even today. The news is bad, and family conflict is awful, but Jesus is still with you, today and every day from now until forever. The good news for us all is that it is true, even when it doesn't feel true.</p> <p><b>What tempts you to believe that Jesus is not with you today?</b></p>	<p>Thank you Jesus that you are with me, today and always. Help me in my unbelief! Amen.</p>
14	<p>And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”</p> <p>In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”</p>	Mark 1:7-11	<p>We are either the wisest people on the planet, or the most foolish. We, as believers, have pinned all our hopes on Jesus Christ, which could end very badly for us if it turns out he is not who he claimed to be. It's a strange decision, to be sure. We believe that a little baby—who grew up to be a man, who was killed, who we believe rose from the dead—we believe that this baby is the fulfilment of all the promises of God. It's not like we don't have evidence: we have God declaring it to be true. The truth of Christmas does not depend on the strength (or weakness) of your faith. God has fulfilled all his promises in the person of Jesus Christ, and he is “well pleased”.</p> <p><b>What part of the Christmas message do you find hard to believe? Does knowing that God is “well pleased” with his Son make any difference?</b></p>	<p>Holy Lord, thank you for considering it right that Jesus should come to earth and take human form, for us. Thank you that the truth of that doesn't depend on our faith. Help us to believe. Amen.</p>