

**THE
LEPROSY
MISSION** 
NORTHERN IRELAND



He draws close

Advent devotionals 2025

Foreword

By Pam Rhodes

Vice President of TLM Great Britain

Are you counting down the days to Christmas? If so, perhaps that's because you've got so much to do – work deadlines to achieve, cards to send, presents to buy, food to organise – the list goes on. And with the big day getting closer by the minute, it can all feel a bit daunting at this time of year.

But it's not only the day that's drawing closer. In just the same way as the shepherds, the wise men and the angels felt drawn to the stable, so God is drawing us closer to Him, through the coming of Christ on earth. And amidst all the bustle and busyness of Christmas preparations, it's good to take a quiet moment every day to feel God's closeness in our lives and souls, drawing us to Him with unconditional love.

We have been thinking about the ways in which we sense the closeness of God in our own lives. And in this devotional, we share our thoughts, one prayerful message for every day of Advent.

Put down the list of things you need to do. Lay aside anything that worries you. Find a quiet moment to read and let God draw close to you with His eternal warmth, comfort and love.

I wish you every blessing this Christmas and always,

Pam

1 December

He draws close in the waiting

By Jonny Wicks

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. (Luke 2:25-26)

Travelling by plane to a recent holiday, my youngest son, Jude, had no concept of time whatsoever. Repeated questions, minutes apart, were fired in my direction: "Dad, are we there yet?.... Dad, when will we be there?.... Dad, how much longer?"

Each reply I gave just seemed to fall on deaf ears, until finally I uttered the immortal words no six-year-old can bear to hear: "Look, you just need to be patient!"

Patience is needed as we wait. And waiting is often hard. Sometimes the wait is difficult because we're excited for something – "Ooh, how long is it before I can open that lovely, comfy new pair of slippers I've been promised for Christmas?!" But sometimes we wait in fear of something that's coming up. An exam, a difficult meeting, or that goodbye.

Waiting isn't easy. It often brings concern or worry, and stirs up all sorts of what-ifs and maybes that make our hearts restless. As Christians, we're no less prone. This Advent, you may be waiting for something that's slow in coming. For an answer to prayer, for healing perhaps, for a door to open, or even for God to show you what's next. The temptation in these times can be to accuse God – "Where are you? Do you even care? Perhaps He's forgotten me altogether?"

But Simeon's story reminds us that God never forgets His people. It was in the waiting that Simeon was most blessed. As he leaned on God and trusted His promise, he experienced God's presence in remarkable ways. He didn't waste his life in the waiting; instead, he allowed the waiting to deepen his faith and draw him closer to the Lord. And when the time was right, God came to him in the most wonderful way, revealing His Messiah, the hope of the world.

Like Simeon, we discover that the waiting itself can be a place of encounter. As we wait and lean on God, He meets us where we are. Often not with instant answers, but with His presence, His peace, and the quiet assurance that His promises will come to pass in His perfect time.

So this Christmas, your season of waiting isn't wasted time. As we turn our hearts toward Him, we find that He is already there, waiting to meet us. Waiting to pour out His compassion, to comfort our hearts and remind us how much He loves us. A love which took on flesh and entered our world, so that we would never have to wait alone again. This Advent, may we find joy not just in what we're waiting for, but in the one who waits with us.

2 December

He draws close when we invite Him to

By Judith Merrell

God's angel sets up a circle of protection around us while we pray. (Psalm 34:7 The Message)

The four weeks of Advent can feel overly busy with cards to write, gifts to wrap, mince pies to make, and tinsel to untangle. If we're not careful, the joy and peace of Christmas can evaporate in the rush to get everything done.

Long ago, in the 5th century, Saint Patrick and his followers often said circle prayers. They invited God to draw near and encircle them with His love, His blessings, and His protection. This sense of God's presence is something we all need daily. But perhaps we need it especially during the Christmas season, when our hearts and minds can feel stretched in every direction.

A typical prayer might sound something like this:

*Circle me, Lord:
Keep love within
And hatred without.*

*Circle me, Lord:
Keep light within
And darkness without.*

*Circle me, Lord:
Keep peace within
And turmoil without.*

*Circle me, Lord:
Keep hope within
And despair without.*

Some people draw a small circle around themselves, in the air or on the ground, as they pray. A simple gesture that helps us visualize God's protection, peace, and presence surrounding us on all sides.

So, this Christmas, wherever you are, whatever you are doing, may you feel God's loving presence close at hand. And may the joy of the angels, the faith of Mary, the eagerness of the shepherds, the wonder of the wise men, and the love of the Christ-child fill your heart and mind.

3 December

He draws close to those that seek Him

By Imogen Moore

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart (Jeremiah 29:13)

It's in Matthew 2 that we hear the account of the Magi, who have come from the east to Jerusalem to seek the new King of the Jews. Although we may not know much about their story before this, there is so much we can learn from them. The name 'Magi' means 'wise men' in Greek, and they were likely astrologers, as we learn that it was their study of the stars that led them on this journey.

The Magi were Gentiles rather than Jews. But they set out on what is believed to be a considerable journey to worship a King that was yet to be born. As we see time and time again in the Bible, God was saying 'come close' to the most unlikely of characters and inviting them to be part of His unfolding story. God was beginning to reveal His love for all people and all nations.

And the Magi were obedient to that call. They wouldn't have known what they would find at the end of their journey. Yet they set out in faith, with an expectation of witnessing something worthy of their time and attention. Once the Magi arrived in Jerusalem, their search wasn't over as the new King was not where they would have expected. And so their journey continued.

When they finally found the baby Jesus, in a lowly, humble state, it didn't deter them. They were overjoyed and bowed down in worship. They knew that they had found a pearl of great joy. They were witnessing something incredible, someone worthy of their adoration.

In Jeremiah 29:13, God promises that "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart". To all who take the time to seek Him, He will draw close. To all who want to know Him more, He will reveal Himself. What an incredible promise for each of us.

I pray in this Advent season that you would be encouraged to seek God with all your heart, knowing that He will draw close to you just as He has promised.



4 December

He draws close in darkness

By Kit Owen-Smith

For part of my childhood, I grew up in Cadgwith on the Lizard Peninsula in Cornwall. The village is unique locally for having no street lighting. It is a stargazers' paradise, as the nights are pitch dark and the heavens are gloriously visible. They portray God's handiwork, displaying his glory (Psalm 19:1).

On August 11, 1999, I got to see that glory again during a total eclipse of the sun. Only visible in the UK from Cornwall and Devon, I had a ringside seat. It was one of the most disorientating moments of my life. At totality, I was bathed in darkness. Yet on the horizon out at sea, I could see it was broad daylight with sunbeams streaming down over the water.

When times are hard and we face darkness in our lives, I think the analogy of an eclipse can help. We might be enveloped in thick obscurity where we are, surrounded by fear, grief, or uncertainty. But if we raise our eyes to the spiritual horizon, we can see the light of Jesus.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:5 we read, "You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness". God came into this world so that we could live in His light. He now calls us to be who we truly are – His children. Praise God that our identity is not rooted in our troubles but in our relationship with Him through Christ!

Here in the UK, we celebrate Advent when the nights are longest. It's a fitting reminder that Jesus is the light of the world, that no darkness can overcome. I pray that you too will have a new sense of His brightening presence this Christmas, and know His hope, peace, joy, and love.



5 December

He draws close when we doubt

By Stuart Towell

Doubt is such a strange feeling. It carries with it so many other emotions. On one hand, it can be coupled with immense fear and anxiety. Maybe it's in the form of an unanswered prayer that you've been taking to God year after year. Still waiting for the shift. On the other hand, we might question our ability to do something.

Doubt ultimately speaks of the unknown. We might be unsure of an outcome, and our default is to expect the worst. I don't know about you, but I'm guilty of that sometimes.

Whatever situation you might be attributing doubt to right now, there is a fundamental truth that you can cling to. His name is Jesus! He came so close to His creation. He left His throne to come down to earth and be among us. At Christmas, we remind ourselves of this amazing truth once again. He is Immanuel, God with us. The best thing is, He never leaves us. He isn't just with us in the highs and lows, He is close to us all the time.

Throughout this year, I've faced a lot of sickness. My daughter started nursery, and as a family, we've been dealing with all the bugs that come with it. It's been really challenging at times. I've experienced times of heavy fatigue. In those moments, the doubts jump in – 'will this ever end' and 'will I feel well again'. Often things pass, and while I wouldn't say that I am firing on all cylinders, I know I've experienced God's presence throughout. Whether I felt it or not, I know He has always been close.

When we aren't sure and don't know the answer, we need to hold on to truth. Jesus is the best truth that we can cling to. In Him, we find certainty. In Him, we find stability, strength, and courage. And best of all, we find Him close. So, whatever you are facing today, may you know that Jesus is already beside you.

Jesus, as I go through my day today, make me more aware of your presence. In the difficulties I'm facing, show me where you are. In those moments of celebration, remind me to give thanks. For you are Immanuel, God with us. God with me.

6 December

He draws close in gratitude

By Ray Biswadeep

One of my favourite lines from a Charles Wesley hymn goes like this, “Our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man”! Do you ever ponder, He is the same person who flung the stars in the sky, at whose command the mighty oceans come up to a point and no further. All He needs to say is “be still” and the raging thunders bow in silence. Infinity embraces finitude. He who formed our hands and feet had to be taught how to walk.

Isaiah 9:6 reads, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”. The small phrase that catches my attention in this verse is ‘a son is given’. Yes, we could have never dared to ask for something, or rather someone, so precious.

If I have £1000, and come across someone in need, I will give to them in a manner that doesn’t leave me broke. I might give £5 or £10, or even £100. But the act of God giving His Son was as though He poured the very best of heaven to undeserving sinners like us. So great was the payment for our sins that nothing less than Christ could atone for it.

Charles Spurgeon once said, “It was as though Father entreated us to have His Son. We never asked, for how could we? We were without light, and darkness loomed all around.” This season of Christmas, we should be awestruck at the tremendous display of God’s bountiful grace. Oh, let heaven and earth rejoice and see the Christ, born in Bethlehem. Mild He lays His glory by, born that man no more may die, Oh Jesus our Immanuel!

He took the first step, He initiated it, He accomplished it. He plunged the depths of hell, that wrought us deliverance. We “strangers to the promise” (Ephesians 2:12) have now been given access to the throne of grace. As former enemies of God, we are now privileged to call Him Father, the rebels are now called His friends.



7 December

He draws close in silence

By Gabby North

I don't know about you, but for me, Christmas tends to be a pretty noisy time of year! Cheesy Christmas songs blasting through supermarket speakers, congregations belting out beloved carols, the laughter of loved ones as they share bad cracker jokes at the dinner table. The sounds of this time of year can be chaotic, messy, and joyful.

I often get swept up by the Christmas train sometime in the middle of Advent, and carried through Christmas in a cacophony of chaos, fun, and music. And then, before I have time to catch my breath, it's New Year's Day and the shops are putting out Easter eggs!

I've been reflecting on the story of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. For him, the build up to that first Christmas was a pretty quiet one! When the angel appeared to him in the temple, bringing the news that Elizabeth would have a child, Zechariah's doubt led to his voice being taken away. For months, he lived in silence, unable to share the wonder, fear, or hope within him.

Yet, in that silence, God was at work. When Zechariah's voice finally returned, his first words were not complaints or explanations. Instead, he praised God: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them." (Luke 1:68)

In that quiet season for Zechariah, God drew close. Sometimes when our own words run out, or when the world around us becomes too loud, it's in the silence that we can finally hear the whisper of God's peace. This Advent, amid the noise and activity, perhaps we too can make space for stillness. To pause, listen, and allow God to draw close.

As an organisation that seeks to raise the voices of those who go unheard, we know that silence has another purpose too. When we take time to listen to God, we can be equipped to speak words that matter, to speak up for those who are ignored. The peace we find in stillness can strengthen us to bring peace to others.

So, as you navigate the bustle of this Christmas season, may you find moments of holy silence. May you hear the gentle voice of God speaking peace to your soul. And may that peace overflow into courage, to lift your voice for those who need to know that God draws close to them too.



8 December

He draws close through donkeys

By Debra Chand

Have you ever noticed that some animals just want to be close? Not badgering you for treats or attention, but simply wanting to be alongside, to be near you.

You may wonder, as I often do, whether the birds and animals moved a bit closer when Jesus was preaching. Along with the crowd, they were curious to find out who this special person was. The Lord of Life was calling.

Likely or not, there was a donkey or two among them.

Judging by the merchandise we see today, it may feel as if there's a donkey for every season. Christmas without a donkey can feel like Easter without the eggs. And many of us can feel a deep connection with these creatures. Somehow, these incredibly brave, loyal, hardworking, strong, and fun-loving herbivores have a way of capturing hearts. (Ok, they can be stubborn too, but can't we all?)

Donkeys seem to have had a special place in God's heart too, as witnesses and connectors at key, often prophetic, moments in history. There's the talking donkey in Numbers 22. Beaten for trying to protect an ignorant prophet from disobeying God. In turn, the Lord opens the donkey's mouth, and it begins to speak. Balaam is so shocked that his stubbornness melts away.

It is widely believed that Mary rode into Bethlehem on a donkey. And surely, Jesus being laid in a manger, it's not unreasonable to expect a donkey or two looking on. Wondering why this little gathering was so special that even dignitaries visit. Perhaps they're lost? Other babies born in lowly circumstances don't get such attention.

Centuries after it was written, Jesus fulfils the prophesy of Zechariah 9:9 as He rides into Jerusalem. Not on a war horse, but a young donkey. The very selection of this foal feels mysterious. Unprepared as it was, Jesus foresaw that it would be available and ready for a momentous journey. Carrying the humble King who wins victory over sin and death. The Christ revealed in the nativity scene.

And at Advent, a time of great expectancy and hope, we too are called to draw closer to God in faith. To be available and ready. To believe, to wonder. This Advent, may you be blessed with a new encounter with God. May you sense His presence and inspiration as He draws close to you too. The Lord of Life is calling.

9 December

He draws close in unexpected places

By Peter Waddup

"Do not come any closer" the Lord warned, "Take off your sandals for you are standing on Holy ground" I AM the God of your Father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:5)

I was recently visiting a leprosy colony in Odisha, India and arrived after nightfall. I was returning for the third time and met someone I already consider a friend. Blind and disabled by other effects of leprosy, he told me that he greets me as his son. He asked that the team from the Leprosy Mission pray for his wife and carer. Her health was rapidly deteriorating. She had fallen and fractured her hand recently and had become gravely ill.

We stayed much longer than planned, which gave us time to pray and minister to his wife, and spend quality time with my new friend.

There was a feeling of anger at God, but reflection allowed the truth to sink in. Humankind has exercised its free will and got things so terribly wrong.

That time of reflection also allowed me to understand the privilege I have in visiting these communities. For I know through these experiences that God still leaves the ninety-nine to seek the one. And despite their pain and anguish, the people I met are blessed in a way I'm not through the tangible presence of God in their situation.

Please pray for the many people like my friend in Odisha. Ask our loving Father to help us to see His presence among the blessed lives we live. God's voice is often lost in the noise of this world, but He will help us to listen. We just have to ask.



10 December

He draws close to parents

By David Beazley

The tale goes of children drawing pictures from the Christmas Story. One drew Mary on a donkey holding baby Jesus close, with Joseph walking alongside as they escaped from Herod. In the bottom corner of the picture was an insect hopping along. "What's that?" enquired the teacher. "It's the flea," came the reply. On further questioning, the teacher was reminded by the child of the angel's words to Joseph: "...take the child and his mother and flee into Egypt" (Matthew 2:13).

A friend of mine recently gave birth to a baby who needed to spend time in hospital. I was reminded of the risks and anxieties which attend childbirth. For this special family, there was also the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem (70+ miles), the simple circumstances of Jesus' birth, and the hurried escape to Egypt (100+ miles). We can only imagine the traumas surrounding our Saviour's birth, and His parents' complete dependence on God and His promises concerning the child.

Towards Christmas, our minds almost inevitably turn to circumstances in the conflict zones of the world. To young, perhaps first-time, mums carrying and bearing a child. To dads, full of anxiety for their loved ones. To all parents in war-torn, devastated situations. Where missiles or gunmen are constant threats. Where basic necessities or medical support are nearly impossible to find.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ was closer to Mary and Joseph than they can have ever known. Surely then, our loving God draws close to those with whom He shares the miracle of birth and creation. And especially when they are surrounded by the same threats that greeted the baby Jesus, even as He came into the world to be its Saviour.

May we share our loving Parent-God's closeness in our hearts together.

11 December

He draws close in the wilderness

By Nicky Ward

Advent is a season of waiting, of longing, and of preparation. It is a time when we remember that God came near in Jesus. And that He still draws close today, especially in the wilderness seasons of our lives.

Isaiah speaks of dramatic transformation: valleys lifted, mountains flattened, rough ground smoothed (40:4). These are not just geographical changes – they are spiritual ones. The wilderness, often a place of isolation and hardship, becomes the very place where God prepares the way for His coming.

I came across this poem by Rev Tozivepi-Nzegwu, which may help you think about what wilderness is.

1. The wilderness is not one place, it is many.
It is Israel wandering, prophets crying, Jesus
hungering.
It is exile, silence, division, decline.
It is the migrant turned stranger at the border,
the earth groaning under flames and floods,
the neighbour feared for being different,
the child going to bed with an empty stomach
while others feast.

2. God knows the way in this wilderness.
I do not. We do not.
We stumble on paths unseen,
longing for Egypt's illusions,
fashioning golden calves of wealth, nostalgia,
national pride, self-protection.
Yet a pillar of cloud still moves ahead,
a fire still flickers in the night.
The promise is not of clarity but of presence.
And because God goes before us,
the way is not mine alone.

3. The same Spirit of creation dwells in me,
dwells in my neighbour,
dwells in the one I call stranger.
If I can follow, they can too.
If I can lead, they can too.
Imago Dei is not a privilege,
it is our shared birthright,
etched into every face.

4. So the questions rise:
Will we dare to remove the fear of the other,
trusting that if we can, others can too
with the right care, the right direction?
Will we surround the stranger with the same
compassion we give ourselves?
Will we speak the words aloud,
when silence is easier,
when prejudice feels safer?
God knows the way in the wilderness.

5. This does not erase hunger or betrayal,
it does not mend the fractures overnight.
But it anchors hope:
bread can fall again,
water can spring from stone,
justice can rise in dry ground.
Because every step is taken
by those who share the same Spirit,
those who walk together,
those whom God is remaking
for the journey ahead.

6. So, I wrestle, I stumble, I rise, and I follow.
Not because I see the road,
but because I trust the One who does.

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Lord, in this Advent season, help me to see the wilderness not as a place of abandonment but as a place of encounter. Level the rough places in my heart. Raise up what is low and humble what is high. Prepare the way in me for your coming. Amen.

12 December

He draws close when we need a guide

By Heather Henry

Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path (Psalm 119:105)

The lady stumbled out of her car and fumbled her way to her front door. 'Must get that light fixed' she mumbled to herself. Winter was setting in, and she could no longer depend on daylight to illuminate her way into the house. The next day, she brought a torch. But it wasn't until the electrician fitted a new light that she could walk with ease along the garden path and into her home.

The Magi had neither torches nor overhead lighting. Instead, God provided a star to guide them on their journey, initially to Jerusalem and finally to the manger in Bethlehem. How often must they have wondered where the star was leading them? How long might the journey that brought them to Jesus have been?

In our lives, when the way ahead seems hopelessly dark, we might try to stumble along for a while. It is only when we trust God, through His word, to guide us that He provides both a lamp for our feet and a light to our path. We may have no idea where the path is ultimately leading. But having found Jesus, we can be assured that He Himself is the Light and that, in the end, He will lead us safely home.

Lord Jesus, light of the world, thank you for your word. May it comfort those affected by leprosy and be a constant guide to those who seek to help them. We long for the day when we will all arrive home with you forever. Keep us following your light until then, we pray. Amen.

13 December

He draws close when we feel alone

By Rachel Ormston

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. Your right hand will hold me fast.
Psalms 139:7-10

Advent is a season of waiting, but it is also a season that can remind some of loneliness. The Christmas story is filled with holy beauty, yet Jesus' arrival on earth was marked by isolation. Born in a stable far from home, His first breaths welcomed by animals, miles from anywhere. Poignantly too, at the end of His earthly life, as He hung on the cross, He asked, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Jesus knew loneliness, not as an observer, but as one who felt the ache himself many times over.

There have been moments in my own life when the world felt distant. Once, when I was suddenly rushed into hospital, I faced major surgery and a long, painful recovery. There were days I could not sit up on my own, re-learning how to stand and walk again. I was surrounded by medical teams, family and prayers, yet mentally I often felt alone. There were nights in a hospital bed and weeks at home where fear and uncertainty whispered louder than hope.

One day in hospital, an inexplicable feeling of warmth and light filled my entire body, and I had this sense of 'knowing' wash over me. Immediately afterwards, a lady happened to come around the corner, walking towards me saying she was the hospital chaplain and wanted to offer me prayer! I knew in that moment that God was with me and had never left me.

In those quiet places, I discovered something deeper about God's presence. Jesus does not wait for us to come out of these periods of mental or physical isolation before He draws near. He steps into the place of our suffering. Into the thoughts we don't know how to voice. Into the hidden fears behind the brave face.

Advent reminds us that God chose to come close, close enough to feel lonely Himself. And because of that, our loneliness is not without purpose. It becomes a place where God meets us, strengthens us, and gently teaches us to trust again.

If you feel unseen this Advent, remember you are not alone. The one who came quietly into the night continues to enter the silent spaces of our lives. Immanuel means God with us, always and forever.



14 December

He draws close in dreams

By Rachel Harris

The birth of our Saviour, Jesus, is something truly wonderful. For those of us who are being saved, Christmas is such a precious time of year. A moment to pause and let our hearts dwell on the story that changed the world.

We picture our Lord, born in a humble stable to the virgin, Mary. We marvel at the star that led wise men from the East to Bethlehem. We imagine the night sky bursting with heavenly light, as angels brought good news to shepherds watching their flocks. And we can almost hear their voices still, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!" (Luke 2:14). All of it reminds us that the wonder of Christmas is not just in a story long ago, but in the love and peace that continue to touch our hearts today.

Those first visitors to the stable, where Jesus lay in a manger, must have shared their stories with awe and joy. The shepherds spoke of the angels' message, the wise men of the guiding star. Scripture tells us that Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. What a night it must have been! One filled with wonder, worship, and holy stillness.

Even that most sacred night, however, had to come to an end. The shepherds returned to their fields, glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard. The wise men, warned by God in a dream, did not return to Herod but went home by another way.

And then, what happened next? When the visitors left and the stable grew quiet, when the angels returned to heaven and the star had faded from sight, what remained? The celebrations were over, yet the miracle itself was only beginning.

The Christmas story is just the start – the start of Jesus' life, the beginning of Mary and Joseph's journey as parents, and the unfolding of God's plan for the world.

Even before Jesus was born, God used dreams to protect and guide His people. Joseph listened to the angel in a dream, taking Mary and the child to Egypt to keep them safe. Later, another dream reassured him that it was safe to return home. How tender and powerful is God's care? Kindly using dreams to birth new beginnings, to guide the way, and to protect the precious life He had sent into the world.

It seems to me that God still works this way today. He still brings new things to life in our hearts, often in ways we might not expect. And sometimes, just as with Joseph, He guides us gently and quietly, giving reassurance along the way.

So I wonder...what new beginnings might God be quietly bringing to life in your heart? What dreams might He be watching over, protecting, and guiding even now? Perhaps the miracle is not only in what has happened, but in what He is still doing, as He brings light, life, and hope into our world today.



15 December

He draws close in uncertainty

By Rob Oakley

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6 (NIV)

When Jesus was born, the world was no gentler than it is today – political tension, shifting borders, rulers grappling for power, and ordinary people anxious for their safety and struggling to provide for their families. Into that noisy, uncertain world, God sent a small, vulnerable child. A promise that His presence comes most fully where fear and fragility live.

Today, many of us in the UK watch the news and feel a familiar unease. Stories of conflict, economic hardship, political instability, and the ongoing effects of climate change. While we are blessed with relative security and access to healthcare, many around the world face uncertainty as a daily reality.

In the countries where The Leprosy Mission works across Africa and Asia, health systems are stretched, livelihoods are fragile, and stigma continues to isolate families just as it did in Jesus' time.

God's peace is not the absence of trouble, but a steadfast presence that calms and strengthens hearts.

Christ's peace invites courage. Courage to reach out, to offer care, to speak out against stigma, to bring treatment and healing, and to hold hope when others cannot. Through the faithful work of our partners and the generosity of supporters, like you, people affected by leprosy can experience that peace in practical, transforming ways. Through life-changing surgery, medicine, counselling, and restored community.

This Advent, as we watch and wait with faithful expectation, we remember that the same Christ who entered a turbulent world still steps into ours today. His light continues to shine in dark places, in healed bodies, in reconciled relationships, and in communities that refuse to let stigma win.

Jesus entered a world of fear and unrest; today, he still enters ours, bringing peace when we need it most.

16 December

He draws close through unexpected visitors

By Heather Henry

Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel (Luke 2:13)

I love gardening. Not so much in the winter, when it is cold and dark, but in summer when the sun shines and the air is fresh and colour abounds. On such afternoons, you might find me among the flower beds, digging over the vegetable patch, or pruning a shrub. The temptation is to spend too long on such tasks. Before I realise it, I am weary.

It is then that I often notice him, my friendly robin. So many times, when I have just about decided to quit, out he pops from a nearby hiding place and joins me as I work. Head on one side – as if to say, ‘great job!’ or ‘keep going, you’ll be okay’ – he is my silent encourager. He has never sat on my hand or even pecked at my gardening shoes. Nevertheless, He draws just close enough to make his presence felt and his companionship known.

I wonder...do we ever experience God drawing close to us in similar ways? Just when we think we have reached our limit or have become really weary. Perhaps we have exhausted every idea we had for the youth programme, or we have spent all our savings on a still-unfinished project, or we’ve just run out of steam in doing our day-to-day tasks. But then, as if from nowhere, God steps in! He sends a robin, a colleague, a legacy, or an angel.

It must have been the last thing on Mary’s mind the day the angel appeared to her. And the shepherds, spending another long night in the fields, were amazed when a whole band of angels brought them the news of God Himself having drawn near.

God, like my robin, sometimes seems to hide Himself. But then, oh what joy, when we suddenly become aware of His presence, often in the most unexpected places. This Christmas, even among the tinsel and the till machines, in the midst of our very ordinary lives, let’s leave room for God to break through.

Almighty God, You who are above our understanding, thank You that You are also Immanuel, the one who draws near to us. Today we pray especially for any who may feel overwhelmed by their circumstances. May Your loving presence bring encouragement and hope. In the name of Jesus, the hope of the world. Amen

17 December

He draws close when we feel vulnerable

By Chris Stratta

Vulnerable. What do you think of when you hear that word? If you're a bridge player, you'll have a particular understanding of 'vulnerable'. If you're not a bridge player, I've just wasted a few seconds of your life having to read that.

In seriousness, the word 'vulnerable' might give you a very bad feeling. A sense of being in danger, exposed, under threat. Perhaps it gives you an urge to protect yourself or put up barriers. But I've heard the word used with a more positive slant, with a sense of it being important for us to be vulnerable with one other. To be open, honest about our struggles and sorrows, willing to put ourselves at risk emotionally. And this vulnerability will often lead to a deeper friendship with the person we're sharing with.

I think we can apply both meanings to what it meant for the Son of God to come down to earth as a baby. In 'Once in royal David's city' we sing, "He was little, weak and helpless". Isn't it remarkable that God himself, in the person of Jesus, was willing to be made helpless at the beginning of his rescue mission? What a shock that He didn't come with a powerful army. Instead, He humbled himself to be born as a baby, to grow up to suffer opposition and arrest, and to die on a Roman cross.

Jesus, who put stars into space and raised the dead to life, had the power to come down from the cross and save himself. Yet He chose to be vulnerable. To stay on that cross, because He knew it was the only way we could be saved. The only way a deep friendship between God and human beings could be possible was through sin being dealt with once for all.

We worship a God who was willing to become totally vulnerable for us. So today, you can come to His throne of grace with your vulnerability. With your fear. Your pain. Your despair, in total confidence that you will find mercy and grace to help you in your time of need (Hebrews 4:16). And you can simply pray this Christmas: Thank you Father for little, weak, helpless Jesus, who has made a way for me to know You as my friend: the big, strong, kind Lord God Almighty.

18 December

He draws close in the face of the impossible

By Sheila Turner

Excruciatingly shy people develop sophisticated avoidance strategies. I know!

At theological college, speaking engagements for students' wives were voluntary, so it was possible to give lifts, serve coffee and wash up and avoid being 'up front'. Hurray! But, the best laid plans...

One day, my husband Alan told me excitedly that the College Principal had been invited to preach at the Trinity Sunday service in a boys' public school. He thought it would be interesting to take three young people to each speak on a person of the Godhead during his sermon.

"So, are you one of them?" He was.

"And who are the other two?" I asked.

"Well, there's Bill."

"Oh, Bill will be good."

"And...you." What a shock!

"What? I can't do that!" And I burst into tears.

Alan assured me that another wife would happily step in, but I knew, as one does, that God was saying, "Will you trust me for this thing that is impossible for you?" So, I agreed.

My constant prayer was "You have to do this, Lord, you know I can't. I'll shake or cry or be sick or something"

Trinity Sunday dawned and we all set off early to drive from London to Oxford. The others chatted and I was silent, anxious. The college chapel seemed vast and full of boys and tutors. I was nauseous. "Please, Lord, I need you to do this. You know I just cannot"

I hardly noticed the worship, but heard the Principal say, "And now Alan's wife is going to tell us what Jesus means to her." With leaden feet I climbed the steps to the platform. I stood there; so many faces looking at me and then...

Like Lazarus, unwrapped from his grave clothes, I was free! I spoke and enjoyed every moment of it. This was a miracle to me and Alan was astonished. I knelt down back in my pew and whispered, "Oh, what an awesome God you are!"

Later I discovered this gift wasn't just for that particular day; it was permanent. Shyness and fear had fled and I was free! Hallelujah! Thank you Lord for giving me the grace and courage to step out of my boat! Today, may he do the same for you too.

19 December

He draws close in ordinary things

By Gloria Kearney

She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:7)

"Did someone come to the door last night?" asked the innkeeper's wife. "I thought I heard knocking."

"Oh, it was just a young couple – all the way from Nazareth. We had no room, of course, and the rest of the town is overcrowded because of the census. I think the woman was about to give birth too!"

"So what did you do? Where are they now?"

"I said they could stay in the stable – at least it's dry and the straw will make a soft bed."

"It's no place for a woman to give birth – dirty and smelly and cold. Poor woman...what an awful situation."

I sometimes wonder about the innkeeper's wife...did she ever visit the young couple whose child came into the world in her stable? I don't think I would have been able to resist! If she did, I wonder what she saw? God incarnate came closer to her that night than anyone else in Bethlehem. Jesus, the Saviour of the world, born right where she lived!

The shepherds came because a host of heaven's angels announced that a Saviour had been born in David's town. The Magi came because their study of the eastern sky had told them that a new King of the Jews had been born. They understood the importance of the child in the manger. But I wonder what the innkeeper's wife thought of it all. Did she have any sense that this child would change the world, or was this just a baby who had the misfortune to be born in a stable?

God often chooses to come close to us in the ordinary things of life and sometimes we don't recognise His coming. He comes in the words of a song, in the smile of a friend, in the beauty of a rose or in the majesty of the night sky. Be ready to welcome Him when He comes and receive the blessing that He brings.

May God who loved us and sent His Son to be our Saviour, draw close to us in these days of Advent, wherever we live and whatever our circumstances. May we welcome His coming with joy.

20 December

He draws close when we need strength

By Abielle Hallas

Mary had some good reasons to say no to the Angel Gabriel.

Pregnant outside of marriage, she would face the whispers and judgemental stares of her community every day. (At The Leprosy Mission, we know all too well the devastating impact stigma has on people's lives.) Her husband-to-be might have left her, leaving her to cope alone. And on top of that, childbirth itself was fraught with danger. She would be putting her life on the line.

It's easy to underestimate how brave Mary was. Because she didn't say no. She knew the journey ahead was going to be hard. And she said yes anyway.

She knew that God would be with her. She knew that God's strength wasn't for the powerful. It was for her, for a time such as this (Luke 1:51-52).

It's a story we see throughout Scripture. Of ordinary people who step up, say yes, and trust in God. He never forsakes them. In fact, He does the opposite. He raises them up to do amazing, astounding things. In Mary's case, to fundamentally change the course of human history.

God doesn't call us with a promise that our journeys will be easy. He doesn't say we won't face challenges. He doesn't keep us safely inside our comfort zones.

Instead, He promises us His presence. In every challenge, He will draw alongside us. Like Mary, we can lean on His strength. We can trust that His plans are for good (Jeremiah 29:11) and that He will protect us (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

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

And we can take heart! When all the worldly evidence says this is going to be hard, we have another truth we can cling to. The all-mighty God, who defeated death itself, to whom all greatness and glory belongs, will strengthen us. To say that's pretty incredible is an understatement for sure.

And so I pray that today, whatever challenge you are facing or call you are answering, you will feel the God of all strength drawing close to you, this Christmas and always.



21 December

He draws close to the outcast

By Louise Timmins

Jesus' birth was not announced in royal courts or religious temples. It was proclaimed in a field, to shepherds. Revealing this amazing news to men living on the margins of society was no accident. This choice reveals something profound about the heart of God.

In first century Judea, shepherds were looked down upon. Their work kept them away from religious rituals and they were considered unclean. Yet they were the first to hear the angel's message: "I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people" (Luke 2:10). The Gospel begins not with the powerful, but with the humble.

This moment reminds us that God's love reaches beyond social status, reputation, or religious standing. The shepherds' inclusion in the Nativity story is a powerful symbol of grace. It tells us that no one is too far gone or too unimportant for God to draw near. The shepherds responded with faith. They didn't hesitate or question their worthiness. They went to find Jesus and shared what they had seen. And they encourage us to respond to God's invitation with the same openness and joy.

At Christmas, we celebrate the God who comes close. Jesus didn't arrive in grandeur, but in humility. His birth in a stable and His choice of shepherds as witnesses show us that God delights in revealing Himself to those the world often overlooks.

Romans 15:7 says, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God". The Christmas story invites us to live this out practically. It calls us to welcome others, especially the outcast, with the love of Christ. Consider who in your life or local community might feel pushed aside or unseen. How can you extend the same grace and welcome that God offers?

God's message is for all people. The good news of salvation is not reserved for the elite. Perhaps you don't yet know the wonder of God's free gift of love and eternal life. I'd love to chat and pray with you if you'd like to know more. Don't let this precious gift pass you by for another year. You can email me at louiset@lm.org.uk

22 December

He draws close to ordinary people

By Anna Greenwood

"You doubt your value. Don't run from who you are" (The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader, C.S. Lewis)

In The Voyage of The Dawn Treader, Lucy encounters a spell from the Book of Incantations that promises to make the reader "beautiful beyond the lot of mortals". Lucy is captivated by the possibility of dramatic transformation into someone more beautiful than her sister, Susan. In this vulnerable moment, Lucy's vision stirs her deep-seated feelings of inadequacy and envy. It exposes her yearning to be seen, admired, and valued like Susan. Then, Aslan appears and speaks: "You doubt your value. Don't run from who you are."

What a powerful reminder. Lucy's value is intrinsic, not defined by external validation or comparison. It is a truth she must hold onto, especially when the world tries to tell her otherwise. The story parallels a deep biblical truth found in 1 Corinthians 1:26, where Paul reminds the Corinthian believers: "Brothers and sisters, consider who you were when God called you to salvation. Not many of you were wise scholars by human standards, nor were many of you in positions of power. Not many were considered elite when you answered God's call." (1 Corinthians 1:26 The Passion Translation)

Paul is inviting the Corinthians to reflect deeply on their spiritual journey, reminding them that their place in God's family was never earned by human merit. The early church was made up mostly of ordinary people – those without wealth, power, or influence. Yet God deliberately chose those the world might overlook to build his kingdom. It is a beautiful picture of how inclusive the gospel truly is. It doesn't matter where you come from or what you have achieved. God's sovereign invitation to salvation through Christ is open to all.

God's kingdom works in a way that turns worldly expectations upside down, and that is good news for us all. The world says we need to be more, do more, and have more to make a difference. But God says He can use us just as we are. Throughout history, God has often chosen those the world disregards to carry out his purposes. Even in the story of Jesus, God did not choose the powerful or elite to witness his incarnation and glory. It is not human strength or status that fulfills his will, but God's divine power and presence working through us.

Salvation, then, is an act of grace. A gift that restores our identity in love and truth. Our worth is not something we must prove; it is something already affirmed by God himself. So, celebrate the truth that God's plan includes you, exactly as He made you: unique, chosen, and essential to his kingdom work.



23 December

He draws close during praise

By Margaret Nderitu

The Christmas story is filled with praise. Mary, Zechariah, the angels, and the shepherds all worshipped and glorified God. And just as it was for them, our praise opens space for His presence. It is in praise that we build faith and make our hearts ready to receive from God.

Praise takes our focus off ourselves and places it on God. It prepares our hearts to meet God, to feel His presence, and know His grace. It opens the door to understanding what God has done and is doing still. At the Nativity, Mary, Joseph, the angels, and the shepherds praised God. And through this, they saw who Jesus was. The King who brings redemption and new hope to the world.

Praise unites us. Those who praised God at the news of Jesus' birth were very different. Yet honouring the Christ Child drew them together. It's a message of hope for us today, taking us beyond all that divides, even in the war-torn and troubled reaches of our world.

When we praise God, we arm ourselves with a formidable spiritual weapon. One that silences the enemy and makes way for His divine intervention. In 2 Chronicles 20, we read how when King Jehoshaphat directed his army to glorify God, victory followed. In our troubled world, we might see no way through the challenges we face. Praising God will open that way! The Lord will draw near, and we will see breakthroughs.

So, this Christmas let us answer the call of Psalm 150:6: "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord".

As a recent popular song titled 'Praise' invites us, let us praise the Lord in all circumstances. In the joyful times, in the sad times. In the valley and on the mountain top.

Let us praise Him as we celebrate this wonderful season with our loved ones. Let us declare with Zechariah, God is to be praised because He is merciful and gracious to His people. Let us magnify His name with Mary, because He has done great and marvellous things. Let us glorify Him as the great choir of angels did. Finally, like the shepherds, let us tell everyone about this great and wonderful news of the birth of a saviour.

And when we praise, God will draw close today, this Christmas, and forever.

24 December

He draws close to bring hope

By Siân Arulanantham

In our lives there is often so much that drags us down – problems to surmount, relationships to navigate, disappointments to deal with. That is without the bigger problems going on in the world: devastating wars, heartbreaking environmental damage, climate change disasters, human rights abuses, and injustice.

When we listen to the news or hear of the challenges faced by so many people affected by leprosy, we can feel overwhelmed by despair. Our world is in such a mess that sometimes we might wonder whether God is really in control.

Advent is a good reminder that our God is not just the creator of the universe, He is the controller of it – however incongruous that might seem. God has not abandoned His creation to its fate. He loves each of us as His children. When we feel far away from Him, He does not abandon us. He reaches out through the gift of His Son and has given us promises to cling to, particularly during the dark times:

- He is Immanuel, God with us. He will never leave us or forsake us, and nothing will separate us from Him. We need never face our problems alone. He is always there to guide and protect us.
- God is our Father, and loves us so much, despite our imperfections, that He was willing to sacrifice His Son for us.
- Salvation is for everyone, and can be claimed by ordinary people like you and me.
- He hears our prayers, and as we come into His presence, He will surround us by His peace.
- He will have the ultimate victory; light will reign over darkness.
- Jesus died for us, so we can claim our gift of everlasting life, where our pain will be wiped away. Where love will abound and justice will reign.

For me, perhaps the most important promise of the Christmas story is that Jesus came to bring hope to all. You don't have to be wealthy or educated, socially respected or confident, have a good job, or a life that is Instagram-worthy. Jesus came for all, regardless. He came for the widow, the orphan, the homeless, the sick, and the bereaved. He came for those pushed to the margins, the refugees, the victims of abuse, the lonely, and those who are afraid. He came for those affected by leprosy, as well as for you and for me.

And when He came, He brought a hope unlike any other.

Amid the darkness that surrounds us during the winter season and the darkness that tries to permeate our lives, we can find hope in the birth of Jesus. Just like a candle shining in the darkness, the birth of Jesus brings light and hope. Cling to that hope this Christmas!

I pray that just as the heavenly host of angels lit the sky with joy, praise and thanksgiving, bringing hope to the shepherds, so God will fill you with His light, joy, and hope this Christmas.

25 December

He draws close in times of joy

By Freya Irvine

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (Philippians 4:4)

Advent is basically heaven's countdown to the biggest birthday party ever. And when Jesus was born, the celebration was epic. Angels didn't just whisper the news, they sang it! A whole choir lit up the night sky, dazzling shepherds with a concert that began with "Glory to God in the highest!" (Luke 2:14). That's not quiet joy. That's full volume, heart-bursting, sky-splitting joy.

Mary, too, couldn't keep her joy to herself. She sang her own song: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46-47). Her circumstances weren't easy – young, pregnant, far from home, but her heart was full. Why? Because she knew God was doing something wonderful. Her song reminds us that joy is not the absence of hardship, but the presence of God.

Joy is woven through the story of Jesus' birth. The shepherds, startled by angels, ran to see the newborn King and returned glorifying and praising God (Luke 2:20). The wise men, guided by a star, "rejoiced exceedingly with great joy" (Matthew 2:10) when they found Him. Every celebration in the nativity story reflects the truth that God is with us, Immanuel.

And here's the best part: that joy didn't stay in Bethlehem. It's for us too. Whether you're sipping hot chocolate by the tree or navigating a tough season, joy is still possible. Not because life is perfect, but because Jesus is present.

In our own lives, joy often comes in unexpected places. It may arrive in a quiet moment of prayer, in the laughter of loved ones, or in the peace that surpasses understanding. Philippians 4:4 urges us, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice." This is not a call to ignore pain or pretend everything is fine. It is an invitation to anchor our joy in the unchanging presence of Christ.

At Christmas, we remember that joy is not just a feeling. It is a response to the reality of God's love. Jesus came into a broken world to bring healing, hope, and salvation. His birth was the beginning of a rescue mission that would culminate in the cross and resurrection. That is why we celebrate. That is why we sing.

So whether this Christmas finds you in celebration or sorrow, know this: joy is still possible. Because Jesus came, joy is always within reach. Let's join the songs of the angels and let the joy of Advent fill our hearts with the hope that Christ is near!

Jesus, thank you for bringing joy that reaches even the darkest places. Help me to celebrate your presence this Christmas with a heart full of wonder and gladness. Let my life reflect the joy of knowing you. Amen.



We wish you a happy and blessed Christmas

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throughout the year, please visit
leprosymissionni.org

 The Leprosy Mission Northern Ireland, Lagan House,
2a Queens Road, Lisburn, Co Antrim, BT27 4TZ

 028 9262 9500  info@leprosymissionni.org  www.leprosymissionni.org

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