



THE COMING KING

AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL FROM THE GLOBAL CHURCH

WITH AN INTRODUCTION FROM

Christopher J. H. Wright

Global Ambassador for Langham Partnership



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The Coming King: An Advent Devotional from the Global Church

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Our vision is to see churches in the Majority World equipped for mission and growing in maturity through the ministry of pastors and leaders who believe, teach, and live by the Word of God.

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- Nurturing national movements for biblical preaching (Langham Preaching)
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- Strengthening the theological training of pastors and leaders by qualified evangelical teachers (Langham Scholars)

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Introduction

“What is your flight arrival time?” I spent part of today arranging to meet a Langham colleague from Africa who will be landing in Heathrow. The point of the planning and the hope that goes with it is that she will land “at the appointed time,” and, when that time comes, I will head to Heathrow for a meeting at the airport, welcome her, and accompany her on the last miles of her journey to our home. She is coming to where we live; she will not be turning round to take me back to where she lives.

Paul has a similar image for the “appointed time” for Christ’s second coming—only on infinitely grander scale—in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17. When a Roman emperor or provincial governor arrived with great fanfare to visit a city, the civic dignitaries would go out for a meeting with him as he approached and accompany him into their city. Believers who are alive when the “appointed time” comes will do the same: we will meet and welcome Jesus back, forever, as the returning king of His eternal new creation.

That is the glorious Advent hope which fills our hearts and worship in these weeks before we celebrate Christ’s first coming. And its “appointed time” is known only to God; we are not to waste time guessing its ETA but to be prepared at all times. And there will be no flight delays, strikes, or bad weather! But it is the second “appointed time.”

In this book, we will be looking mainly at the first “appointed time,” that is the vision and hopes of Old Testament Israel that God Himself would come. They needed Him to come, what with the nation and the world in such a mess. God must come to the rescue of His human race and His created order! And, in their prophetic sights, they knew and proclaimed that He would. As indeed He did, in the incarnation of God the Son in the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth.

Psalms 102 has an interesting angle on all this. It begins with a long, heart-rending cry for help from one who is suffering greatly (vs. 1–11). He badly needs God to come for himself: “Turn your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly” (v. 2). This is a very personal plea. And there are plenty of those in the Psalms, recorded there for our use and encouragement in such times. Perhaps Psalm 102:1–11 speaks for you this Advent.

But when the Psalmist contemplates the moment when God will sit up and act, his horizon broadens out far wider than his own needs. When God's "appointed time" comes, it will be to restore His own people ("Zion") and to extend His glory among all nations and peoples. It is a remarkably missionary vision and prayer.

*You will arise and have compassion on Zion,
for it is time to show favor to her;
the appointed time has come.
For her stones are dear to your servants;
her very dust moves them to pity.
The nations will fear the name of the LORD,
all the kings of the earth will revere your glory.*

The New Testament sees the beginning of the fulfillment of this vision. As Paul says, "when *the set time* had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship" (Galatians 4:4–5). Or again, "You see, *at just the right time*, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6).

But as we look forward from that first appointed time to the second, "when the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship the *LORD*" (Psalm 102:22), it is most appropriate that the devotions that follow come from all around the world, reflecting the global reach of Langham Partnership's own vision and ministries.

I look forward to meeting my friend at Heathrow "at the appointed time" (I hope!). Let us all look forward even more eagerly to meeting our Lord when He comes at His "appointed time."

Chris Wright
Global Ambassador and Ministry Director
Langham Partnership

Jesus and God's First Promise of the Coming King

Omosomi'Gamazi Izesu Nimu ogo Venabo mino evene do eita iline gamagi

Darno / Genesis 3:14–21

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

Genesis 3:15

To understand God's promise in Genesis 3:15 of an offspring of the woman who would crush Satan's head is to make sense of the rest of the Bible narrative. It is like joining the final pieces of the jigsaw puzzle to fully understand God's work to restore the kingdom of God in Jesus.

God's Promise of the Coming King in the beginning

God promised a deliverer in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15). The idea and identity of the deliverer is developed further in Genesis and then throughout the Bible's narrative, but the promise is first made here. God intervenes because His rightful rule as King was distorted by Adam's disobedience. In Genesis 1–2, God clearly fulfilled the role of king by ruling over His creation. His visit in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8) was a regular expression of His loving, personal rule among His creatures, but it took a turn because of the disobedience committed by Adam and Eve. Though they rebelled and sided with the serpent, allowing him to rule them, God, from His abundance of love and mercy, promised that He would undo the new, broken order by sending one who would, though struck himself, defeat this enemy of God and God's rule, the serpent. Throughout its subsequent pages, the Bible records a conflict between two kingdoms—between God and Satan, between evil and righteousness—anticipating the promised victory by the seed of the woman who would defeat the serpent.

God's Provision of the Coming King for Us

Jesus fulfills this wonderful promise when He comes and achieves victory through His obedience all the way to the cross! When Adam disobeyed and brought despair and death, God promised that another, Jesus, would obey and bring rescue from death to life. Jesus has delivered us from the punishment for sin through His death and resurrection. And He delivers from the reign of sin by sending His Spirit to lead His people in renewed obedience to God's rule and restored life in God's kingdom. Eventually, Jesus will reunite heaven and

earth, restoring His people to life with God where God dwells. This is, as Mark Meynell defines it in his book *What Angels Long to Read*, the blessed reality of the Kingdom of God: God's people living in God's place following God's rule.* What was lost by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when they went against God's word and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is partially restored now as the church, where God dwells by His Spirit, walks according to His Word as revealed in the Bible. And it will be fully restored one day when Jesus returns and makes all things new! That full restoration is hinted at in God's first promise in Genesis 3:15.

In Papua New Guinea, one of the big challenges people continue to face is poverty and the hunger and sickness that go with it. Our citizens expect the government to deliver, but nothing happens at all! Greed and corruption are huge road blocks to societal development, so many people live in bondage to that poverty. In the face of that, God's promise of salvation through His Son is our living hope and can fuel our restorative efforts! We are the stewards of this promise to re-establish the good and rightful reign of Jesus. As we apply God's Word into our societies, resisting greed, corruption, and selfish living, we are a living hope to the many people we serve as we holistically meet their needs and work to deliver from the bondage of poverty, hunger, and sickness. What a privilege to know this promise and be a foretaste of its ultimate fulfillment!

*Mark Meynell, *What Angels Long to Read* (Carlisle: Langham Preaching Resources, 2017), 14.



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Jesus and Melchizedek

Исус и Мелхиседек

Bulgarian / Genesis 14:17–24; Psalm 110:4

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram. . .

– Genesis 14:18–19a

The story of Melchizedek is an enigma and a mystery first for the Jews and then for Christians. Remarkably, the narrative of Melchizedek is placed right at the beginning of the story of the formation of God's chosen people. God called Abram to follow Him and be a blessing to all families on the earth. He made a covenant with him and his descendants, and, in the midst of establishing a pattern of spirituality, community practices, and worship to shape a holy life as His people, God introduces Melchizedek and shows that He has more than one way of accomplishing His mission. There is assurance and warning in the story. Abram and his people are blessed for their righteous deed of restoring justice (Genesis 14:1-16). At the same time, they are shown that they are not the only agents of God's grace and salvation.

Let us dive into the Melchizedek enigma with a closer look at Genesis 14:17–20 and then Psalm 110:4. The out-of-nowhere encounter between Abram and Melchizedek is a very intriguing story indeed! God is choosing and establishing a people for Himself, but instead of making their founding father the greatest hero, God humbles Abram by allowing an unknown and seemingly pagan king-priest to bestow blessings on him on behalf of "God Most High." Melchizedek brings out bread and wine (a symbolic sign for Christians), blesses Abram, reminds him that God hands over his victory to him, and then receives tribute from Abram. All this occurs amidst rich symbolism. The name Melchizedek means "My King is righteous" or "The King of righteousness." He is the king of the city-state of Salem (shalom) and thus king of "peace" (and king of the city later to become Jerusalem, David's city). So, Melchizedek epitomizes and embodies the godly value of a reign of righteousness that brings and presides over peace. This is what Israel and her kings were supposed to be about (see Genesis 18:19) and what Jesus came to fulfill.

The psalmist, David, picks up the story of Melchizedek in Psalm 110. But here another detail of the story is emphasized, the priesthood of Melchizedek. Considering that the Psalms were composed at the time of an established and

divinely sanctioned Jewish priestly system, it is striking to be reminded that the Aaronic priestly arrangement is not the only one endorsed by God. There is another line of priesthood, and apparently an individual who will serve in it forever, in the order of that strange figure, Melchizedek.

We readers of the Scriptures are fortunate to have a record of the earliest Christian reflections on the Melchizedek story in the letter to the Hebrews (Hebrews 5–7). There Jesus' priesthood in the order of Melchizedek is a central theme. For the author of Hebrews, Melchizedek is not an enigmatic character. He is a forerunner of Jesus. The two of them are both kings and priests, but the emphasis in Hebrews is on their sacerdotal function. Jesus' priesthood is not an aberration or a mistake or a plan B. It follows a legitimate order established by God in Melchizedek. More than that, it actually supersedes the Levitical priesthood and has a superior high priest because it is eternal and Christ's sacrifice of Himself is perfect and once-for-all (Hebrews 9:11-14).

The enigma that is Melchizedek is solved when we understand its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus. He is the king of righteousness who brings and presides over a kingdom of peace that abounds with bread and wine. He is the eternal high priest whose perfect sacrifice fully, finally, and forever reconciles His people to God. And this is needed good news for the people in Eastern Europe in this troubled time. Millions in Ukraine and Europe are praying for God's intervention in the midst of chaotic upheaval. The weaponry and mortars are not sufficient to stop the aggressor and free the land. The only and ultimate hope is for the king of righteousness to bring His kingdom of justice and peace in Ukraine, in Europe, and everywhere. Come, Lord Jesus, come!



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Jesus and the Abrahamic Covenant

Jesu to alikawoli nya Ibrahim

Nupe / Genesis 12:1–3

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

– Genesis 12:1–3

The call of Abram introduced some incredible promises into God's relationship with man. As one goes through the great themes of Genesis—creation, the fall, the flood, the tower of Babel—the inescapable impression is like a descent from a mountaintop into a valley. Neither God nor man could be excited about such universal regression. But God did not despair or abandon man to the consequences of his rebellion. Genesis 12 opens with God's initiative for a new beginning: "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you'" (Genesis 12:1).

There is both mystery and marvel about this call. The mystery is why the Almighty Creator should need to relocate Abram to a land of promise when He could easily have blessed him in his homeland. To relate with God requires absolute trust in Him over and above all else. That is the import of Abram being asked to break away from his established sources of security—his family and homeland—all that had defined his life up to that point. It had to be a relationship of faith in God. This remains the unchanging pattern for anyone who will follow Christ. It demands breaking from the cherished past and launching into the unknown future, trusting in Him. May our trust in Him grow this Advent season!

The marvel is that God who owns the universe is so mindful of man in our sinfulness (see Psalm 8:3–4). But He is, and Genesis 12 is about more than Abraham. His call builds on Genesis 3:15 and God's promise, following the fall, to fix what the fall broke. In Genesis 12, God advances His plan for humanity's redemption. He calls Abram (later Abraham) into a covenant relationship that moves progressively through him to his offspring (seed) who become the chosen nation of Israel. The climax is reached with the birth of Jesus who is the true seed of Abraham.

This call came with major promises: of land of becoming a great nation of a great name in special relationship with God, and of becoming the channel of blessing to all the families of the earth. God made and kept these great promises because He is the Almighty, ever faithful, ever sure. Each came true in some sense for Abraham and the nation of Israel, and all will be fulfilled in the fullest sense through Jesus: a great multitude that no one can count from every tribe and language and people and nation dwelling with God in the new heavens and new earth as His beloved children with His name on their foreheads! Through the gospel proclaimed around the world from generation to generation, despite persecution, many have become God's children. Through Abraham's offspring, Jesus, God is a blessing and will bless all nations—as He promised.

With men, promises are easy to make, but often those making them are unwilling or unable to keep them. Not so with God. In my country, Nigeria, promise-keeping is a major test of integrity. On wedding days, couples make promises of lifelong fidelity to each other; parents make promises to their children; friends make promises to each other; politicians assure the public that they understand and are pained by their hardships, promising to turn things around. Sadly, others use the sacred platform of religion to make promises that have no foundation in biblical discipleship only to deceive the gullible. Promise-keepers are rare and much needed, for they are the people who paint the true picture of our faithful God.

Advent reminds us that God fulfilled His promise to Abraham with the coming of Christ. Advent strengthens our faith in God who is able to keep all His very great and precious promises! He will uphold us, never leave us in this life, however turbulent, and take us to be with Him for eternity.



Emmanuel
Bishop in Central Africa

Details withheld for security reasons

Jesus and the Story of Joseph

Yesu dɛn agaran Yusufu

Teyaa / Genesis 37, 39–50

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

– Genesis 50:20

Today in most of northern Nigeria, it is common to go to sleep after a long day of working on the farm only to find yourself not allowed to sleep and eventually away from your God-given land and community. You might end up living as a displaced person or a refugee in another country, away from parents, siblings, school, and many things a person has grown up to love—all as a result of an attack by Islamic jihadists. One of the painful realities of such stories is finding out, after investigations by security personnel, that the attackers were aided by community members—sometimes even a relative or sibling. The story of Joseph and its parallels to the life of Jesus has a lot to teach us about what our response should be amid our reality as we reflect on Christ's coming to the world this season.

Joseph's and Jesus' Identity: Joseph is a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ. Reading through Genesis 37, you encounter Joseph, a favored and loved child of Jacob who went on an errand for his father and was caught, thrown into a pit, and eventually sold into slavery by his siblings. Jesus Christ, the beloved Son of God, willingly left the splendor of heaven to be born into the broken world to serve His Father's mission (Philippians 2:3–7) and, like Joseph, experienced rejection, betrayal, and suffering from the ones He loved. Their stories should encourage us! Despite being God's children committed to serving His purpose on earth, we may face trials and temptations, but that should not change our commitment to serving God's purpose in and through those hard realities.

God's Redemption through Suffering: Throughout Genesis 39–50, one can see God's providence and faithful care for Joseph even amid adversity, pain, and life in a foreign land far from home. At one point in the story, after a declaration of God's presence in his life that led to a promotion, Joseph was wrongly accused and imprisoned for standing for the right thing. Still, he clung to his faith and obeyed God. Similarly, Jesus Christ, despite declaring His mission, doing miracles, and serving people, was accused, rejected, and ultimately crucified by the ones He was born to save. Ultimately, Joseph's yielding to God

brought redemption to many persons and the preservation of many generations of both Jew and Gentile. Likewise, Jesus' commitment to the Father's purpose brought salvation to mankind. Might that encourage your perseverance through suffering, too.

Finding Hope in God's Presence Amid Adversity: In Genesis 39:1–2, we read that Joseph was taken to Egypt and that God was with him. This reality was also evident in the ministry of Jesus Christ where angels attended to Him after a period of temptation. When I was younger, a crisis interrupted my studies in high school and higher institutions because of the persecution of Christians in the Bauchi State of northeastern Nigeria. Reading about Joseph and Jesus has enabled me to go through the trauma and the pains the memory brings all the time. As you reflect on the birth of Jesus Christ and the challenges of His life, do remember that God is with you even amid adversity.

Joseph's and Jesus' Rise to Prominence: The story of Joseph and Jesus Christ did not end with the challenges they faced. Joseph became a prime minister in Egypt and moved on to save his entire family and that generation of God's people. Jesus Christ's obedience to come to the world and endure the rejections, suffering, death, and resurrection lead to His exultation to the right hand of the Father as Savior and Lord of the world.

This Advent season as we reflect on Jesus Christ and the life of Joseph, may we be assured that despite the pains and rejections we face in the world, God is with us, and He will turn things for the good of humanity and the glory of God.



Hankuri
Pastor in Central Africa

Details withheld for security reasons

Jesus and the Passover

Jesús y la pascua

Spanish / Exodus 12

The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.
– Exodus 12:13

For several years in Colombia, my husband and I pastored a church in a violent context. The possibility of dying was a reality in our ministry. We were also involved in prison ministry, which exposed us to much news of death. On several occasions, I felt fear in my heart, but I found peace in the account of Exodus 12. It recounts how the Lord instructed the Israelites to sacrifice an unblemished lamb and to sprinkle its blood on the doorposts and lintel as a sign for the angel of death to pass over those houses. This blood would serve as protection and liberation from judgment, and this scene is a great picture of the protection we have in Jesus.

The book of Exodus is the story of *Yahweh* responding to Israel's prayer, a people suffering in slavery under Egypt. He called Moses, revealed His identity, and unleashed His power for the liberation of His people. The first Passover, chapter 12's subject matter, arises in the context of the ten plagues sent due to Pharaoh's hardened heart as he refused to release the people and instead subjected them to forced labor characteristic of slavery. These plagues demonstrated God's power and authority over the Egyptian gods. The final plague was the death of the firstborn, including Pharaoh's son. It would also have included Israel's firstborn sons were it not for the blood of the perfect lamb marking their homes, a sign for Israel's protection demonstrating the Lord's power over life and death.

God's instruction for Israel included the institution of the annual Passover celebration to honor the Lord, allowing the people and future generations to cultivate the memory of God's great act of protection and liberation. Throughout the Old Testament, in various books, God reminded the people of this event: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt." Thus, the people would have no foreign gods (Deuteronomy 5:6), they would worship Him (Psalm 135), and they would acknowledge the Lord's power (Psalm 114). In the context of this cultural and generational memory, John uses the figure of the lamb to refer to Jesus: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Indeed, the gospel brings us the good news that Jesus' birth would bring redemption to humanity. Like Israel, we need to be freed from bondage—to sin and its consequences of eternal death. And just as it was prefigured in the Passover, the blood of Jesus was shed for our liberation, our restoration, to protect us from eternal death (Ephesians 2:5). In fact, His shed blood provides us with abundant and eternal life.

God instructed Israel to celebrate the Passover to commemorate His power. Likewise, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper so we will remember His death—how it fulfills all the Old Testament prophecies and how He is the promised Messiah! His sacrifice has allowed the forgiveness of sins, and that is why we can enter the presence of the Father and enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit. Unlike the Old Testament, we no longer need to offer an animal sacrifice because the death of the Son of God was sufficient for all of humanity, once and for all.

Currently, we serve the Lord in southern Chile, and, although the social and cultural context is different, fear, insecurity about salvation, and the oppression of sin remain frequent issues in the life of a Christian. Hence, it is important not to forget but rather to accept the invitation to cultivate the habit of remembering Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. As we do, we celebrate His protection and liberation as a pillar of our faith and a fundamental element for proclaiming the gospel to the next generations, and we recognize that nothing we face in this life, challenging and scary as it may be, can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Passover Lamb.



Dr. Eliana Marcela Ortiz-Velosa
Temuco, Chile

Eliana Ortiz is co-pastor at Encounter with Christ Church in Temuco and serves as the *escuelita* (preaching club) coordinator for Langham Preaching in Chile.

Jesus and Moses

ယေရှု နှင့် မောရှေ

Burmese / Deuteronomy 18:15–22

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.

– Deuteronomy 18:15

Myanmar has for centuries been a strongly Buddhist country, but in the daily life of the Buddhists, religious practices are different from the teachings of Buddhism. Thus, the Burmese spiritual quest is connected to a belief in all spiritual beings in the most inclusive form. They are still fascinated by horoscopes, fortune telling, witchcraft, and weird cults as means to find the solution to their daily survival in a socio-economic crisis. On the other hand, there are a variety of so-called prophets in Myanmar today who utter things outside the Bible's teaching, and many Christians follow their utterance without testing to make sure that what the prophet says fits with the Word of God.

God's people in the wilderness faced the question of how they would know God and His ways in the world. Deuteronomy 18:15–22 is preceded by a section in which Moses commanded the Israelites not to "imitate the detestable ways" of the Canaanites and other tribes who listen to magicians and diviners. The prohibition against using the pagan sources mentioned in the section does not mean that the Lord would not provide a way to access Him or receive His guidance. Moses promised the people: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him" (Deuteronomy 18:15). This passage teaches that the Lord would supply prophets to Israel who would proclaim His Word to His people and make Him and His ways known. Eventually, He would send the ultimate prophet, Jesus Christ.

As one of the great prophets and leaders of the Old Testament, it is not surprising that Moses should be a type of Christ. The prefiguring of Christ we see in Moses goes beyond the prediction of a prophet like himself. Several significant events in Moses' life foreshadow the life of Jesus and so help us to recognize God's work in and through Him. Like Moses, Jesus' life was threatened as a child and God intervened to preserve Him. Like Moses, Jesus had a sojourn in the wilderness and a key experience lasting forty days and nights. Both provided bread for God's people miraculously. Both delivered God's instruction

to the people authoritatively (and both from a mount, no less). Both were rejected by God's people and yet delivered God's people. Both fill the roles of prophet, priest, and ruler among God's people.

Given these connections between Moses and Jesus from the Old and New Testaments, we can confidently conclude that Deuteronomy 18:15–22 is ultimately a messianic prophecy, fulfilled in Jesus. In its immediate context, the last verses help God's people distinguish between true prophets and false prophets so they know whom to trust of those who would come after Moses. But the ultimate fulfillment of this prophet like Moses is Jesus the Messiah, God Himself in the flesh (John 6:14; 7:40). This second Moses serves as the mediator between God and people through His death on the cross and His intercession at God's right hand. Jesus is the living Word of God who, like no one and nothing else, makes God known through what He says and does.

Amid false prophets from the church and other false hopes for answers, we know that God has not remained aloof, unknowable, and silent. Rather, through Moses, the prophets that followed him, and in the last days through Jesus, God has faithfully revealed Himself and His ways to us. What great news to celebrate and affirm again this Advent season! While people in Myanmar face the current socio-political-economic crisis, the false prophets are twisting the biblical truth in the name of God to follow the ways of envy, self-seeking, and exploitation, and many look to other sources for wisdom to navigate these hard times. But the people of God in my country and around the world can and must look to Jesus. His teaching and example of obedient love for God and sacrificial love for neighbor are God's way and the way to life.



Peter
Author in Southeast Asia

Details withheld for security reasons

Jesus and Joshua Proclaim God Saves

Yesu kple Yesua de gbefabe Mawu nye ame dela

Ewe / Joshua 3:1–17

Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you."

– Joshua 3:5

The African people hold in highest esteem the one who will deliver an African tribal state from the incessant attacks of other tribal states and foreign slave raiders and give them peace and rest on all sides. Joshua and Jesus are similarly estimable figures who bring peace and rest for their people, and the story of Joshua in the Old Testament anticipates the redemptive work of Jesus in the New Testament. "Joshua" is the Hebrew form of the Greek name "Jesus," which means "the Lord saves." Through both of them, God does just that.

Joshua obeys the Lord's instruction and so leads the people of Israel across the Jordan River and into the promised land (Joshua 3:1–17). The ark of the covenant represents the presence and power of God among His people to fulfill His covenant promise. Indeed, the text draws Israel's (and our) attention to this: "This is how you will know that the living God is among you. . . . See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you" (Joshua 3:10–11). They experienced a miracle as soon as the feet of the priests carrying the ark touched the water so that the whole nation completed the crossing into the promised land on dry ground. The text notes that this happened at the time of the flood stage of the Jordan River. Not only does this make the physical miracle more impressive, it also draws attention to the biblical symbolism of raging waters as judgment (i.e., the flood of Genesis 6–9 and the Red Sea being released back upon the Egyptians). What an awesome miracle of God's divine power and his redemptive grace! God's people cross into the promised land protected from judgment by His grace and love, fulfilling His covenant promise. Salvation is the work of God alone.

There are important similarities between the stories of God's divine intervention and provision in Joshua's story and God's provision in Jesus. In Joshua's story, the crossing of the Jordan River marks a new beginning as the Israelites leave the wilderness life behind and step into the promised land. "Crossing the Jordan River" with Jesus is a transition from death to life through faith in Jesus.

First, there is life reconnected to God the Father. God made Jesus "who had no sin to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21), and when, on the cross, He cried, "It is finished," the curtain of the temple was torn into two (Matthew 27:51), demonstrating the access to the very throne room of God that He had won. Whoever follows Jesus through belief and repentance enters this new life with God.

Second, this new life with God is eternal (1 John 5:11–12). The resurrection of Jesus assures us that He can and will lead us through death into a life that is everlasting. By grace in keeping His promise, God delivers us from sin's guilt and punishment to new, eternal life with Him through His servant, Jesus.

Third, this new life is purposeful. In Canaan, Joshua mobilized the people who experienced God's salvation to fulfill God's mission in the land. Similarly, Jesus commissions those who have new birth in Him to participate in God's mission to witness to and facilitate people's entry into the Kingdom of God through faith in Jesus. Jesus' plan is for all people groups on all continents to receive the invitation of entry into the Kingdom God.

And so, believers from all corners of the globe should partner together for a global conquest of hearts and minds for Jesus. The sweet music of the salvation Jesus brings must be heard from the lips of all people groups worldwide (Revelation 7:9–12). Dr. Kwegyir Aggrey of Africa said that when you play the black keys only on the piano, you get some good music, when you play the white keys only, you get some good music, but it is when you play both the black and the white keys together that you get excellent music. Through Bible-centered and Jesus-honoring global partnerships, motivated by the love of Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:14–15), may the sweet music of salvation ring out to people worldwide!



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Ghana

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Jesus the Kinsman Redeemer

Jesu mudzikinuri wepedyo

Shona / Ruth 3–4

Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel!

– Ruth 4:14

Every five years there is the potential advent of a “kinsman redeemer” in the Zimbabwean political landscape as the country goes into elections to choose a president as well as Parliamentary and Council representatives. All candidates promise to rescue the electorate from poverty and usher in a dispensation of peace, security, and prosperity. Oftentimes, they prove to be false or imperfect kinsman redeemers.

Like Zimbabwe, Israel for a long time waited for such a kinsman redeemer. Throughout history, God raised up many deliverers who pointed forward to the ultimate deliverer, Jesus Christ. In addition to the different deliverers and personalities of historical significance, there were also Jewish cultural practices whose enactment kept moving the story forward and reminding people of their need for redemption.

One such cultural practice was that of a kinsman redeemer, introduced in Leviticus and lived out by Boaz and Ruth. The kinsman redeemer was a male relative who had the responsibility to rescue a family member who was in trouble, distress or need. They would rescue the person or their property, depending on the situation (Leviticus 25:25–55).

Naomi and Ruth were women in distress. They had both lost their husbands and, as widows, had limited prospects to secure their future (Ruth 1). There was need for a kinsman redeemer to protect and provide for them. So Naomi coached Ruth on how to secure redemption (Ruth 3:1–6, 16–18). The behind-the-scenes, divine superintendence orchestrating the events unfolding Ruth 3–4 should not be underplayed! As the story unfolds, Ruth musters the courage and makes a petition: “Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family” (Ruth 3:9). Boaz takes her request seriously and begins the process of redemption (Ruth 4:1–8), resulting in their marriage (Ruth 4:9–12) and the blessing of a son, Obed, who would take care of Ruth in old age (Ruth 4:13–17). What a redemption!

Here are some reflections from this story as we think of Jesus the kinsman redeemer represented by Boaz:

- The story shows how God works through the mundane, daily routines of rustic Jewish life and culture to achieve His redemptive purpose. We must be alert to divine activity in our context and partner with God as He redeems His world.
- Looking at the genealogy in Ruth 4:18–22, the writer points us back as far as Judah and forward to David. This tells us that God’s story of redemption is not static. It has a past, present, and future. We are part of a story bigger than our generation. We are in community with past, present, and future generations of the redeemed!
- The genealogy has both unworthy outsiders (Ruth) and unworthy insiders (Perez and David), suggesting that none of us qualifies ourselves through a work-based righteousness scheme. Rather, God, by His grace, picks us, qualifies us, and uses us!
- We must think about those who, like Ruth, are seen as unworthy outsiders. These include the poor, the downtrodden, immigrants, refugees, the disabled, tribal and racial minorities, and unreached people groups to name a few. We need to bring help to them in their places of trouble and distress and point them to the kinsman redeemer they desperately need. Like Ruth, they need to be sucked into the redemption story!
- Finally, we need to recognize the unregenerate who are part of our church membership and continually preach to remind them (and us!) of our need of a redeemer in Christ!

God bless you as you look back to the first Advent, look forward to the second Advent, and celebrate the work of our great kinsman redeemer!



Mukululi Ncube
Eswatini

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Jesus and the Davidic Promise

Ko Jisu kei na vosa ni yalayala me baleta na vuvale nei Tevita
Fijian / 2 Samuel 7:12–16

Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.

– 2 Samuel 7:16

Who is building whose house?

David had informed Nathan the prophet that he intended to build God a house. This initiative came from David's assessment of things: He is living in a house made of cedar while the ark of the covenant still lives in a tent. In other words, it seems wrong to David that he lives in a permanent dwelling, but God (whose presence with His people is represented by the ark of the covenant) is still living in a temporary shelter. Nathan initially agrees with David's proposal. He seems to suggest to David that his idea was a brilliant one and that he should go ahead as planned. But God spoke to Nathan that evening and gave him new instructions to take back to David. God tells Nathan that instead of David building God a permanent house, God was going to build David an eternal house.

This might sound very confusing for the Western reader, but for us in Fiji and certain parts of the South Pacific, we understand what God is saying to Nathan. Our cultural understanding of a house is similar to that of the culture of David and Nathan. For us, a house is more than just a building. A house is a family of many generations before and the generations to come. Likewise, when God speaks to Nathan about making a house for David, he is not referring to a physical building. He is referring to the Davidic dynasty, to the future generations of Davidic kings and the family they will oversee!

When we read this promise of God, we might rejoice with the Old Testament people of God because it appears they will now settle permanently in the land of promise. But our rejoicing would be short lived, because as we read the rest of the accounts of David's sons, we realize that they were a mixed bag of good and evil kings. According to this same promise to David, God had to discipline the sons of David for their waywardness. The rest of the Old Testament records the exile and humble return of both the house of David and the people of God. The temple (the house for God) built by David's son was destroyed, and attempts made to rebuild it saw only partial success.

The joy of belonging to David's eternal house

However, as we turn to the New Testament, the gospel of Matthew takes us through the genealogy of Jesus and makes the point that He is the son of David. In other words, Jesus comes from the house (family) of David. He is the one through whom God's promise is fulfilled. He is the one who will make David's house eternal and its reach global. Jesus is the eternal son of David who was born of a virgin, who lived, died, and rose again so that even Fijians and Pacific Islanders can be part of God's eternal household by trusting Him.

This Advent season, let us give thanks to God for how He has established the house of David as an eternal house through His son, Jesus Christ our Lord. His righteous reign will be everlasting. His house will include people from every tribe and language and people and nation. As we wait in anticipation of His return, let us remember that God will fulfill His promise no matter how bleak things may appear. He promised David an eternal house and provided the Davidic dynasty with an eternal king. Jesus our risen and eternal Lord will come again, and all of us, even Fijians and Pacific Islanders, will be part of His house (family) forever.



Pio "Tukana" Nakesu
Fiji

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Jesus and the Forsaken One

Yeso Fɔri Wə Nə Imbi Wa'i Ni

Meta' / Psalm 22

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?

– Psalm 22:1

Have you ever felt abandoned? What made you feel that way?

Many factors can cause a state of despair where one feels abandoned, deserted, and forsaken. Since 2016, there has been a war in what is known as the “English” Cameroon. During this period, many people have been killed or watched loved ones be killed, some have been maimed, others have lost their homes and valuables to arson. On top of that, vibrant economic sectors have shut down, paralyzing the economy and leading to an atmosphere of hopelessness. Some have been forced to flee their homes and become Internally Displaced Persons in other towns. Still others have fled to neighboring countries, leaving helpless widows and orphans wailing in the streets and mothers digging graves to bury their loved ones.

In despair, we feel abandoned and cry to God, asking: Is God unjust? Why allow these incessant killings? Walking the streets, one could picture Ezekiel’s “Valley of Dry Bones” (Ezekiel 37:1–6, 13–4), with lifeless bodies littered around, and long for the day God will order life into them. The situation is so bad that people recite Psalm 31:10: “My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak.” Some blame the calamity on the errors of our forefathers. Others attribute it to our departure from God’s will. Whatever the cause, the experience of abandonment and despair is real.

Whenever issues of pain and frustration emerge, humankind’s first feeling is that God seems not to care. This was demonstrated by Jesus’ disciples when He slept during the furious squall and waves on the sea. Their reaction was direct: “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” (Mark 4:38).

Psalm 22 opens with such a cry of despair. In frustration, David groans to God, expressing the sense of abandonment he experienced. Yet the verses that follow express confidence that God, who never forsook David’s forebears, will never abandon him, and that God, who has watched over him since birth, is with him especially when he’s in grave need. David reminds God of His covenant and care

for their ancestors and so reiterates his own trust and confidence in God’s saving grace (Psalm 22:11–21). While the cry in this text verbalizes an accusation that God has abandoned David, it equally reminds us of where to lean when troubled.

And beautifully, this desperate cry of David is replicated by Jesus on the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). Our Savior, too, felt that despair that suggests abandonment and cried out to God. As we celebrate Advent, the arrival of the Savior of the world, we are reminded that the purpose of this coming took Him to the cross of Calvary. The cry of Jesus Christ reminds us of two very important things.

First, in Jesus, God Himself identified with humanity in every painful situation. Jesus, the forsaken one, knows pain: from His scandalous conception to His birth in a stable, from conflicts with the religious leaders to abandonment by His peers—all the way to His crucifixion He lived the reality of pain and suffering in a broken world. And ultimately, He conquered it.

And that leads to the second takeaway: Jesus was abandoned by God on the cross to ensure that we never will be. He bore our sin and its punishment—death and separation from God—in our place. And because He did, we know that we who are united to Him by faith will never be left or forsaken, even when our challenges and circumstances make it feel like we have been. Like the shepherds in the snow tending their flock, God’s messenger brings us words that are relieving, reassuring, and heart-warming; “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord” (Luke 2:10–11). Yes, God sees our plight and hears our cry; that is why He sent us a Savior. May we rest in Jesus Christ, the forsaken one who underwent pain to save us.



Reverend Bah Formijang Cameroon

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Jesus and David's Lord

Jesús y el Señor de David

Spanish / Psalm 110

The Lord says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

– Psalm 110:1

Psalm 110, which is written by David, opens with a declaration where the LORD (*Yahweh*) gives authority to one whom David calls Lord (*Adonai*), saying: "The LORD says to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" This Lord's authority is further confirmed when Yahweh extends his "mighty scepter from Zion" (Psalm 110:2).

Jesus interprets this Psalm prophetically, applying it to Himself as the victorious king to whom authority and power over his opponents have been given. When the Pharisees said that the Messiah was David's son, Jesus challenged them, asking how, if David calls him "Lord," he can be David's son (Matthew 22:41–45). Thus, Jesus demonstrates that, as the promised Messiah, He is Lord even of David. And this is true because He is not only David's son but also God in the flesh!

In Genesis 3, God promised one who would be victorious over sin, death and the devil. This Messiah was humiliated, mocked and died as a martyr. But by dying and rising from the dead, He fulfilled the prophecy foretelling His victory (Hebrews 2:14-15) and His seat at God's right hand (Ephesians 1:20-21).

How marvelous to bring that to mind! Even in the face of so many temporal powers that rise up against God, we belong to and worship the victorious King. He reigns on our behalf, and there is no enemy who can defeat Him.

And there's more! The victorious king is also "a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4). David thus foretold Jesus' eternal priesthood (Hebrews 7:17–25). On the afternoon of His death, the veil of the temple was torn in two. Hebrews 9:1–12 helps us understand this happening as Jesus opening the way for us to have free access to the Father. And at God's right hand, as our eternal priest, He intercedes for us (Romans 8:34).

What amazing news! As we face the reality of our own sinfulness and struggle, we have an eternal priest who opened the way to take us to God the Father. He

provides for our forgiveness, reconciles us to God, and sends His Holy Spirit to sustain us in our weakness and sufferings.

And there's still more! This king is also judge over all the nations. Psalm 110:5–7 shows what He will do on the day of His wrath. The verbs used indicate intense actions: breaking kings and judging nations. He will condemn every unjust and unrighteous power. What began in Genesis will culminate with the second coming of the Lord who is judge and who will pronounce His judgment on the serpent and all that opposes His righteous reign (Revelation 20:11–14).

What great hope! In the midst of a world plagued by chaos, bad news, and dominated by powerful empires that subjugate the weakest and most vulnerable, what comfort to know that the One with the greatest power will use it to set things right.

Yahweh has sworn an oath and will fulfill his Word. He promised in Psalm 110 a Lord superior to David who is victorious king, eternal priest, and just judge, and His promise has been fulfilled in Jesus. Everything will be subdued under His feet. "Anti-Christ" systems and leaders will not have the last word. The Lord Jesus will return for us and reign forever. And so, every Advent season is both a reminder of His first coming and a celebration of His sure return.

Let us say today, "Thank you my king, my Lord, you who are exalted at the right hand of the Father, victorious, eternal, my priest and intercessor, the judge who will return for His church and destroy all His oppressive enemies." And let us pray: "Come soon, oh Lord."



Mercedes Quintero
Medellín, Colombia

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Jesus as the Treasured Word

Jézus az az Ige, aki az igazi kincs

Hungarian / Psalm 119

Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord

– Psalm 119:1

Our culture loves stories. Today, ideas about good and evil and the directions to happiness are wrapped into songs, movies, and film series. In a post-communist culture, like Hungary has, questioning God's existence and His revelation is the norm. Our global postmodern, or rather meta-modern, culture suggests that only resistance to the rules and orders can lead us to our true selves, to our supposedly authentic identity. However, the result of this guidance and advice of our culture is dehumanizing and actually robs us of life. In contrast to these stories, God's words and testimonies are not only for directing, motivating, and encouraging but, because they are true, good, righteous, and sure, they are lifegiving and bring radical transformation. They can make even the simplest wise, having more understanding than all the teachers (Psalm 119:99). They can turn us into salt (Matthew 5:13–14) and light (Philippians 2:15).

The author of Psalm 119 reveals how he is not perfect and the world he lives in is not perfect either, just like our experience with ourselves and our circumstances. He knows brokenness from inside as his soul melts away from sorrow (Psalm 119:28), as he feels like a lost sheep (Psalm 119:176), and as his soul clings to the dust making him feel lifeless amid the struggle (Psalm 119:25). He also experiences brokenness from outside as he suffers from affliction (Psalm 119:107) and others' wickedness (Psalm 119:95). However, he still sees himself as someone who is made and fashioned by God's hands (Psalm 119:73), who is a sojourner on the earth (Psalm 119:19) and a servant of God (Psalm 119:125), and who confesses from his heart: "I am yours" (Psalm 119:94).

God's words and God's law are something to which this man fully relates: with his cognitive capacity (observes, thinks of, meditates on, seeks to understand), with his affective abilities (rejoices, delights in, longs for, loves, trusts, hopes in, clings to), and with his actions (keeps, does, turns his feet to, walks in, lives according to). His concern and prayer is that he would not turn away, not

forget, and not delay to keep God's commandments. This approach reminds us of Jesus' command: love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind (Matthew 22:37).

This psalm is about God's law, rules, and statutes. How is it that they do not restrict our freedom but rather give an essential order to life in which we can freely, confidently live? How is it that as they show what is straight and right, they uphold us and revive our souls? Instead of rebelling against the commandments, how is it that this song shows that our heart can long for them and that their guidance and direction is delightful and desirable (Psalm 119:35, 131)? How can it be that precepts, which at first sound cold and distant, actually warm the human heart so the psalmist says he loves them (Psalm 119:159)? The answer lies in the fact that they are God's words, laws, rules, statutes, testimonies, commandments, and precepts. They show God's heart, what God values, and what is dear to Him. They show what it looks like when love is at work toward God and toward neighbors. And ultimately there is a mysterious unity between God's Word and the person of Jesus. The laws and commands all echo one heart and all depict one face: Jesus' heart and face. And by His Spirit, whoever sees Jesus through His Word—be it among the laws and statutes or in the New Testament gospels—the joy, delight, wonder, and awe will bring that person to the same reaction we see in Psalm 119—singing.

Jesus, the Word of God, became flesh so that He would live a blameless human life, walking in the law of the Lord among us, and give not only His words but His life for us and to us. He gives us, in His covenantal steadfast love, life (Psalm 119:88).



Bori Mikola
Budapest, Hungary

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Jesus as Embodied Wisdom

「耶穌是智慧的體現 (箴言第八章)」

Chinese / Proverbs 8

For those who find me find life and receive favor from the LORD.

– Proverbs 8:35

On December 28, 2022, I took my first step into the world of ChatGPT, and I was truly astounded by its power and capabilities. In mere seconds, it poured out knowledge that had taken me a lifetime to acquire. Have you had the chance to play with ChatGPT?

In this era of artificial intelligence (AI) and hope in technology, there's a growing concern about the possibility that computers, machines, and robots may one day replace humans, making us redundant. These discussions often revolve around how to alleviate this very real existential fear and anxiety. So how does Proverbs 8, which is all about knowledge and wisdom, address the current threats humanity faces?

While Proverbs 8 is a lengthy chapter, it beautifully unfolds wisdom in several dimensions: (1) wisdom is personified, (2) wisdom is superior to material wealth, (3) wisdom already exists prior to creation, (4) wisdom governs the created world, (5) wisdom creates like a craftsman, and (6) wisdom brings life rather than death.

One of the most pertinent messages in Proverbs 8 for our current situation is the emphasis on the personification and embodiment of wisdom and knowledge. It might be said that one way to harness the power of AI is to ensure that, while AI possesses incredible capabilities in terms of information, knowledge, power, and creativity, it lacks embodiment—the human dimension of shared space and rubbed elbows and therefore love that AI doesn't possess (though efforts are being made to infuse consciousness and “humanness” into AI).

This is where Jesus enters the picture. Jesus is the embodiment of intelligence, but of the divine sort, not artificial. While Jesus possesses a preexistent nature with knowledge and wisdom beyond humanity's combined, He chose to become fully human in real time and space. He was born naturally, in a humble manger, His first cry echoing through history. He ate, drank, and lived among us (John 1:14). Like every one of us, Jesus “grew in wisdom and stature” (Luke 2:52).

So while Jesus embodies all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3), surpassing the capabilities of AI, and possesses unmatched creativity as the very creator and sustainer of all things in heaven and on earth (Colossians 1:15-17), all of that potency now dwells forever in a human being and animates His life. Jesus came to earth in flesh and blood to demonstrate what it means to possess truth, wisdom, and knowledge while simultaneously embodying the “fullness of grace” (John 1:14). Grace is kindred to gift—benevolence, kindness, patience, and gentleness to the underserved and undeserved—unmerited favor. In a world where machines drive productivity, efficiency, and delivery and serve a meritocracy, grace stands in warm contrast. It understands our human fears, our moments of folly, our undeniable finitude, and our inherent frailties. Grace is the antidote to the cold mechanisms of our society and what knowledge needs to be combined with to be true wisdom. Jesus, as wisdom incarnate and the fulfillment of Proverbs 8, came to grant life to all who receive and embrace Him as savior and king. In Him, we find life—eternal, abundant, and meaningful. It's a life worth living, and it's a life meant for humanity. Jesus found favor with God and men as He lived out this life (Luke 2:52).

I don't know what the future of AI will be. I hope that there are capable followers of Jesus working in the field who will help us maximize its benefits while recognizing its disembodied limits. What I do know is that Jesus can be received with open arms by humanity because He came full of grace and truth to ensure our well-being and flourishing. Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8 is on the street and by the gates, extending her invitation to all—whether simple, naive, or wise—to respond and embrace what she embodies. As we continue to find our place in the world of AI, Lady Wisdom says: whoever finds Jesus “finds life and receives favor from the LORD” (Proverbs 8:35). May you find rest and hope and true wisdom in Him this Advent season.



Dr. Shirley S. Ho
Taiwan

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Jesus and the Virgin Birth

Kumarir gorbhot probhu Jisu Christor jonmo

Assamese / Isaiah 7:14

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

– Isaiah 7:14

The Bible holds within its sacred passages certain subjects that stir great controversy, particularly among those who do not embrace the faith. Many such individuals work in my field, the medical profession. Two particularly troubling topics are the miraculous virgin birth and the resurrection of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ. For our present purposes, our focus shall center on the virgin birth as we endeavor to understand its place in the redemptive plan crafted by God the Father for the salvation of humanity.

During the time of Moses at Mount Sinai, God made the provision that sacrifices would be acceptable for the forgiveness of an individual's sin or even for the entire nation, but only if the sacrificial animal was without blemish (Leviticus 1:3b). However, Hebrews teaches us that this was always only a temporary provision, evidenced by the need for these sacrifices to be offered over and over again (Hebrews 10:1-4). So what were these unblemished sacrifices pointing to? Could there be an immaculate sacrifice capable of bearing away the sins of the world in perpetuity?

Sin entered the world with Adam's disobedience in Genesis 3, and, since then, it has wielded dominion over humanity, being transmitted through generations much like inherited diseases such as hypertension, diabetes mellitus, and certain types of cancers. In fact, we are born with the stain of sin upon our very DNA (Romans 3:23). This inherited nature inclines us towards evil, even without formal instruction to do so.

Herein lies the significance of the prophecy made by the ancient prophet Isaiah regarding the virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14). According to His divine plan, God chose Mary to bear the child in her womb, eventually giving birth in a humble manger at the appointed time. This unique virgin birth sets Jesus apart from the rest of humanity, for there is no transmission of the sinful nature through His DNA, as is the case with ordinary human conception. Consequently, Jesus was born sinless and without blemish, making Him the acceptable sacrifice in the eyes of

God, as proclaimed by John the Baptist (John 1:29). Today, we bow in awe before our God and offer our worship, acknowledging what He has accomplished through the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ, for the redemption of humanity.

May this understanding of the necessity of the virgin birth illuminate our hearts during this Christmas season and quiet our doubts concerning the miraculous birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He came at the perfect time and in the perfect way to be our way to reconciliation and eternal life with God (John 14:6). Let us rejoice in the divine gift of redemption bestowed upon us through the miraculous birth of Jesus, a testament to God's unwavering love for humanity.



Mahesh

Medical Doctor, Preacher and Teacher in South Asia

Details withheld for security reasons

Jesus the Light in Darkness

Si Jesus ang Liwanag sa Kadiliman

Filipino / Isaiah 9:2-7

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

– Isaiah 9:2

In 1992, Metro Manila experienced massive power outages associated with the weather phenomenon known as *El Niño*. The greater population was plunged into total darkness. I still remember the days and nights we lived without power. Life was difficult. Darkness reigned, making it difficult for the people to live their lives in freedom and joy. There was no peace but rather all sorts of economic and political trouble.

Living himself in a time of political, economic, and spiritual uncertainties, Isaiah hoped for a better future for Israel when he prophesied about a great light dawning on those living in darkness (Isaiah 9:1-2). Israel's rejection of God and His kingship plunged them into darkness. This darkness was Isaiah's metaphor for God's inactivity, if not God's absence, as Israel's king. Through disobedience, Israel had lost not only their kings but God Himself as their real king, resulting in all kinds of suffering. Into that darkness, Isaiah prophesied about the renewal of God's activity among His people in and through the birth of a new king who would bring peace, justice, and righteousness to the nation and nations (Isaiah 9:6-7).

While some better kings and some better days came to Israel after Isaiah's prophecy, darkness mostly reigned for centuries. Matthew recognized that Isaiah's prophecy remained unfulfilled, took up the hope it held out, and applied it to Jesus (Matthew 4:12-17).

Why does the coming of this king bring light in darkness? Why is He a joy to Israel and the nations? Isaiah 9:6-7 provides a poetic summary:

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 Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness

from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

The joy of the great light is anchored in the kind of kingdom He would establish: a kingdom of peace through a reign that reconciles people to God as well as people and nations to each other; a kingdom of justice through a reign that assures that oppressors, swindlers, corrupt leaders, and all evil shall have no place and a kingdom of righteousness through a reign under which all things shall be put to rights so that all may live lives of flourishing! And this kingdom, Isaiah says, shall last forever (Isaiah 9:7).

For Matthew, Jesus is that promised king through whom the kingdom of God would come. Christmas is indeed the dawn of the kingdom of God promised and prophesied in the Old Testament. When Jesus was born, the light shone among the people (Luke 2:1-21). It continues to give light to the world today. And to those who have seen the light, joy does indeed fill their hearts.

Looking at the world today, particularly places like the Philippines, where I'm from, and Guam, where my wife and I now live and serve, Isaiah's words of prophecy appear to be far from reality. Both countries experience economic and political troubles, not to mention people's daily personal and social struggles. Where do we find the truth of Isaiah's words? In the church, the new people of God. The church is the enlarged nation where Jesus is king and where the kingdom of God is advancing through its mission in the world. We who obey the call of King Jesus to repent and follow Him (Matthew 4:17, 19) certainly experience the joy of the great light and the first fruits of the kind of kingdom prophesied by Isaiah. King Jesus is our light in darkness.



Jason Valeriano Hallig
Guam

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Jesus and the Suffering Servant

İsa ve Acı Çeken Kul

Turkish / Isaiah 52:13–53:12

He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

– Isaiah 53:3

Growing up and living in the Middle East as a Christian, I learned to expect responses that varied from criticisms about the Crusades to judgments on eating pork and the affluence of the Western lifestyle. In the minds of my friends, Christianity had nothing to do with any kind of suffering. If anything, Christians were considered the guilty party causing suffering or injustice. Much could be said about the mix of truth and misinformation surrounding these reactions, but it would be fair to say that suffering is not the first thing that comes to mind when people think of Christianity and Christians.

And yet the Christ we follow is the crucified one, the suffering servant of whom the prophet Isaiah speaks in such stark and moving terms. Christ Jesus came into the world to be oppressed and afflicted for the sake of our healing. This is not a truth we can brush aside as something that only happened for a moment on the cross. This truth of Christ as the suffering servant is at the core of the incarnation. It is at the core of how God chose to reveal Himself to mankind so that the nations would see what they were not told and understand what they had not heard (Isaiah 52:15b). Isaiah seems to imply that it is in the very suffering of God's chosen one that He is revealed to the nations. What an amazing thought! The God of the universe revealed Himself to the nations as the man of sorrows, telling the nations that He knows what it's like to be humbled and humiliated, to feel pain, to be betrayed, to be misunderstood and treated unfairly, even to die; telling them that He was willing to suffer all of this because such love was the only way to be close to them and ransom them from sin. This sacrificial love is what shaped Jesus' life on earth because it is who God has been from the very beginning, ever since we went astray deciding to turn to our own way. God has suffered with us through every generation as we've experienced violence, fear of the future, enslavement, war, injustice, political instability, corruption, poverty—troubles we see all over the Bible and history and troubles that feel very close to home right now. God suffers with us. And actually, that is good news. This is the good news that my people need to hear. This gospel is what Christianity should look like.

In a world where people will spend thousands to look more attractive in the hopes of drawing others to themselves or attaining some sort of twisted standard, Isaiah says that the suffering servant “had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:2b). Yet it feels sometimes that we have tried to dress our gospel up to look more attractive and desirable, ignoring the suffering servant and acting as if we've already arrived at the place of rest. But Advent reminds us that we are still waiting, still wandering, still suffering, still fixing our eyes on the horizon to see the coming one.

Let us abandon the effort to try to make our Christ more “attractive” to our wounded world that looks into a broken mirror. Let us reveal the beauty of His pierced hands of healing and the gracefulness of His wounded back carrying our sorrows. Let us not hide our faces as we look upon our Christ who suffers, lest the nations think that God is not familiar with suffering. This Advent, may we remember that we still wait. We wait for the Lamb that went to the slaughter who is gathering His offspring. We wait for the nations to see what they were not told and understand what they have not heard: That Jesus is the suffering servant who suffers and mourns with and for them so that suffering may be no more. Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel is the suffering servant who comes to thee.



Kayra

Teacher and Elder in the Middle East

Details withheld for security reasons

Jesus and the Nations

Jesús y las Naciones

Spanish / Micah 4:1–5

Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem

– Micah 4:2

The people of Israel had divided into two nations, Israel and Judah. Both became degraded in their way of life. The people who had been chosen to promote life became an embarrassment to the God who chose them. Both Israel and Judah left God aside and put their trust in other gods, building idols and worshiping at altars where they offered human sacrifices (2 Chronicles 27-28). The rulers fell prey to the lust for power and riches. Religious leaders and prophets became businessmen, giving hopeful messages only to those who paid, telling them what they wanted to hear. Bribery and extortion thrived in the justice system, causing greater deprivation and suffering for the poor and vulnerable among the people. Women and children especially suffered mistreatment as their society was polarized—the rich on one side and the poor on the other, the powerful on one side and the vulnerable on the other. Moreover, the rupture of the relationship between Israel and Judah rose to such a point that wars arose between them, and they made alliances with other nations against each other!

Into this context, Micah spoke the word of the Lord. He denounced all these things and warned God's people of the consequences of their actions. With pain in his heart, he announced a coming invasion, significant destruction upon these peoples, and their exile.

But the prophet also announced messages of hope, unity, peace, and security for the nations in new times with a new government, if they repented and returned to God. He promised the intervention of the Lord, great in power and mercy, who will mediate and resolve conflicts between powerful and distant nations. He will transform the instruments of war into tools to sustain and promote life. He will teach the way of life in abundance and make those who seek and trust in Him walk in the path of good works.

In Latin America and around the world, many countries are against each other. We hear of bombings, invasions, terrorist attacks, and other tragedies. Several nations are going through internal crises because of division in the population.

Some have gone through strong clashes among their own citizens, leaving the whole country in mourning.

My country, Bolivia, is no different. It also has international and internal conflicts. Internally, it is divided into factions thanks to leaders who seek their own interests. We have lived through difficult times of conflict that left us weeping and mourning. Corruption is the worst of the evils in our society because it has taken over the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial branches of our government and even the Electoral Organ.

There is no doubt that looking at this reality is discouraging. But the message of hope of the prophet Micah is also for my country Bolivia and all nations. The Lord will intervene. He will mediate between us and other countries. He is able to bring peace, unity, security, trust, and well-being for those of us who trust in Him because He has opened the way for access to God! And as we find peace with God, we learn to trust Him and walk in His ways, and that is what transforms relationships and families and communities and even nations. We will embrace and share with one another rather than serve our own interests and greed. We can lay down our lives for others because Jesus has laid down His for us. A new era has begun under the reign of Jesus Christ, one who is impartial, righteous, sensitive, equitable, and wise.

So I ask myself questions and invite you to join me, dear reader: How do you convey this message of peace as a citizen of heaven? How can your following Jesus' ways contribute to peace and reconciliation in your relationships, your family, your country and the world around you? In this Advent season, may we find hope in the peace Jesus came to bring, and may we be agents of that peace as we "walk in the name of the LORD *our God* now and forever."



Maria del Carmen Urey
Cochabamba, Bolivia

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Jesus and Bethlehem

Yecu kede Beterekem

Lango / Micah 5:1–5

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

– Micah 5:2

In the tapestry of God's divine plan, the small town of Bethlehem holds profound significance as the birthplace of the long-awaited King. The Old Testament prophet Micah, inspired by God, foretold the miraculous birth of the Savior who would come from this humble town. The prophecy in Micah 5:1-5a not only reveals the Messiah's birthplace but also speaks of His majesty and reign as the coming king.

In the African context, where believers encounter hardship and yearn for hope, the theme of Jesus as the King born in Bethlehem carries a message of comfort and assurance. Micah's prophecy unveils the mystery of Jesus' humble birth: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clan of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times" (Micah 5:2). The fulfillment of this prophecy in the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem demonstrates God's faithfulness to His promises, even when they unfold in ways that seem improbable and unexpected.

For believers in the African context, the significance of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem resonates deeply. Africa is a continent with many regions facing significant challenges, including poverty, conflict, and social injustice. Like Bethlehem, often overlooked and considered too insignificant, Africa may seem overshadowed by larger nations and global powers. Yet in the midst of such circumstances, the story of Jesus' birth in a humble manger in Bethlehem brings hope and encouragement. It reminds African believers that God's plans are not confined to the grand and powerful but that He chooses the humble and unexpected to accomplish His divine purposes.

In the Diocese of Lango, Uganda, the theme of Jesus as the King born in Bethlehem holds particular meaning. Lango, like many regions in Africa, is home to communities facing poverty and striving for a better future. The story of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem emphasizes that God is present and active in the

most unassuming places, offering hope and redemption to those who feel marginalized and forgotten. It assures believers that, even in their lowliest state, they are significant in the eyes of the coming king.

The African context offers a unique backdrop to contemplate Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. The story of a King born in humble surroundings resonates with the hearts of African believers, who understand the struggle of living amidst challenges while seeking hope and redemption. Jesus' birth in a stable, among the poorest of the poor, reflects His identification with the marginalized and His willingness to share in the human experience of vulnerability and hardship.

As believers in the African context, we stand united, embracing the promise of Jesus as the king born in Bethlehem. In the Diocese of Lango, Uganda, and throughout the continent, we find strength and hope in the transformative power of Christ's humble birth. May His example inspire us and believers around the world to recognize the significance of every individual and community, regardless of their circumstances, as we eagerly await His glorious return and the fulfillment of God's promises for all nations.



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Uganda

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Jesus and the Rebuilt Tent of David

Yesuvum thirumba edupikkapatta dhavithin koodaramum
Tamil / Amos 9:11–15

"In that day, I will restore David's fallen shelter—I will repair its broken walls and restore its ruins—and will rebuild it as it used to be..."

– Amos 9:11

As I write this, social media in India is filled with distressing stories and videos of church buildings (usually big tents made of metal sheets) being pulled down and torched by religious fundamentalists in Manipur (North East India). Regular church people are seen helplessly weeping and wondering when they will be able to rebuild their sanctuaries and begin their gatherings again.

The prophet Amos witnessed "the fallen tent of David." David's tent, another name for Judah, was once a safe, prosperous, and God-oriented kingdom. Decades later, Amos, a citizen of Judah, is now part of the fallen tent of David. Judah had rejected the Law and followed false gods (Amos 2:4). God tried warning Judah of its impending fall and ruin (Amos 2:5). Sadly, Judah's slide continued, and God's word came true centuries later.

Is that all? Can ruins be repaired, after all? As a young kid, I remember our house had a thatched roof with mud walls. When it rained heavily, the mud walls broke down, and our house was a big pool. Immediately, Dad would call his friends and mend the broken mud walls.

Amos knew God's grace, and so he proclaimed that God would certainly repair, restore, and rebuild Judah as it used to be (Amos 9:11). In addition, he visualized a great reunion on "that day." Even Edom, Israel's archenemy, along with all the other nations, would come under the repaired tent (Amos 9:12). Incredibly, there will also be "reaping" in Israel's fields (Amos 9:13). The harvest will be so plentiful that the reaper will not be able to finish before he is overtaken by the plowman (Amos 9:13). Similarly, the grape harvest in Judah would be so incredible that the planter would follow the one collecting the grapes. Amos' vision is an incredible story, one that began with a tent in ruins but then pans to a beautiful picture of repair, reunion, and reaping.

Today, we are privileged not only to read the text of Amos's grand prediction but also to see its miraculous fulfillment in the coming of our Lord Jesus. Before

the advent of our Lord, the tent of David was indeed fallen. God's promise of a global kingdom under a Davidic king (2 Samuel 7:8-16; Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-8; 33:14-26; Ezekiel 37:24-28; Hosea 3:4-5) remained a forgotten dream. Yet in God's great plan of salvation, our Lord Jesus, the Son of David, made sure the tent of David leapt back to strength with even more glory.

Just as Amos predicted, the ministry of Jesus repaired the broken purpose of Israel. Through His church, Jesus continues to reunite the nations. As we speak, we are reaping a great harvest of believers. In building His church, Jesus has rebuilt the fallen tent of OT Israel that now extends beyond Edom into all the world. Therefore, at the Jerusalem council James triumphantly referenced Amos 9:11-12 when he was speaking about a huge number of believing Gentiles joining the early church (Acts 15:13-17). Today, the tent of David is not fallen. Rather, through Jesus, the church stands as a big, international community.

We live in a time and day when some people, motivated by evil agendas, destroy church buildings, beat up believers, and threaten us with death. History has proved time and again that our God is a builder of His church. We must simply depend on God's grace, promise, and power. Unlike them, our strength is not in horses, chariots, or political power. We may seem to fall back, but God's kingdom always grows. In the end, the meek will inherit the earth. Let us stay the course. Let us be the energetic plowmen and the reaper in God's kingdom. Let us never stop.



Michael
Pastor in South Asia

Details withheld for security reasons

Jesus and the Coming Shepherd

Jesús y el pastor que viene

Spanish / Ezekiel 34:11–16

For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "I myself will search for my sheep and look after them."

– Ezekiel 34:11

Although we are separated by thousands of years and tens of thousands of kilometers from the place where the book of Ezekiel was written, the description of the evil leaders of Israel at that time resonates deeply with Latin American realities and, I suppose, also with realities throughout the rest of the current world. Ezekiel 34:3-4 could easily be a description of our people's mistreatment, clearly evidenced after the pandemic.

Those leaders who were supposed to care for the population organized banquets and private parties while most people were deprived of the opportunity to earn their daily bread. The best doctors in the best hospitals cared for them and their families. At the same time, thousands of people died on the streets from suffocation without the possibility of receiving any medical care. Those already rich became richer, while marginalized people were condemned to oppression and desolation. Although the health crisis has passed, these problems persist and continue to grow over time.

Sadly, religious leaders are not free of guilt either. Scandal after scandal of spiritual abuse continually comes to light. Leaders provoke anguish, trauma, and disorders and cover up their tyranny with their power circles. They protect the abuser under the excuse of not affecting the reputation of the church and blame the victim for the suffering they've endured.

Other church leaders serve another god: money. They preach about prosperity and demand extensive offerings from impoverished communities with the empty promise that those who give will receive even more. However, the donated money stays in the leaders' pockets, and they do nothing to improve the conditions of their people.

Last but not least, some religious leaders have made agreements with the powerful. Their political involvement does not seek a fairer society but rather influence and recognition for themselves. If they participate in public

discussions, they limit themselves to moralistic issues and what "the empire" considers relevant. However, crucial issues such as hunger, inequality, and violence have been ignored. In essence, they blame the poor for their poverty and continue stigmatizing those distant from God without any intention of reaching out.

In this context, these words of God are a great hope for us: "I myself will search for my sheep and look after them" (Ezekiel 34:11). As believers, through Christ, we have experienced how God rescued us and accompanied us during the dark night (Ezekiel 34:12), provided us with well-being (Ezekiel 34:13), and gently healed our wounds (Ezekiel 34:16). Jesus is the good shepherd, the leader we all need and long for. He searched for us at the cost of His own life to celebrate and organize a great party when He found us (Luke 15:7).

Although we have personally experienced the promise of the good shepherd in our faith communities, the injustices and abuses experienced worldwide continue to cause great anguish in our hearts. We yearn for the rest of the world to experience Jesus' reign of justice and eagerly await His return when He, the true and good shepherd, will set all things to right. In the meantime, we cry out, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."



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Jesus and the Challenge of Loving Like God

Jesús y el desafío de amar como Dios

Spanish / Hosea 2:14–3:5

The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes."

– Hosea 3:1

The book of Hosea is framed in the tragic experience of Hosea's marriage produced by the scandalous infidelity of his wife. In the first pages, the prophet opens his heart to us to understand why, despite the humiliating outrage experienced, he does not make the decision to separate or divorce her. On the contrary, in the midst of the immensity of his suffering, Hosea felt a deep calling to restore his marriage. But returning to his wife confronted him with the fear of a new hurt, that she would cheat on him again and abandon him. Faced with this possibility, an implicit question appears in the story: What must I do so that she will never be unfaithful again?

This prophetic biography reaches unexpected heights when, through the heartbreaking experience of his own marriage, Hosea discovers God's immeasurable pain caused by the immoral and irrational infidelity of His own people. Despite the disloyalty and ingratitude of seeing Israel worship other gods, God reveals Himself incapable of completely destroying her or exchanging her for another, better people. Hosea discovers that God's love is much greater and stronger than the infidelity of His people and that of Hosea's own wife. God's passionate and faithful love ceased to be an abstract theological concept and became a powerful motivation and life-giving force to fight to save his marriage and regain the love of his wife.

Simply put, just as God cannot abandon His unfaithful people, Hosea could not abandon his spouse. With His example, God challenged His prophet to go beyond the logic, ability and behavior of a normal husband. Hosea, as he emulates God, discovers deep in his soul that he does not want to punish his wife but rather wants her to return to him and never leave him again. He learns that only the path of undeserved, unconditional love, not threats, would achieve this miracle. Thus, the words about punishment, regardless of whether they are executed or not, basically have a pedagogical function: to communicate the seriousness of infidelity.

In the midst of the breakup of his relationship, Hosea experienced a profound change. His marriage went from being a relationship based on "duty" (remember that Hosea gets married in response to an order from God) to a relationship based on "love." He learned tenderness is an effective antidote to prevent and cure the devastating effects of infidelity. Through his tormented marriage and his efforts to save it, Hosea fulfills his mission as a prophet. In other words, he discovers God's will for His people as he discovers God's will for himself. Hosea, then, preaches about God as a loving and compassionate husband who cannot stop loving his wife, even when she is unfaithful to him.

Incredibly, Hosea knows something of what it feels like to be God who forgives the unforgivable. God does not just forgive us when we ask Him to. Rather, in the face of our sin, while we were yet sinners, God did not stop loving us but provided for our forgiveness through the person and work of Jesus. God's final action, therefore, is not punishment but to continue and continue and continue loving us. And as we are so loved, God's way of loving becomes the way humans can and should love. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..." (Ephesians 5:25).

In the city of Lima, where I live, two out of every three marriages end in divorce. At the age of twelve, I watched my parents' marriage come to an end. Statistics show that children of divorced parents tend to divorce more, but God invites me to love my wife as Christ loved me, not as my father loved his wife. And this, against the odds, has sustained my marriage for more than 30 years.

What a joy to celebrate the coming of Jesus, the Messiah-husband, who revealed this love and embodied this truth! May our experience of His love transform us into those who give undeserved and unconditional love to others.



Alex Chiang
Lima, Peru

Alex Chiang is a local church pastor, the Regional Coordinator for Langham Preaching in Latin America, and the author of numerous books. Alex and his wife, Elke, live in Lima, Peru and have two children.

Jesus and the Sign of Jonah

Yeeshu aur yona ka chinh

Hindi / Jonah, esp. 1:17

Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

– Jonah 1:17

“A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.” Jesus then left them and went away.

– Matthew 16:4

Signs are all around us, giving us information or giving us directions. They are important to a city. What would it be like if we were to enter a city with no signage? A great deal of time would be lost trying to locate things, and it would be quite frustrating.

In the Bible, the birth of Jesus Christ and His mission were to be anticipated by certain signs. For example, Matthew used this expression at Jesus’ birth: “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet. . .” (Matthew 1:22). Jonah is an infamous prophet of the Old Testament, a runaway prophet. His name meant dove, and he tried to fly away from the mission God had for him. A popular image of Jonah finds him in the belly of a large fish (often pictured as a whale). Jonah was not interested in carrying the call for repentance to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. The Assyrians were mighty warriors and would later invade Northern Israel and take the people captive. They were detestable to Jonah! He would rather have them die than repent.

So Jonah made an escape plan to sail to a far-off land called Tarshish. However, Jonah misjudged God’s sovereignty. Not too far from the shore, a storm supernaturally developed, and Jonah recognized God was pursuing him. “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land”, he confessed (Jonah 1:9). The only way out of the storm was to give Jonah over to the raging sea. Unknown to his fellow sailors or to Jonah himself, a rescue was in store in the form of a large fish. Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of the fish where he repented of his disobedience. The fish then vomited him out on land. A messy affair on the outside but sanctified on the inside!

Fast forward to the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees who asked Him for another sign to prove He was the Christ. Jesus responds

with a harsh rebuke, calling them “wicked and adulterous” and emphasizing that no sign other than the sign of Jonah would be given them. This sign was a reference to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ—which they were about to witness! At Advent, the sign that gets the most attention is Christ’s birth. However, a little further into the Gospels, the fuller revelation of Jesus Christ is made known. Unlike Jonah, Jesus did not run away from the mission that the Father sent Him for. Jesus inaugurated his Kingdom on earth with a call to repentance (Jonah was to do that with Nineveh). Jesus becomes the full expression of God’s character which Jonah knew but struggled to embrace: “I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity” (Jonah 4:2b).

As we celebrate Christmas, we conclude a year that saw a lot of suffering and calamity. Wars, floods, famine, terrorism, persecution, economic distress, and other challenges have made their mark. Some of us are possibly still in the middle of it, and Christmas this year threatens not to hold the same joy for us. However, for the children of God, the sign of Jonah which points to Christ’s resurrection gives us true hope and joy in all circumstances. To it is attached the sure promise of God that one day all suffering and calamity shall cease because all things will be made new by the grace and power of our gracious and compassionate God.



Benji
Administrator in South Asia

Details withheld for security reasons

Jesus and the Day of the Lord

Si Hesus at ang Araw ng Diyos

Tagalog / Joel 2

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming...

– Joel 2:1

The phrase “the day of the LORD” has two major uses in the Old Testament. The first is positive. It denotes a period where God will usher in a golden age for His people. In contrast to this use, the prophets often use the phrase to describe a dreadful day, one that people should not look forward to. The prophets usually use the phrase in a sarcastic way to castigate the Israelites for their over-confidence in the fact that they are God’s people. What is quite interesting is that the book of Joel employs the phrase in both its positive and negative uses.

In Joel 2, we see the negative meaning in the first half of the text and the positive in the latter part. The vivid but gloomy description of “the day of the LORD” in the first half of the chapter uses imagery common in the prophetic books. The “day of the LORD” means serious business and is a day that should make people afraid. This is reinforced by intense imagery of destruction, including people trying to flee but finding no escape.

As a person diagnosed with major depressive disorder, the reality of wanting to flee but finding no escape is a feeling that is familiar and real, especially during acute episodes. This is why it is common for people with major depression to have suicidal ideations. It often feels like the only escape or solution to one’s situation is to not exist. And there are many other circumstances in life that feel this way, utterly hopeless with no way out.

Joel 2, however, spells the way out from the reality of hopelessness, pointing to the Lord as the only possible solution to such a desperate situation. The prophet calls on people to “return” to God and to trust that His gracious and compassionate character will make Him relent, granting blessing instead.

Indeed, the appalling situation portrayed in the first half of Joel 2 is reversed in the latter half. There, “the day of the LORD” is no longer a day of great suffering but a day of glorious salvation characterized by blessings and abundance not just for the people but for the entirety of creation. Moreover, the people are

described as having a new kind of revival with the Spirit of the Lord overwhelming humanity with His positive power.

Scholars have insightfully noted that, unlike other prophetic utterances involving the day of the Lord, there is no mention of a specific infraction or sin that caused God to bring the judgment that verses 1-17 describe. So, the clear call to return to the Lord puts things in relational rather than transactional terms. Return to the Lord whose character you know and, who knows, things could still change. Indeed, the new situation of tremendous blessing described in verses 18-32 is born out of God’s compassion and generosity towards his people. For the prophet, the blessing of “the day of the LORD” flows from God’s resolve to do Israel good and, through them, the world as well.

Hence, it is no surprise that the New Testament writers appeal to Joel 2 to talk about the implications of the Advent of Jesus. He is God’s agent to bring to fruition both uses of “the day of the LORD”—blessing and judgment.” On His first visit, He engaged the judgment sense of the “day of the LORD” by taking God’s judgment on sin upon Himself. Thus, He secured forgiveness through repentance for those who turn to Him and made possible the “here and now” blessing of the Spirit of God poured out as described in Acts 2:17-21 (using the words of Joel 2:28-32). At His second coming, He will bring final judgment on all that opposes His kingdom and rule but also the blessing of the promised newness of the “day of the LORD.” The creation will be restored to its life-sustaining glory, and, indeed, “everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved” (Joel 2:32).

What a wonder to ponder during the Advent season as we remember one “day of the LORD” and long for another. In the Lord Jesus, people caught in realities of despair may find meaningful hope and salvation.



Dr. Annelle Gumihid-Sabanal
Manila, the Philippines

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Jesus and the King's Entry to Jerusalem

Jesus ye Obong edukde ke Jerusalem

Efik / Zechariah 9:9–17

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

– Zechariah 9:9

A nation's king returns

In June 2023, the arrival of the President from his first international trip after his inauguration, escorted into the city by a convoy of over one hundred cars on sealed roads with loud sirens, generated a public outcry. Fuel subsidies had just been abolished, inflicting untold economic hardship on citizens. For my mum, the cost of fueling her generator (in the absence of power) increased, and my sisters have to walk long distances to minimize transportation costs. Church attendance and giving have dropped. Morale is low, hope for our nation lags, and some Christians are losing faith.

Zion's King and Jesus enters Jerusalem

In contrast to the situation described above, Zechariah 9:9-17 details the arrival of a king in Jerusalem who brings blessings to his people. After defeating the nations in judgment (Zechariah 9:1-8), the Lord comes to Jerusalem to reestablish His royal rule and restore His people. Daughter Zion (God's covenant people) is commanded to exult because of the expected king who rules in righteousness and offers salvation to Israel. Drawing from Jacob's blessings on Judah in Genesis 49:10-11, the prophet portrays this king as humble yet with universal dominion. With no military equipment in the land, the Messianic king's rule is peaceful, and He proclaims peace to the nations (Zechariah 9:9-10).

Zechariah's prophecy received fulfillment in the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-11). At that time, expectations and hopes for the Davidic Messiah were high. The people's conception was a warrior king who would bring deliverance from Rome and restoration of Israel's former glory (Luke 1:68-75; Acts 1:6). At His entry, the multitude greeted Him with acclamations of praise. However, dismissing any revolutionary or military intentions, Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey's colt, a declaration of His agenda of peace. This humble king is the suffering servant who died on the cross for the sin of His people, reconciling and restoring us to God (Ephesians 2:15-17). Yet He is also the

conquering king! Zechariah's prophecy will receive complete fulfillment when Christ comes again to bring salvation to those walking in His ways as they wait for Him and judgment upon those who refuse His reign (Matthew 25:31-46).

The King brings restoration to His People

The world's model of kingship is lordship and the exercise of authority for its own sake (Matthew 20:25; Nehemiah 5:15). This occurs in my country, where leadership is for self-advantage and the advantage of allies. Subsequently, there is social unrest and insecurity inflicted by militant groups, herders, bandits, kidnappers, and unknown gunmen. In contrast to the far-from-perfect rule of these earthly kings, Zechariah describes how the LORD rules justly for the blessing of His people. As a result of His covenant, He delivers His suffering and exiled people from captivity. He blesses them exceedingly and employs them according to His purposes (Zechariah 9:11–13). As a protective shield, He grants this community victory in battle. He shepherds them with His providential care. As jewels, he gives them beauty and worth. He restores their land, making it productive for health and sustenance (Zechariah 9:15–17).

This king inspires hope amongst believers in my nation. Economic hardship drives many to Him. Disappointment with and alienation from national leaders drives many to Him. His reign brings blessing, and He can be trusted in distressing times.

As we celebrate King Jesus amidst real hardship this Advent season, may we trust His grace and presence and hope in the coming blessings of His reign. God's sovereign hand is at work through the changing affairs of our nations, and God's just government guarantees ultimate security, provision, and peace. May we rejoice in hope and be patient in tribulation (Romans 12:12) as we wait for the return of our soon-coming king.



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Jesus and Elijah, the Prophet

Jesus e Elias, o Profeta

Portuguese / Malachi 4:5–6

See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.

– Malachi 4:5

Advent is a season of renewed hope, but the seemingly insoluble problems of life in Brazil can make us forget its true meaning. Is hope mere optimism that the future will go according to our own plan? Is it a good feeling that numbs us to the present needs of the world? How can the Christmas message teach us about true hope, especially in a context where corruption—and all the social issues resulting from it—abounds?

Malachi speaks to a context where hope had almost vanished. Despite recent efforts to rebuild Jerusalem, those who returned from Babylon were caught in the crossfire between global empires. The Davidic throne had not been reestablished (Malachi 3:6-12), and the priests compromised the purity of the altar (Malachi 1:6-13). As a result, it became commonplace among the people to practice social injustice, unwarranted divorce, adultery, and even sorcery (Malachi 2:13-16; 3:5).

Malachi spoke true hope to that reality. Grounded in Yahweh's unchanging character (Malachi 3:6), hope assured that the same God who had called Abraham, made a covenant with Israel, and appointed David as king would fulfill His plan of a new creation. Circumstances may suggest otherwise (Malachi 3:15), but the Lord would surely bring about final restoration—a reality which would be materialized in Yahweh's return to His house (Malachi 3:1).

True hope, however, includes the anticipation of God's perfect justice. If the return of Yahweh's glory would represent redemption to some (Malachi 4:2), the "terrible day of the Lord" would also be like a purging fire to many others: the wicked would have their share (Malachi 4:1, 5), and even the priests would face God's scrutiny (Malachi 3:2-4). Instead of turning a blind eye to the calamities surrounding him, then, Malachi summons his contemporaries to action: because God would indwell his sanctuary once again, the people should live according to His righteousness (Malachi 3:18). Hope is renewed only in the context of repentance (Malachi 3:7).

So Malachi announces the coming of a messenger who would warn the people about such a climactic moment. A beacon of true hope, Yahweh's herald would prepare the way of the Lord (Malachi 3:1) by calling the chosen nation to remember the law (Malachi 4:4). This is the whole point of Malachi 4:5-6: just like Elijah summoned his own generation to obey the Lord's ancient covenant (cf. 1 Kings 18), the end-time prophet would "turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents" (Malachi 4:6a). To take heed of this message is the only way to avoid the cursing of the land (Malachi 4:6b).

Indeed, it is in these terms that the Gospels speak of John the Baptist and the significance of Jesus's coming. As Malachi's herald (Luke 1:16-17), John prepares the way of the Lord by calling the people back to the ways of divine righteousness (Mark 1:1-6). As the one who baptizes believers with the very presence of God (Mark 1:7-8), Jesus brings final redemption to His people (Matthew 4:23), the culmination of Yahweh's saving purposes. Accordingly, the coming of Jesus calls us not only to celebrate but also to repent: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15).

As we prepare for Christmas, Malachi 4:5-6 calls us to renew our hope according to the Lord's unending—even if slow—justice. Brazilian Christians are famous for remaining hopeful regardless of our everyday hardships. But we need to remember that hope is not a mere sentiment nurtured by some sort of religious entertainment. Hope stems from an incorruptible conviction. Far from sentimentalizing the brokenness of the world, true hope leads us to align ourselves with God's agenda, living righteous lives and pursuing justice for those around us. The same Jesus who visited the temple in the first century will come back to fix all things and reign forever over a resurrected world. We anticipate that glorious day by living in the light of it, with repentance resulting in concrete righteousness and trust.



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Wisdom from the Global Church:

Where these devotionals were written



About Langham

Our Vision:

To see churches in the Majority World equipped for mission and growing to maturity in Christ through the ministry of pastors and leaders who believe, teach, and live by the Word of God.

Our Mission:

To strengthen the ministry of the Word of God through

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The Langham Logic



“If God wants His people to grow up, which He does. And if they grow by the Word of God, which they do. And if the Word of God comes to them mainly through preaching, which it does, then the logical question to ask is: what can we do to raise the standard of biblical preaching?”

-JOHN STOTT, LANGHAM FOUNDER

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Our approach to walking with the global church reflects the heart of our founder, John Stott.

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WE EQUIP LOCAL LEADERS

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WE FOCUS ON GOD’S WORD

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“We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God.”

-JOHN STOTT, LANGHAM FOUNDER

“When God’s “appointed time” comes, it will be to restore His own people (“Zion”), and to extend His glory among all nations and peoples. During Advent, as we look forward from the first appointed time to the second, “when the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship the LORD” (Ps. 102:22), it is most appropriate that the devotions in this volume come from all around the world, reflecting the global reach of our missionary God.”

**-CHRIS WRIGHT, GLOBAL AMBASSADOR
AND MINISTRY DIRECTOR LANGHAM PARTNERSHIP**



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