



Advent

hope

peace

joy

love

THECHAPELCollective

An Advent Prayer



Lord Jesus, Master of both the light and the
darkness,
send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for
Christmas.

We who have so much to do seek quiet spaces to
hear your voice each day.

We who are anxious over many things look forward
to your coming among us.

We who are blessed in so many ways long for the
complete joy of your kingdom.

We whose hearts are heavy seek the
joy of your presence.

We are your people, walking in darkness,
yet seeking the light.

To you we say,
'Come Lord Jesus!'
Amen.

Henri J.M. Nouwen

Your Invitation

You're invited on an Advent pilgrimage. To push back against the rush & hurry of the season. A counter-cultural pivot against consumerism & unrealistic expectations.

We bid you come & join the chorus of Christ followers through the centuries; celebrating Christmas with thanksgiving for the Messiah who came, with joyful expectation of His return.

Advent comes from the Latin *adventus* ~ arrival/to come. This is an invitation not to add to your overburdened schedule; rather to invite Jesus into it. To come renew hope. To come infuse peace. To come inspire joy. To come saturate with love.

Traditionally Advent is celebrated on the 4 Sundays preceding Christmas (3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th in 2023), however we walk in liberty. The following are suggestions not to regulate & to legislate; rather to pause & anticipate. Adjust & incorporate in rhythm with your season.

On the following pages you will find 5 reflections you can engage with, one each week plus one for Christmas Day. You may find it helpful to intentionally place these in your calendar alongside moments that are already there.

There are 2 versions, one practice for young families and one practice for pairs/groups/families with older children. You may like to reflect on these practices over lunch with friends on Sunday. Or with your Connect Group mid week. Over family dinner on a Saturday. With your workmates on a meal break. You are invited to gather 5 candles to light (any type is fine) and partake of communion together with whatever supplies you have on hand. There is no formula, only grace, though these practices were designed to be engaged in with at least one other person. Created in the image of the Holy Trinity, we are designed to live flourishing lives in community.

May Jesus be glorified & you be ever more formed in Christ's likeness (see 2 Cor 3:18) as you abide in His presence this Advent season. "The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life." (Rev 22:17 NIV) Amen, let it be so.

Week 1

PRACTICE FOR YOUNG FAMILIES

Prepare ~ Lighting this candle is a special way we take time as a family to think about Jesus. The reason for Christmas! This week we will think about a word called hope. Hope means Jesus is always with us and He always keeps His promises. As we light this candle, let's say hope together: HOPE.

Play ~ (You may like to invite your child to make the word *hope* out of play dough or string.) Hope means we can trust God to keep His promises in the Bible. In Romans 15:13 it says: "I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit." Israel (the people of God) had hope that God would send someone to save them from the bad things they had done. And He did! They looked forward to what God was going to do, and so can we. Let's draw a picture of something we're looking forward to this Christmas.

Pray ~ Let's thank God for the hope that one day He will make all things new. Say after me: Thank you God that you keep your promises just like you said you would. Thank you for hope. Amen.

Praise - Play 'Born Is The King (It's Christmas)' by Hillsong Worship

Week 1

PRACTICE FOR PAIRS/GROUPS/FAMILIES WITH OLDER CHILDREN

Prepare ~ Let's all pause & take some deep breaths. Take a moment to slow our anxious thoughts. Jesus who is always present to us, we became aware of Your presence with us now. Holy Spirit You are welcome. As we light this candle, we reflect on the life-giving hope you bring. Say after me: Jesus, you are the light of the world. Thank you for hope.

Partake ~ Hope is faith-filled expectation. As Israel waited for a Saviour, let us wait on God for what we need in this season. His presence can carry us through whatever we encounter this Advent. Psalm 39:7 is a faith declaration: ““But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you.” Let us call to mind God's past faithfulness to inspire our hope for the future. *(Invite people to share a time when God has been faithful in their lives.)* Let hope rise as you lift your eyes off your circumstances and fix your gaze on Jesus who is so faithful to walk with us through all seasons of life. Let us thank Jesus for the hope of His return when He will make all things new. *(Take communion together.)*

Pray ~ Hope isn't blind optimism, dependent upon external factors. It's an intentional step of faith, trusting that as we wait on God, He will meet with us and walk with us. Today let us reflect on Jesus' resurrection, to give us hope that the power that raised Christ from the dead lives in our hearts. That the God who came as a baby will one day come again in power, glory, mercy and justice. Let us pray along with the Psalmist who in Psalm 130:5 wrote: “I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” Say after me: Thank you Jesus that in you we have exquisite hope, not just for the life to come, but You walk with us in this life too, no matter what we face. Amen.

Praise ~ Play 'Prince of Heaven' by Hillsong Worship



Week 1

HOPE

Daily Prayer:

Faithful God, whose promises stand unshaken through all generations: renew us in hope, that we may be awake and alert, watching for the glorious return of Jesus Christ, our Judge and Saviour, who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

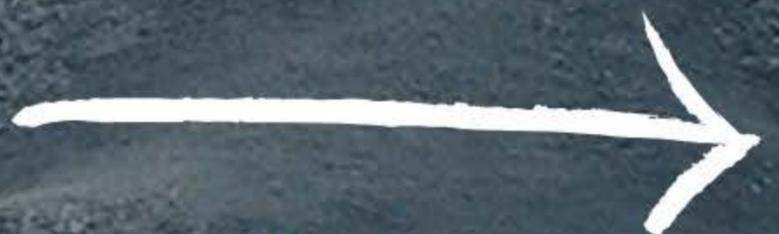
Day 1

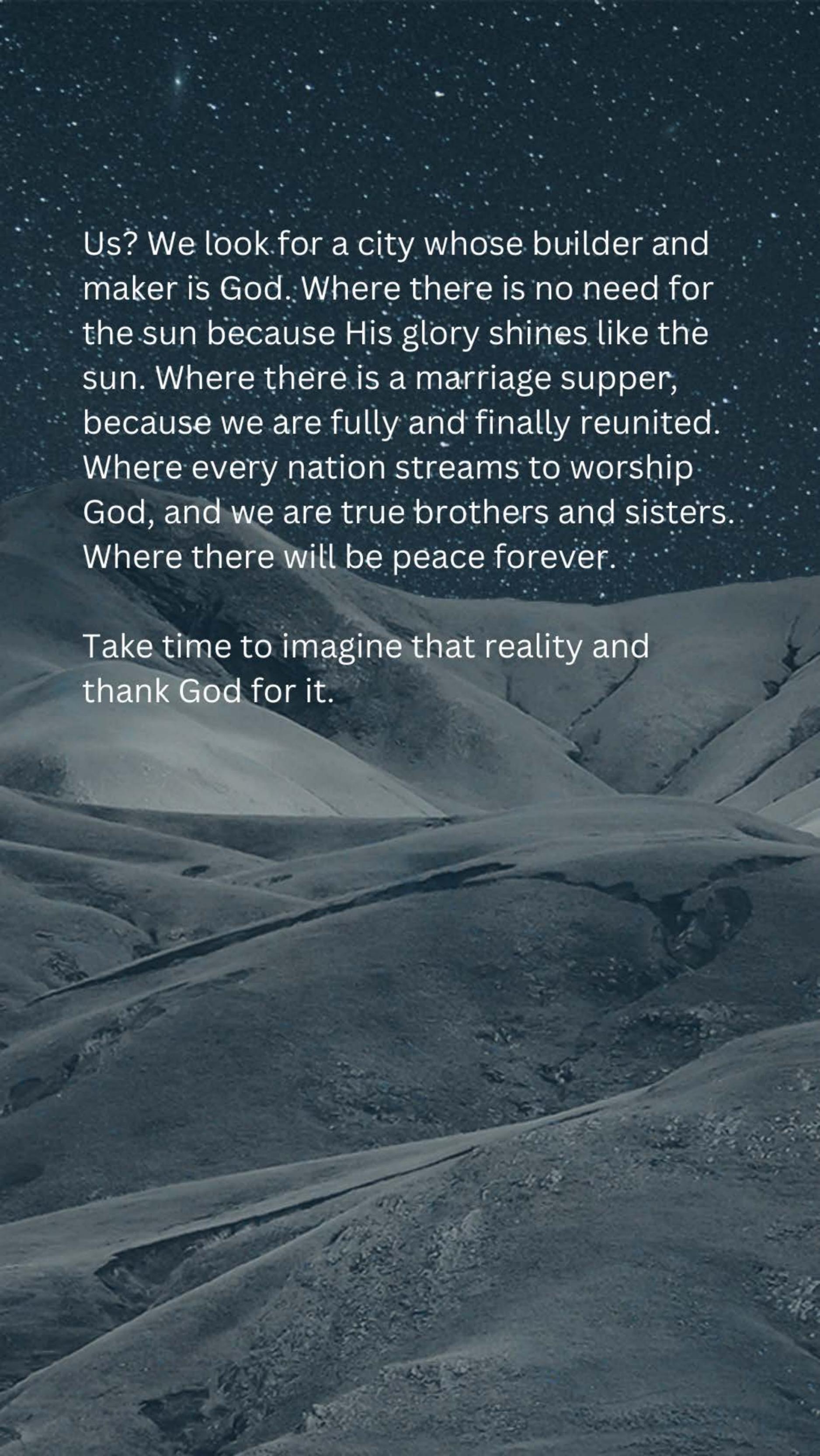
Welcome to day 1 of our journey ...

Today's reading is **Isaiah 2**

Christians everywhere have applied the Christmas season to look forward to the day Jesus comes and look back to when He came. When we look forward, we identify with the Israelites who were captured and taken to Babylon (approx. 597 BC). They were the people of God; we are the people of God. They were waiting for their Saviour; we are waiting for our Saviour. They were longing for home; we long for home.

v1-5 This text had a meaning for those in exile, longing to be back in Jerusalem, worshipping and celebrating the festivals of the Lord. They longed for no more invasions, no more battles, but a time of peace.



The background of the image is a dark, starry night sky. Below the sky is a dark, textured landscape that appears to be a desert or a rocky terrain with rolling hills and ridges. The overall color palette is dark, with shades of blue, black, and grey.

Us? We look for a city whose builder and maker is God. Where there is no need for the sun because His glory shines like the sun. Where there is a marriage supper, because we are fully and finally reunited. Where every nation streams to worship God, and we are true brothers and sisters. Where there will be peace forever.

Take time to imagine that reality and thank God for it.

Day 2

Welcome to day 2 of our journey ...

Today's reading is **Romans 13:8-14**

If we are serious about a future day (and we are), it should affect our current day. The foundation of our life choices is not rules and punishment, and fear of that future day, but LOVE.

If we love our neighbour, we will not sleep with his wife.

If we love our neighbour, we will not long for her stuff, rather, we will celebrate it.

If we love our neighbour, we will not talk smack about him.

If we love our neighbour, we will not take advantage of her.

Let's not be like the Pharisee and ask, "Well, who is my neighbour?" in an attempt to narrow this powerful fulfillment of the whole law into a shoebox that gives us an out to behave ordinarily to some; let's pick up our weapons of light, let's put on Jesus, and get ready to fight.

Day 3

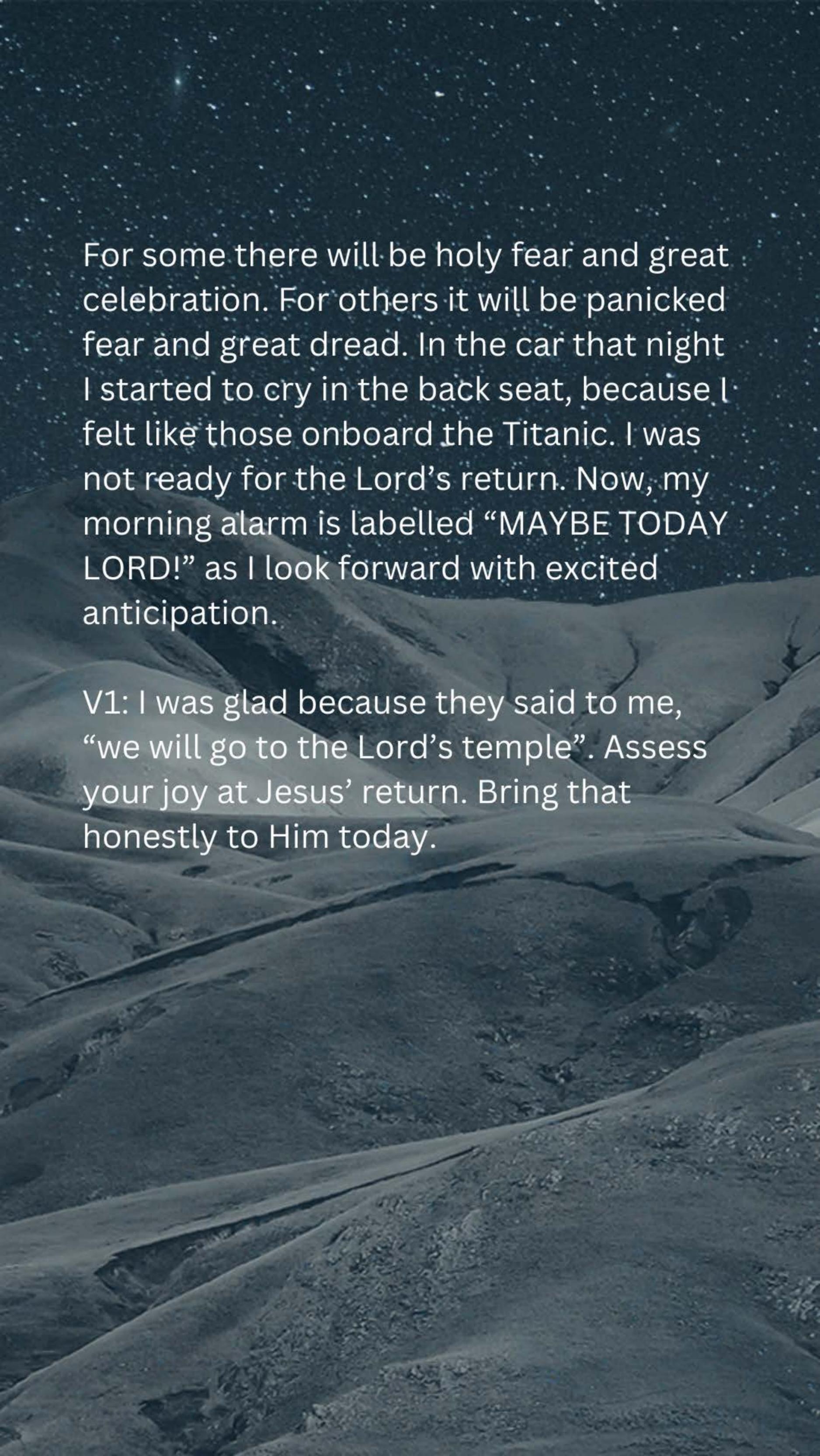
Welcome to day 3 of our journey ...

Today's reading is **Psalm 122**

In light of our theme, we are reading this Psalm not as the original writer or reader was intending it, but as those who are looking forward to a day when the tribes and nations stream toward the throne of the King of kings, King Jesus. Read the Psalm again and insert "new" before everywhere you see Jerusalem.

As we look forward to Jesus' return with great hope, assess your internal reaction. When my mum, my sister and I went and watched Titanic in 1998, we were unpacking the movie on our way home. My sister said that the sudden surprise the passengers felt (spoilers: the Titanic was a cruise ship that sank) must be the way that some will feel when Jesus returns.





For some there will be holy fear and great celebration. For others it will be panicked fear and great dread. In the car that night I started to cry in the back seat, because I felt like those onboard the Titanic. I was not ready for the Lord's return. Now, my morning alarm is labelled "MAYBE TODAY LORD!" as I look forward with excited anticipation.

V1: I was glad because they said to me, "we will go to the Lord's temple". Assess your joy at Jesus' return. Bring that honestly to Him today.

Day 4

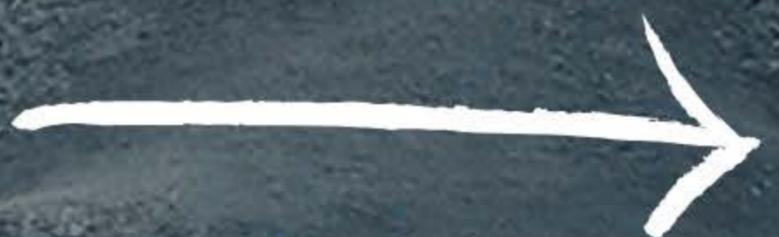
Today's reading is **Matthew 24:36-44**

Depending on your background, you will have different accompanying thoughts and feelings from this passage.

Perhaps you have heard it preached, and you felt it was an attempt to scare people to give their lives to Christ.

Who could ever forget the picture of the swinging electric razor from the 70s movie where the wife is left behind to face perilous times – all the Christians having left the earth? (If you're under 50 – you've probably never heard of it).

We had a guest speaker once who had to do “rapture practise” in Sunday School. There are others who have never heard of the rapture.



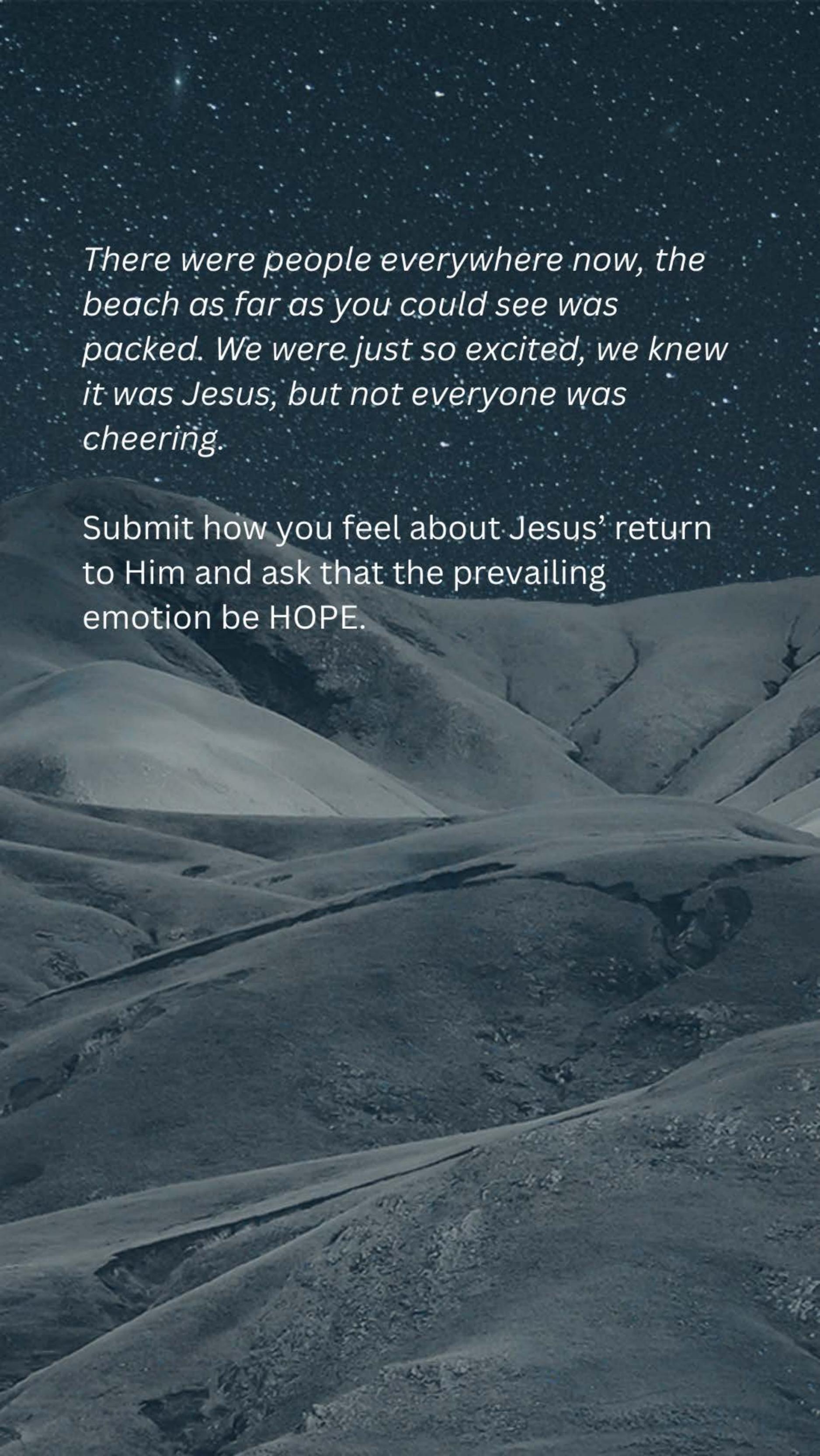
What do you think Jesus' intent is here? Do you think He is trying to scare us? Is that why He is using language like a thief in the night? Is that why He's reminding us of the suddenness of the flood, where people who had not paid attention to Noah preaching repentance perished?

Nothing about Jesus is consistent with using fear for motivation. So then, He is wanting to warn us. To tell us to make sure we are prepared.

Lachie had a dream when he was 14:

We were on the beach, a bunch of us teenagers. All of a sudden there was this massive, deafening bang, like a thunderclap. I looked around and I was thinking "IT'S HAPPENING!" I looked at Zac and we looked at each other so pumped, and then a figure came down from the sky to the headland - a light poured out of his chest. Zac yelled out "YEAHHHH!" and the beach erupted like the loudest stadium you can imagine.



The background of the image is a dark, starry night sky. The foreground consists of rolling sand dunes, illuminated from the side, creating soft shadows and highlights on the sand's surface. The overall tone is serene and contemplative.

There were people everywhere now, the beach as far as you could see was packed. We were just so excited, we knew it was Jesus, but not everyone was cheering.

Submit how you feel about Jesus' return to Him and ask that the prevailing emotion be HOPE.

Day 5

Welcome to day 5 of our journey ...

Today's reading is **Psalm 11**

The Psalmist affirms God's goodness and rule here. People's advice is "in the midst of such crazy and evil, your uprightness won't make any difference, so you may as well get out of here!" But the Psalmist has full faith that God is still in control, still working His plan. That one day, His justice will prevail.

We deserved justice, but Jesus took our just punishment. We got mercy instead. Today, let's thank God for His mercy that enables us to look to a future day where there is an end to wickedness, not with fear, but with anticipation. With HOPE.

Week 2

PRACTICE FOR YOUNG FAMILIES

Prepare ~ Lighting these candles is a special way we take time as a family to think about Jesus. The reason for Christmas! Let's light a candle and say last week's word, hope. HOPE. This week we will think about a word called PEACE. Peace means Jesus is always with us and can help our hearts to feel calm, no matter what is happening. As we light another candle, let's say peace together: PEACE.

Play ~ (You may like to invite your child to make the word peace out of play dough or string.) In John 14:27 in the Bible Jesus says "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid." Let's imagine we're wrapping a present up. Folding and wrapping and sticking, then tying a great big bow. Then pretend to give that present to each other. What a great gift Jesus gives us, the feeling of knowing that God is in control.

Pray ~ Let's thank God that He is always with us so we can feel safe. Say after me: Thank you God that your Holy Spirit is always with us. Thank you for peace. Amen.

Praise ~ Play 'On That Very First Christmas' by Colin Buchanan

Week 2

PRACTICE FOR PAIRS/GROUPS/FAMILIES WITH OLDER CHILDREN

Prepare ~ Let's all pause & take some deep breaths. Take a moment to slow our anxious thoughts. Jesus who is always present to us, we became aware of Your presence with us now. Holy Spirit You are welcome. As we light these 2 candles, we reflect on the indescribable peace You offer us all. Say after me: Jesus, you are the light of the world. Thank you for hope & peace.

Partake ~ These words I will read may be familiar to us. May God's Holy Spirit breathe fresh life as we read them. Let's take a moment to soak in the richness of all that He is. Whatever our need, His love is greater. May God's love wash over us in unrelenting waves of peace, that He is all we need. Isaiah 9:6 "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." (Read the 4 names slowly, 3 times. Then invite people to share a time when God has given them unexpected, indescribable peace.) Let us thank Jesus, the Prince of Peace, for the peace He won when He made a way for us to be reconciled to our Everlasting Father. (Take communion together.)

Pray ~ May the words of John 14:27 resound afresh in our hearts, louder than our circumstances. Louder than the enemy. Louder than the rush, to-do-lists and weight of expectations this season can bring. Let peace wash over you as a flood of God's love. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." Say after me: Thank you Jesus that in you we can have hearts at peace, as we quiet our souls before the Prince of Peace. Amen.

Praise ~ Play 'His Name Shall Be' by Matt Redman



Week 2

PEACE

Prayer of the week:

Merciful God, who sent your messenger John the Baptist to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: give us grace to heed the warning and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, our God, now and forever.
Amen.

Daily Prayer:

Father in heaven, who sent your Son to redeem the world and will send him again to be our judge: give us grace so to imitate him in the humility and purity of his first coming that, when he comes again, we may be ready to greet him with joyful love and firm faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord.



Today's reading is **Isaiah 11:1-10**

The picture here is the redemption of all creation. A beautiful image of peace restored and everything in alignment. What needs to be judged will be judged. The injustice endured by so many will be set right.

We will no longer devour each other or rape the earth and plunder it for selfish gain.

For there will be universal submission to THE LORD's sovereignty, just as the waters cover the sea.

Amen. Come Lord Jesus.

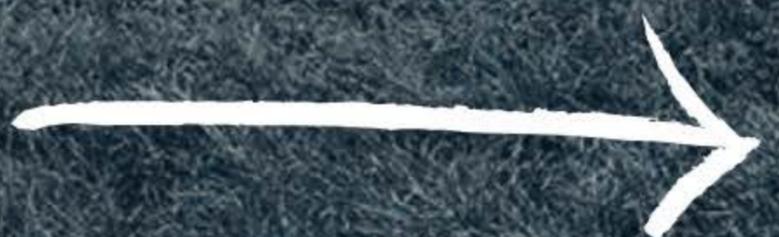


Day 2

Today's reading is **Romans 15:4-13**

It's amazing to think – when we read that passage in Isaiah yesterday, we were reading what people who love God have been reading for nearly 3000 years. Today, we read something written almost 2000 years ago, and they are reflecting on what we reflected on yesterday. 2000 years apart but reflecting on the same scriptures. Paul, the writer of Romans tells us why: *for our instruction, so that through endurance and encouragement of the scriptures, we may have hope.*

We have hope as we stay standing (though sometimes staying standing looks like being flat on our face, yet refusing to give up), and being encouraged as we stay in the Word.





The outworking means receiving each other, being united, even as we have been received and brought into unity with Christ.

We see from these 4 quotes in v 9,10,11,12 (found in Psalm 18:49, Deuteronomy 32:42, Psalm 117:1 and Isaiah 11:10) that this was always God's plan. This fills us with hope.

God, fill us with your peace, so that we may abound in hope by the power of Your Holy Spirit.



Day 3

Today's reading is **Psalm 72**

From the NET study notes: *The psalm depicts the king's universal rule of peace and prosperity. As such it is indirectly messianic, for the idea it expresses will only be fully realised during the Messiah's earthly reign.*

The Messiah is God's promised anointed one, who we know to be Jesus.

Go through the Psalm and note the attributes of Jesus' reigning over the earth. Just decisions, equality, deliverance from generational poverty, the crushing of the oppressor, His refreshing Presence, the needy rescued, abundance of provision.

At the time of writing this, in my prayer time, the phrase popped into my head "world weary". Just that lethargy of being human, day in and day out. This scripture ministered to me today. In our week of peace, may it minister to you.



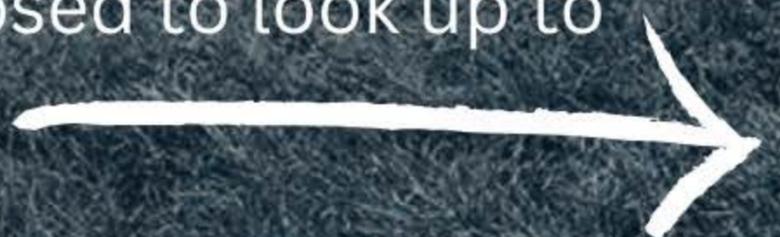
Day 4

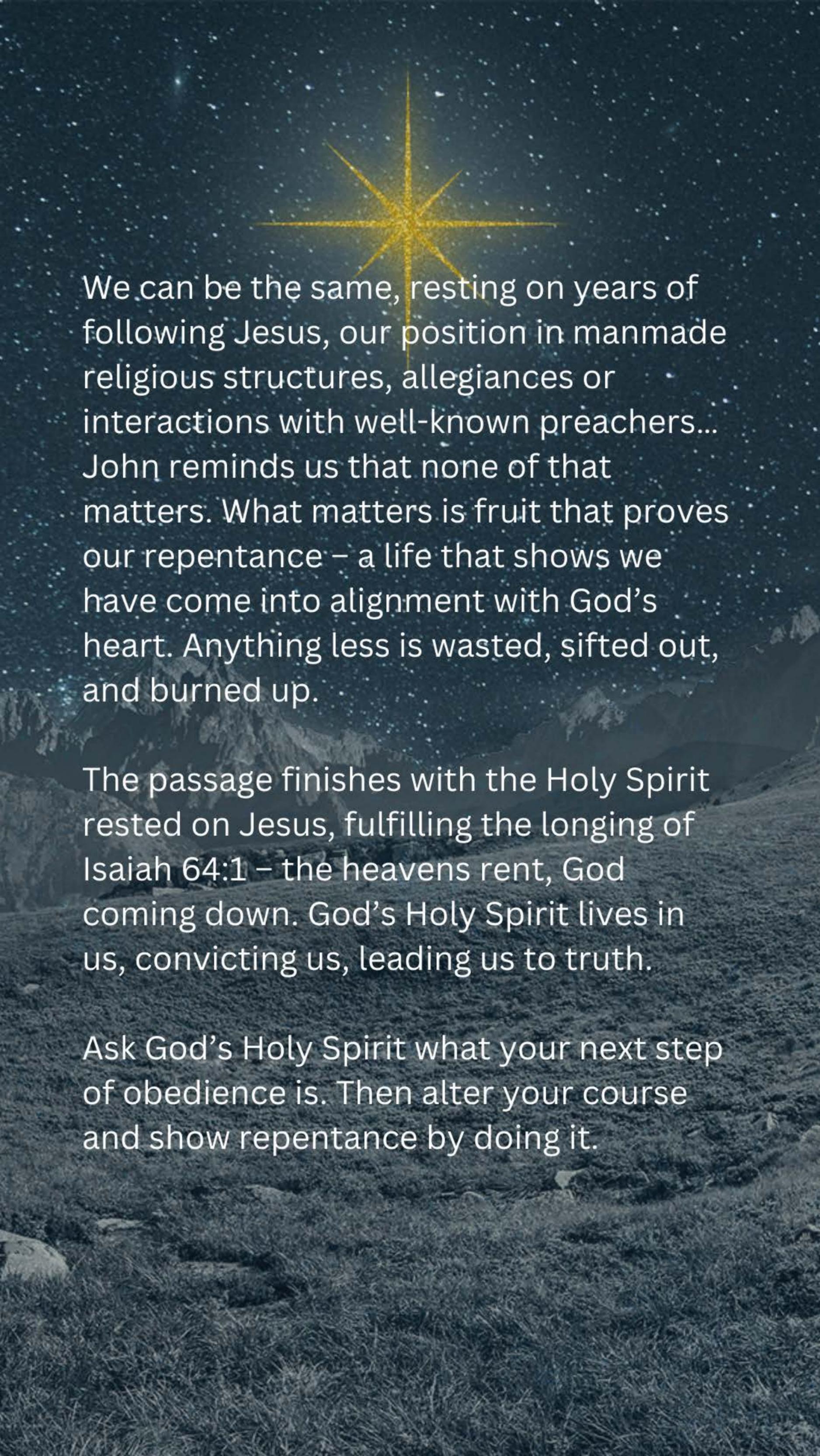
Today's reading is **Matthew 3**

Repenting is changing your mind to obedience. Repentance is not a onetime action; we go on repenting all our lives. Every time we discover something that God is saying, we should alter our current course to a direction that is in alignment with His.

This was John's mandate: Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near.

Repentance is harder the more entrenched in something we are. The Pharisees (the most influential religious and political group amongst the Jews at that time) and the Sadducees (the Jewish group made up of the more wealthy and/or aristocratic Jews) lived in luxury compared to John. They were the elite; for them to admit their need to repent would have felt like weakness in front of people who were supposed to look up to them.





We can be the same, resting on years of following Jesus, our position in manmade religious structures, allegiances or interactions with well-known preachers... John reminds us that none of that matters. What matters is fruit that proves our repentance – a life that shows we have come into alignment with God's heart. Anything less is wasted, sifted out, and burned up.

The passage finishes with the Holy Spirit rested on Jesus, fulfilling the longing of Isaiah 64:1 – the heavens rent, God coming down. God's Holy Spirit lives in us, convicting us, leading us to truth.

Ask God's Holy Spirit what your next step of obedience is. Then alter your course and show repentance by doing it.



Today's reading is **Luke 1:57-80**

Back story: When the angel came to Zechariah to say he and his wife Elizabeth would have a baby, and that he will go as a forerunner before THE LORD in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts...to make ready for THE LORD a people prepared for Him, Zechariah responded with facts rather than faith. Facts? He and his wife were old. Faith? God can do anything. Zechariah was left after the vision unable to speak.

It feels pretty drastic. You respond, not with derision, but just facts, but because there is no belief in the words, you get shut up!





Imagine if every time we were about to respond with something that is not faith, we shut our own mouths. As a dear sister from church reminds me, the facts are..., but the truth is...

Read Zechariah's prophecy over his son, vv76-79. It's not about him, it's about salvation, and the part he plays. If you were to prophesy over the next generation, what would you say? We can complain about the world going to hell in a handbasket (facts), but what if instead we responded in declaration (faith)? Declare some things now about the next generation and pray into that with great faith.

Week 3

PRACTICE FOR YOUNG FAMILIES

Prepare ~ Lighting these candles is a special way we take time as a family to think about Jesus. The reason for Christmas! Let's light 2 candles and say the last couple of words we did, hope & peace. HOPE. PEACE. This week we will think about a word called joy. Joy means Jesus can help our hearts to be happy, no matter what happens. As we light another candle, let's say joy together: JOY.

Play ~ (You may like to invite your child to make the word joy out of play dough or string.) When we get new presents at Christmas we may feel very happy. Show me a happy face. If our new toy breaks, we would feel sad, show me a sad face. Joy is the happy feeling deep deep down in our hearts, that we can have even if sad things happen because we know Jesus loves us and that He is the best gift! Show me a sad face that turns happy because of Jesus. We are going to make a list of things that bring us joy. (Write list together.) I'm going to read our list now. Every time I say something that brings us joy, you are going to jump for joy!

Pray ~ Let's thank God for the joy and happiness we can have even if things seem hard. Say after me: Thank you God for giving us joy deep down in our hearts. Thank you for joy. Amen.

Praise - Play 'Joy to the World' by Bethel Music Kids

Week 3

PRACTICE FOR PAIRS/GROUPS/FAMILIES WITH OLDER CHILDREN

Prepare ~ Let's all pause & take some deep breaths. Take a moment to slow our anxious thoughts. Jesus who is always present to us, we became aware of Your presence with us now. Holy Spirit You are welcome. As we light these 3 candles we reflect on the true joy of knowing You. Say after me: Jesus, you are the light of the world. Thank you for hope, peace & joy.

Partake ~ Thankfulness isn't merely expressing thanks for what we have. It is a choice we make to turn our eyes to Jesus instead of our circumstances. It is a heart attitude we cultivate. As we give thanks, our hearts fill with joy. (Invite people to share some things they are thankful for.) Psalm 103:11-12 reminds us that "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." Let us thank Jesus for the absolute joy of knowing He forgives our sins and loves us completely. (Take communion together.)

Pray ~ We choose this day Jesus to base our joy not on current circumstances, but on the joy set before us when You return in glory. Hope despite hardship. Not denying feelings and reality, but defining our lives by Jesus and His promises to restore & renew. May Romans 15:13 be the reality in our hearts this day. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Say after me: Thank you Jesus that in you we can have deep, abiding circumstance-defying, enemy-defeating joy. Amen.

Praise ~ Play 'Joy to the World (Unspeakable Joy)' by Chris Tomlin

Week 3

JOY

Prayer of the week:

Almighty God, you have made us and all things to serve you: come quickly to save us, so that wars and violence shall end, and your children may live in peace, honouring one another with justice and love, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, Amen.

Daily Prayer:

Sustain us, O God, with the power of your love on our journey to meet the one who is coming: Strengthen our weak hands, Make firm our feeble knees, And open blind eyes to the dawning of your kingdom so that our hearts may rejoice as we behold the majesty of our God. We ask this through Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.



Today's reading is **Isaiah 35**

According to the NET verse 1 uses 3 different terms for desolate places: wilderness, desert and rift valley. (What does your version say?)

A wilderness receives less than 12 inches of rain a year. A desert here is not so much a Lawrence of Arabia kind of desert, but the most desert of the 3. The rift valley has a reputation of being dry and desolate.

All 3 are told to get their dancing shoes on! We live in Australia; we know the heartache dry times bring. The author and reader of this word would have known it also. Yet they are told to lift their eyes, lift their faith, and take heart.

Read the passage again from that perspective. A view of a coming day when everything is made right. Let your faith rise and celebrate the restoration of all things.

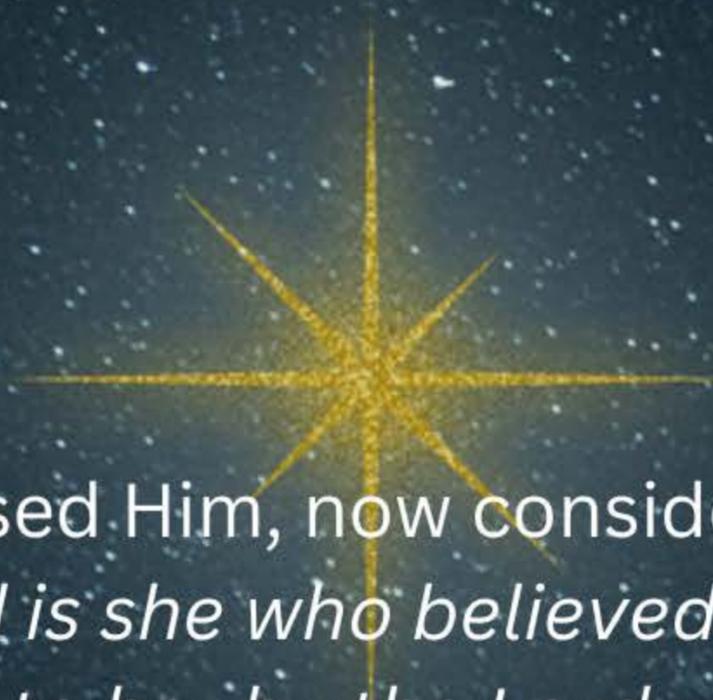
Day 2

Today's reading is **Luke 1:39-55**

You might know a family like one I know – Amie, Amy, and Sarah. I imagine when they get together it is filled with the prophetic, and praise, and encouragement. This family reunion was supernatural: Elizabeth speaks prophetically by God's Holy Spirit. In response, Mary offers one of the few New Testament psalms of praise, known famously as the "Magnificat". In it, she praises God (v 46-47), then expounds on why from her perspective (v 48-49), then more broadly based on God's mighty, just character (v50-55).

Take time to pray your own "Magnificat" today. Start by praising outwardly, then praise from deep inside you. The Psalmists would instruct their soul to praise God. Now, praise Him for what He has done for you. Reach as far back as you like. Lastly, praise Him for what you see of His character, in the way He deals with the proud, in the way He looks after the downtrodden, in His faithful and steadfast love.





Having praised Him, now consider this verse: *and blessed is she who believed that what was spoken to her by the Lord would be fulfilled.*

Consider prophetic words that resonated, concepts that dropped into your spirit, dreams long held in your heart, something a friend said that rang true that, you have heard. Do you believe that what was spoken to you by the Lord will be fulfilled? Where is your faith sitting on that right now, out of 10? 1? 7? Believe wholeheartedly again today – if you remain humble, God can let you know if you are wrong! In the absence of that, believe!

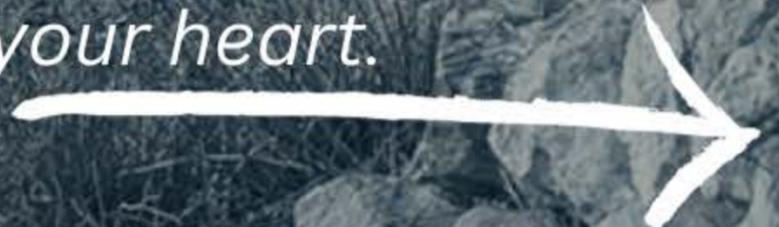
If you think, Bron, I just don't have anything like that...God has a promise for you. Consider how you are feeling. Weary? Lonely? Unmotivated? Listless? Google "God's promises for when you are..." Read through the list of Bible verses, and when one makes sense, lay hold of it. Write it out. Memorise it. Believe for a shift.

Day 3

Today's reading is **James 5:7-11**

When we truly begin to anticipate the Lord's return, we require patience. You don't need to be patient for something you aren't expectant about. If we do not require patience for Jesus' return, if we aren't feeling a bit antsy, we probably aren't thinking about it enough.

BUT, once we begin to long for it, we will need to be patient. If we suffer persecution, we will need patience. If "down here" we are experiencing the trouble that Jesus told us in John 16:33 we would, we need patience. James compares us to a farmer waiting for rain. Coming from regional NSW, Australia, we get that we are a land "of drought and flooding rains". James tells us to not just be patient, but to strengthen our hearts, for the Lord's return is near. If that was the case 2000 years ago, it's a lot nearer now. How do we strengthen our hearts? Psalm 27:24 *says wait on the Lord, be of good courage and He will strengthen your heart.*





Isaiah 40:31 they that wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. The idea here is of patience and strength going hand in hand.

He gives us further instruction for “in the waiting”. Do not grumble against one another. Pause. How much would your life change if you fulfilled that one instruction? Just zipped your lip. Imma be honest. I would say a lot less.

So, we wait patiently, we strengthen our hearts, we don't grumble against each other, and we endure. We last. We stand. We make it. We see how good God truly is. He makes Himself known as the God full of compassion and grace to Moses when He passes by Him on the mountain. Jonah declared that that is who he knew God to be when He pardoned the city of Nineveh. This is the God who sustains us, and the God we will see face to face.



Day 4

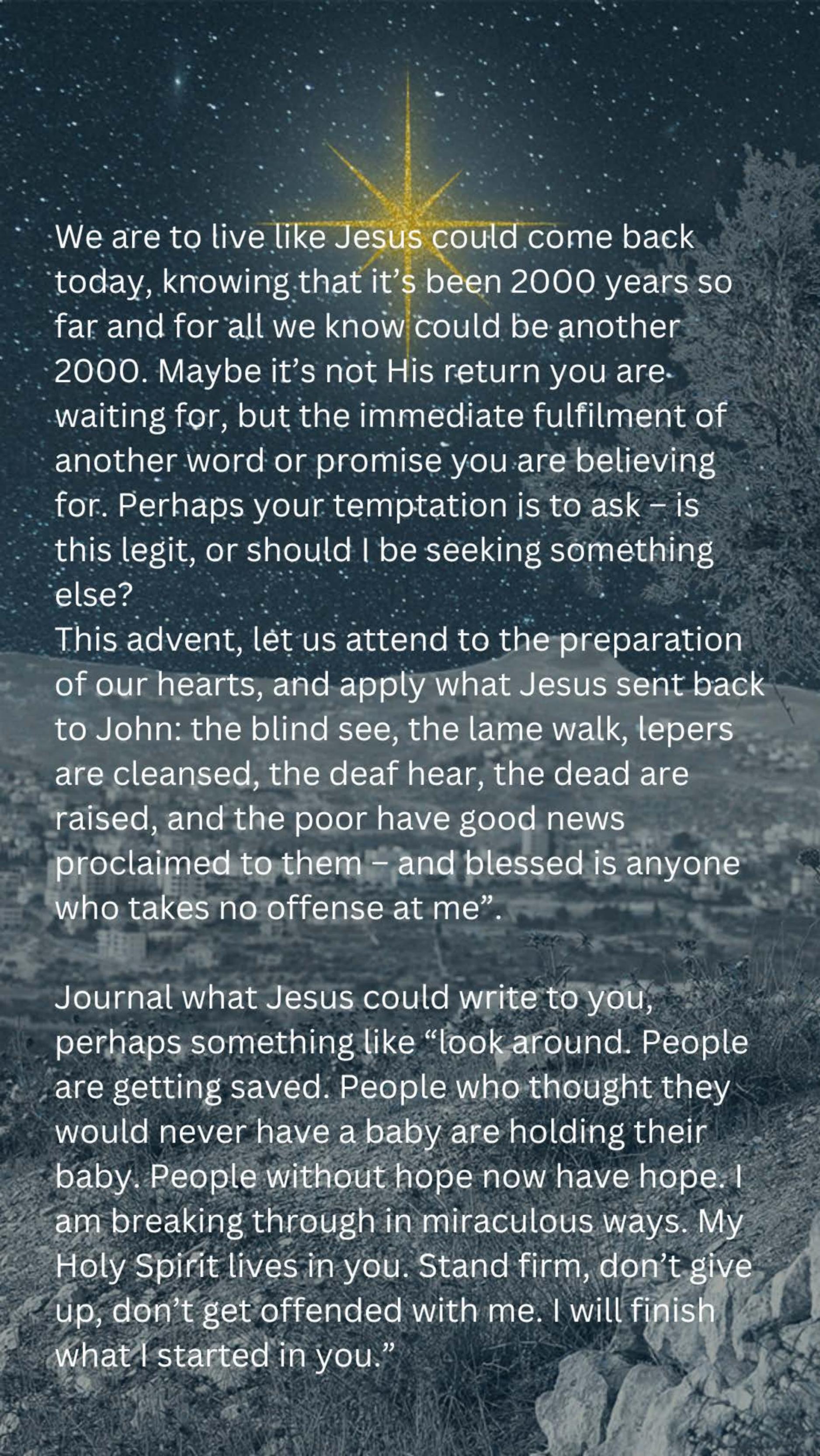
Today's reading is **Matthew 11:2-11**

John, imprisoned and knowing the hatred he is facing has him in an incredibly precarious position, sends a question to Jesus: are you the one?

Having seen John's confidence in John 1 and 3, and Matthew 3, it might seem odd that there are questions now. Did John have doubts? Maybe. It could also have to do with John preaching the judgment to come. Jesus is here – but it's John in prison, not Herod Antipas who was living in an adulterous relationship with his brother's wife.

We read in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Paul encouraging the believers to not stress about those who have died. It hadn't entered their minds that they would die – Jesus said He was coming back! Their expectation was immediate fulfilment; perhaps John's was too. The lack of such can cause discombobulation, disorientation, even discouragement.





We are to live like Jesus could come back today, knowing that it's been 2000 years so far and for all we know could be another 2000. Maybe it's not His return you are waiting for, but the immediate fulfilment of another word or promise you are believing for. Perhaps your temptation is to ask – is this legit, or should I be seeking something else?

This advent, let us attend to the preparation of our hearts, and apply what Jesus sent back to John: the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news proclaimed to them – and blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me”.

Journal what Jesus could write to you, perhaps something like “look around. People are getting saved. People who thought they would never have a baby are holding their baby. People without hope now have hope. I am breaking through in miraculous ways. My Holy Spirit lives in you. Stand firm, don't give up, don't get offended with me. I will finish what I started in you.”

Day 5

Today's reading is **Isaiah 40:1-11**

I received a prophetic word in a regional event this year.

I want to just say this to you: You're not going to walk on a tightrope. You're walking on a road. A flat broad road. Full of peace, full of joy, full of more than enough. The last 8 months you've been walking on a tightrope. God says I'm going to start healing you and restoring you. Other people would have packed their bags and gone to a beach somewhere in California, but you've stood the ground. You've stood it and God says, daughter today, I'm putting ring on your finger and I'm establishing you, on a level you've never been before.

The 8 months he was referring to had indeed been very real, and 2/3 of the room knew it: the word felt very apt.

Over the next 3 months, that tightrope season came to an end, and I eagerly looked forward to the flat broad road, full of peace, full of joy, full of more than enough season.





A few weeks later I broke my neck. Since then, I have continued to look forward to my flat broad road. I remind myself that to most of the population of the world, I am in a streets of gold season. They would long for the life of an average Australian. But...it's not a flat broad road for me. Not yet.

This passage reminds me that not only would these exiled Israelites return to their land (the hope of which comforted them greatly), not only would Jesus arrive on the scene, bringing salvation, but one day: every valley must be elevated, and every mountain and hill levelled. The rough terrain will become a level plain, the rugged landscape a wide valley, the splendour of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it at the same time, for the Lord has decreed it.

This is what is coming for us. We are all going to be in a flat, broad road season. He is going to bring it.





If that return makes your heart nervous, commit yourself to Jesus, who like a shepherd He tends His flock, He gathers up the lambs with his arm; He carries them close to His heart; He leads the ewes along.

I look at what God has done for me, but in the light of what He has revealed for all of us. I believe for my broad flat road while knowing one day I will receive it in full. I believe for a healthy body, while knowing one day I'll get a new one. I believe for peace, knowing one day peace will be all I know.

Week 4

PRACTICE FOR YOUNG FAMILIES

Prepare ~ Lighting these candles is a special way we take time as a family to think about Jesus. The reason for Christmas! Let's light 3 candles and say last few words we did, hope, peace & joy. HOPE. PEACE. JOY. This week we will think about the word love. Love means Jesus always loves us, no matter what we do, because He made us & we are His! As we light another candle, let's say love together: LOVE.

Play ~ (You may like to invite your child to make the word love out of play dough or string.) God's love for us is soooo big! A love so big, He came all the way from Heaven to Earth to show it, then all the way back to Heaven again. Romans 5:5 in the Bible says: "And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love." We are so blessed to have hearts filled with Jesus' great big love. So we're going to share some of that love around. We're going to make some cards to share God's love with others. (Use whatever supplies you have at home to make some cards. A4 paper folded in half and pencils will do just fine.)

Pray ~ Let's thank God for how much He loves us, just because we're His! Say after me: Thank you God that you love us no matter what we do & that your love for us is bigger than the universe! Thank you for love. Amen.

Praise ~ Play 'The King of Christmas' by Colin Buchanan

Week 4

PRACTICE FOR PAIRS/GROUPS/FAMILIES WITH OLDER CHILDREN

Prepare ~ Let's all pause & take some deep breaths. Take a moment to slow our anxious thoughts. Jesus who is always present to us, we became aware of Your presence with us now. Holy Spirit You are welcome. As we light these 4 candles, we reflect on the unconditional love You have for each one of us. Say after me: Jesus, you are the light of the world. Thank you for hope, peace, joy & love.

Partake ~ God's love is so vast no one can begin to understand it. How wonderful it is not static, but dynamic. Psalm 23:6 says "Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Invite people to share some ways they have felt the love and goodness of God.) Let us thank Jesus for His love that we can only begin to imagine the depths of. (Take communion together.)

Pray ~ Take some time to pray these verses from Ephesians 3:16-19 over each other. "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Say after me: Thank you Jesus that Your love is relentless and You are continually pursuing us.

Praise ~ Play 'Silent Night/Jesus We Love You' by Maverick City Music



Week 4

LOVE

Daily Prayer:

Gracious God, you chose the virgin Mary, by Your grace, to be the mother of our Lord and Saviour: so fill us with your grace, that with her we may rejoice in Your salvation, and in all things embrace Your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Day 1

Read: **Matthew 1:18-25**

Read: **Luke 2:1-21**

No commentary today. Just ponder on the “eipcnness” of this whole event. Engage your imagination and read through again. Imagine being a shepherd and going through this night.

Read: **Matthew 2**

Again, just engage with this passage. Imagine the anticipation of the wise men, the insecure fear of Herod, the protectiveness of Joseph, the roller coaster for Mary, the guidance and sovereignty of our Father.



Christmas Day!!!!!!

Read: **Luke 1:26-38**

What a rollercoaster for Mary.

1. She is troubled by the meaning of his greeting. Have you ever been like that? Someone begins to tell you what they believe God has for you, and at the opening line, before they get anywhere, you begin to freak out.

2. She has questions. How? That might be the question you respond with. My most frequent who, what, where, when, why, how question would have to be “when?” What’s yours?

Often, God gives us the way without any of the detail. Fortunately for Mary, He gives her the how. By the Holy Spirit, and with power. When: 9 months. Who: you, then Jesus. Why? Well, Jesus means Yahweh saves, so that would have been a clue.





Mary's response is as epic as a response to God can be: "Yes, I am a servant of the Lord: let this happen to me according to Your Word". Surrender. Submission. Up for it.

This passage's focus is v31-33. Read them again slowly:

He shall reign forever and ever. His Kingdom will never, ever, end.

Christmas

PRACTICE FOR YOUNG FAMILIES

Prepare ~ Lighting these candles is a special way we take time as a family to think about Jesus. The reason for Christmas! Let's light 4 candles and say all the other words we've done, hope, peace, joy & love. HOPE. PEACE. JOY. LOVE. In the Bible, one of the names for Jesus is Christ. But Christ isn't Jesus last name! It's a word that means anointed one, which is a fancy way of saying Jesus is King! As we light our last candle, let's say Jesus is the King together: JESUS IS THE KING.

Play ~ (You may like to invite your child to make the word King out of play dough or string.) In Revelation 17:14 in the Bible it says that Jesus is ".....Lord of all lords and King of all kings....." We're going to listen to a song after we pray and it's all about Jesus being the King of the whole world, including us! As we listen, we're going to make some fun actions together.

Pray ~ Let's thank God for being a kind and loving King. Say after me: Thank you God that even though you are the King of Heaven, you came to earth so we could be your friends. Thank you for being my King! Amen.

Praise ~ Play 'Who's The King Of The Jungle' by Colin Buchanan



Christmas Night

Read: **Luke 2:22-40**

We come full circle today. In our readings across advent, we saw John the Baptist ask, “is it really You, Jesus, that we have been waiting for, or should we wait for another?”

Here, we have a man whose last thing on the bucket list, the one thing left to do before He dies, is to see the Lord’s Christ – the anointed one. He declares Him to be the salvation for all the world: Israel and the Gentiles. Israel and Gaza. Israel and Palestine. Russia and Ukraine. Tearing down every wall of hostility that remains between us.





Anna, the prophetess arrives on the scene with confirmation that this is the One. And now, we wait. If we have received His salvation, eternity has started right now for us, for even if we die, we will live. Death is defeated, sin is conquered, but we wait for the restoration of all things, when Jesus will come and reign on the earth, conquering all rules and authorities who are against His redemptive, restorative plan.

Christmas: we remember He came, and all He did and achieved – and we remember He is coming again.

Christmas

PRACTICE FOR PAIRS/GROUPS/FAMILIES WITH OLDER CHILDREN

Prepare ~ Let's all pause & and take some deep breaths. Take a moment to slow our anxious thoughts. Jesus who is always present to us, we became aware of Your presence with us now. Holy Spirit You are welcome. As we light these 5 candles, we reflect on Your coming as a baby, and we eagerly anticipate Your triumphal return when You will make all things new again. Say after me: Jesus, you are the light of the world. Thank you for hope, peace, joy, love & for You Jesus.

Partake ~ God is infinitely worthy of our praise, and how blessed we are that He chooses to lavish His love on us. May we all know the hope, joy, peace and love of God as they defining reality of our lives today. Luke 2:14 ""Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." " (Invite people to share what Christmas means to them.) Let us thank Jesus for his sacrifice of taking on flesh and ultimately dying in our place. Let's eagerly anticipate His Second Coming when He reconciles and redeems. What a glorious hope we have in Him. Hallelujah. (Take communion together.)

Pray ~ Today we celebrate our Mighty King who humbled Himself, that He might make a way back to God for those who seek Him. Matthew 6:33 exhorts us "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Let us seek Him today and may we experience the hope, joy, peace and love of Jesus. Say after me: Thank you Jesus that Your love is far more than we deserve, yet so freely given. We are so thankful for you! Amen.

Praise ~ Play 'O Holy Night (O Night Divine)' by Rend Collective

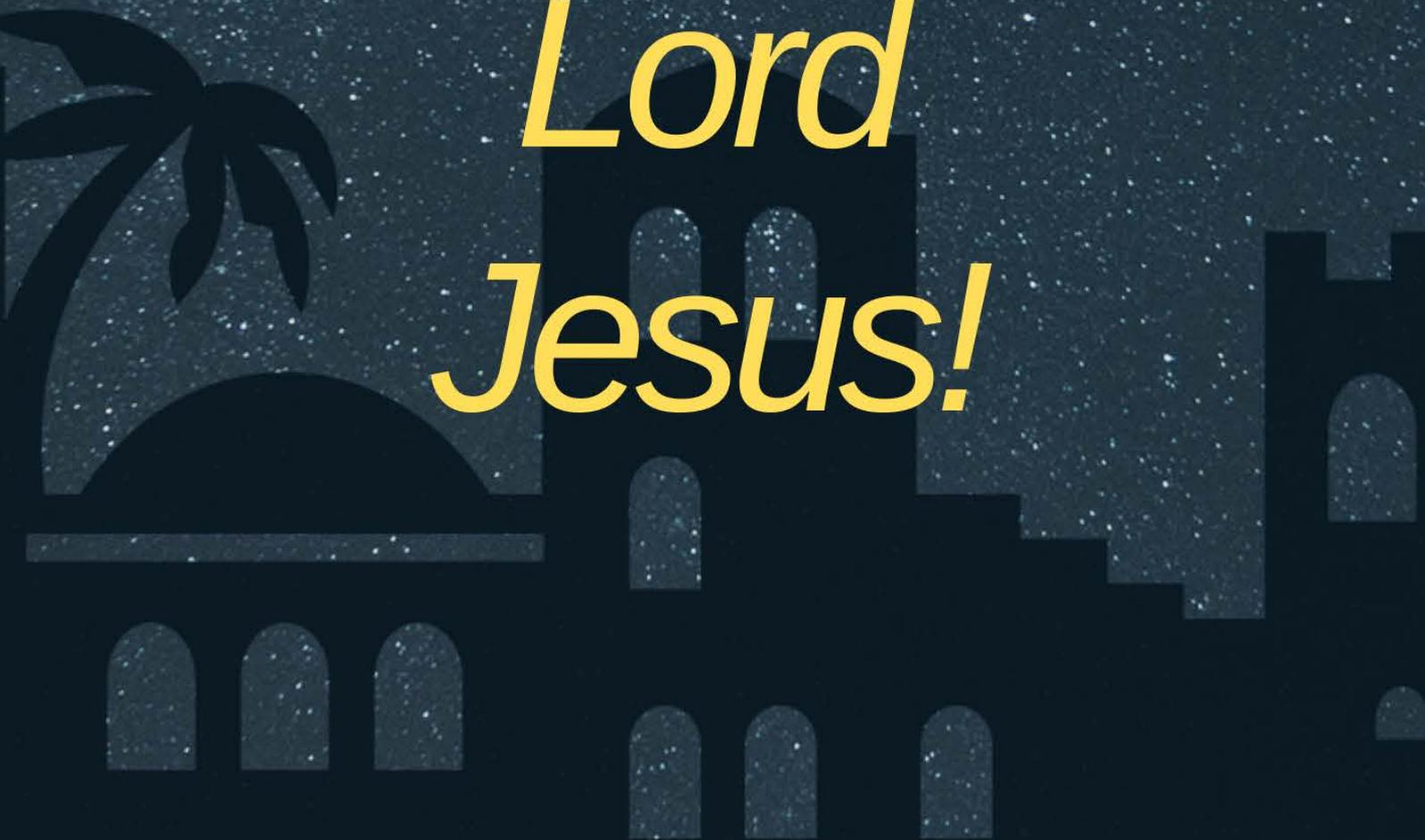
Colour one candle in during each reflection
& write the matching Advent word.
Made for kids & for the young at heart!





Advent

*Come
Lord
Jesus!*



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