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**Sunday 2 January 2022 to Sunday 9 January 2022**

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Sunday 2 January 2022

# Born of God

by Ruth Olsen

**They are reborn – not with a physical birth … but a birth that comes from God (John 1:13).**

Read John 1:[1-9],10–18

As John wrote, the Word of God already existed with God before time began; he gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. A light that the darkness can never extinguish (John 1:1–5)! But the world does not recognise him. Of ourselves, we do not recognise him! Human self-determination has separated us from God so that we are blinded and cannot recognise Jesus (see 2 Corinthians 4:4). Yet to any who receive him and believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. Reborn by the Spirit from above. Given new life that comes from God and has his DNA flowing through it! Amazing!

Anyone who receives and believes Jesus no longer belongs only to their earthly family but also to God’s family. Because Jesus, the Living Word of God who is ‘full of grace and truth’ (John 1:14 NIV) has come to us and dwells among us. He makes his grace and truth fully available for us to live in, walk in, soak in and share with others. He reveals God to us as the Father who is for us. His family spans around the world and stretches across time. Does that make a difference to how you see yourself and others around you?

The gift of unconditional love for a newborn is amazing, but often, we don’t recognise it. An unconditional love that comes from God, given anew to every person born from above, empowers us to love others.

Every day as we receive Jesus and believe in his name, we are drawn into his grace and truth, to what he is like. His DNA in us by his Spirit makes us new; his light inside us overcomes the darkness no matter what the world might shout or what our spiritual enemy whispers. Reborn with new life from God, in renewed relationship with him.

**Lord God, draw us deeper into your grace and truth that sets us free to live as loved children, in and through Jesus, your light into the world. Amen.**

Monday 3 January 2022

# Being teachable

by Ruth Olsen

**He will teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths (Isaiah 2:3).**

Read Isaiah 2:1–5

How much do you understand the ways of the Lord? Do we recognise the difference from our own? Our human ways are so small, self-focused, downward-looking – at ourselves or on others. We might think we are so smart, yet of ourselves, we so readily indulge ourselves at the expense of others, just as in centuries past.

In speaking of Judah and Jerusalem, Isaiah says, ‘Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord’ (Isaiah 1:4). Since Isaiah ministered primarily to the southern kingdom (Judah and Jerusalem), the northern kingdom of Israel is not mentioned here. But he was speaking to God’s people!

The ‘mountain of the Lord’ (Mt Zion) is a common theme in Isaiah, depicting the coming of both Jews and Gentiles to Jerusalem (Zion), to the place of God’s presence (see also Psalm 43:3). In today’s reading, Isaiah sheds light on what will happen in the last days concerning Judah and Jerusalem. It will be the Lord himself who will draw people from all nations to his presence. He will teach people his ways, to walk in his paths. It will happen at God’s initiative. He is continually at work – today also!

Through Jesus, he has opened the way for all people to come into his presence. As we saw in yesterday’s reading, Jesus’ life brought light to everyone (John 1:4). Available to all people, whoever then lives by the truth comes into the light – by God’s enabling (John 3:19). That’s the grace of God that Jesus brings to us. Grace and truth, revealed to us and through us, by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13–15). Let’s be teachable, relying on Holy Spirit to teach and train us every day to walk in God’s ways instead of our own.

**Thank you, Holy Spirit, that you take from what belongs to Jesus and make it known to us. Enable us to honour Jesus in all that we are and do. Amen.**

Tuesday 4 January 2022

# On that day

by Ruth Olsen

**On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name (Zechariah 14:9).**

Read Zechariah 14:6–11

Zechariah was born in Babylonia and was a young man (see Zechariah 2:4) among those who returned to Judah in 538 BC under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua. His grandfather Iddo was a priest named among those returning exiles (Nehemiah 12:4; Zechariah 1:1,7). Zechariah later succeeded his grandfather as head of that priestly family (Nehemiah 12:16), meaning he was both a prophet and a priest.

The returnees had completed laying the foundation for the temple, but the work was halted by opposition and persecution by surrounding peoples. Zechariah and Haggai both began to preach in the second year of Darius, 520 BC, (although Zechariah’s ministry continued long after Haggai’s four-month ministry, Haggai 1 and 2). They both rebuked the returnees for their giving way to fear, exhorting them to return to the Lord (Zechariah 1:3–6) and encouraging them through visons to motivate them to complete the rebuild of the temple and trust him in their daily lives.

How different are we, when opposition comes, when we are ridiculed for trusting God through Jesus his Son by his Spirit? Though we might be shut down for a while, will we remain in that frame of mind, focused on our inadequacy, forgetting to look to the Lord and his adequacy?

When the heat is on or complacency knocks, let’s encourage each other to recognise where our help comes from, that the Lord is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1).

Zechariah gives glimpses in his book of the coming Christ, foretelling what he would be and do. These glimpses help us understand Jesus’ words to his disciples after his resurrection (Luke 24:25–27,44). Although this lectionary reading for today may seem rather oblique, it also points forward to what will come ‘on that day’ when the Lord will be acknowledged as king over the whole earth, and every knee will bow before him (Isaiah 45:22,23; Romans 14:11).

**Lord Jesus, name above all names, we worship you! Thank you for your presence with us to lead us, no matter whatever we face. Amen.**

Wednesday 5 January 2022

# The light of life

by Ruth Olsen

**Jesus said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness’ (John 8:12).**

Read John 8:12–20

We are probably used to using a photo ID to verify who we are, but have you ever needed to validate what you stand for? The photo ID is simple enough, but explaining what we stand for can put us in the ‘hot seat’, subjected to sarcasm, ridicule or, hopefully, some genuine questions.

Speaking of Christ, the Eternal Word, John began his gospel saying, ‘In the beginning the Word already existed … The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone’ (John 1:1,4 NLT). This is John’s witness to Jesus: his life gives us light. It echoes Psalm 36:9, ‘For you are the fountain of life, the light by which we see’ (NLT).

Today’s reading picks up on this claim of Jesus about himself, and the Pharisees challenge him on the validity of his claim. It was an established principle that, for something to be validated, it needed the testimony of two or three witnesses. Included also were instructions on dealing with a false witness, giving no mercy (Deuteronomy 19:15–21; Numbers 35:30).

Law cannot give us life, and it can shut out the light with ease, especially when used stringently. And the Pharisees prided themselves in upholding God’s law. Jesus also knew the Scriptures and reminded them that if two people agree on something, their witness is accepted as fact; also, that the Father who sent and stands with him is the other witness (John 8:16,17 NLT). But they did not know God as Father. In their adherence to the law, the light was shut out for them.

We judge by human standards that only see part of the bigger picture. We so readily live by law, forgetting to welcome the light that Jesus can shine into our situations, revealing truth and giving life. His light enables us to recognise things we can’t otherwise see. He is light, life and truth in person, and he desires to lead us into an abundant, satisfying life (John 14:6;10:10).

**Lord Jesus, we welcome you and your light shining into our darkness and the world. Touch the hearts of all humankind. Shine, Jesus, shine! Amen.**

Thursday 6 January 2022

# Jesus revealed

by Ruth Olsen

**But you, Bethlehem … out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel (Matthew 2:6).**

Read Matthew 2:1–12

God’s ways are often the opposite of our human ways and expectations. Would you have the promised Saviour of the world come to the big stage with all the bells and whistles or to a back paddock? Yet God chooses the seemingly insignificant, making it significant.

‘But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come forth for me one to be ruler over Israel – one whose origins are of old, from the days of eternity’ (Micah 5:2). This one coming from eternity will be a ruler and a shepherd. That’s quite a contrast because shepherds were considered outcasts in Jesus’ day. But if we know the Old Testament, we know that the shepherd boy David, the youngest and ‘forgotten’ son of Jesse from Bethlehem, eventually became King of Israel, ruler over Israel (1 and 2 Samuel).

Matthew 1:6–17 traces the lineage of Jesus through Mary and Joseph to King David. It’s after Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea that God revealed who he was to some Gentiles (non-Jews). These wise men from the east (perhaps Persia or southern Arabia) came to Jerusalem looking for the King of the Jews. Naturally, King Herod in Jerusalem was disturbed at this news and told them he also wanted to worship this baby. Although, he had other plans, as told in the verses following today’s reading.

Despite Herod’s plans, God used the star to continue leading the wise men to where Mary and Joseph were with the baby Jesus, but he then warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod.

The Lord knows the plans he has for each of his children. We see his provision for Mary, Joseph, Jesus and the wise men. Likewise, his plans for us are to prosper, not harm us, and give us hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). Things can look rather scary, but he will also lead us as we trust him.

**Abba Father, by your Spirit, continue daily to reveal Jesus and more of your ways to us and through us to others. Amen.**

Friday 7 January 2022

# Beautiful feet?

by Ruth Olsen

**Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame (Romans 10:11).**

Read Romans 10:11–17

Have you ever felt embarrassed or shamed for trusting someone or something? I imagine this has happened to everyone at some point, also because that is how our spiritual enemy likes to work –shut us down. After all, he specialises in accusing the followers of Jesus (see Revelation 12:9–11) – or anyone, really.

Each of us may face attempts to shame or embarrass us for being a follower of Jesus. Maybe those doing so are testing us to see how we will respond. Perhaps they have a genuine question they don’t know how to ask or who to ask. How we answer them can be a turning point for them.

The verses preceding today’s reading speak of believing with your heart and confessing with your mouth who you believe, speaking of trusting Jesus (Romans 10:6–10). This contrasts with the efforts of the Jews (Israel) to get right with God, keeping the law instead of trusting in him. Taking God at his word and trusting him in and through Jesus is a ‘stumbling stone’ to fallen human nature that says, ‘I’ll do it my way’. But God’s ways of our being made right with him are not by our efforts or works, but by our trusting the one he has sent to us (Romans 9:30–10:10; John 6:29). As Isaiah wrote: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed”’ (Isaiah 28:16).

Is the message of Jesus a ‘stumbling stone’ to us also? Or do we believe that Jesus is the precious cornerstone and sure foundation, totally reliable and trustworthy – because of who he is and not because of what we are like? And are we willing for Holy Spirit to lead us in sharing that message and thereby have ‘beautiful feet’?

**Holy Spirit, help us do the ‘sweet swap’ and leave our embarrassment and shame at the cross of Jesus in exchange for courageous love. Embed it in our hearts that ‘anyone who trusts in Jesus will never be put to shame’. Bless you! Amen.**

Saturday 8 January 2022

# Ascribe greatness

by Ruth Olsen

**Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name (Psalm 29:2a).**

Read Psalm 29

The footnote in my NIV Study Bible describes this psalm as a hymn of praise for the King of Creation, whose majesty and power are trumpeted by the thunderbolts of the rainstorm!

We have had a few thunderstorms this year. What do you tend to do when there is thunder rolling in? I wonder what David the young shepherd did when thunder was around, both for his sheep and wellbeing out there in nature. Can you imagine him finding a cave to shelter in and then simply watching and listening to the power on display in the thunderstorm?

A lightning strike and responding thunder can make things shake and rattle! Wind and rain in the storms can flatten trees or strip them bare. My Study Bible footnote says the glory of the Lord is not only visible in the creation; it is also audible in creation’s most awesome voice.

The power on display is beyond our control! The best thing is to find shelter and watch in awe and wonder. David calls the ‘mighty ones’ – perhaps referring to the angelic host or to any thought to be gods – to ascribe to the Lord glory and strength (verse 1). And for all of us to recognise and acknowledge the Lord who holds all things in his hands, not just ‘the whole world’ as the old song goes, but the expanding universe! Not just the galaxy our home is in but also the new galaxies continually being discovered. It all proclaims the Lord’s glory!

David reminds us that, amid his majestic display, the Lord cares for us. He is ‘enthroned as King forever’, above the thunderstorm, while at the same time, his heart is always towards us. The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace (verses 10,11). He is our shelter, and we can find our ‘safe place of peace’ in him, our dwelling place (Psalm 91:1; Matthew 11:28–30).

**Lord God – Abba Father, Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit – we give you glory, honour and praise. You are amazing – always! Amen.**

Sunday 9 January 2022

# Are those words for me?

by Pastor Steve Liersch

**I baptise you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come … He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3:16).**

Read Luke 3:15–17,21,22

If you have been baptised as an infant, chances are you weren’t aware of what was said when this amazing offer of God’s grace was given to you. Ever since Pentecost, the Holy Spirit’s power has been gifted to those who have had the life-giving waters of baptism applied to them. The miracle of the occasion is such that we will never fully understand what God has just given to another of his children.

Martin Luther in the Small Catechism, Part 1, says:

Baptism is not just water used on its own. It is water used together with God’s word, in the way God has commanded. Our Lord Jesus Christ says: Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19 NIV).

It’s hard to take in the enormity of those words spoken by John the Baptist in his reference to Jesus, the ‘one who is more powerful than I … He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire’. Yes, those words are for us as they refer to the refining fire of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. Dwell on those words for a moment and let the devotion title question ‘Are those words for me?’ stir your heart. Whoever has been baptised has the most powerful force in the universe living within. Keep exploring what that might mean every day of your life as you ask the Holy Spirit to go to work in you.

What does the fire of the Holy Spirit need to ‘burn off’ from your life through repentance to enable you to grow deeper in your relationship with Jesus?

**Come Holy Spirit, come and pour yourself anew into my life so that I may be drawn closer to Jesus. Refine my heart and lead me to repentance. Give me a renewed willingness to work in God’s kingdom. Amen.**