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**Sunday 5 December 2021 to Sunday 12 December 2021**

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Sunday 5 December 2021

# Be prepared

by Georgie Schuster

**As it is written in the book of Isaiah the prophet: ‘A voice of one calling in the wilderness, “Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him”’ (Luke 3:4).**

Read Luke 3:1–6

My friend once described herself as an ‘event cleaner’. This means someone who really gets stuck into a thorough clean just before the guests arrive. I had to smile because I identify with that. When I know someone special is coming over, I put in extra effort to make my place look as good as it can. The rest of the time, things seem to accumulate. Other things take priority, or I get busy or tired.

There are times when my spiritual life gets a little messy too. Things accumulate and weigh me down. I hold on to past hurts longer than I should before offering forgiveness. I allow ‘stuff’ to make demands on my time and focus. But if I knew that Jesus was coming today …

John said it plain and straight. ‘Prepare the way for the Lord; make straight paths for him.’ There is urgency in his voice as he implored those who came to hear to repent and be ready with open ears and hearts to receive Jesus. He earnestly desired people to position themselves to see and receive God’s salvation.

God’s desire is for us to live in the restored relationship that Jesus paid for. What ‘things’ might need clearing away today as we prepare the way for the Lord?

**Dear God, please reveal the things I need to clear from my life. Help me to deal with them. Thank you for your love and mercy. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.**

Monday 6 December 2021

# Rock eternal

by Georgie Schuster

**Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal (Isaiah 26:4).**

Read Isaiah 26:1–9

As I write this, Australia is unsettled. Storms are sweeping across the nation. Reports of hail, strong winds and floods feature heavily in the news. There was even a story of a recent earthquake. There is also that other ‘unsettling thing’ we have been contending with for quite a while now, which continues to challenge our way of life. There are other things, too. World issues, relationship difficulties.

I’m reminded of Jesus’ story of the man who built his house upon the rock (Matthew 7:24,25). The storms came, and the house on the rock stood still.

It might come across as a little trite to say, ‘Just trust in the Lord’, especially when you are in the middle of a raging storm right now. And yet …

For thousands of years, people have struggled with all manner of storms and life-shaking experiences. Here in Isaiah, these words offer a true, secure, unchanging, reliable and firm foundation to stand on – or cling to! Over the ages, people have declared this truth. They have sung about it in psalms, hymns and modern-day songs. They have praised our mighty God and encouraged each other with it. Hear their voices encouraging you today. And remember, God is with you in whatever storm you face today.

**Dear God, our Rock Eternal, thank you for being with us in these turbulent days. You are our firm and secure foundation. Thank you for your great love. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.**

Tuesday 7 December 2021

# Our Good Shepherd

by Georgie Schuster

**He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young (Isaiah 40:11).**

Read Isaiah 40:1–11

I grew up on a farm with sheep! I have fond memories of working with them, admittedly, from a child’s perspective. I loved shearing time and jumping in the wool bales (this was before the days of hydraulic presses), feeding the sheep and checking they always had water. We kept careful watch during lambing time. I loved watching lambs prance around happily in the paddocks and see how fast their tails shook as they drank from their mothers. There are other memories too.

While we loved and cared for our sheep, none of it really compares to the intimacy expressed in today’s Bible text. The connection between shepherd and sheep is personal. We can visualise the tiny lamb, safe in the shepherd’s arms, hearing the heartbeat of its strong protector. The image of the shepherd gently leading those that have young … it implies patience, not force. The shepherd is responsible for the safety and wellbeing of all of the sheep, young and older.

We are his flock. Where do you see yourself in this picture? Being carried in our Good Shepherd’s strong arms? Hearing his heartbeat of love for you when things become overwhelming? Or perhaps being gently led by him as you care for your own family or loved ones? Wherever you see yourself, being carried or led, know that our Good Shepherd is strong and dependable - and he loves you!

**Dear Good Shepherd, thank you for the security I have in you. Carry or lead me through this day. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.**

Wednesday 8 December 2021

# Coming to town

by Georgie Schuster

**‘Shout and be glad, Daughter Zion. For I am coming and I will live among you,’ declares the Lord (Zechariah 2:10).**

Read Zechariah 2:10–13

You could say these days, we have the world at our fingertips. As we look into a screen and press a few buttons on our devices, we can transport ourselves across the globe or invite others into our own homes or work environments. This technology has proven invaluable in recent times. But it is not the same as being together in person.

Hugging a loved one, playing with a grandchild, sharing the same air. Connection. But still, cherished moments melt away far too quickly if they only last for a holiday visit.

But when someone comes to stay – to really stay – it’s different.

Today’s text is one of delight – perhaps relief – and hope. God is coming to town, and he’s going to stay! After so much longing and eager anticipation, he will be with his people. Doubt crushed, insecurity gone, relationship as it was always intended. His presence felt and experienced like never before. Together. Shout and be glad, sons and daughters! He is coming! How might this knowledge influence your day today?

**Dear Lord, lift my eyes today, above my circumstances, to you. To your love, your promises and the hope I have in you. I thank and praise you for all that you are! In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.**

Thursday 9 December 2021

# What’s underneath?

by Georgie Schuster

**For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness … knowledge … self-control … endurance … godliness … mutual affection and … love (2 Peter 1:5–7).**

Read 2 Peter 1:3–11

Soil profiles. On the surface, shallow and deep profiles can look similar. But when it comes to growing the seed and caring for it so that it flourishes, shallow and deep soils produce very different outcomes. Weather conditions aren’t always favourable. Wind or lack of water can wreak havoc, especially when the plant's root system can’t reach deep into the soil and the resources it needs to survive.

Relationships can be like that.

Consider the list of attributes mentioned in the text, and think of them in terms of a rich and deep ‘soil profile’. ‘Weather conditions’ (circumstances) aren’t always favourable. Sometimes you need to reach down to the traits/skills of perseverance, self-control and love to keep the relationship viable during a season of duress. Each quality listed in the text above is important in sustaining, strengthening and enabling our connections to ultimately flourish.

As we live our lives, redeemed by Jesus and freed from the shackles that bound us, we continue to grow in the understanding of all that this means. We respond in loving and serving God and others. These attributes equip us to follow Jesus’ command to ‘Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another’ (John 13:34). Who has Jesus placed on your heart to check in with today?

**Dear God, as I love and serve you today, guide me to the relationships you want me to cultivate. Thank you for providing everything I need. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.**

Friday 10 December 2021

# Confident victory!

by Georgie Schuster

**I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades! (Revelation 1:18)**

Read Revelation 1:9–20

This is not the image of ‘gentle Jesus, meek and mild’. Quite the opposite, in fact! The verses preceding this one describe Jesus as truly awesome, mighty, powerful, brilliant and glorious. Definitely not someone to be messed with! John’s human reaction was to ‘fall at his feet as though dead’. (That sounds a bit like fainting.)

But Jesus didn’t leave him there. He touches him and tells him not to be afraid. Then he declares these victorious truths, to John, to us and to everyone. These truths reverberate throughout all time and reach every ear, and I mean every single one! ‘I am the Living One; I was dead … I am alive forever … and I hold the keys of death and Hades.’

When we ‘picture Jesus’, we sometimes dwell on earlier accounts of him. Jesus, wandering around Israel hanging out with people, teaching and healing them, for example. Perhaps even the horrific picture of him on the cross. But he is not confined to that time and space any longer. Right now, he is living victoriously at the right hand of God the Father. And he’s got the keys!

To remember all he went through to redeem us and to know where he now reigns is humbling and awe-inspiring at the same time. But it also gives us tremendous confidence. His triumph is final. We share in the victory he paid for. Don’t be afraid! You are loved.

**Dear King Jesus, we are humbled and filled with awe as we come before you. We praise and adore your magnificent name. Thank you for your great mercy and love. You reign forevermore! Amen.**

Saturday 11 December 2021

# I will trust and not be afraid!

by Georgie Schuster

**Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my defence; he has become my salvation (Isaiah 12:2).**

Read Isaiah 12:2–6

Humans like to be in control. There is a sense of safety and enjoyment when we get to pick the experience, ‘power it up’ to the speed we are comfortable with, and ‘ride it’ for the length of time of our choosing. It can actually be fun. But it doesn’t take long to realise that many life experiences aren’t like that.

Many things are beyond our ability to control. Worries of ‘what might happen tomorrow’ can consume us if left unchecked. When we are out of our depth, we can flounder and feel overwhelmed and helpless. We need to anchor ourselves to something bigger and stronger than we are.

God is bigger and stronger than anything we will ever encounter. As scary as it sounds, taking our eyes of that ‘thing’ – whatever it might be – and onto our God can alter our perspective. To trust him with ourselves and our loved ones may seem like a leap of faith. But when we think about it, it is more like stepping in close to the one who loves us most. He encircles us with himself. He is our strength, defence, song and salvation. So, for today and tomorrow, let’s trust and not be afraid.

**Dear Loving God, you are our strength, defence, song and salvation. Help us to keep our eyes on you today. We trust you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Sunday 12 December 2021

# A preposition

by Pastor Reid Matthias

**He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3:16b).**

Read Luke 3:7–18

In terms of grammar, we don’t take much notice of prepositions. Often, we fixate on nouns and verbs and the occasional adjective or adverb, but prepositions seem like poor, neglected cousins.

Here is an example of how prepositions can make such a huge difference.

Dave threw the ball to Tina.

Dave threw the ball at Tina.

Both sentences are directional. The ball is going towards Tina with intention. But in the first, it seems like they are playing catch. In the second, they are playing dodgeball.

Prepositions make a big impact.

Notice in our Scripture verse the intention of the preposition.

Now, why does the preposition ‘with’ make such a difference? In many translations, it reads, ‘baptise you in the Holy Spirit and fire’. Which sounds better to you? As we move towards Christmas, towards the time of year when our spiritual hopes are piqued, would you prefer to be splashed or immersed?

To be baptised with the Spirit and fire comes across as something that happens to the outside – a nice blanket of comfy Spirit and cozy warmth that the gentle Holy Spirit brings to us. The splashing baptism with the Spirit and fire feels somewhat ‘safe’ or that somehow this baptism is a vaccination against fear.

Yet, to be baptised in the Spirit and in fire, there is no escape. This is an immersion into the power of a holy and utterly separate, powerful God who brings you into communion with him and the Spirit, always pointing to the Messiah. The Spirit surges through the body of Christ, bringing life and power through the Incarnated Promise – Jesus.

When John speaks to the groups, he wants them to be in people, not merely with people. He wants them to experience the power and the all-consuming burning hope of the Father, as the Messiah comes so that when the Spirit and fire have purified us, all that is left is a glorious joy in Jesus.

I hope you can think about your prepositions this Advent.

**Holy Spirit, as the lights of Christmas around us remind us of Jesus, let the power of the Holy Spirit illuminate a future in him. Amen.**