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**Sunday 31 December 2023 to**

**Sunday 7 January 2024**

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Sunday 31 December 2023

**A promise fulfilled**

by Eden Bishop

***And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ (Luke 2:26).***

Read [Luke 2:22–40](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A22%E2%80%9340++&version=NRSVUE)

When I was a child, the time of year that I would wait the most for was Christmas. It had many exciting draws: it was in the middle of the summer holidays (so no school!), we got to set up the Christmas tree and listen to lots of Christmas music, it signalled that my birthday was drawing near, and of course, what child would not be excited about presents? As a kid, it feels like you are waiting forever for Christmas time to come around, no matter how patient you try to be.

A child waiting for Christmas is a little bit like Simeon waiting for the greatest gift of all: the Messiah. Similar to how our calendars and pre-Christmas routines act as a signal or promise to us as children of presents, Simeon had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would get to see the Messiah before he died. Each year, we get to partake in a little reminder of how Simeon – and all of Israel – waited for the coming of the Messiah, and this reminds us of how we wait for the return of Jesus.

This text also reminds us that God is faithful and fulfils his promises. Simeon does get to see the Messiah before he dies. We can be assured that Jesus will come again.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the joyful fulfilment of your promise to your servant, Simeon. Please fulfil your promise of coming again to us, your faithful servants. Amen.***

*Eden Bishop lives in Adelaide and is a member at St Paul Blair Athol. She attends the University of Adelaide and is in the final year of her Advanced Economics degree. Eden enjoys reading (particularly The Lord of the Rings), playing the piano in church, knitting and learning fun facts about dinosaurs.*

Monday 1 January 2024

**Good news sheep**

by Eden Bishop

***And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger (Luke 2:16).***

Read [Luke 2:15–21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A15%E2%80%9321++&version=NRSVUE)

My favourite ‘characters’ in the Christmas story when I was a child were always the shepherds and, of course, the sheep. This was probably due to the absolutely adorable sheep in the Little People nativity set we had as children, but also my delight in the story of the angels appearing before the shepherds. My enjoyment of the presence of the shepherds and sheep in the Christmas story was also probably helped along by the time I played, somewhat anachronistically, Shaun the Sheep in a Christmas play.

Upon some reflection as an adult, I think I would still say the shepherds and the sheep are my favourite ‘characters’ (outside of Jesus, of course) in the Christmas story. However, this is due to how much I like that it is the shepherds who are the first to see Jesus and spread the good news about his birth. There is a certain poetic symbolism about this because Jesus is the Good Shepherd who has come to look after his sheep. It is beautiful that shepherds, who are, in fact, sheep, share the news of the coming of the Good Shepherd.

Just like the shepherds of the first Christmas story, we, the sheep, also get to share the excitement and good news of the arrival of our shepherd.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending a shepherd to care for your sheep. We pray that you will continue to give us the excitement that comes with knowing our shepherd has come to us. Amen.***

Tuesday 2 January 2024

**Chosen**

by Eden Bishop

***Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience (Colossians 3:12).***

Read [Colossians 3:12–17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+3%3A12%E2%80%9317&version=NRSVUE)

The ‘chosen one’ trope is beloved in literature and film. Some examples include Anakin and Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars*, the Pevensies in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and Frodo Baggins in *The Lord of the Rings.* This is not everyone’s favourite trope; it is seen as overdone. What about everyone else in the stories?

We can often experience feelings of inadequacy. Are we special? We don’t have some fancy sword or the Force to help us in our everyday struggles. However, we actually do have assurance that we are special. We are ‘God’s chosen ones, holy and dearly loved’. God has personally picked us to be a part of his family. You are the chosen one!

With this comes our ‘special powers’: compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience and love. Sometimes, we can struggle to feel or show these. Our sinful human nature can get in the way. However, we have the assurance that as God’s chosen ones, we receive daily strength, renewal and forgiveness. God continues to equip us with all the tools and special powers we need to be his chosen ones.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for choosing us to be your children. Continue to strengthen and renew us each day. Amen.***

Wednesday 3 January 2024

**Steadfast prayer**

by Eden Bishop

***Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving (Colossians 4:2).***

Read [Colossians 3:18–4:18](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+3%3A18+%E2%80%93+4%3A18&version=NRSVUE)

When someone asks you to picture someone praying, what do you imagine? Do you visualise someone kneeling beside their bed, head bowed, and their hands clasped? Do you think of someone sitting in a church pew or at a kitchen table? Do you picture yourself praying? As a child, the classic image of someone praying beside their bed came to mind when I thought about prayer. However, our nightly prayers did not go like this: we children would be in bed, and our parents would pray for us. This used to worry me somewhat as a child. Were we praying correctly?

As it happens, there are no restrictions on the time of day or how you must sit when you pray. God hears our prayers whether we pray beside or in bed. However, we do have some instructions about how to pray. That is, to pray in the first place! We should continue praying and do so with thanksgiving. Therefore, we shouldn’t be discouraged if our prayers appear unanswered. God still wants to hear them.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the amazing gift that is prayer. Thank you that we can bring our requests to you and for the knowledge that you want to hear them. Amen.***

Thursday 4 January 2024

**True wisdom**

by Eden Bishop

***She [wisdom] is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed (Proverbs 3:18).***

Read [Proverbs 3:11–20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs+3%3A11%E2%80%9320&version=NRSVUE)

Wisdom is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as ‘the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgement; the quality of being wise’. This sort of definition is what used to come to my mind when hearing or reading mentions of the word ‘wisdom’.

However, my understanding of what wisdom is evolved dramatically two years ago when I used a devotional book on Proverbs. This book talked about how wisdom is – and comes from – being in a relationship with God and reading his word. Dwelling in God’s presence and putting his word into practice in your life makes you wise, not experience or knowledge. By Jesus’ death, we can be in a relationship with God, which gives us his life and blessings.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sacrificing your son so that we could receive the gift of life. Help us to cling to this and receive wisdom from doing so. Amen.***

Friday 5 January 2024

**Praise the Lord!**

by Eden Bishop

***Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion (Psalm 147:12)!***

Read [Psalm 147:12–15 [16-18] 19,20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+147%3A12%E2%80%9320&version=NRSVUE)

Praise psalms are some of my favourites. They’re often filled with beautiful imagery (my favourite is nature imagery) and are incredibly joyous. As the unofficial literature nerd of my young adults Bible study group, it is my job to evaluate whether the week’s psalm is a ‘certified banger’ (disclaimer: this is all for fun, of course). This involves assessing the aesthetics of the psalm and the type of language used.

Today’s psalm is one of those bangers. It has everything you could want from a psalm: comfort, nature imagery, reminders of God's mighty and good deeds, and a call to praise him. I hope that you will take today’s devotion as a reminder of the greatness of God and thank him for the day and the start of a new year.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for all of the things you have done for us, your special children. You are a wonderful and mighty God! Amen.***

Saturday 6 January 2024

**Exceeding joy**

by Eden Bishop

***When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy (Matthew 2:10).***

Read [Matthew 2:1–12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+2%3A1%E2%80%9312&version=NRSVUE)

When I studied literature in high school, one thing we learned about was literary devices. One of these devices is called ‘tautology’, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as ‘the saying of the same thing twice over in different words, generally considered to be a fault of style’. The use of tautology is generally discouraged in creative writing.

However, writers in the Bible often use tautology. It is a device used, especially in the Old Testament, to place emphasis on the idea. Here, tautology is used to highlight the joy the wise men felt when they saw the star that guided them to Jesus. It is the most overwhelming joy, and the writer wants us to know this is how they feel.

Just like the wise men, we feel joy in the presence of God, especially at Christmas time when we celebrate the coming of Christ into the world. Let the fairy lights at Christmas time remind you of the joy of having Christ revealed to you.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your beloved son into the world to save us. Continue to fill our hearts with joy as we remember how we have been brought into your kingdom. Amen.***

Sunday 7 January 2024

**God revealed in the Jordan River**

by Rev. Dr Noel Due

***And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased' (Mark. 1:11 ESV).***

Read [Mark 1:4-11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+1%3A4-11&version=NRSVUE)

The most basic and important truth in Christian theology is that God reveals himself.

Apart from that we would have no idea of what God is like. We would be stuck in a completely lightless cellar, creating ‘god’ or ‘gods’ out of our own imagination—making idols instead of knowing God as God really is.

Yet, thankfully, God has revealed himself. He has done that through his acts in history, through his relationship with great Old Testament figures such as Moses and Abraham, through the prophets, and through his Law. But most completely and fully he has revealed himself in his Son. In Jesus we see God fully as he is. As Archbishop Sir Michael Ramsay once said, 'God is like Christ, and in him is no un-Christ-likeness at all'. Jesus said, 'If you have seen me, you have seen the Father' (John 12:45; 14:8).

That stunning revelation of God's presence with us is amazingly clear in the passage before us today. Jesus’ baptism was not merely an earthly event. He was baptised by John in the Jordan river. And he was also baptised with the Spirit, as his Father declared his love for him, so that all history might know who Jesus was and is.

This passage reveals Jesus in our midst being baptised for us, to stand with us. It also reveals God, the Father who sent him. And God, the Holy Spirit, who filled and empowered Jesus to do the Father’s will.

You will not read many devotions this year containing a Latin phrase. You don’t have to remember it! There is no test at the end, but the phrase is: *opera Trinitas ad extra indivisa sunt*.

What does that mean? It means that every action of our Triune God involves all the Persons. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are each fully involved in creating the world; sustaining the world; redeeming the world. And embracing you.

You live in the middle of a three-fold embrace.
That can never be undone.
Because they can never be undone.

***Thank you, dear heavenly Father, that you have revealed yourself to us in you Son Jesus. Thank you that you have sent him into the world by the power of your Spirit for us, and for our salvation. Thank you that through him you have gathered us up in your arms, and that we are fully loved, fully embraced, and fully secure. We pray, in the grip of the Father, Son and Spirit. Amen.***

*Noel is currently spending his retirement serving as the Intentional Interim Pastor of the Top End Lutheran Parish. He lives in Darwin with his wife, Kirsten, a medical doctor who mainly works on remote indigenous communities. He also serves as a professional supervisor for a number of pastors, chaplains and others.*