

**DAY 1 - (week beginning Mon 17 Dec 2018)****Read - Isaiah 11:1-9**

Let's put some background into this week's reflections. In the little section before this, Isaiah refers to Assyria like a tree cut down from the height of its power, never to rise again. Judah (the royal line of David) would be like a tree chopped down to a stump. But from that stump a new shoot would grow – the Messiah. He would be greater than the original tree and would bear much fruit. The Messiah is the fulfilment of God's promise that a descendent of David would rule forever.

God will judge with righteousness and justice. How we long for fair treatment from others, but do we give it? We hate those who base their judgments on appearance, false evidence, or hearsay, but are we quick to judge others using those same standards? Only Christ can be the perfectly fair judge. Only as he governs our hearts can we learn to be as fair in our treatment of others as we expect others to be toward us.

Judah had become corrupt and was surrounded by hostile powers. The nation desperately needed a revival of justice, righteousness and faithfulness. They needed to turn from selfishness and give justice to the poor and the oppressed. The righteousness that God values is more than refraining from sin. It is actively turning toward others and offering them the help they need.

The parallels for our country right now are stark. Could it be that this Advent season we may be reminded of God's call on our lives to reach out in His name, and be a blessing to all we encounter on a daily basis?

**Prayer: O God, help me to see your world through your eyes, and reach out in your name in this Advent season.**

**DAY 2****Read Luke 1: 26-38**

Nazareth was a long way from Jerusalem, the centre of Jewish life and worship. Nazareth was frequently visited by gentile merchants and Roman soldiers. It was known for its aloof and independent attitudes. Jesus was born in Bethlehem but grew up in Nazareth.

Mary was poor, young, female – all characteristics that, to the people of her day, would make her seem unusable by God for any major task. But God chose Mary for one of the most important acts of obedience he has ever demanded of anyone. You may feel that your ability, experience, or education makes you an unlikely candidate for God's service. Please don't limit God's choices, He can use you if you trust him.

But let us note that God's favour does not automatically bring instant success and fame. His blessing on Mary, the honour of being the mother of the Messiah, would lead to much pain and heartache. Her peers would ridicule her, her fiancé would come close to leaving her, and her son would be rejected and murdered. But through her son would come the world's only hope, and this is why Mary has been praised by countless generations as the young girl who "found favour with God". Her submission was part of God's plan to bring about our salvation.

If sorrow is weighing you down and dimming your hopes – think of Mary and wait patiently for God to finish working out His plan for your life.

**Prayer: Dear Lord, you know the plans you have for me. Plans to prosper me, bless me, grow me and empower me. I pray for you to fill me with your life-giving Spirit. Amen**

**DAY 3****Read - Luke 1:26-38**

Mary's story is interesting on many levels. Some suggest that she was privileged to be chosen to be mother to our Lord. Others say that she could be seen as God taking pity on her lowliness as a young girl from a poor family. It could also be argued that Mary was very immature to be the mother of the Lord. However in all this Mary didn't go out seeking status. She was chosen by God! At that young age when the angel visited her with the news that she would bear the Saviour of the world, she could have balked at the responsibility. But after listening she accepted her responsibility.

The story of Mary and the Angel produces three scenarios for us to learn from. (1) She embraced the plans of God for her life. "I am the Lord's servant. May it happen to me as you have said" she told the Angel. She didn't reject the Angel's prophecy out of hand. She accepted. God wants us to have the same attitude, the same kind of heart.

(2) Further in the same passage we read that she goes on a journey of 'self-preparation', be it consciously or subconsciously. She visits her older and more mature, righteous cousin, Elizabeth. It could be argued that Mary took practical steps to prepare for motherhood. While she may have been helping Elizabeth, she was also learning to be a wife and good Jewish woman as she listened and observed Elizabeth and Zachariah. (3) She believed the message from Gabriel. Scripture is full of messages and promises for you and me. Do we believe them and trust as implicitly as Mary did?

**Prayer: Lord please prepare me to be trusted by You so that You may be glorified. AMEN**

## DAY 4

## Read – Luke 1:26-38

Before the angel came to Mary, she was an ordinary young Jewish girl living in a small Jewish town. Just like all the other girls in her town. I'm sure Mary would have been perfectly happy to remain that way. Having the same dreams that all the other young girls had – fall in love – settle down – get married – have a family. But God steps in and everything changes. And when that happened she responded in three ways which we can learn from.

**(1) Mary was AMAZED at God's wisdom.** She was thinking: Who is this "favoured one"? I'm not anything special. Surely it is not me he is talking about. To this day we are also called favoured ones. The Message puts it this way "*Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son.*" Eph 1:5-6. Amazing that God choose you and me. **(2) Mary was PERPLEXED by God's Plan.** She asked "*How can this be? I'm still a virgin.*" Like Mary we too would be confused at being pregnant without having had sex. But we are also acutely aware "*For nothing will be impossible with God.*" We ask – "How can this be?" God answers – "Because I am God and you are not." **(3). Mary SUBMITTED to God's Sovereignty.** She had heard God's call. She had listened to God's plan. She was told of God's power. Her response – She submitted to God's sovereignty. "*I am the Lord's servant.*" She said

Amazement and being perplexed are OK as long as we end in submission.

**Prayer: Lord in my amazement and confusion help me to always submit to you alone. Amen**

## DAY 5

## Read - Luke 1:26-38

"The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."" v 27-28

Having seen that God tends to perform His work through humans, we must now turn our attention to why Mary was chosen. There is clearly no definite answer to this question, but the life and actions of Mary can teach us much about the kind of person that God uses.

The first thing we notice about Mary is that she heard God's call and was available. God may not call us through the physical visitation of an angel, but He does call us in ways that are pretty clear – a sudden urge to do something, a warming of the heart or a reaction to injustice or hurt.

I believe the biggest problem God has in getting people to do what is needed, is our lack of availability. Our lives are often so full that we simply don't have time to do what God wants and so the urge or warming slowly dies as we get on with our busy lives.

If, on the other hand, we have the time, there are often other issues that result in us being 'not available' – these may include a lack of confidence, a lack of faith in God or fear of failure (or even of success).

Whatever may be going on within us, God is firstly looking for people who are available to respond to His call.

**Think: Are you running your life or is your life running you? How available are you if God calls?**

## DAY 6

## Read: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

When the world is in trouble, we want a super hero don't we. In other words we want someone larger than life to save the day. Very rarely do we turn to the Lord because we so easily forget the majesty and power He possesses. I'm almost sure that you will agree that the world is certainly in need of saving. The world that was created by God was beautiful. It was a perfect paradise. But God, in his infinite wisdom and incredible love for us gave us the gift of *free will*.

The world we live in is fallen. Sin dominates our world and with it come disease, hatred, war, pain, suffering and selfishness. The world is broken and is need of a saviour. In our reading Paul is reminding the Corinthian Christians that even though God's plan may seem foolish on the face of it, it is actually brilliant. Paul is reminding them of where they come from.

Applying this to ourself; God didn't choose you or me because we are wise or wealthy or powerful. God needs regular folks. He wants to use regular folks so that when they do things that are out of character, out of the norm that people would expect from them, then He would be glorified. God can use anybody, even a humble young Jewish girl. I struggle to be competent but people who see me now, who knew me way back when, are amazed at what God has done.

We are the people He wants to use. Those that are not people of stature but the ones voted least likely.

**Meditation: When the Lord calls on me, how ready am I to be used for the Lord's purposes?**