

*lectio divina*

*lectio divina*

PRAYING THE SCRIPTURES IN ADVENT Year B



Written by Bishop David Walker DD, with the support of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Commission for Mission and Faith Formation.

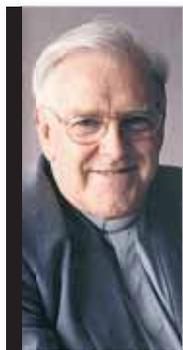
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## *Acknowledgements*

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David Bennett; Kenneth Overberg SJ; and St Anthony Messenger.*



## Introduction

As the world becomes less complicated through technological advances, we still find ourselves waiting – waiting for that package to arrive that we ordered online in record speed; waiting in a queue at the supermarket checkout, designed to eliminate the evils of waiting; waiting for the phone to ring; waiting for that great job to come along, or waiting for that elusive perfect relationship. It never ends.

Researchers suggest that the average person will spend 5 years of his or her life waiting in line, 2 years playing telephone tag, and 6 months sitting at red lights – over seven and a half years of waiting, at best doing nothing, or at worst experiencing great aggravation! Even in our fast-paced world, with all of its conveniences, we are all waiting for something. And, as strange as it sounds, during the Advent season, we discover a purpose to our waiting.

Advent is the time when we participate symbolically in the waiting of patriarchs, kings, prophets, and priests, as we await Christ's final and glorious return. Through prayer, liturgy, Eucharist, and the signs and symbols of Advent, we groan with Isaiah for that day when weapons will be turned into ploughshares. We rejoice with Zechariah that the dawn from on high is breaking upon us. We pray with Adam, Job, Hannah, Solomon, Micah, and millions of others, women and men, named and unnamed, whose expectations of the future kingdom may have been unclear, yet still yearned for something more complete and more "real" than what they knew.

It's only right that we cry out '*Maranatha*, Come Lord, Jesus', with St Paul. When the Word became flesh in Christ, the world was sanctified. Something in the fabric of the cosmos shifted as creation became a fitting vehicle for God's redemptive work. Human experiences have been sanctified as well and commemorated in our Church Year. Yes, as the season of Advent shows, even waiting has become sanctified.

As we wait in long queues this Advent season, or as we wait for anything really, it is important that we remember the waiting of those expecting the Messiah, and always wait with patience, humility, and expectant hope in a state of prayer. I know it is difficult, but especially during Advent, waiting prayerfully and patiently, in the manner of our Lord and his blessed Mother, is not only a good spiritual discipline, but could also lower our risk of holiday-induced blood pressure. It seems like we're all waiting for something, so why not use these experiences to enhance our Advent discipline by prayerfully waiting, joining our prayers with Isaiah, Zechariah, and all the saints?

*Lectio divina* invites us to rest with the Word. In our resting with the Word this Advent may we find the space and the place and the patience to wait and discover anew the meaning of our waiting.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David L. Walker".

**David L. Walker**  
**Bishop of Broken Bay**

# How to use this booklet

This booklet invites you to prayerfully and meditatively reflect on the Sunday readings during Advent and select readings of the Christmas season.

A brief outline of meditative and prayerful reflection is offered on the inside covers of this booklet, which can be used as bookmarks throughout the period.

To find out more about *lectio divina* please visit  
<http://www.dbb.org.au/ourworks/Pages/LectioDivina.aspx>

This booklet is an instrument that can be used in a variety of ways. Please use it in whatever way suits you best.



*advent:*

Walking Towards The Light

At first glance, Advent may seem simple enough to understand as a period of preparation for the great Feast of the Lord's Nativity. But the themes that emerge from the liturgical texts of the Roman Liturgy – the antiphons, collects, readings, psalms, prefaces etc. – present a season that is altogether unique and profound. There is nothing quite like it in the liturgical traditions of the East. Certainly they do have their own special periods of preparation for Christmas and Epiphany but nothing the same as Advent.

## *The Origins of Advent*

The first signs of what we now call “Advent” appeared in the latter part of the 300's in the Christian communities of Spain and Gaul (present-day France and parts of Germany). It was in some places a two to three-week preparation for the rites of Christian initiation celebrated in these regions at the feast of Epiphany. This preparation seems to have involved not only those who were going to be baptised but also in various ways the whole community.

## *Christ, The Unconquered Light Of The World*

But why Epiphany and not the Easter Vigil as the most auspicious time for conferring the sacraments of Initiation?

The simplest and shortest answer to this is to point to the theme of Light and the belief that Baptism means to be enlightened by Christ. And in the northern hemisphere, the Christmas/Epiphany season depends upon the event of the winter solstice, when the sun begins its “ascent”, the days begin to get longer, and the darkness is “conquered” by the Light of Christ. According to the old calendars this winter solstice was calculated as taking place on 25 December, and not, as our modern calendar determines, 21 December. So from the early 300's in Europe, Christmas was made to coincide with the solstice because it meant that Christ the Light had come into our world and would continue to conquer the darkness of sin, year after year – the Christ, the Son of God, our Saviour.

Gradually, as time went on, the custom of group Baptism at Epiphany waned. But the theme of baptism and conversion of heart, mind, and action remained embedded in the character of this special time. In time, Advent took on the character familiar to us, as preparation for the feast of the Lord's Coming in the flesh. Its length varied from six weeks to four weeks depending on regional customs, until it reached its present fixed form of four weeks.

## *Adventus – Momentous Arrival of Salvation*

The word “Advent” itself has an interesting background. Both the Latin “Adventus” (Coming) and its Greek equivalent “Parousia” (Appearance) were both originally secular, pagan, words which epitomised singular events such as the birth of an Emperor

or the proclamation of the Victor of a crucial battle. These kinds of events meant that people's lives were forever changed and transformed. Is it any wonder, then, that both of these words found their way into the Christian expression of the Incarnation?

## *Advent in its Final Form*

Although the countries of Western and Northern Europe already had a form of Advent for some two centuries, it wasn't until the mid 500's that Rome itself began to observe this season. Eventually, the latter part of the four weeks of Advent in Rome was marked by a more intense time of expectation, fasting, and prayer from 17-24 December. Finally, in the High Middle Ages (13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> Centuries), Advent was characterised by the strong eschatological message of the glorious return of the Lord at the end of time. It was this fully developed form of the season that spread rapidly throughout Europe.

## *An Advent Overview*

Today the four weeks of Advent develop certain dominant themes which can be described as follows:

**1<sup>st</sup> week** – Watch and Pray: Vigilant waiting for the Lord's coming

**2<sup>nd</sup> week** – John the Baptist's challenge: Prepare the way of the Lord!

**3<sup>rd</sup> week** – The Messianic Age is here: Therefore, Rejoice!

**4<sup>th</sup> week** – The Incarnation of the Word: God's plan set in motion

We can also look at the unfolding of Advent in two phases:

**PHASE ONE – from the First Sunday of Advent until 16 December.** In a broad sweep and with stirring words of warning issued against the backdrop of stark signs in nature and in the unfolding of human social history, Advent focuses on the two Comings of Christ: his 1<sup>st</sup> Coming when he took on our own human nature and lived among us; his 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming when he will appear as Judge at the end of time. The point is that even in the midst of a long history of turmoil and upheaval there is embedded in the human heart and soul a longing for the Messiah and the expectancy of his coming.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* expresses this as follows:

**524** When the Church celebrates the Liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Saviour's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming. By celebrating the precursor's (*John the Baptist's*) birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to his desire: "he must increase, but I must decrease."

**PHASE TWO – from 17 December to 24 December.** By contrast to Phase One, this eight-day period is far more personal as it focuses on the persons and events leading up to the actual birth of the Saviour in Bethlehem. It is crystal-clear that the underlying theme is that God’s own Son has taken on human nature to live among us in order to lead us back to God where we truly belong.

On each of these eight days, the 1<sup>st</sup> readings are from Old Testament and trace the prophetic development of God’s promise to send us the Messiah. The Gospel of Day 1 (17 December) presents us with the genealogy of Jesus Christ, Son of God, complete with a truly human (and problematic) ancestry, a Gospel so important that it is repeated on the Vigil of the Nativity.

Then in a series of “annunciations” the details of God’s plan are revealed and set in motion: the annunciation to Joseph, to Zechariah, and then to Blessed Mary, together with the aftermath of this extraordinary sequence of events: John’s witness to Jesus’ presence in the flesh and Mary’s *Magnificat*. This whole period of prelude culminates in the Forerunner John the Baptist’s own Nativity and the proclaiming of the *Benedictus* (that “God has visited his people”).

## *The “O” Antiphons*

Woven into these special days is a series of seven ancient antiphons, called the “O” Antiphons, which can be easily missed but which express the Church’s faith in what the Messiah means to us. Their authorship is unknown but they were already in use in the 700’s. In our present liturgical plan they are used at Mass as verses before the Gospel and in the Divine Office as *Magnificat* antiphons for Evening Prayer. Here are three of these beautiful antiphons:

- **O Wisdom**, you come forth from the mouth of the Most High. You fill the universe and hold all things together in a strong yet gentle manner. O come to teach us the way of truth. (17 December)
- **O Adonai** and Leader of Israel, you appeared to Moses in a burning bush and you gave him the Law on Sinai. O Come and save us by your mighty power. (18 December)
- **O Immanuel**, you are our King and Judge, the One whom the people await and their Saviour. O Come and save us, Lord our God. (23 December)

## *Summarising The Advent Themes*

1. **Preparing to accept “Good News”**: The Canticle of the Angels (Lk 2:14) is the Church’s profound Christmas proclamation. Advent must prepare us in such a way that this Good News, when it is proclaimed in the Church, is accepted and taken to heart.

- 2. Appreciating the mystery of the Word made flesh:** That the divine Son of God actually took on our own human nature is the foundation of our entire faith. But appreciating the humanity of Jesus the Christ really depends upon how we understand and appreciate our own human nature. In the course of a year so many things happen to shake our faith in the human condition and its destiny. Advent is a prime time for correcting this negative bias and checking our fundamental basis for hope.
- 3. A recommitment to justice and mercy:** The urgent cry of John the Baptist can be heard throughout the Advent season, “Prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight his paths!” The vigilance and watchfulness called for here does not entail an increase in personal anxiety or spiritual pressure. It flows out of our Baptismal and Confirmational sense of responsibility for our world, for love of the person, and our commitment to practical justice and mercy “as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ” (cf the embolism of the Lord’s Prayer, new text).
- 4. The Advent response of baptismal conversion of heart:** As we have seen, Advent had its beginnings in the celebration of Baptism as the rising of the Light of God’s face shining in the face of Jesus. Our 21st Century Advent likewise is a call to conversion of heart and true reconciliation as we turn from the inherent darkness to embrace this Light.

# Prayer in the Days Before Advent

Lord, it happens every year. I think that this will be the year that I have a reflective Advent.

I look forward to Sunday and this new season.

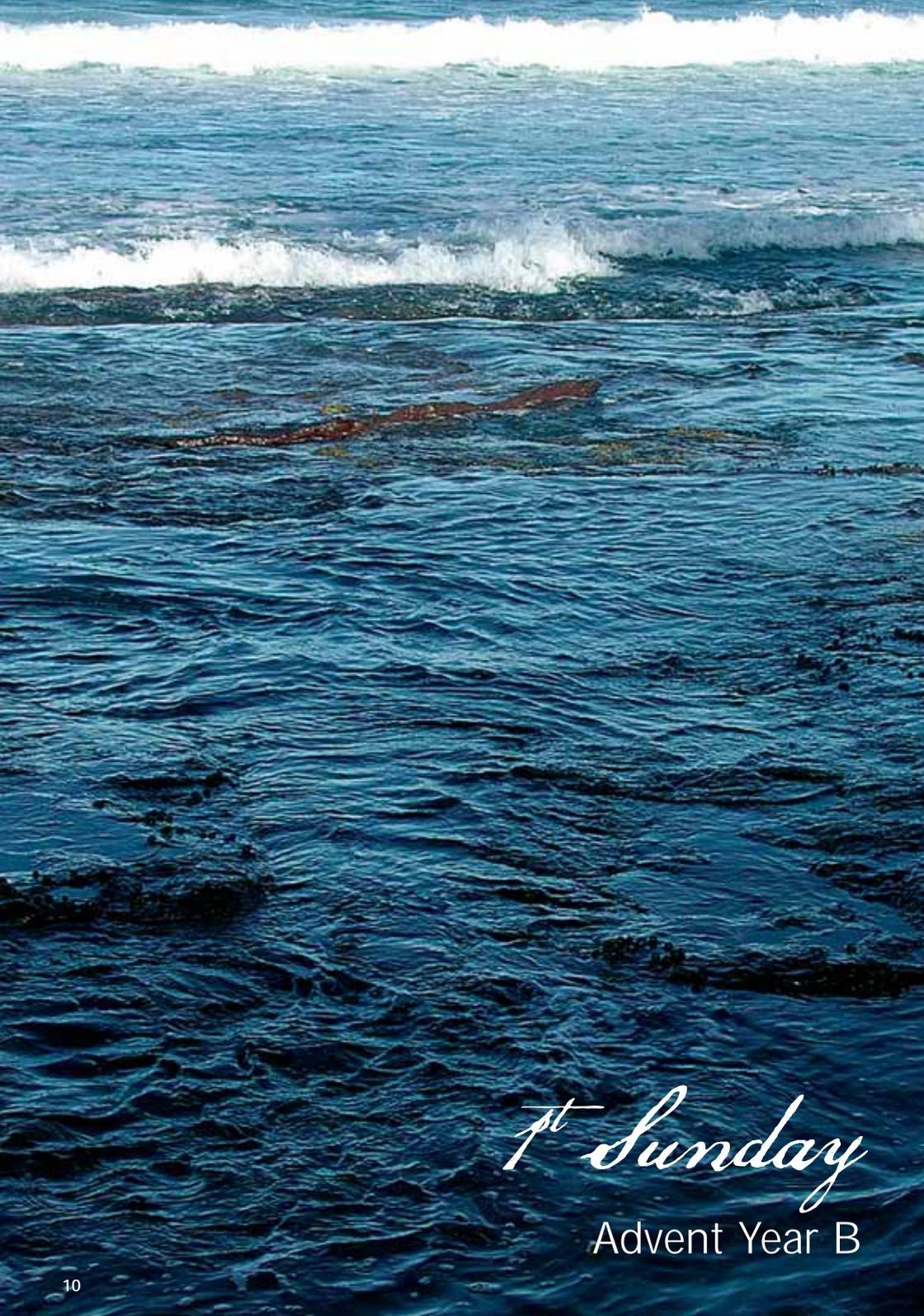
But all around me are the signs rushing me to Christmas and some kind of celebration that equates spending with love.

I need your help, Lord. I want to slow my world down. This year, more than ever, I need Advent, these weeks of reflection and longing for hope in the darkness.

This year, help me to have that longing. Help me to feel it in my heart and be aware of the hunger and thirst in my own soul. Deep down, I know there is something missing in my life, but I can't quite reach for it. I can't get what is missing.

I know it is about you, Lord. You are not missing from my life, but I might be missing the awareness of all of the places you are present there.

Be with me. Guide me in these weeks to what you want to show me this Advent. Help me to be vulnerable enough to ask you to lead me to the place of my own weakness, the very place where I will find you the most deeply embedded in my heart, loving me without limits.



*1<sup>st</sup> Sunday*

Advent Year B

Welcome into Advent as we prepare for the coming of Emmanuel, when God will be with us to dwell among us. It has long been the human heart's desire to know God ever more intimately. Such yearnings are echoed in today's Reading from Is 64:1, 'O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.' Yet what is it that we anticipate in God's approach? What is it we want from God? What is it that we deeply need? Once again let us return to Is 64:8 where we read, 'we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.' The human heart's desire is to know its Creator ever more intimately. In this Advent we hope to be made more into the image of God. Advent is a time to prepare ourselves for change, so that God can work in us, recreating us in love and spirit.

Advent is a necessary time in all our lives as we often stray from our purpose and we forget the essence of our life, which is Emmanuel, God with us. Advent is a time to openly recall how much we need God in our midst. Advent invites us to prepare among humanity a place of welcome and hospitality, where God can be. We read in 1 Cor. 1:9, 'God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.' To be in fellowship with Jesus, however, is also to be in fellowship with all people. In Advent, preparation for Christmas is a universal event, where we as one Church, from one end of the earth to the other, gather to welcome Emmanuel. Yet Advent is only the beginning for when Jesus comes we are transformed and our union with God is forever ongoing and reflected in our relationship with all. This is achieved through the gift of grace given to us in God, 'for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind' (1 Cor 1:5). Thus Christmas is the acknowledgment that in the coming of Emmanuel, we are all one with God, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

So 'Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come' as we read in Mk 13:33. We have Advent to help us prepare to receive a gift that will transform our entire lives, a preparation where we are moulded by our Creator to become people of peace and joy. Advent reminds us how wonderful the coming of Emmanuel is and it reminds us to partake in this great event, to gladly prepare and be ready for a God who will grace us with every blessing.

### *Isaiah 63:16-17, 64:1, 3-89*

63<sup>16</sup>For you are our father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our father; our Redeemer from of old is your name. <sup>17</sup>Why, O LORD, do you make us stray from your ways and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you? Turn back for the sake of your servants, for the sake of the tribes that are your heritage.

64 O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence<sup>3</sup>When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. <sup>4</sup>From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who

wait for him. <sup>5</sup>You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed.

<sup>6</sup>We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. <sup>7</sup>There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. <sup>8</sup>Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.

## *1 Corinthians 1:1-9*

<sup>1</sup><sup>3</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup>for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind – <sup>6</sup>just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you – <sup>7</sup>so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup>He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

## *Mark 13:33-37*

<sup>33</sup>Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. <sup>34</sup>It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. <sup>35</sup>Therefore, keep awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, <sup>36</sup>or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. <sup>37</sup>And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”



*2nd Sunday*

Advent Year B

In Advent we prepare to celebrate the greatest miracle we will ever encounter, the miracle of our Lord and Saviour taking on our humanity. Isaiah and John the Baptist call on us to tear down our mountains and fill in our valleys to make straight the path of Our Lord. Our valleys are the times when we do not live as Jesus has taught us. Our mountains are times when we live against those teachings. We are to make level the uneven ground of our lives turning our rough places into a plain. We are to make straight the path of Our Lord to our hearts and our souls.

2,000 years ago John the Baptist strode out of the desert proclaiming to all who would listen that they were to make low their mountains and lift up their valleys. John was a wild looking figure. He wore camel skin clothes and a thick brown belt. He had wild hair and a wild, bushy beard. His eyes fixed his audience with a fierce gaze. His language was uncompromising. “The ground of your lives is uneven. The places of your lives are rough! Make straight the path of Our Lord!”

It is by no co-incidence that John bore a remarkable resemblance to the great prophet Elijah, wearing the same clothes Elijah wore. It is no co-incidence that John spoke fiercely in an uncompromising manner as did Elijah. It is no co-incidence that John baptised at Bethany over the Jordan where Elijah had ascended to heaven in a fiery chariot.

John was saying, “Look at me, look at me! Like Elijah I have something important to say. Listen or suffer the consequences! Make straight the path of the Lord!”

In our second reading St Peter reminds us that our Lord will patiently wait until each of us tear down our mountains and lift up our valleys. In our first reading Isaiah reminds us that Our Lord will feed us, gather us in his arms, carry us and gently lead us. We are his sheep. He is our shepherd. He knows us each by name. Our shepherd will climb our mountains and descend into our valleys, to carry us and lead us to the “new heavens and the new earth, where righteousness dwells.” Our Shepherd will not let any of his sheep perish.

2,000 years ago John heralded Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God, whose sandals he was not fit to untie. 30 years before then, the stars heralded the birth of Jesus, the angels sang his glory, the shepherds told all who would listen that he was born and the animals whose manger he shared lowed gently. Creation knelt at the crib of our Lord and Saviour, marvelling at the miracle of his birth.

Today we who share in the baptism of Jesus the Christ, baptised with the Spirit not just water, kneel in worship of Our Lord and God, who has taken on our humanity so we may share in his Divinity. We tear down our mountains and fill in our valleys, making our rough places level. We make straight the path of Our Lord. Don't we?

### *Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-1*

**40** Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup>Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. <sup>3</sup>A voice cries out: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup>Every

valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. <sup>5</sup>Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

<sup>9</sup>Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!” <sup>10</sup>See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. <sup>11</sup>He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

## *2 Peter 3:8-14*

<sup>8</sup>But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.

<sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. <sup>10</sup>But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

<sup>11</sup>Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, <sup>12</sup>waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? <sup>13</sup>But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. <sup>14</sup>Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish.

## *Mark 1:1-8*

<sup>1</sup>The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

<sup>2</sup>As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;

<sup>3</sup>the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.’”

<sup>4</sup>John the baptiser appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup>I have baptised you with water; but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.”

## *Halfway through Advent – have I missed it?*

It's halfway through Advent and I'm not sure what happened. I really wanted to make this a reflective and calm season, preparing for your birth and pondering how you came into this world in such a stunningly humble way. But it's so busy and I'm distracted and sometimes even short-tempered with those I love the most. Where are you in THAT?

I am discouraged and wish I could start over. But as I sit here in the rare moment of silence, I contemplate your birth. In a bed of straw, with the smell of manure everywhere. It's a mess in that stable ... and come to think of it, my life is a little messy, too. I suddenly see that it is not just into the mess of the stable but into my mess that you enter the world. You came into a humble place and that humility is often where I live my life – feeling guilty or distracted and wishing I were a better person. But if I stop thinking of myself and focus on you, I realise that there you are, waiting to love me, even though I have so many unfulfilled good intentions about prayer, so many desires of how to change this fleeting Advent season.

I can begin Advent today and make this season deeper by making room in my heart for you. I can take just a moment before I get out of bed in the morning and feel the empty place in my life I so often fill with my busy-ness. It is there I need you the most. Come, Lord Jesus. Come into that dark and lonely spot in my heart. You know what my needs are more than I do. Let me feel your love. If I only carry that thought with me each day, it will prepare me for Christmas.

Thank you, Lord. It's not too late. You are waiting to enter my life today, wherever I let you in. Help me to open my heart in these remaining days.



*3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday*

Advent Year B

Two weeks to go and Christmas will be upon us. Today is *Gaudate Sunday* which means rejoicing Sunday. Originally Advent was longer than it now is and was a time of penance as well as of prayer and preparation. The Church decided we should have a day off, a day of celebration in the middle of our time of penance. Some priests will wear pink to highlight the different flavour of this Sunday from the other Sundays of Advent.

In our first reading from Isaiah we read that, “The Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all nations.” In our second reading from Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians we are encouraged to, “Rejoice always, to greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss.” Very much party mode! We greet each other with a kiss and rejoice as our Lord God brings righteousness to our world and our lives.

But we have to prepare for this party. There is work to do. We are to, “bring good news to the oppressed, bind up the broken hearted, proclaim liberty to captives and release to prisoners, to comfort all who mourn.” St Paul exhorts us to “be at peace, encourage the faint heartened, help the weak, be patient, always seek to do good, pray without ceasing.” We are preparing to party with the Lord. The “we” is you, me and all of God’s children.

To be ready to party in righteousness we are to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the lonely and care for the elderly and sick. We are to speak for the voiceless. Everyone is invited to this party and it is our job to make sure they make it.

John was not a party animal. He was also not the Light, not the Messiah, not Elijah and not **the** Prophet (he was a prophet but not **the** prophet). He told the priests and Levites that he wasn’t any of those things. He told them what he was. He was the voice in the wilderness, the baptiser, the witness to the Light.

Jesus the Christ is the Light. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the Good Shepherd. He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. The party we are preparing for is in his honour. He is the guest of honour. He is the Host, from whom we receive the gift of eternal life. Although Jesus came after John in time, he preceded John, he succeeded John and he raised John from the dead by his death and resurrection.

John told us to get ready for the party to end all parties. Jesus is coming. When he does, you, me and all his brothers and sisters, our brothers and sisters, will celebrate in our Father’s many-roomed home. What a party that will be!

## *Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11*

61 The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; <sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.

<sup>10</sup>I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. <sup>11</sup>For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

## *1 Thessalonians 5:12-28*

<sup>12</sup>But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labour among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; <sup>13</sup>esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

<sup>14</sup>And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. <sup>15</sup>See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all.

<sup>16</sup>Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup>give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. <sup>19</sup>Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup>Do not despise the words of prophets, <sup>21</sup>but test everything; hold fast to what is good; <sup>22</sup>abstain from every form of evil.

<sup>23</sup>May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup>The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this. <sup>25</sup>Beloved, pray for us. <sup>26</sup>Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss. <sup>27</sup>I solemnly command you by the Lord that this letter be read to all of them. <sup>28</sup>The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

## *John 1:6-8, 19-28*

<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.

<sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

<sup>19</sup>This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" <sup>20</sup>He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." <sup>21</sup>And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." <sup>22</sup>Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" <sup>23</sup>He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. <sup>24</sup>Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. <sup>25</sup>They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" <sup>26</sup>John answered them, "I baptise with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, <sup>27</sup>the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." <sup>28</sup>This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.



*4<sup>th</sup> Sunday*

Advent Year B

We have arrived at the fourth Sunday of Advent – only a week away to the great feast of Christmas. Advent is a time of preparation and hope, and waiting for the birth of Jesus. How have you prepared for the birth of Jesus this year?

The Gospel reading we hear this week is from Luke's Gospel. It is the story of the Annunciation. It is a story that we know well and one that we have probably heard often from when we were a child. Basically, Mary said 'Yes'. But have we really looked at the story in great detail as an adult, and thought about the true meaning of this story, and thought about what she was saying 'Yes' to?

This is an amazing story of unconditional faith and trust. A poor Jewish girl is visited by an angel. She is to be married to Joseph in the near future. The angel comes to her and says that she will give birth to a baby, not any baby, but the Son of God. By saying 'Yes' she is risking becoming an outcast by Joseph and his community. But she says yes – yes to giving birth to Jesus. And as we have said many times in the Hail Mary, "Blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus"!

What does this great story mean for us in 2011? Do we see Mary as our role model, and do we say 'yes' to God all the time?

This story tells us about faith and trust. With God all things are possible. God is beyond our understanding and we need to trust in God, and have faith. Mary, who would have been frightened with the angel's appearance, does not totally understand God's ways, but says "Let what you have said be done". We too need to follow Mary's example in our response to God.

## *2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16*

<sup>7</sup>Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, <sup>2</sup>the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." <sup>3</sup>Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you." <sup>4</sup>But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: <sup>5</sup>Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? <sup>8</sup>Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; <sup>9</sup>and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. <sup>10</sup>And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, <sup>11</sup>from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. <sup>12</sup>When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>14</sup>I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with

a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. <sup>16</sup>Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

## *Romans 16:25-27*

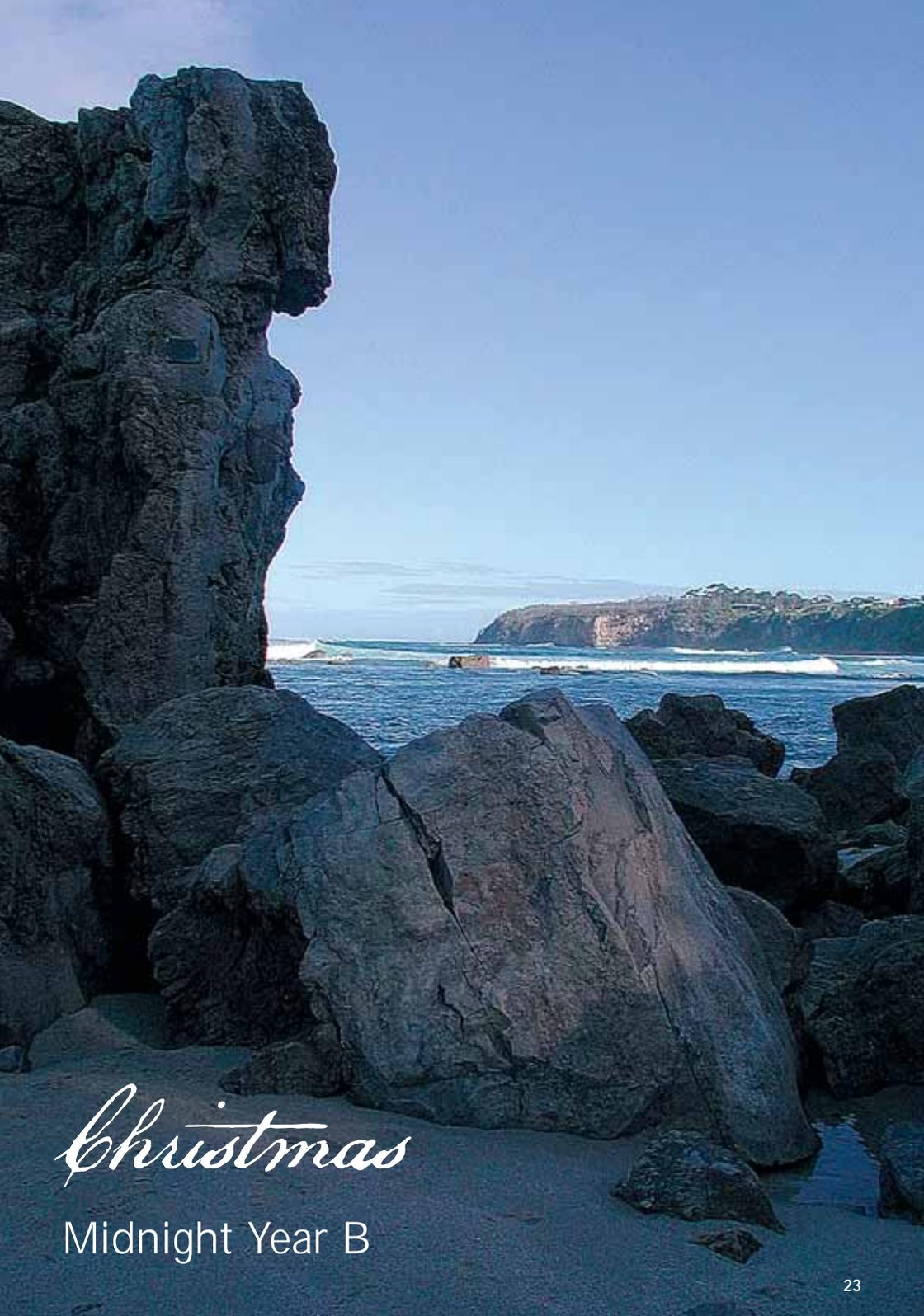
<sup>25</sup>Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages <sup>26</sup>but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith – <sup>27</sup>to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

## *Luke 1:26-38*

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup>But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. <sup>31</sup>And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." <sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup>The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup>And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God." <sup>38</sup>Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

## *Prayer before Christmas Dinner*

God of all gifts, we thank you for the many ways  
you have blessed us this day.  
We are grateful to each of those  
who are gathered around this table.  
We ask you to bless us and our food  
and to bless those we love who are not with us today.  
In our gratitude and love,  
we remember your humble birth into our lives  
and pray for those who are without enough to eat.  
We remember the stable in which you were born  
and pray for those who have no place to live.  
We remember your challenging message of caring and giving  
and we pray for peace in families and nations throughout the world.  
We bless you and give you thanks in your Spirit  
who brings our hearts to life the Christmas Day and forever. Amen.



*Christmas*

Midnight Year B

A favourite carol for Midnight Mass begins,

*“It came upon a midnight clear  
that glorious song of old...  
The world in solemn stillness lay  
to hear the angels sing.”*

Quiet, clear air, crispness, stillness, peace...are images which console and caress us.

God’s zeal for our welfare (Isa 9:7), the appearance of the grace of God (Titus 2;11)

God’s promise of peace (Lk2:14), are assurances of great joy and fullness of life to come.

However, the readings for this liturgy are disturbing in their content, and it is important that our hunger for certitude and peace does not blind us to the reality that this kingdom of righteousness is a reality in the now, only as we co-operate with the power of God’s Spirit. (Titus 3:7)

**Isaiah 9:2-7** Isaiah the prophet, looks with hope to the leadership of a small nation facing military invasion and the tensions of diplomatic and political intrigues. The people walking in the darkness of injustice and oppression will be enlightened and freed by a ruler to come who will establish justice and peace. But the establishment and continuance of the godly kingdom by this king, counsellor and father, only grows as much as people respond to his gracious authority. An emphasis in Isaiah is that pride is the great sin: the prophet calls for true enlightenment and knowledge of the Lord through wise judgment and holy justice. These are the virtues that take the people out of darkness, and along the road of light.

**Titus 2:11-14** The letter to Titus looks towards the establishment of the kingdom also, perhaps anticipating its coming sooner than later. But however long we wait, we are to accept the training (knowledge and wisdom) offered to us through the grace of the Spirit. Then comes the disturbing challenge: we are to renounce one way of life and become self-controlled and upright. So, in the still of midnight worship, there are hard demands made on us to respond to Christ who “gave himself for us”.

**Luke2:1-20** In a world dominated by one of the bloodiest political and military systems in written history, the people of Palestine were ordered to be registered, that all the world was to be recorded as owned by Rome. But, a parallel kingdom was being revealed to the world in the little town of Bethlehem. This was the realm of the Savior, the Messiah, whose ownership was liberating (good news) and fulfilling (great joy) to all people. It’s worthwhile just considering these contrasting participants in the story: Emperor Augustus, Governor Quirinius of Syria, with the carpenter, his peasant wife, baby child and, possibly

vagrant, shepherds. The two announcements are also telling us something: a decree that went out from the Emperor that all should be registered and the angel, saying “do not be afraid...I am bringing good news of a saviour”. There really is no question of which kingdom we must choose, is there?

As we are sent out from midnight Mass, we can treasure these words, praising God for what we have heard and seen.

## *Isaiah 9:2-7*

<sup>2</sup>The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined. <sup>3</sup>You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. <sup>4</sup>For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. <sup>5</sup>For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. <sup>6</sup>For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup>His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

## *Titus 2:11-14*

<sup>11</sup>For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, <sup>12</sup>training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, <sup>13</sup>while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. <sup>14</sup>He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

## *Luke 2:1-20*

<sup>2</sup>In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup>Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

<sup>8</sup>In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup>“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!”

*a new beginning, with a  
new relationship  
with Jesus*



Getting to know Jesus in a new way, at a deeper level is just like getting to know anyone. We begin by spending more time with a person. We pay attention to them. We get to know their story more completely. Eventually, we become more and more curious and more and more fascinated by how the person acts, what motivates that person, how he or she thinks. Of course, the key here is not only to learn more about Jesus, but to come to really know him, to experience a relationship. It is easy to imagine that Jesus knows me. It is more difficult to imagine that I am in a relationship with Jesus, and we know each other and there is something special about this relationship. For example, some of us will get to know Jesus and become really fascinated by his mother and father and that will shape our sense of who he is and our relationship with him. Some of us will come to love the way he chooses and interacts with his disciples. Many of us will learn a great deal about Jesus from how he tells stories and reveals things about God and about the Kingdom of God. Still others of us will become engaged by how Jesus interacts with, and heals sinners and sick people. Perhaps we will identify with this or that story which will characterise our particular relationship with him.