

1. God and his sovereignty, power and purposes

Read Galatians 4 v 4

The birth of Jesus was, without doubt, the most planned birth of all time. God was in control. As you read this verse consider how God displayed his

- **Sovereignty** – ‘when the time had fully come’
- **Power** – ‘sent his son, born of a woman...’
- **Purpose** – ‘to redeem

Prayer and Worship

- ‘It never ceases to amaze me that God often begins with small things and inadequate people. It certainly seems that God could have chosen "bigger" things and "better" people to do His work in the world. Yet if God can use them, and reveal Himself through them in such marvellous ways, it means that He might be able to use me, inadequate, and unwise, and too often lacking in faith that I am. And it means that I need to be careful that I do not in my own self-righteousness put limits on what God can do with the smallest things, the most unlikely of people, in the most hopeless of circumstances. I think that is part of the wonder of the Advent Season.’
- ‘Father, in your mercy, Christmas comes again, and in faith we set out on the road to Bethlehem to see this thing which has happened.

Lead us on in our journey and kindle in our hearts a spirit of expectancy; and may we not rest until we bow in wonder and adoration before the Child of Mary, the everlasting Son of the Father and sing, ‘Glory to God in the highest.’ (Frank Colquhoun)

Getting ready (One)

Studies for Advent

1. Some very old friends have indicated that they would like to spend a night or two with you as a stopover on their way to Cornwall. Do you
 - a. Groan and say, ‘I could do without that’
 - b. Try to put them off
 - c. Feel really excited at the prospect
 - d. Do all you can to make their welcome and time with you a good experience?
2. How would you prepare for their arrival and stay with you? How does your preparation involve your mind, emotions and body?

ADVENT is all about getting ready for the visit of Jesus.

‘The word Advent means "coming" or "arrival." The focus of the entire season is the celebration of the birth of Jesus the Christ in his First Advent, and the anticipation of the return of Christ the King in his Second Advent.’ So it is:

1. Preparing to celebrate the first coming of Christ
2. Anticipating his Second coming
3. Living between the two comings

And so it encompasses the past, present and future.

Preparing to celebrate the first coming of Christ

Mary and her sense of awe and wonder

Read Luke 1 v 26-38

Mary, we are told, was 'greatly troubled'. As a teenager, engaged to be married within a society with strict laws in this area of life, her feelings were not misplaced.

- a. What reasons might there have been to cause Mary to be 'greatly troubled' and yet filled with a sense of wonder at the same time? (v29) Consider her
 - i. **Inward** look –who she was
 - ii. **Outward** look go Joseph and the local community
 - iii. **Upward** look – to God and his message
- b. When Christmas is unwrapped of all its human accretions, what creates in you a sense of awe and wonder?
- c. John Betjeman combines simplicity of language and divine mystery in his poem, 'Christmas'.

*'And is it true? And is it true?
This most tremendous tale of all,
Seen in stained-glass widow's hue,
A baby in an ox's stall?
The maker of the stars and sea
Become a child on earth for me?
.....And is it true? For if it is...
(nothing) can with this single truth compare-
That God was man in Palestine
And lives today in bread and wine. (John Betjeman. Christmas)*

Or as another hymn writer put it:

*'God contracted to a span,
Incomprehensibly made man'.*

- d. What creates in you the greater sense of awe and wonder?
 - i. 'The maker of the stars and sea became a child on earth...' or
 - ii. 'For me'
- e. You might like to read together John 1 v 1-14 and follow it with a short time for one sentence prayers of wonder and gratitude.

2. Joseph and his practical faith and obedience



Read Matthew 1 v 18-25

'... the new man takes form in him, who looks to the future with confidence and courage, does not follow his own project, but entrusts himself totally to the infinite mercy of him who fulfils the prophecies and inaugurates the season of salvation.'

- i. How is Joseph depicted as an example of integrity and godly character?
- ii. Why did Joseph require confidence and courage? What was the object of his confidence and the sources of his courage?
- iii. How did his faith sustain and direct him both in the days and years ahead?
- iv. What does faith see at Christmas to which sight is blind?
- v. What encouragement and example does Joseph offer dads?
- v. Can you think of a sentence or phrase which would summarise your faith view about Christmas and which might be placed on the front of a Christmas card?