

the name of jesus

Luke 1: 26 – 38

thought for the week

The Old Testament closes with a series of huge question marks and a sense of uncertainty as to the future direction. The focal points of creation, covenant and commandment have all been broken, as have the function of the prophet, priest and King. Ezekiel saw the Spirit leaving the Temple and, whilst the Temple was rebuilt, the Jewish people themselves never believed the Spirit returned.

The period between the two Testaments is a time of waiting and longing, unexpectedly fulfilled in the visit of Gabriel to Mary. Suddenly it appears that the power of heaven is engaging afresh with creation, and new possibilities and opportunities are being opened up. Mary, a young girl, in Nazareth, suddenly finds herself in the heart of God's purposes and has to respond to a calling that could easily see her rejected by society as she becomes pregnant. However, she is prepared to be open to the call of God, and allow herself to be part of his on-going purposes.

verse for the week

'I am the Lord's servant; may it happen to me as you have said'

Luke 1 verse 38

image for the week



prayer for the week

God, of your goodness,
give me yourself;
for you are sufficient for me.
I cannot properly ask anything less,
to be worthy of you.
If I were to ask less,
I should always be in want.
In you alone do I have all.
Amen

reflection for each day

day one

'He was named Jesus'

Reflect on that name – the gift of a saviour - for the individual but also for the renewing of the whole of creation

day two

'A message for a girl promised to a man called Joseph, who was a descendant of King David'

The wider purposes of God, reflected on yesterday, link back into the Old Testament, and show the continuing concern for the on-going history of the people of Israel and its connection with the coming Lordship of Jesus

day three

'Peace be with you'

As the Spirit comes to each of us individually there will always be the promise of peace – a peace which comes from the heart of our God and into which we are invited every day

day four

'You will give birth to a son and name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God'.

The call to Mary must have felt overwhelming as she discovered that she was being invited into the very heart of God's purposes for humanity.

day five

'I am a virgin. How then can this be?'

Often, when the Spirit speaks, the immediate reaction is to respond from a human point of view. It is vital to be drawn deeper into the heart of our God and so discover his ways

day six

'There is nothing that God cannot do'

As you live through this day, discover afresh the abundance of God's grace and love

day seven

'I am the Lord's servant'

May response this be echoed in our lives today, as we seek to recognise and then walk in the path of openness to the Spirit and obedience to the way of God.

for the group

as you gather...

- What has particularly struck you about the response of Mary?
- How might this openness and obedience to the call of God be echoed in our own lives, both individually and as a community?
- Are we ready, and indeed willing, to see our individual calling, as part of the wider purposes of the Spirit
- As we reflect on the past week have we been open to hear the voice of God in different circumstances and different places.

prayer for the group

*Lord,
give us a willingness to be open to your Spirit,
moment by moment,
and to live in the circle of your love and grace
with a deep obedience.*



continue the conversation
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the birth of jesus

Luke 2: 1 – 20

thought for the week

Whilst the birth of Jesus is a key moment in the history of creation and God's purposes for that creation, Jesus is born in poverty and almost as a refugee. Whilst heaven sings the glory of God, the birth of the baby is similar to any other child. The difference that this is in a stable with a manger as the crib. The first to hear of God's gift are shepherds – poor and deprived and probably tending sheep to be sacrificed in the Temple. However, in the midst of all this the shepherds are able to recognise the gift of God. Mary, also, thinks deeply about the gift that has been given.

verse for the week

The angel said 'don't be afraid, I am here with good news for you, which will bring joy to all people'

Luke 2 verse 10.

prayer for the week

We praise, we bless, we glorify, and we give thanks to you, for this greatest of mercies, O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty.

Thomas Ken

image for the week



reflection for each day

day one

'Whilst they were in Bethlehem the time came for her to have her baby'

Share the joy of the birth of Jesus, but also imagine the uncertainty that this gift from God must have brought to Mary and Joseph

day two

*'She wrapped him in strips of cloth
and laid him in a manger'*

Think again about the birth of Jesus – the sense of poverty and deprivation. The son of God born to a humble and young girl.

day five

*'Let us go to Bethlehem and see this
thing that has happened'*

Would you have joined the shepherds and made the journey to Bethlehem. Think of your reactions and attitudes

day three

*'An angel of the Lord appeared to
them and the glory of the Lord shone
around them'*

In your imagination, be part of that group of shepherds. How would you have felt as the news of Christ's birth was announced?

day six

'All who heard it were amazed'

Does the gift of the birth of Christ still warm your heart? Are you ready to hear again his call and follow him into his broken and hurting world?

day four

Glory to God in the highest'

Although born into poverty, this was the birth of the messiah – the one for whom Israel had been waiting and longing. What would your reaction have been?

day seven

*'The shepherds went back singing
praises to God'*

Is your life a constant life of praise and thanksgiving?

for the group

as you gather...

- What particularly struck you about the account of the birth of Jesus?
- Do you think that heaven still touches earth as with the praise of the angels?
- How might Mary and Joseph felt as they saw the gift of the Messiah?
- Do we need to learn and ‘ponder’ on all these things in a new and deep way?
- As we celebrate Christmas each year do we need to see and understand new things about the gift and birth of Jesus?

prayer for the group

Lord God, help us to celebrate every day the gift of our Lord Jesus, and to realise that in him heaven is touching earth – to sustain and renew.



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the gift of jesus

Luke 2: 21-38

thought for the week

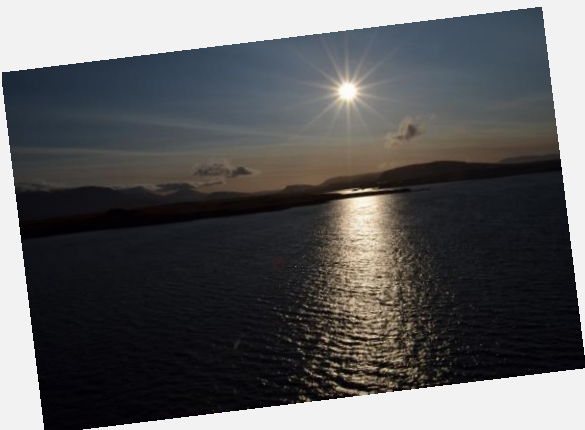
The name Jesus, the name given to Mary by the angel at the annunciation, means 'saviour'. It is the same name as Joshua, the one who led Israel after the death of Moses. However, this baby, named Jesus, is given from eternity, not just for Israel, but for the salvation of the whole world and the eventual renewing of the whole of creation. It was this promise of God which Simeon celebrates in his words of praise, praise and thanksgiving taken up by the prophetess Anna. As we read these words during the course of this week, we need to celebrate again the depth of the love, creativity and power of our creator God.

verse for the week

'Led by the Spirit, Simeon went to the Temple. When the parents brought the child Jesus into the Temple, to do for him what the law required, Simeon took the child in his arms and gave thanks to God.'

Luke 2 verse 27

image for the week



prayer for the week

The words of Simeon: -

*Now, Lord, you have kept your
promise,
And you may let your servant go in
peace.
With my own eyes I have seen your
salvation,
which you have prepared in the
presence of all peoples.
A light to reveal your will to the
Gentiles
And to bring glory to your people
Israel.*

reflection for each day

day one

'He was named Jesus'

Reflect on that name – the gift of a saviour - for the individual but also for the renewing of the whole of creation

day two

'Every first-born child is to be dedicated to the Lord'

Reflect on all this would mean for this child – a life of servanthood, obedience to the Father's will and the long road to the cross

day five

'A light to reveal your will to the Gentiles'

Do we believe the good news of Jesus is for the whole of the world and for each individual within it? Are you willing to share the grace, love and hope of Jesus with all you meet today?

day three

'The Holy Spirit was with him'

Are you open to the Spirit's presence – how might the power of the Spirit shape you thinking, actions and involvement in God's mission today?

day six

'Sorrow like a sharp sword will break your heart'

Think carefully about how Mary might have felt as she heard these words. Are we willing to be marginalised and even suffer as we follow Jesus into his world?

day four

'Now Lord, you have kept your promise'

Reflect on the promises made to the Christian Community, in and through Jesus. Reflect also on the promises to you as an individual. Are you willing to live in their light?

day seven

'She, (Anna), spoke about the child to all who were waiting for God to set Jerusalem free'

With Anna, are we willing to explore more of who Jesus is, so that we can follow him more closely into his world

for the group

as you gather...

- Share the particular insights which have struck you this week
- Try and enter the mind and rejoicing of Simeon – what did this event really mean for him?
- How might Joseph and Mary felt as they held the child Jesus, and experienced this sense of thanksgiving and rejoicing
- Would they have begun to realise the significance of who he was and why he had been given?
- What does all this mean for our own discipleship?

prayer for the group

O Lord my God,
 Teach my heart this day where and how to see you
 Where and how to find you
 You have made me and remade me,
 And you have bestowed on me
 All the good things I possess,
 And still I do not know you.
 I have not yet done that for which I was made.
 Teach me to seek you
 For I cannot seek you
 Unless you teach me
 Or find you
 Unless you show yourself to me
 Let me seek you in my desire
 Let me desire you in my seeking.
 Let me find you by loving you
 Let me love you when I find you.

Anselm of Canterbury



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the childhood of jesus

Luke 2: 41-52

thought for the week

Whilst we can understand the concern and worry of Joseph and Mary, we also need to realise the importance to Jesus of discovering his Father's will and exploring his life calling and mission. The birth of Jesus was not in a vacuum. The whole of the Old Testament had been awaiting this moment. As was said at the beginning of the month, Jesus brings the new creation, he is the new covenant and the new commandment. Jesus is the eternal king, in the line of David. He is not just a prophet amongst other prophets, he is the word of God made flesh – the word which can bring life and hope. Above all, he is the new Temple, through which and in which we can meet the creator, who seeks to share his love and possibility with us.

verse for the week

*Did you not know that I had to be in
my Father's house?'*

Luke 2 verse 49

image for the week



prayer for the week

Disturb us Lord, when
We are too pleased with ourselves.
When our dreams have come true
Because we dreamed too little;
When we arrived safely
Because we sailed too close to the shore.
Disturb us Lord, when
With the abundance of things we possess
We have lost our thirst
For the waters of life;
Having fallen in love with life
We have ceased to dream of eternity
And in our efforts to build a new earth
We have allowed our vision
Of the new heaven to dim.
Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly
To venture on wilder seas
Where storms will show your mastery;
Where losing sight of land,
We shall find the stars.
We ask you to push back
The horizons of our hopes,
And to push back the future
In strength, courage, hope and love.
This we ask in the name of our Captain
Who is Jesus Christ

reflection for each day

day one

'When Jesus was twelve years old they went to the Festival as usual'

How might Jesus have felt as he and his parents made their way to Jerusalem? What might have been in his mind?

day two

'But the boy, Jesus, stayed in Jerusalem'

In your imagination try and enter the mind of Jesus – why did he stay behind and why in the Temple?

day five

'Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?'

This reply must have amazed Mary and Joseph – how would you have responded?

day three

'All who heard him were amazed at his intelligent answers'

Again, in your imagination, be amongst the teachers and leaders. What might you have heard from this young boy?

day six

'His mother treasured all these things in her heart'

Try and enter into the heart of Mary – what might she have treasured?

day four

'His parents were astonished when they saw him'

Think of the turmoil and anguish which Mary and Joseph must have experienced. How might you have felt, and how would you feel when you found him in the Temple

day seven

'Jesus grew both in body and wisdom, gaining favour with both God and people'

Think through these early years of Jesus. How was he being shaped for his future ministry – sharing the Father's mission heart?

for the group

as you gather...

- The way in which Jesus fulfilled the promise of the Old Testament
- Imagine yourselves as a group in the Temple – what would you have heard?
- Enter into the minds of Mary and Joseph – what might they have been thinking
- Reflect on the whole account of the birth of Jesus. What stands out the most?

prayer for the group

Lord, you call us to discover your risen life and live in your resurrection power

Give us the courage to seek you, knowing that in seeking you we will find you

Lord, you call us into the way of your cross to share in your sufferings, that your church might become the church you long for it to be, that the world might see and taste and know

Give us courage to hold open our hands to grasp the way of the cross and share the suffering of Jesus for his broken world

Lord, you call us to share in the death of Jesus, to let go of our own lives for the sake of your kingdom.

Give us courage to seek your way above all others, and to go where you lead

Lord, you set before us the glory of heaven and the promise of your kingdom in all its fullness and glory. Keep this vision before our eyes now and for all eternity

Give us eyes that we can see you now and for all eternity. Amen.



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