

THE CANADIAN BAPTIST

2015

Advent Reader

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Greetings to our Canadian Baptist family!

There is nothing quite like Christmas to gather a family together. Our Canadian Baptist family is no exception.

We are pleased to present you with this year's series of Advent reflections written by young people from across the country and beyond.

Surprised?

Let's face it—we live in an age where “youth today” is usually accompanied by the shaking of heads, sighs and eye-rolls. But these young people are challenging us to go deeper in our faith, to be excited about what God is doing and to have hope for the future. They are the next generation of Canadian Baptists, and our future is bright, indeed.

We welcome you to join together with us as we let our youth take the lead and teach us a little about what it means to prepare our hearts to celebrate the coming of Christ.

May God bless you as you journey with us, and we wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Joyeux Noël.

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Director, Canadian Partnerships,
CBM

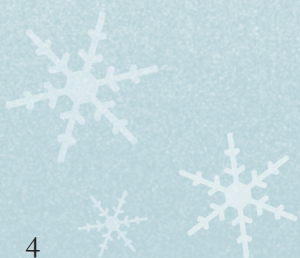
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Luke 1:26-38

Micah Knowles

Age 20

Highfield Baptist Church, Moncton, NB

The coming of Jesus was humble in every way. The king of the heavens and the earth was born of a poor, teenage girl from Nazareth. Despite their modest circumstances, here we discover clues to what our Saviour will be like and, through the faith of this young girl, what God requires of us every day in our own lives.

As we hear this story again this Christmas season, we may lose sight of how dramatic this situation was to Mary! She was only a teenage girl, betrothed to a carpenter, when she was approached by an angel with an incredible proclamation. God did not choose a queen or wealthy noble family. God chose Mary, the most unlikely of people, to nurture and raise this child. Since the very coming of Jesus, Christianity has been this kind of faith—accepting for all people, no matter their circumstances.

Mary was chosen because of her faith. When the angel approached her, she simply said, “I am the Lord’s servant”(v. 38). What a faith! Mary, who was not yet married, would have known the social ramifications of becoming pregnant out of wedlock. She could have been shunned, beaten or killed for her choice—yet this is of little worry to the faithful girl. Mary trusted that God had called her and would not abandon her. Her heart was open to God’s work and she was content in knowing that the Lord of all creation was with her.

As we go into this season, let us all have the kind of faith Mary does—certain of who God is and open to the good works he has prepared in advance for us to do. Finally, let us go forward with the absolute assurance that “nothing is impossible with God.”

Day 2, November 30

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Timothy Warkentin

Age 15

Southside Community Church, Burnaby, BC

As we wait expectantly for the coming of Christ, we celebrate the coming of God as a change in thinking. Though Jesus hasn't returned yet, evidence of the coming of Jesus' presence is daily found in the pockets of life that we overlook in our busy lifestyles. This is where opportunities arise for us to show Jesus' hope to our communities.

In partnership with the Salvation Army, each Monday night Southside opens its doors to the homeless and provides a safe place to stay for the evening. We serve the kingdom of God by sharing fellowship and a warm meal. We glorify God and, most significantly, we can envision how profoundly the kingdom of God will change our lives. When we offer hope to our homeless friends, we are participating in the construction of the kingdom. The kingdom of God is amplified, and the people living in darkness see the light of God until all of the world is surrounded with the overwhelming luminescence of God.

Jeremiah started a chain of hopefulness in Judah. By the Lord's hand, anyone who conveyed Jeremiah's message was doing the Lord's work in Judah. In today's age, it's our responsibility as Christians to bear witness to Christ by spreading this hope to others to cultivate the kingdom of God. We humans are, by nature, sinners. The kingdom of the Lord must be elevated to become our number one priority as it once was in the beginning. This means that we need to be perceptive in sensing hope in others, intentional in acting and bold in conveying the hope within us in a world of fierce sin. We can start by simply assessing our day, and considering a version of it that is full of the evidence of Jesus' Hope. This will make our days on Earth relatively more joyful, peaceful, and meaningful for everyone involved in our lives.

Psalm 25:1-5

Nadia Brophy

Age 16

Christian Baptist Church, Newmarket, ON

Have you ever felt a complete loss of hope in your life? Has it ever felt like you didn't have anywhere to turn? You may have hit one of these difficult walls in your life that stops you from being truly happy. There's only one way we can turn that will fill that hopeless gap and steer us back on the right course. Jesus is that way. We can have hope in knowing that if we give our lives to Jesus, there are no boundaries between us and the kingdom of heaven. When we make the choice to turn from sin and allow the Lord to enter our lives, it is a promise that we are rewarded with eternal life with him.

What could be better than that?

This Christmas season, we are reminded of the birth of Jesus Christ and the hope he provided when he died on the cross for each and every one of our sins. As we see the hope candle ignite to life, let's remember that when we make the choice to give our lives to Jesus, we will have a Saviour who will never fail to provide us with the hope we need to get by, day after day. JESUS is our hope. Let us reach out and allow him into our lives...there's no greater way to live.

Dear Father,

We are so thankful in knowing you desire to be close to us. You provided us with a Son who defines hope; a Son who will lead us out of the darkness. We thank you that we have a way to turn to when all seems hopeless and lost in our lives. Help us to always remember Jesus is that very way as we learn about the hope he provided for the world this advent season. For we pray in Jesus' sweet name,

Amen.

Day 4, December 2

Psalm 25:6-10

Sandi Hicks

Age. 23

Lewisville Baptist Church, Moncton, NB

McMaster Divinity School, Hamilton, ON

Psalm 25, a lament, comes to us at from a low point in David's life, but two things stand out: his appeals to God to remember and forget.

Remember Your mercy and steadfast love. The term “steadfast love” comes from the Hebrew word *hesed*—a beautiful word. It is the love that God demonstrated when he promised that all the nations of the world would be blessed through Abraham, when guaranteeing David's line on the throne or when, despite the rebellion of his people, God remained true to his covenant. It's the love that God showed when he sent Jesus to earth to die in our place. This isn't a new love. David is not asking God to act out of character. Rather he appeals to this unconditional, all-enduring, relentless love that will be faithful despite our faithlessness.

Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions. (25:7). Elsewhere we read: “If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord who could stand?” (Psalm 130:3). Because of God's steadfast love, he is able to look at David and forget his sins. He is able to extend grace and forgiveness for his goodness and his glory. In the same way, because of Jesus Christ, his incarnation, suffering, death and resurrection, God looks at us and sees his Son. He is able to look on us and forget our sins.

I am thankful that I serve a God who remembers—a God who, since the beginning of time, has never neglected his plan of redemption, enacted in the person and work of Jesus. I am thankful that I serve a God who chooses to forget my sins and instead, shows steadfast love to me in Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Isabel Federgreen

Age 16

Kingsway Baptist Church, Toronto

Hope and faith go hand in hand; in order to have hope for the future you must have faith that God will provide. Times of trouble require the most faith because when you are “..standing firm in the Lord” your faith grows and you become closer with God. God wants what is best for us, to be closer to him, and he provides people on Earth that we can walk with to help us remember that. God has a plan for each one of us. Yes, that plan will involve struggles, and it may lead us to think that God is working against us, but he isn’t. It’s good that God doesn’t make the journey to him easy.

I asked a friend who helps me with my walk with God why they thought this was. Their answer was one I try to remember: “Because easy things are under-appreciated and get taken for granted.” If the path to righteousness was easy, it would be travelled by people who may not be ready for it. So hope for challenges, hope that you make it through them and that you become closer with God because of them. Hope that even though it may be difficult and tiresome, God is so, so worth it.

Day 6, December 4

Luke 21:25-36

Mandy Blanchard

Age: 28

New Minas Baptist Church, NS

The return of the Lord will be signalled by difficult times. They seem to be opposing events: the distress of the world against the return of the Lord. One evokes fear, the other hope. But what if distress strengthened our hope? Could uncertainty breed confidence?

Our natural reaction to trouble is to despair. We like to focus on problems, to worry about them. But in this Scripture, God tells us that we're made for more. He seems to say, "Trouble should make you hopeful" This is confusing. We do everything in our power to avoid difficulties or lessen their effects on us. We ask God to remove trouble. How often do we pray, "Lord, please take away this pain/problem." But what if, instead of asking to be spared from difficulty, we asked God to make us stronger through it? What if it was more about our faith and less about our comfort?

Consider how our perspective of trouble could be changed.! Where we would once worried over foreshadowed distress, we would feel the awe of God's power. Rather than fear, we would feel confidence in our God's promises and warnings. Instead of lazily praying to have it easy, we would "watch at all times, praying [to] have strength" (vs. 36, RSV). We would be put in our place, and we would see God in his.

God promises that his coming will be accompanied by trouble; there's no "praying away" the turmoil that will come. But remember, that in the face of this trouble, and all trouble, he gives us permission to be confident; "look up and raise your hands, because your redemption is drawing near" (v.28, RSV). We can take comfort in knowing that though "heaven and earth will pass away...my words will not pass away" (v.33, RSV).

Micah 5:2-5a

David Frappier

Age: 30

Église Évangélique Baptiste de Pointe-aux-Trembles, Montréal, QC

As Christmas approaches, we prepare our hearts to rediscover the heart of God, he, who announces the coming of his Son with simplicity and great humility.

Jesus was born of a virgin in the town of Bethlehem in a manger surrounded by reclusive people of the time. God prepared his coming through the announcement made by the prophet Micah.

Micah makes us aware that God chooses the least of the cities of Judah to become the birthplace of his son, this, in spite the fact that it is a unique event in the history of humankind. What humility in contrast to the universal scope of his ministry and mission to bring peace!

During this season, may God speak to us and through us. Let's be humble messengers who bring a powerful message of salvation for all humankind. May we present Jesus in all simplicity, but with the majesty that he deserves. Although born humbly, he rose triumphantly and reigns supreme for all eternity.

May we see the greatness of his coming this Christmas, and realize, afresh, the humility of Jesus and experience peace and joy in him.

Day 8, December 6

Luke 1:39-45

Shelby Ebens

Age 16

Ponoka First Baptist Church, AB

I don't know what Mary was thinking, but I can imagine. And I am sure when Gabriel told her about her cousin's state she must have felt some joy and relief. God gave Mary and Elizabeth one another—someone to relate to. Itty bitty John even recognized Jesus in the womb! Jesus was already making a huge impact on people's lives from the very start. Mary and Elizabeth knew God was with them just by a little thing like this to remind them.

Has God hinted something to you that he is calling you to do? Are you afraid you'll be alone? Are you scared to trust God? Man, I am still working these things out. But I know that Jesus is with us and we all are being called to do something. If you're afraid no one is going to be with you take comfort in this—God is always there. In Isaiah 41:10 God gives us a reminder:

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

God has a purpose for you and has given you people to be with you. God's peace will be with you and it can be now. Trust in the Lord your God because he is a lamp unto our feet!

Father, I ask you to open my eyes, ears, heart and mind so that I am able to do the work you've set me out to do. May I trust in you. God, I know I'll have my ups and downs but because of Jesus' death on the cross for the forgiveness of sin you are closer than ever before. Please help me to remember that I only need to lean on you. And that you send people to help me too. God, I thank you for the life you have given me. You are truly amazing. I pray all these things in Jesus Christ's name. Amen.

Malachi 3:14-20

Claire Hurlburt

Age 17

Queensway Baptist Church, Toronto, ON

The Old Testament is a constant cycle of sin and redemption, saturated with God's extravagant love for a people that were constantly turning their backs on him. Resolute in their complacency, the Israelites saw faster, easier ways to get ahead without God, abandoning him for pride and idolatry.

But God did not allow all of the descendants of Jacob to be consumed. A remnant gathered to worship and serve the God who had loved them through their sin, and God credited them with righteousness as they lived lives contrary to the ways of the world. This remnant lived life in a way that sought the kingdom of heaven here on earth. They lived life focused upon God's economy of love, mercy, grace and faith rather than the world's economy built upon hatred, lust, anger and greed. Long before the Sermon on the Mount was preached by the very Saviour that would come to redeem humankind, these men and women were living lives that reflected the Beatitudes. They may have been poor in spirit, meek and persecuted, but God promised to remember them as they stored up treasures in heaven. When he wrote their names in a book of remembrance as those who feared the Lord and esteemed his Name, God also wrote their names in the Book of Life, promising to spare these, his children, when he comes to take them home as his treasured possession.

The best part is that God still loves and saves the people who are living their lives "backwards" for the glory of his Name, despite their sin. By his grace, and in his righteousness our names can now be written in the Book of Life, too.

Day 10, December 8

Luke 1:68-75

Hannah Steeves

Age 20

The Journey Church, Moncton, NB

The speaker of these verses was Zechariah, father of John the Baptist. Zechariah had not always been so vocal—he had been silenced by God for a lack of faith. Though a Jewish priest, Zechariah had been unable to comprehend the angel’s message that his aged wife would have a child.

Zechariah must have felt isolated and frustrated, stumbling to find words for what God could possibly be doing, the questions on the tip of his tongue but unable to be vocalized. Suddenly, once John is born and Zechariah responds in faith, his voice returns and he responds to the Spirit, experiencing clarity, joy, trust, and reassurance for all people which he excitedly declares: “Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people!” I can almost hear the laughter and expectation in his voice as he worships the Lord.

An unmatched change is already taking place in the world beginning with one man. For Zechariah, where there was once confusion, peace. Where there was once doubt, faith. Where there was once fear, holiness and righteousness. Where there was once silence, there are now too many words to speak at once!

Isn’t this perfect foreshadowing? We who once lived in confusion, doubt, fear, and silence can now boldly declare our love, trust, and allegiance to Christ. Especially in this season, let us speak the Benedictus joyfully and freely knowing we too have been given new words of life to speak and a restored relationship with our mighty Saviour.

This is the sort of peace we simply cannot keep quiet about: “Praise the Lord, the God of Israel!”

Luke 1:76-79

Kyria Pierre-Jérôme

Age: 20

Église Évangélique Baptiste de Pointe-aux-Trembles, Montréal, QC

It's amazing how a mere child was given such a fate. Who would have thought Israel's saviour would come from a simple and respectable family. God gave his son to assure our salvation and reconciliation with him. From the beginning of his nation, he had this plan set and he promised his people that he would free them from evil. Even if people were waiting for a warrior and a leader to overthrow Caesar, God's gift surpassed everybody's expectations. A place was prepared for us in the heavens but the path leading to it was also cleared for us who were lost. Jesus was the secret weapon to God's plan. Let us take again and again the opportunity to proclaim how glorious and faithful our God is for he brought us back to him through Jesus. Let's make these holidays a special moment to spread God's Word in our families, neighbourhoods and circles of friends.

Day 12, December 10

Philippians 1:3-11

Naomi Froese

Age 16

Ponoka First Baptist Church, AB

I once saw a painting done around the theme of peace. It was a depiction of a bird, sitting on her nest, calm and unconcerned with what was going on around her. Her nest was sitting on a branch, on a tree, in the midst of a waterfall. The water was flowing around the tree, and her nest was precariously close to the cascading waters.

The peace that Christ gives to us is a lot like the peace depicted in the painting. God gives us an assurance that he is in control, no matter what life throws at us, and we can let go of the reins. God tells us not to be afraid and not to worry...countless times! He wants us to know that we do not have to worry or be afraid because he is in control.

Peace is a gift of God that he starts to grow in us as soon as we accept him as our Lord and Saviour. It is part of the good work that he has started in each of us and will surely finish. The process takes a lifetime and sometimes it's hard to tell where God is working, but we can always be sure that he is constantly transforming us to be like him.

The only reason that we are able to have this peace that God gives, is because God sent his son to be born a human, to live perfectly. He then took our sins upon himself so that we might be at peace with him. By accepting God's gift of extraordinary grace, we are able to receive the peace that he brings. We are now able to trust that he is in control of our lives, no matter what life throws at us. We are now forgiven for the sins we have committed. This gives us even more peace! We are able to rest in the assurance that we can now stand before a righteous God and not be ashamed of our sin. Jesus' own blood has washed us, and covered us. We are clean in Gods eyes!

Luke 3:1-6

Tristan Kenny

Age 16

CBM, Nairobi, Kenya



Hope Graffiti

Westlands, Nairobi, Kenya

The Lord is coming and every-
thing is going to change
Nothing will stay the same

Mountains will crumble down
The broken ways will be made
whole
The uneven paths set right
Pain, suffering, poverty, and war
All the ways we get lost in dark-
ness
They will end when he comes

Hope is that crying voice
The defiant graffiti on the wall
The one who shouts -
“This is not the end of the sto-
ry!”

The Lord is coming and every-
thing is going to change
Nothing will stay the same

Day 14, December 12

Psalm 80:1-7

Aidan Mealey

Age: 14

Walmer Baptist Church, Toronto, ON

Psalm 80 is a song written by Asaph about how he wants God to give him and his people strength because Asaph and his people have strayed away from what God had planned for them. He feels as if God is punishing them. He feels God is making them look meaningless and weak to other nations. They are blaming God for what is happening to them.

I've had times where I do not pray or acknowledge God's work in my life. Then when something bad happens, I turn to God and say, "Why you have done this to me?" when I have not been asking God for help in the first place.

Only Jesus can fix this problem. God sent Jesus to lead us back towards God, and he gives us the strength to follow God and the courage to pray and ask God for help. He also shows love and compassion towards us. He came to die for us so that we can be forgiven.



The picture symbolizes how we need Jesus to fill in the gaps in our lives and, without him, we don't have a complete picture. The fist symbolizes strength from the passage.

Luke 1:46-55

Jiani Shi

Age: 15

West Vancouver Baptist Church, BC

Surely we all know the feeling of joy, to feel immense happiness and rejoice. The emotion is much greater than three letters can carry.

Mary's faith in God allowed her soul to feel connected to his. True joy is felt when all the walls built up around your heart crumble and you let God in. Everyone deserves to feel joy.

God's compassion extends beyond one's status—brighter than one's sins, higher than one's difficulties. He knows all but will forever bless those who continue to seek him. When everyone finally slows down to appreciate all the love around them, hearts will unlock. When all the distractions end and lead to just the peacefulness of being surrounded in such warmth under the light of the birth of Jesus, spirits will be lifted. When you accept that God gave his all for you, souls will only brighten to reflect joy.

Just like how Mary praises him, we praise him too. Being trapped in one's own state of mind is a horrendous sorrow. The despair in one's own thoughts changes how their eyes perceive reality. When given a chance to escape, it must be taken. Mary values God's presence in her life, how he leads the way and shows her a path. Even in total darkness or blinded by circumstances, it exists for those who faithfully accept that he is everlasting.

The true essence of joy does not resemble the fake. To live as the humble is not to be fictitious but rather to be in God's mercy. So as the humble who gather around in celebration and delight in comfort, let us all give thanks to God for blessing us with joy.

Day 16, December 14

Zephaniah 3:14-17

Abby Murphy

Age 14

Lancaster Baptist Church, Saint John, NB

Joy is an incredible thing. It is so much more than being happy. Joy fills you up till you can't hold any more of it. Joy can come while singing and dancing, by watching a sunset or by spending time with someone whose company you enjoy.

There probably wasn't all that much joy in the life of a shepherd and in shepherding. The shepherds lived difficult lives. They were social outcasts and I'm sure they were often lonely, depressed and weary. But then, very early one morning, the air felt just a little bit crisper and a certain star was shining a little bit brighter. Through tired eyes, the shepherds saw a beacon of hope shining all around them. This group of social outcasts were the first to know the biggest news of all history.

I can just see the shepherds, leaping up and racing to Bethlehem. Was their joy similar to that of a bride on her wedding day? Or maybe even the bliss of finally getting your driver's license? They must have been tired; their sheep may have kept them up all night. Maybe their feet ached, but they were running to meet their Saviour, and none of that mattered to them anymore. The joy of the Lord was giving them strength before they even met him.

We need to have a joy like the shepherds did that night. A joy that makes us sing. We may even shout, but we'll most definitely be celebrating and rejoicing. Sometimes they happen all at once. This joy will make us throw our baggage down and run like those shepherds did to Jesus, to rejoice and celebrate with him. Let's pray for the uncontainable, immeasurable, contagious joy of the Lord to fill us this Advent season and the rest of the year.

Zephaniah 3:18-20

Cailey Morgan

Age 27

Southside Community Church, Burnaby, BC

CBWC Staff

God's promises, like this one in Zephaniah, are perfectly fulfilled by the birth, life, death and resurrection of a humble King—the living God putting on skin to experience firsthand the inequality of humanity. Born into an oppressed people group, spending much of his childhood as a refugee in Egypt, relying on the hospitality of strangers to support his itinerant ministry, Jesus was even homeless in death: his body lay in someone else's tomb.

He endured this hardship and oppression to bring his people home and restore equality as he promised. But for Jesus, even the oppression of death was broken as he rose again, defeating the grave.

Christmas time is a perfect opportunity to open our homes to neighbours as we celebrate love and family. We can open our hearts and show generosity to those in our society who are oppressed. It's an ideal season to open our mouths to share the story of Jesus as it is already being introduced in songs, nativity scenes and theatres in churches, homes and even shopping centres. How will you open your life to show your love for Christ this Christmas?

Across the globe there are thousands upon thousands of uprooted, displaced people who are looking for a fresh start. Across the street there are people who live in loneliness, and have maybe never heard the name of Jesus. Whom will you reach out to as you live like Christ this Christmas?

Pray that God would rescue people and show how you can participate in his transforming action in your neighbourhood and the world.

Day 18, December 16

Isaiah 12:2-6

Catherine Cole

Age 25

Minto Baptist Church, Minto, NB

Ever since I was a little girl, Christmas has always been my favourite time of year—seeing the beautiful decorations and the twinkling lights, hearing the sweet melodies of Christmas carols, smelling the delicious sweets baking in my mom’s kitchen and the anticipation of spending quality time with my family. It has always been a combination that leaves me with a smile on my face for the entire month of December.

What I never understood as a child were the numbers of people who seemed absolutely miserable during such a magical season—the adults who had scowls on their faces in line purchasing gifts for loved ones because they didn’t want to deal with crowds; the people who were in such a rush that they couldn’t be bothered to apologize to someone they had just bumped into; the people who closed doors on carollers instead of taking the moment to enjoy the music. As an adult, I understand the stress and pressure that comes with wanting to create the “perfect” Christmas for their families, but my heart breaks for those who get so caught up that they forget the true joy of the season.

Isaiah 12 encapsulates that joy. It is a celebration of praise expressing the joy that people would experience when Christ came to reign over the earth. It’s a joy that should overflow from us so that everyone around us can visibly see it and want to experience it for themselves.

My prayer for you this Christmas season is that you will be visibly and contagiously joyful in all things. Whatever you are doing, may the joy of knowing Christ fill you with gratitude, praise and a desire to tell others the Good News.

Philippians 4:4-7

Mehul-Edward Martin

Age 19

Thornhill Baptist Church, ON

I found out along time ago that I am
nothing,
I am not brave,
I am not selfless,
I am not beautiful.

I'm weak.

I found out not too long ago,
That I wasn't the only one,
That shared a bed
With a demon named depression.
Ghosts haunting the church I built in
my heart.

I forgot what I was, the armour I was
born into,
This thing by my bed, I just opened it.
And it fell to Philippians
And I realized what I was,
what I am.

A Christian,
Who wore self-doubt like his favourite
sweater,
Who forgot that he couldn't see the
angels around him.
Who let his life slide in into the
shadows,
Where his demons shone the brightest.
I forgot what I could do, with you by
my side.

When I put my hands together and
called him,
Tears flooded my face.
Demons began to fade.
They cannot harm me,
The anxiety in my heart
about the demon in my bed,
Weighs heavy on the prayers I send out.

I leave my house with a smile on my
face,
Now I see my friends,
And I know that they are real,
Much like this armour God has built
for me.

As a writer,
I have found that these black scratches
We make on clean white pages,
Bear no meaning;
Unless we give them life.

This is what the Lord,
Has done for me:

He has made me realize,
I am brave,
I am smart,
I am beautiful.

I am the sum of my faith in him,
And the sum of my friends' faith in me.

Day 20, December 18

Luke 3:7-18

Seth Schouten

Age 15

Nelson Avenue Community Church, Burnaby, BC

CRC/ Southside Community Church, Burnaby, BC, CBWC

Joy? There's no joy here! That was my first thought when I received the task of writing a devotional on joy based on this passage. At first glance, it seems to be devoid of joy. John's message to his audience is one that none of us would want to hear. Threats of being thrown into the fire and a call to repentance are difficult to digest. Even when John starts talking about the Messiah, the one people are expectantly waiting for, he still sounds very negative. How can one who will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire bring joy? But John has to say these things.

The crowd then and the crowd today, is heading towards destruction. John must correct us. He is trying to help us prepare for the perfect, eternal joy that comes from the Messiah, Jesus.

The only way we are able to access this joy is to confess our faults, and to ask for forgiveness. It is a long, hard, road, but it is the only way to truly be filled with joy – the Good News that John proclaimed.



Hebrews 10:5-10

Naomi Feltmate

Age 18

New Minas Baptist Church, New Minas, NS

I hate Christmas.

The presents, the shopping, the lights, the decorations, the “Christmas spirit.” It’s like every December our culture goes insane with this desperate need to be “joyful” and buy stuff. I didn’t used to feel that way. I remember being excited about Christmas. I remember getting to move the star to the next pocket of our advent calendar as we counted down the days. But year after year, the older I got, the greater my sense of disappointment when the long expected day finally arrived.

I appreciate the whole, “Let’s put the Christ back in Christmas!” effort. But, just maybe, Christmas itself is missing the point. Christ never told us to celebrate his birthday, he told us to remember his death. Christmas ranks way higher than Easter and I have never understood why. Without Easter, Christmas is meaningless.

For all of you who actually like Christmas, I’m sorry; I don’t mean to be a Scrooge. But perhaps this year we should try to remember why Christmas has any meaning at all. It’s not about presents, food or family—our faith is meant to come even before the people we love.

Christmas is merely a setup for something so much greater. No matter how many offerings we gave, how many sacrifices we made, only Christ’s death—not birth—could bring us back into perfect communion with God. So as you go about the holidays and appreciate this “joyous” time of year, let’s not forget the reason Jesus was born was for us to experience the true joy of entering into God’s holy presence. That is a holiday I will look forward to.

Day 22, December 20

Luke 2:1-14

Victoria Huang

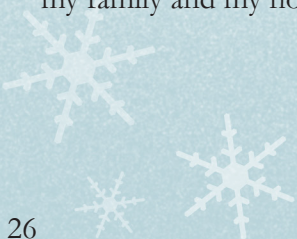
Age 20

Flow Without Bounds Ministries, Markham, ON

Markham Chinese Baptist Church, ON

At Christmas, the kids in the children's choir clambered over each other to get a role in the nativity play as an angel, especially the angel Gabriel. I remember acting out how tired Mary and Joseph must have been, finding no room to stay in after their long journey. But later, being given the simple grace of a stable and the wonders of the angels and the shepherds, they had peace and joy and rest. Even though it was nerve-racking and we tripped and fell and made mistakes, our parents would congratulate us and look at us as if we were as precious as the angels that we played. With our parents by our sides, we had happy, peaceful and joyful Christmases.

As we grew up, the pictures and the stories lost their glimmer and our Christmas holidays became busier and more stressful. Some years, Christmas day would be spent completing homework or attending stressful parties with people I didn't know. One year, the holidays were spent filling out university applications. I spent the next couple of years away for university, coming home for brief visits and trying to catch up on as much sleep as possible. I slept over 12 hours each day due to my depression, and never remembered my medication. But when I woke up, my parents cooked food for me, handed me my medication, and let me sit in quiet and calm. There was peace on earth, and I was finally ready to welcome the peace back into my life, my family and my home.



Day 23, December 21

Luke 2:15-21

Greg Matthews

Age 27

Weston Park Baptist Church, Toronto, ON

Angels
Sacred burden bearing
Holy human name declaring
Jesus

Christ
The King of Nations namely
Incarnation frailty baby
Boy

Child
In manger laying lowly
Slow—no quickly—tell the story
Shepherds

Many
Maybe few, who knew a news
So good and true none could confuse
Saviour

Glory
Highest heaven ringing clear
Peace he brings to all who fear
Love



Day 24, December 22

Luke 2:25-33

Marie-Eve Lalonde

Youth Ministry Coordinator,

Union d'Églises baptistes francophone du Canada

The greatest gift of God to humanity is the gift of his own Son. Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to those who love him. Before Jesus' arrival on Earth, God sent the Holy Spirit to those who had "a heart for him" and recognized him as their king and only God.

The Holy Spirit infuses wisdom and perseverance in the lives of believers, directing their steps like a lighthouse and transforming their heart. This is what happens when Simeon, "moved by the Spirit," sees the newborn baby Jesus as the one to bring salvation.

Jewish people of that time knew that the words of Isaiah and other Messianic prophets would be a "light unto the nations." At that time, Israel expected a great warrior king—a political saviour—who would deliver them from the domination of other peoples. Israel would become the most powerful nation on earth. Simeon understood that Jesus would not be a great political leader, but a light to all nations.

He would not wage war against another nation, but rather fight for life over death, love over sin, good over evil. The "new Israel," the one the prophets announced, would rise up and be eternally victorious. Jesus did not come to save a specific group from an oppressive nation, but to save humankind.

Those who decided to follow Jesus, the light of the nations, are integrated into the family of God, regardless of their ethnic descent, social status or any other human criteria. Joseph and Mary marveled at the words of Simeon: for the child they held in their arms was to be the light and glory of all humanity. God is love!

Isaiah 11:1-5

Mill Bay Baptist Church Youth

Age: Varied!

Mill Bay Baptist Church, BC

Isaiah talks about how Jesus came to live among us sinners to teach and lead us not only through his words, but through his actions. We should follow his example as we live among others and not only talk about our faith, but live it. For what use are words if your actions don't reflect them? Two lines in particular caught our attention:

*He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears.*

These caught our attention because of how much we see of that nowadays. Being high school students, it was something all of us in the youth group could relate to. It's easy to judge somebody by their appearance. People always assume that one of our youth is not athletic; he is scrawny, somewhat reserved in nature and doesn't play organized sports. However, he is outdoorsy and fit, participating in activities such as scouting and ocean kayaking. Deciding by what you hear with your ears is another common occurrence, in this age where texting and social media are everywhere. Gossip, rumours, and online stories are impossible to avoid in a high school environment. All of us have experienced the way words—true or not—can hurt others, or how a comment on social media can go viral before anyone checks for truth.

In this world we must follow Christ's example. Jesus' incarnation means he came in flesh and blood, fully human, to show us by his example how to live our lives, not by this world's standards, but by the guidelines of our faith in him. Not judging a person by their appearance or by what somebody else says about them is just a small part of this.

Day 26, December 24

Isaiah 9:6-7

Grace John

Age 22

Montreal Chinese Baptist Church, QC

Mary sings, “from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.” (Luke 1:48-49, ESV) Let all the people call you blessed for to you, a son is given who establishes a kingdom of peace, justice, and righteousness. How absurd and awesome it is that your life will never be the same because of a child!

Meditate on how it is the zeal of the Lord alone that chose once—and continues to choose—to restore you from overwhelming darkness to light.

The same creative power that hovered over the face of the deep bestowed hope upon an exiled people.

It seems so much easier to brace myself for disappointment than it is for me to hope. We close our eyes to shield ourselves from the blinding darkness around us. We pinch our noses tightly so that we do not drown in our loneliness. Enslaved to our isolation and embittered by our circumstances, we cower away from the threat of hope. Indeed, we are a despondent and exiled people.

And yet, this evening we remember that the child born to us is our Everlasting Father, the Mighty God giving himself to us as our Wonderful Counsellor that we may have peace from this time forth and forevermore.

The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will do this. – Isaiah 9:7b



*From all of us at CBM, CBOQ, CBWC, CABC and
Union d'Églises baptistes francophone du Canada,*

*Merry Christmas
Joyeux Noël*

*and
et*

*Happy New Year
Bonne année*



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