

Birthing God

Reflections for Advent



Matthew 1

An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by **Tamar**, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by **Rahab**, and Boaz the father of Obed by **Ruth**, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.

And David was the father of Solomon by the **wife of Uriah**, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of **Mary**, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.



***“Her absence became her presence”* When Women Were Birds: Terry Tempest Williams**

The pages of history are littered
with men telling the stories
of women they barely knew
far less understood
They fill in the blanks
and rub out the mystery
and concoct a fiction
they may earnestly believe
but that bears little semblance of truth.
Scripture too
bears all the marks of redactors
whose bodies could not know
the cycle of nature
the passion and beauty
the stretch marks and the scars
the strength and sacrifice
the complexity and compulsion
of womanly wiles
And it would be much too dangerous
to give power to the absence
in a similar way that it was once purported
that pockets in a woman's dress would lead to sedition
So the spaces are not allowed to be
for fear they will grow into a story untamed
beyond control of the raconteurs
with agendas to be met
and canons to be constructed.
And the stories of absent women
are moulded and chiselled
made safe for the sharing.
Until a new generation emerges
to break open the moulds
and allow absence
to be presence
once more.

This Advent Devotional spends time with the women who are mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba (aka the wife of Uriah) and Mary, mother of God.

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Sunday 28th November Advent 1

The story of **Tamar** can be found in Genesis 38.

It is the story of a woman left vulnerable by the actions of those who might have cared for her as she grieved the loss of her husband. It is also the story of a woman who called out those who wronged her and asserted her rights and called in promises made.

As we move through this week, considering stories in Scripture of Tamar and of other women badly treated and harshly judged, we hold in prayer all those in our world today who fare no better.

A half-hearted promise

Genesis 38:11

11 Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, “Remain a widow in your father’s house until my son Shelah grows up”—for he feared that he too would die, like his brothers. So Tamar went to live in her father’s house.

Sent away
with a half hearted promise
a token gesture
scraps from the table
Like countless women
who are forced to settle for less
than is their due
or who are forced to compromise their dreams
because those who hold power
are threatened by their potential
Who are the ones that we dismiss
deeming them less than
fobbing them off
with what costs us nothing?
And how have we deceived ourselves
that our token gestures are enough?
As we anticipate the light that came into the world
may we create puddles of light
through which others may tread
and may our sharing reflect
the extravagant giving of God

PRAYER

God, you give abundantly of yourself. May we seek and find ways to live in your light, making room for others along the way. May we recognise and call out injustice, spending ourselves in creating a fairer world where all are recognised as gifts of your creation and harbingers of your divine spark that dwells in all. Amen



Monday 29th November

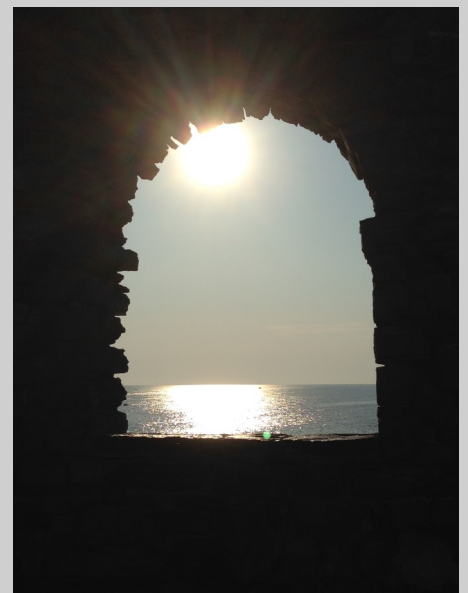
Genesis 38:12-14

12 In course of time the wife of Judah, Shua's daughter, died; when Judah's time of mourning was over, he went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. 13 When Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep," 14 she put off her widow's garments, put on a veil, wrapped herself up, and sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. She saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him in marriage.

Those who underestimate women
are sure to be called to account
For women know the ways of subversion
the ways of subtlety
that are not always noticed or recognised
far less accorded the power that they hold
In a world seemingly obsessed with aggressive confrontation
subtle subversion is often overlooked
Rather, the powerful results speak for themselves
And women, who have, through necessity, learned
how to subvert power
and quietly manifest change
create and sustain movements
that gather momentum
piece by hard won piece
changing the course of history
supplanting fear with love
and threat with collaboration
re-establishing justice for all of creation

PRAYER

In every place where the demands of the powerful prevail
while the weak and vulnerable struggle to be heard
You are present almighty God
In every place where injustice props up the rich
while the poor work quietly for justice
You are present almighty God
In every place where fear calls loudly
while hope is persistently whispered
You are present almighty God
You are present strengthening the arm of the weak, upholding the
efforts of the poor, demolishing all that stands in the way of love.
May we stand with you. Amen

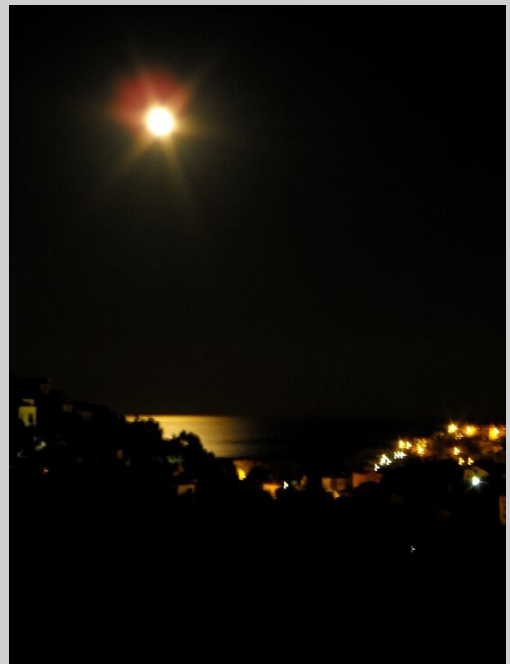


Tuesday 30 November

Genesis 38: 24-26

24 About three months later Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the whore; moreover she is pregnant as a result of whoredom." And Judah said, "Bring her out, and let her be burned." 25 As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, "It was the owner of these who made me pregnant." And she said, "Take note, please, whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff." 26 Then Judah acknowledged them and said, "She is more in the right than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not lie with her again.

How often are the things we call out
as abhorrent in others
the things that dwell in us?
Things tucked away
buried deep
hidden from sight
until, confronted with their presence in another
like looking in a mirror
we are confronted with our own darkness.
The light of Christ shines on us
not to confront or condemn
but to reveal and redeem.
And to encourage us
with that same compassion
to hold out a light for others
an aura in which healing begins.



PRAYER

Christ, the Light of the World, may your light keep on calling us out of darkness.
Embracing your light, may we show compassion for others.
And, finding in your light, forgiveness and healing, may we forgive and heal others with the light of your love. For love's sake.
Amen

Wednesday 1 December

John 8:1-11

Early in the morning Jesus came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

I like to think of Jesus
doodling on the ground
while folk who thought they were important
awaited his pronouncement
on the fate of the woman.
caught in adultery
I like to think that Jesus
did not draw a straight line
but a squiggly circle.
A circle that made room
for more and more inclusion.
A circle that meandered
accommodating others.
A circle full of loopholes
that enabled even the most sceptical
and the least likely
to find a way in.
And I pray that my doodling
will always be as inclusive.
I pray that, when I draw a line
I don't discover Jesus on the other side of it.
I pray that any pronouncement I make
will be filled with compassion
and love
and acceptance
as Jesus was
and is.
I pray that, when the time comes
I will be engaged
in doodling with Jesus.



PRAYER

Inclusive God, when we are compelled to draw lines, may they never exclude but meander until all are encompassed in your never ending, ever expanding, circle of infinite love.
For the love of God.
Amen

Thursday 2 December

Matthew 15:21-28

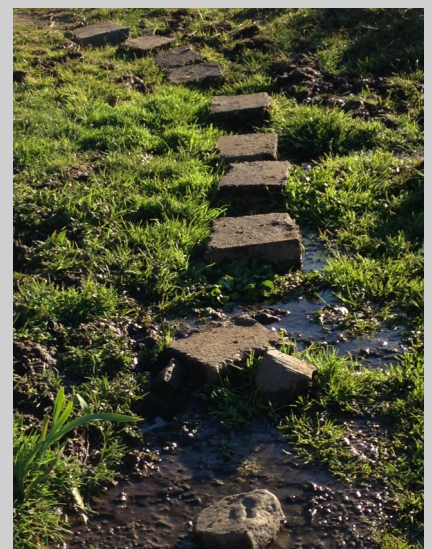
The Canaanite Woman's Faith

21 Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." 23 But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." 24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." 26 He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." 27 She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

*The persistence of a woman
who refused to be set aside
who refused to settle for less
who refused to be silenced
And in her persistence
she expanded the notion
of mercy
and compassion
and justice for all
birthing a revolution
of access
to the kingdom of God
Even the Messiah
needed to be challenged
to reject the patriarchal default
of exclusion
and embrace
a new way
that says
Women matter
and
All are welcome*

PRAYER

For the challenge of "the outsider"
May we always be grateful
For the opportunity to change our minds
May we always be open
For the insight into new ways of being
May we always be welcoming
Continue to grow in us, O God, as we continue to grow in you.
Amen



Friday 3 December

Luke 13:10-17

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

*Shuffling along always looking down
unable to stand up straight
Noticing all the traffic on the street:
Feet striding past
shod in boots and shoes and sandals
stepping out briskly or dragging along
skipping or tripping
disturbing the litter strewn on the ground
lifted and laid by the breeze
avoiding the cracks in the stone slabs
and the gum ground in by other feet
Observing the cigarette ends -
those with lipstick
those smoked down to the very last gasp
and those tossed down still reeking
their rancid fumes.
Looking down
but catching, in all the greyness
the vibrancy and colour
that rushes past
The reflections in the shiny surfaces
the clouds and rainbows in the puddles.
Flashes of glory in eyes cast down.
Glimpses of God in the detritus of the street.
Healing becomes possible when God stoops down
and looks into the eyes
of a woman weighed down by life.*

PRAYER

Stooping God, give us insight, give us compassion, to take time to look into the eyes of the suffering, to see your reflection in them and to be changed by the encounter.

Amen

Saturday 4 December

Matthew 26:6-13

The Anointing at Bethany

Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, "Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor." But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

*They shamed her
They called her out
A woman who gave her all
They pronounced judgment
like we do today
with those whose stories
we do not know
or care to learn*

*They ignored her passion
her costly sacrifice
preferring instead
to quibble about incidentals
about the old ways
of propping up society.
They preferred to bring the focus
to their discomfort
and their petty political point scoring
rather than the woman's
beautiful act of compassion
And Jesus called them back
as we are recalled today*

*to notice what matters
The love
The kindness
The primal urge
to give and to serve
And we tune out the gum bumpers
and zoom in on
the woman
Mary of Bethany
of whom Jesus said:*

***wherever this good news is proclaimed
in the whole world,
what she has done will be told
in remembrance of her."***



PRAYER

God , may we not be so consumed by the small stuff or by our own agenda that we fail to see beauty unfolding before us. Help us to notice and to be grateful for every act of love, for the sake of Christ.

Amen

Sunday 5 December Advent 2

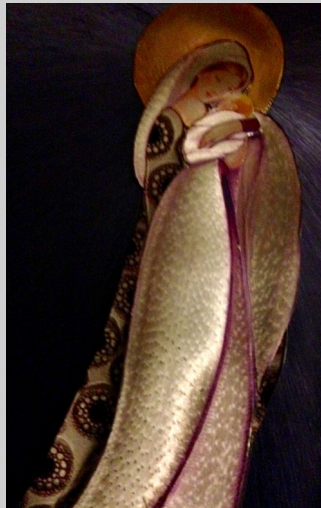
Rahab, a Canaanite sex worker, helps the spies whose mission will result in the take over of her people's land. Faced with the inevitable, she sees a way to at least save her own kith and kin. Rahab was resourceful— a woman alert to the political climate and awake enough to choose her own path. She was also a woman who knew her worth and extracted a price for her help

Spies Sent to Jericho

2 Then Joshua son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went, and entered the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and spent the night there. 2 The king of Jericho was told, "Some Israelites have come here tonight to search out the land." 3 Then the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come only to search out the whole land." 4 But the woman took the two men and hid them. Then she said, "True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they came from. 5 And when it was time to close the gate at dark, the men went out. Where the men went I do not know. Pursue them quickly, for you can overtake them." 6 She had, however, brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax that she had laid out on the roof. 7 So the men pursued them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. As soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

Rahab

*Another woman
whose courage
born of intuition
earned her a place
in the roll call.
of saints
Another woman
whose subversive action
changed the course
of the history
of God's people
Another woman
who did not need to see
the end of the story
but recognised the importance
of doing what was needed
in the moment.
Another woman
who would incur*



*speculation
and be ostracised
who would be judged
and condemned
Another woman
whose faith
informed her risk
enabling her
to emerge from the shadows
embracing the vulnerability
of being noticed
in order to make a difference.*

Rahab

*Another woman
who made history
by her story.*

PRAYER

Give us the will, O God, to do what needs to be done, knowing that that is enough—and to leave the outcome to you, God of truth and power.

Amen

Monday 6 December

Matthew 9:20-22

Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well.

*On his way elsewhere
At the edge of his vision
A woman took her chances,
reached out to touch him
and stopped him in his tracks.
Though his course was set
his intention clear
still he made space
for the unforeseen
noticing the unexpressed
bringing front and centre
the courage mustered
and naming the faith enacted.
Displaying compassion
Calling forth wisdom
and pride
Rewarding the risk taken
Honouring the meeting of souls
that happens on the edges
yet, when afforded space
makes healing a possibility.
A peripheral encounter
becomes centre stage.*



PRAYER

Lord Christ, you honour faith wherever it is found

Lord Christ you honour courage wherever it is mustered

Lord Christ you honour relationship wherever it is sought.

May we welcome every interruption in our day as an opportunity to honour you by serving those around us.

Amen

Tuesday 7 December

Luke 14:1-6

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. 2 Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. 3 And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, "Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?" 4 But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. 5 Then he said to them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?" 6 And they could not reply to this.

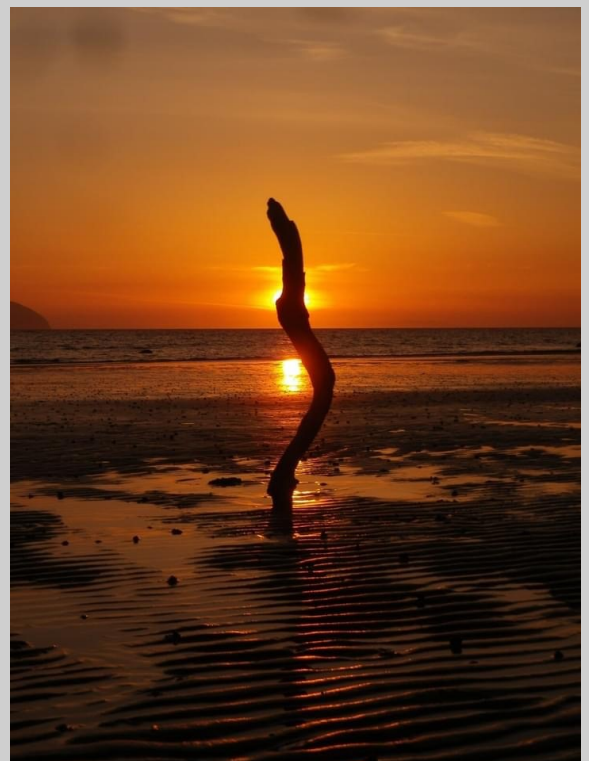
*Lord, while we are still arguing the toss
about rights and wrongs
about privilege and entitlement
about form and decorum
you march in
and make a difference
While we'd rather sit around discussing
who's in and who's out
and what inclusion entails
you extend your arms
to welcome all
While we set up procedures and protocols
and routines and rotas
in order to serve
you get on
with transforming the muddle
Giving each a name
Welcoming all as family
Seeing and addressing need
despite what rules decree
You rewrite the rules
in favour of those who are unseen
those who are not heard
those who have become
simply part of the landscape*

*You rewrite the rules
in favour of inclusion
and compassion
and infinite possibility
You rewrite the rules
to include us
All of us
Seen and loved by you
Seen and freed
to embrace
the abundant life
you set before us.
Thanks be to God.*

PRAYER

How often and how easily we are diverted from the things that matter. Draw us back to you, O God and remind us of the love and compassion we find in you.

Amen



Wednesday 8 December

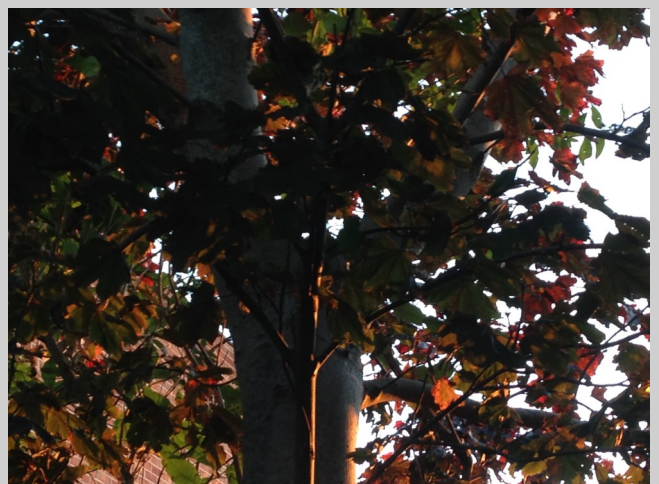
Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.' " And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

*That lesser know spiritual gift:
Tenacity
Harnessed by God as a widow
who knows her rights
Who knows that the arc of justice
is stacked in her favour
that, as a widow,
her rights are protected
in an ethical culture
Tenacity
harnessed to challenge
ethics ignored
and rights denied.
Tenacity
A spiritual gift
required today
for all who long to see
justice done
and God's way upheld
Tenacious God
may we never let up
until your way prevails
in the prayer
and action
and through the tenacity
of your people.*

PRAYER

God give us that staying power that doesn't let up until hearts and minds are changed and your will is done, in Jesus name.
Amen



Thursday 9 December

John 4:5-8

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

*Jesus the rule breaker
asking a woman
a Samaritan woman
for a drink
Breaking a taboo.
The Samaritan woman
a rule breaker too
going to the well
in the heat of the day
avoiding others
yet encountering Jesus.
For encounter
true encounter
involves venturing beyond
stepping over those boundaries
real or imagined
stepping into
a mutual space in which
meeting begins.*

John 4:39

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done."

*Our validation comes
not from any authority
or institution
but from those we serve
those in whose lives
we participate
making a difference
not by our brilliance
but by our presence
Showing up
time and again
with empty hands
and full hearts
Knowing ourselves
called and commissioned
loved and sent by God
who deems us enough
who created us to be
in relationship
holding space
for one another
Validated in service*



PRAYER

As we step outside the lines, O God, may we seek only your way in the knowledge that revealing your love and your grace in the world is your unique calling for us in every day.
Amen

Friday 10 December

John 11:27

Martha said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

Martha's confession of faith, recognising Jesus as God's son is one of the earliest confessions recorded yet goes largely unnoticed, however startling it must have been at the time.

We are surrounded by Marthas , who recognise and point others to the presence of God in our everyday.

*Giving thanks today for all those women who paved a way
and on whose shoulders I have stood...
For Sarah and her laughter, Hagar who named God,
Rebekah the trickster and Leah, the unloved
Athaliah, a queen with sass and Jehosheba, the righteous one
Miriam, awesome sister and Abigail, a prophet
Gomer, lover of men and Bathsheba, creator of kings
Shiphrah and Puah, subversive midwives
Esther, the beautiful one and Ruth, the faithful one
Naomi, the depressed and Anna, the fulfilled
Dorcas and Martha, home makers and creators
Mary the willing, and Elizabeth, the wise
Julian, the passionate and Hilda, the founder
Teneu, who birthed a saint, Theresa, who is one
Those of the past and those of the present
Wise women
Witches, hags and crones
Birthing communities
Birthing stories.
Birthing faith, hope and love
for all the world.*



PRAYER

Lord for all those who have gone ahead and shown us the way, we give you thanks. May we too join in that great company of saints who point to you and forge a way for love to take root.

Amen

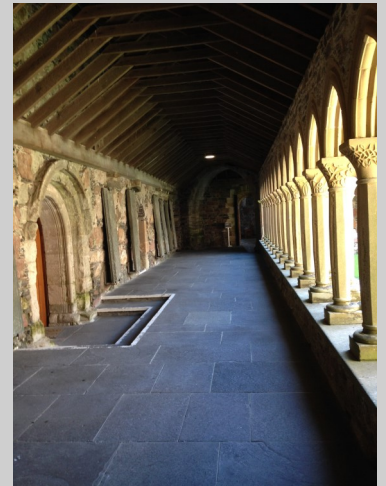
Saturday 11 December

Luke 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Martha and Mary

*Martha and Mary
Sisters who welcomed Jesus
Martha by offering hospitality,
working tirelessly to ensure he had everything he needed
Martha - Distracted by all her tasks, the text tells us.
Yet wasn't it Mary who was the distracted one?
Distracted from all that she'd been brought up to do
by what the hour demanded.
Mary distracted by seeing before her
a man with angst and passion written all over him
A man whose course was steering him inexorably
into the hands of the authorities
who were already out to get him
Authorities, violent and corrupt
who couldn't risk Jesus
being let loose any longer.
Martha did what she knew.
Mary did what she saw
and took the opportunity
to cherish him
and be cherished by him
while there was still time.
And perhaps today
we are called
from what we know
from what is socially acceptable
to do what is right for this time -
To fly in the face of convention
To welcome the stranger
To speak up for the oppressed
To act irrationally in our compassion
And to bring about
the justice of God.*



PRAYER

God help us be faithful in discerning what it is you require of us for today—and to serve you in serving our neighbour.

Amen

Sunday 12 December Advent 3

Ruth relates the story of three women caught up in the patriarchal culture of their times. As in the story of **Tamar**, the tradition of widows being “accommodated” and “provided for” by male relatives comes into play. Through all the cultural complications, a story of bitterness, disappointment, loss and love emerges, relying, largely, on Ruth’s willingness to take risks within a culture stacked against women. This week as we consider women in Scripture striking against societal norms, we remember, too, women who are oppressed by the cultures in which they live today.

Ruth 1:16-17

But Ruth said,

***“Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!
Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.
Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.
May the Lord do thus and so to me,
and more as well,
if even death parts me from you!”***

*A soft heart that could not bear
to see another suffer?
Or a stubborn mind
that would not be moved aside.
The softness
and the steel
go hand in hand.
Those who choose a more difficult path
motivated by love
risk, too, being misunderstood and maligned
dismissed and diminished
and can only endure
with persistence and passion
Caring demands tenacity,
singularity of purpose
the will to make a difference
and the stamina to go after the desired goal.
All of these anchored
in a heart filled with love.*



PRAYER

We pray this day for all who are facing hard choices. May they have the strength to choose the way of love and the persistence and tenacity that will carry them through hardship and adversity step by step. And, as they travel on, may there be glimpses of light that keep the flame of hope alive.

Monday 13 December

Ruth 1:7-16

So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband." Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. They said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me." Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." But Ruth said,

*"Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!
Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.*

*There are three women in the story
Three who set out
when the famine becomes too
much
A famine of food
A famine of men.
They set out
for a land where there is promise
A land where there is food
A land where their emptiness
might be filled
Naomi
Ruth
and
Orpah
But at the moment Orpah
chooses another way
her story ends.
Naomi's kiss
might just as well
be the kiss of death
For somehow Orpah's choice
is considered less noble
than her sister Ruth's*

*Somehow the path Orpah takes
is deemed unworthy
of narration
and her character is written out
of the story.
Or, worse,
conjecture and condemnation
are woven around the silence.
And so Orpah's exit
becomes another opportunity
for patriarchal norms
to be established
and for she who dares
to choose another way
to be obliterated
lest others should follow.
And a legitimate choice,
a vocation every bit as compelling
as her sister's
is vilified by silence.*

*Three women
in the story.
Only two
remain
a part
of the plot
when the redactor
is done.
So here's to Orpah
who dared to follow
another way
and to the women today
who do not live up to
expectations imposed
and whose stories
are still not told.
May our curiosity enable us
to see beyond the words we read
and beneath the stories that we
hear
to wonder at what is missing
and to facilitate
freedom of choice.*

PRAYER

In a society that worships heroes, we pray for all who are overlooked, those who are judged less than or unworthy of notice. May we, O God, remain curious in our loving, honouring the choices that others make in love. May we be supporters along the way rather than stumbling blocks in their path. May we acknowledge that we are pilgrims together and be willing to offer compassionate companionship every step of the way.

Tuesday 14 December

Ruth 4:7-12

⁷ Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one took off a sandal and gave it to the other; this was the manner of attesting in Israel. ⁸ So when the next-of-kin said to Boaz, "Acquire it for yourself," he took off his sandal. ⁹ Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have acquired from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰ I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, to be my wife, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance, in order that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred and from the gate of his native place; today you are witnesses." ¹¹ Then all the people who were at the gate, along with the elders, said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem; ¹² and, through the children that the LORD will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

Goods and chattel
sold with parcels of land
yet leaving their mark
women who birthed nations
Ruth and Tamar
who both appeared in the genealogy of Jesus
became linked
by the lengths they had to go
to survive being widows and foreigners
Consigned to the margins of society
they found a way
to secure their place in history
and so it continues...
In every generation
and in every culture
women are forced to draw deep from their wells of
wisdom
to find, not just a way to survive
but a way to flourish
carrying within their being
seeds of hope and of promise
and, all along the way
birthing life in all its fulness
and communities that enable growth.



PRAYER

We pray for all who are used and abused by the powerful, especially for women and children caught up in sex trafficking and for all forced into modern day slavery. Give us courage to defend the rights of those whose voices are not heard and wisdom to know what changes we can make that will make a difference, bringing justice and dignity for those oppressed by cultures today.

Wednesday 15 December

Mark 7:27-30

Jesus said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

*Sometimes
It takes a woman
It takes a woman
to cut through the layers
of inheritance
and tradition
of entitlement
and assumption
It takes a woman
to speak truth to power
to say it like it is
It takes a woman
to call out
the dangerous naivety
of blindly following
the notions of the past
It takes a woman
to expand our horizons
and lead us boldly
into a courageous future
defined by compassion
that offers more
than crumbs from the table
of the privileged
to the forgotten
and overlooked
and undermined
and those deemed less than
in every age
It takes a woman.*

PRAYER

Make us active, O God, in calling out injustice.
Give us courage to speak truth to power.
Make us generous in sharing of the abundance you have given.
May we listen before we speak and take our cue from those who not only speak but live out their faith.
Amen



Thursday 16 December

Luke 2:36-38

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

*Anna saw
Through her aged eyes she saw
the one who would redeem her people
Having waited, in hope, for a lifetime
She saw
She praised
She proclaimed
Sharing the hope and the promise
And through the eyes of a woman
the light of the world was revealed
From time immemorial
In every age
in every place
women gather
in the temple
at the well
women gather
sharing wisdom
greeting friends
and strangers
building community
And still today
wherever women gather
stories are shared
friends and strangers are welcomed
and the threads of a community
are woven
into a common strand
And light is revealed for the world.*

PRAYER

Through sharing and stories may wisdom be gathered and communities nurtured. May we see and hear prophets who bring news of redemption today.

Amen



Friday 17 December

Luke 1:38

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.

*The angel departed from her
But I wonder...*

*After he'd delivered his message
that would surely turn a life upside down
did he wish he could take it back?*

*Did he really believe that her grace would be a blessing?
When he saw the herald star over Bethlehem
did he remember that night
that the virgin said yes?*

*Was he part of the chorus
that sang to shepherds: peace on earth
as she gave birth to God?*

*How often did he ponder
what became of her?*

*Did he get to witness
how the courage she mustered for consent
would be tested time and again
as God grew up in human form?*

*Did he see her despair
as her firstborn's life was extinguished,
a pawn in political power games?*

*How apt it would be
if he were the one
who met her on the third day with the greeting*



"He is not here. He is risen"

*Completing the circle
of Annunciation*

*Hail Mary, full of grace
Blessed are you among women*

PRAYER

God, we remember all this day, who are dealing with unwelcome news. We pray for those whose lives are changed forever. May they know the love and support of community as they navigate a new reality and be sustained by your presence in all things.

Amen

Saturday 18 December

Mark 16:9-10

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

*It is said that Mary Magdalene
was a woman possessed.
A woman whom Jesus delivered from demons.
I've long wondered
whether those demons
with which Mary was possessed
were those traits that threatened
to smash the patriarchal culture.
Things like
Love
Passion
Persistence
Loyalty
Fierceness
Curiosity
Intuition
Perhaps Jesus didn't so much deliver her
Perhaps he encouraged her
to live into her calling
as a disciple*

*And in so doing
her demons
were exercised
rather than exorcised.
And we who seek
to smash the patriarchy today,
We whose work is to continue
in the line of Mary Magdalene
dismantling glass ceilings
shard by tiny shard
cut and bleeding as we go
are also labelled as possessed
and bear that label with pride
knowing that the Risen Christ
assuages our demons
encouraging us
to love
to be passionate
to be persistent
to be loyal
to be fierce
to remain curious
(Curiosity prevents us from judging)
and to use our intuition
as those called today
to stay by the cross
to watch over the empty tomb
and with all that we have
to proclaim resurrection.*

PRAYER

You see us, O God, not for what we might be but for what we are. And you love us nonetheless. Open our eyes to look on others with love. To see as you see with the eye of the heart. And so, with new perspective, may we share the good news alongside the risen Christ.

Amen



Sunday 19 December

Bathsheba was the woman whom king David saw bathing and (mis) used his power to possess. He then schemed elaborately to cover his tracks, eventually ensuring that Uriah, her husband, was killed in battle. The first child Bathsheba bore died. Their second child was Solomon. David promised Bathsheba that Solomon would succeed him as king, a promise that Bathsheba had to fight to see honoured. In the genealogy, Bathsheba is not named, merely referred to as the wife of Uriah.

Matthew 1:6-11

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

*She who must not be named -
The wife of Uriah
aka Bathsheba
carefully disguised
in a genealogy
rooting Jesus
Son of God
firmly
in a line of ordinary
flawed
messed up folk
rooting Jesus
alongside the
flawed
messed up folk
of every age.
Inviting those
who would follow him today
to be among
the flawed
and messed up
and especially with those
whose names
have been erased
finding in the eyes of the overlooked
the face of God with us today.*

**This 3rd Sunday in Advent is also known as:
Gaudete!**

Rejoice!

*Just as the steps begin to weary
on a journey that began
with so much promise and hope
there comes a brief respite
while we pause in our journey to Bethlehem.*

*That pause is filled with expectation,
of rest and renewal
of joy and anticipation.*

*We salute Mary the mother of God
and take a moment
to ponder, with her
how far we have come
and the journey that we continue
and resolve, as we light the pink candle
to say yes!*

*to an awesome journey
with the God who loves
to take us on a journey
we would never have imagined
and who gives us the courage
to go along
on a bumpy ride
of discovery.
Rejoice!*



PRAYER

God who knows us and calls us by name, forgive us when we dehumanise others, when we rob them of their God given humanity and identity. We acknowledge Bathsheba, wife and mother of kings and part of the lineage of Mary who birthed the Son of God.

Today we rejoice in Mary's courage to come between heaven and earth so that we might know God.

Monday 20 December

2 Samuel 11:2-5

It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

I am pregnant

The words that Bathsheba

had cause to send to David

No instant text messaging

No surprise scan photo

No gender reveal shenanigans

Simply the starkness of the message

I am pregnant

Words that, for David,

changed the trajectory of his life

as he tried to cover his tracks

but was held accountable for his actions

by Nathan the prophet

and by God.

Words that, for Bathsheba,

brought great suffering

and loss

A woman in no position

to refuse her king

or prevent her husband's death

A woman who looked loss in the eyes

and was not defeated

but found the strength

to fight back

Those words

I am pregnant

wrought in her

fierce love

and determination

Courage

and empowerment

as she mourned the loss of one son

and fought for the rights of another

Bathsheba

abused by one king

and mother to another.

Refusing to carry bitterness

but only love

to see her through.



PRAYER

God as we honour resilience, may we also challenge the systems that make resilience necessary.

Amen

Tuesday 21 December

1 Kings 1: 15-18

¹⁵ So Bathsheba went to the king in his room. The king was very old; Abishag the Shunammite was attending the king. ¹⁶ Bathsheba bowed and did obeisance to the king, and the king said, "What do you wish?" ¹⁷ She said to him, "My lord, you swore to your servant by the LORD your God, saying: Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne. ¹⁸ But now suddenly Adonijah has become king, though you, my lord the king, do not know it.

*A woman, her son and an impotent king
a story of broken promises
misappropriation of power
and abuse of frailty
until a mother's intervention
saw wrong righted
and succession restored
Bathsheba
like countless mothers before her
and countless since
fighting for justice for her child
and holding to account
the men who so easily forget
the words they have spoken.
So many women, today continue
to speak truth to power
to call out injustice
to live by another way
showing that change is possible
And, in their actions
and in their example
we glimpse hope for the future
for all our children*

PRAYER

By our words and actions, may we reveal your love and your purpose.

May we keep on working for life in all its fulness, your promise for all whom you have created in your image
Amen



Wednesday 22 December

Luke 1:46-48

Mary's Song of Praise

*And Mary said,
"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;*



*When Mary pushed her son
from her womb
into the waiting arms of the world
in all its darkness
and neediness
was her heart heavy
and her throat tight
and her eyes full of unshed tears?
As she put him to her breast
and bore the pain and wonder
of nurturing new life
while others came and went
to marvel at the birth,
did her fear for this child
constrict her heart and her lungs?
And as her fear was confirmed
by wise men and women
prophesying that this boy child
would pierce her soul
did she smile sweetly
and let others revel in the joy of his birth
while her heart was breaking into pieces?
Did she know that she would travel
from the pain of bearing a child
through the agony of labour-
(make no mistake
God did not have that covered!)*

*Did she endure those pains
knowing she must confront
the trauma of a son
who left home early
to be about the business of God,
a son who did not return weekly
with his laundry
or looking for a good feed
but who took to the road
and kept on going,
because God's business was
a business that involved
itinerant living
hanging out with those labelled losers
and upsetting the institutions of the day
and, ultimately,
involved dying on a cross.
Mary, the mother of God
endured so much more
than the pain that is simply a part
of mothering a son
that pain of birthing and letting go
that mothers have always borne.
And she knew.
From the moment she said yes to God
Mary knew.
Still she said Yes.*

PRAYER

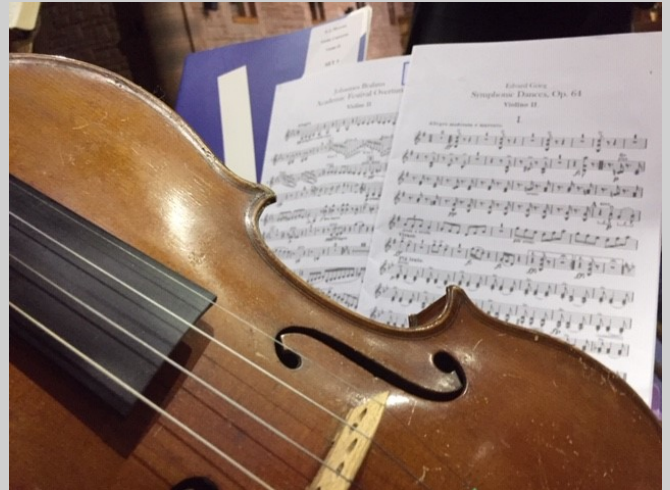
God we thank you for women in every generation who are willing to risk birth and to weather the ups and downs and joys and sorrows of motherhood. May we build communities in which all parents experience support and love through all the tasks and trials of raising children.
Amen

Thursday 23 December

Luke 1:50-53

*His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.*

*How we have tamed this song
A song once banned
because of its subversive nature
A song proclaimed with passion
in the face of grief and turmoil
used to shame the oppressor
an indictment for corrupt rulers
Now, at best, disguised in a complex choral arrangement
or, at worst, read without tone or inflection.
Mary, blessed among women,
knew how to express
the perverse nature of God
and, in all her wisdom,
saw the power in her womb.*



*Let us reclaim the power
of the woman and the song
let us remove the centuries of dust
that has tamed and subdued
and bring the promise to bear
birthing along with the child
a world of justice and peace
fuelled by love and light
wrapped up in a feisty woman
who knew the power
of the child in her womb*

PRAYER

Forgive us, O Christ, when we tone down the revolutionary love that you brought into the world. A love that raises the lowly, feeds the hungry and changes the order of the world. May we take seriously your call to us to join in a revolution of peace.

Amen

Christmas Eve

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

*The Service of Lessons and Carols
like the Easter vigil
reminds us of where we have been
and points to where we are headed.
Those familiar or not so familiar stories
that hint at a trajectory -
Redemption
Promise
Fulfilment
Hope
Light in the darkness
And the Advent
of Immanuel
God with us*



Luke 2:1-7

The Birth of Jesus

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. 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. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 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.

*Birth does not happen just when the time is right
or when everything is ready
when we've done all the right things or when we wait patiently ...
Even when carefully planned and engineered, long awaited or dreaded,
birth comes crashing in bringing change and disruption
The arrival of a baby, even in the best of circumstances
brings upheaval that cannot be anticipated.
Whether homeless on the streets or camped in a refugees enclosure
Crouched in squalor or lying in a manger
Birth comes
Heralding joy and sorrow, excitement and danger
Signalling despair and hope, fear and longing.
Into melee and mystery
God is born.
The world is not suddenly transformed.
The experience of birth is no less traumatic
The chaos and squalor do not disappear.
But the air is charged with a new reality that is seldom grasped:
A message for all: You are deeply, deeply loved by a God who is love.*



PRAYER

God we pray this day for all who are born in homes or hovels, in camps or castles, births long-awaited or greeted with dread. May your love and protection surround parent and child and may the first touch they know be the touch of your love to surround and protect all the days of their life.

Christmas Day

John 1:14

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth

Grace be yours today
In the midst of chaos and noise
In the silence of loneliness
In the yearning for loved ones
May the baby
wrapped in swaddling
and laid in a manger
break free
and grace your life
with light and love
and hope and peace
and take you
to places
you never imagined
May God born for us
dwell forever in you.



FOLLOW THE STAR

*When it comes,
will we greet Epiphany
like a long lost friend
Full of familiar symbols
and comforting themes
Or will we allow
the jarring sounds
of carnage and chaos
to guide us to another truth:
That God with us
is a message
that strikes terror
into the hearts of those
whose power is threatened
inciting violence
doubling down on oppression
resisting all that unites.
God with us
is a call
to muster courage
to move beyond comfort*



*to "not be afraid"
to see angels
and starlight
that lead us on paths
we didn't know existed
to find our way home
by another way
journeying alongside
strangers who will guide us
by their wisdom
forged in the depths
of sorrow
and hardship
with only their awareness
of Incarnation
enabling and empowering
their every step
Such are the ones
who will bring
the light of Epiphany
into our lives today once we move
beyond the manger
to see God in all of life.*

PRAYER

May your grace fill us, your light lead us and your love stir us today with hope for the world as we are changed by Immanuel—God with us. Be born in us today and every day.

Amen

Matthew 1:17

So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

*Slotted in there
A place to belong
Kith and kin established
But cutting a new mould
Refusing to conform
Impossible to peg or label
Needing no human credentials
or heritage to bring authenticity
But at home nonetheless
At home in every time and place
Welcoming the stranger
On the road with the refugee
Tagging along with the outcast
Standing out with the stigmatised
That's my boy!
Birthed by Tamar and Rahab,
by Bathsheba and Ruth
and countless women who have been
subversive
resourceful
loyal
courageous
midwives of God.
Jesus— Son of God
Son of Mary
Stepping out of that noble line
To stand with all of humanity
The Christ - born for us.*



*Longing for change
dreaming of justice
weary of political posturing
and failed promises
we pin our hopes
on a baby in a manger.
Pinning our hopes that the stable
is not a benign shelter
but the birthplace of revolution
And we commit to be the change
we want to see
To pitch in with the baby
shaking off complacency
stirring up restlessness
working for justice
and practising love
in a world longing for light.*