

An Advent Gift to Make a Difference



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# Capture the Moment



An Advent/Christmas Devotional by BIC Canada

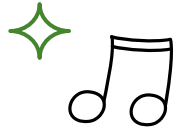
2023



# An Advent Gift to Make a Difference



# Stop and Listen



Our faith calls us to recognize that everything we have is a gift from God, and giving back is a major part of our following of Jesus. Our faith also calls us to be people of action.

Will you prayerfully consider partnering with BIC Canada Global, and our sisters and brothers around the world, as we seek to extend Jesus' message to others? Visit [BICCanadaGlobal.com](http://BICCanadaGlobal.com) for project info.

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At a metro station in Washington on a January morning a man with a violin played for 1 hour. During that time many passed by. A man noticed that there was a musician playing, slowed, then hurried on. A short time later, the violinist received his first dollar from a woman who threw money in the violin case but continued walking. A young man leaned against the wall to listen then looked at his watch and walked on. A 3 year old boy stopped but his mother moved him along as he continued to look back. This was repeated often. As the musician continued people would briefly stop and listen. A few gave money. The man collected \$32. When he finished playing no one noticed.

The violinist was Joshua Bell, a world class violinist. He played Bach with a violin worth \$3.5 million dollars. Two days before he sold-out a theatre where seats averaged over \$100. The social experiment organized by the Washington Post raises many questions but maybe the most important one is this: **If we cannot stop and listen to a great musician, playing wonderful music, with a beautiful instrument... How many other things are we missing as we rush through life?"**

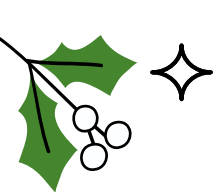
Our Advent guide theme this year is **"Capture The Moment" – Read it again for the very first time.** We hear the Christmas songs and scriptures so often that the wonder can wear off. But what if we imagine that we are reading and hearing them for the very first time. What if we stop, listen and experience the wonder of what we are celebrating like first timers. Just maybe we could find our joy renewed. This is our prayer for you.

A very blessed Advent and Christmas to all!

*Charlie Mashinter*

Rev. Charlie Mashinter  
Executive Director,  
Be In Christ (BIC) Church Of Canada





# Christmas Windows

As fairy lights  
are sparkling  
round windowpanes  
of homes  
Christmas trees are laden  
hummingbirds now gone  
have flown  
winds are howling  
snowflakes swirling  
tumbling from grey skies  
She's nestled warm  
inside her home  
as thoughts of Christmas time

She contemplates  
Two thousand years ago  
the Christ child's birth  
a teenage girl  
ordinary, poor  
Saviour of the world  
His mother, Mary glances  
out Christmas windows  
Bethlehem  
frightened yet,  
quietly call  
carrying the great "I Am"

Another window  
Joseph sleeps  
an angel speaks to him  
a different teen, carpenter  
obedient, lays his hands  
attentively, an angel  
that God sent to speak to him  
with Mary, leaves Galilee  
walks the path to Bethlehem

Christmas windows glanced  
now the stable, Jesus born  
a bed of straw  
manger laid  
swaddled and adored  
Shepherds bowed  
worshipped Him  
after following the star  
Magi came, gifts they bore  
gold, frankincense and myrrh

Perhaps as we gaze  
out Christmas windows  
we'll observe  
remember why, we celebrate  
the Saviour of the world  
who heals all wounds  
holds us tight  
loves beyond compare  
meets us where we need Him  
from Christmas windows  
hearts repaired  
Though shattered, broken  
lost, forlorn  
Our Saviour, Jesus came  
Take His hand  
this Christmas  
you, will never be the same  
through Christmas windows...

by Lisa Sherk  
Port Colborne BIC

Author of *The Looking Glass*  
(2022) and *A Hearts*  
*Window* (2023)



**“Hope is being  
able to see that  
there is light  
despite  
the darkness.”**

Desmond Tutu





**“I have learned  
that people will forget  
what you said,  
people will forget  
what you did,  
but people will never  
forget how you made  
them feel.”**

Maya Angelou

DECEMBER 3

# HOPE

Today we light the candle of Hope.

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. [...] For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.”

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

“Behold the virgin shall bear a child and be with son, and they shall call Him Emmanuel which being interpreted means ‘God with us.’”

Matthew 1:23

### Prayer for Hope:

Help us to see that you are with us. Nothing that comes into our lives is too difficult or messy for you. Bring us the same hope that came that first Christmas, wrapped in swaddling clothes, sleeping in a manger. Thank you, Father for this immeasurable gift of Jesus. Amen.



**December 3**

**Hope**

Lisa Goetze, Sauble Christian Fellowship



**Verse** Romans 5:5-6

"...this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us... When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners."

"A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices." The lyrics from this Christmas song "O Holy Night", echo in my mind. It's such a contrast: a thrill of hope for a tired world.

In reading news headlines on our smartphone, or engaging with people who live on the margins or even coming home to an argument that's been brewing for weeks, many of us need hope because we are truly weary.

When we ask people for support during a time of hardship, we hope they will respond positively. When someone makes a promise to bring dessert to a gathering or show up 'on time', we hope they will keep their word. Hope is good! However, we know people can disappoint. And we know we have disappointed others too.

Yet, we see that our hope in Jesus "will not lead to disappointment". The circumstances we face may not change, but the presence of Jesus can revive a weary soul. The same passage goes on to remind us that 'when we were utterly helpless Christ came at the right time', just as God promised.

**Prayer** Lord, please give me the hope to wait for the arrival of your right-on-time presence. Life's circumstances are making me weary, but I know you can revive my hope.

As we head into a new year let's take all the love, all the memories, and all the lessons of Christmas bringing light into our everyday lives. May you know a sense of God's peace as you do!

From our BIC Church Family to you – God's blessing for 2024.

*Charlie Mashinter*

Rev. Charlie Mashinter  
Executive Director,  
Be In Christ (BIC) Church Of Canada



# After Christmas

PARTING THOUGHTS

We've come to the end of this journey through Advent and Christmas together. But – please do not think of Christmas as an end – but rather a beginning. Howard Thurman was a Quaker minister and activist who penned these thoughts for after Christmas...

## The Work of Christmas

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and the princes are home,  
When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
The work of Christmas begins:  
To find the lost,  
To heal the broken,  
To feed the hungry,  
To release the prisoner,  
To rebuild the nations,  
To bring peace among brothers,  
To make music in the heart.

## Howard Thurman

Black Fire: African American Quakers  
on Spirituality and Human Rights

December 4

## The Distraction of “Why?”

Jon Limmer, Covenant Community Christian  
Church, Penetang



**Verse** Luke 1:5-8

*What did I do to deserve this? Why is God allowing this to happen?  
What is God trying to teach me?*

Questions like this are natural in times of struggle. The songbook of God's people includes them! (Ps. 13:1) But too often, the desire to know why can consume us. Searching for the unexplainable why can distract us from taking the next steps of faith. **Attempting to explain why can hinder us from connecting with God in the present.**

Zechariah & Elizabeth had a decades-long challenge trying to have a child. The why offered by their world blamed them for unconfessed sin. (Jn. 9:2) Luke introduces the story of Emmanuel by pointing out that the whys offered by the world – even our religious world – can be outright wrong. Zechariah & Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes.

Thankfully, the why questions didn't distract Zechariah from doing his next right thing – serving in the Temple. And it didn't hinder him from connecting with God. In fact, by doing the next right thing, he would come face to face with a messenger from God that would change his life and world forever.

**Prayer** God, help me to come to you freely with all of the why questions. And help me to move through my questions into the next right thing for me during this Advent season. May I be ready and open to meet you and be changed by you.

**December 5**

## Open to the Amazing

Jon Limmer, Covenant Community Christian Church, Penetang



**Verse** Luke 5:9-20

Zechariah was a righteous man serving God. Of all people who should be prepared for God to do something amazing, it should be him! But this holy man doing holy work in the holiest place he would ever go is entirely unprepared for what happens.

I'm not criticizing! I tend to affirm the adage, "When something seems too good to be true, it probably is." To me, Zechariah's question to Gabriel feels obvious. But maybe that says more about me than anything else.

Am I open to God doing amazing things? I should be, but there's a lot of "How can I be sure?" in me. I've seen God do amazing things. God does amazing things all the time, but I still find myself asking, "How can I be sure?"

I love Gabriel's response to Zechariah's question. Here's my paraphrase: "Zechariah, you're full of questions. How about you just shut up and watch what God does?"

There is a lesson here. When God shows up, we're better off being quiet and joining in with the amazing things God is up to. If things are truly from God, many of our questions will get answered without us ever asking them!

**Prayer** Amazing God. I'm so glad you're not afraid of my questions or doubts. But when you show up, please help me learn to be quiet and remain open to the amazing things you want to do in my life!

**December 28**

## Marvellous & Ordinary

Rachel Bernard, Fallsview BIC



**Verse** Luke 2:33-40

Here the story continues with Mary and Joseph at the temple not because the Holy Spirit called them there, but because they were following the law. They were doing what they knew was required of them and God met them there, in their obedience, in an extraordinary way.

Today's scripture begins with Simeon's blessing and then prophet Anna coming at the very moment Simeon finished speaking to again confirm that Jesus was someone special indeed. I love that verse 33 says that Mary and Joseph, "Marveled at what was said about Jesus." They'd both met with angels, experienced an immaculate conception first hand, had multiple confirmations about their incredible child and yet they can still marvel at what God is doing in their midst.

The passage ends with Mary, Joseph and Jesus obediently completing the purification rights and then heading back to their hometown of Nazareth.

These parents, raising the son of God live their lives in this beautiful tension between the ordinary and extraordinary. Their normal everyday lives are punctuated by supernatural encounters, divine interventions and miracles.

The most incredible part of all of this is that we get to live in this same tension. God is still at work in our ordinary lives today.

**Prayer** Lord, help us see where you are working in our lives and let us marvel at the great things you are doing. Help us obediently follow you when our lives feel both ordinary and extraordinary.

**December 27**

## **Simeon's Encounter**

Rachel Bernard, Fallsview BIC



**Verse** Luke 2:22-32

“On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.”

Again, we see Mary and Joseph living a normal, everyday Jewish life as they prepare for the purification rites. Jesus was almost 6 weeks old when they headed to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord and offer the required sacrifice.

As they make their way to Jerusalem the Holy Spirit is at work preparing another supernatural encounter. We don't know when, but we do know a man called Simeon was told he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. On this very day, I suspect as Mary and Joseph made their way to Jerusalem, Simeon was moved by the Holy Spirit to go to the temple courts, and when they arrived Simeon took Jesus into his arms Praising God.

Reading this scripture, we see how God has orchestrated this encounter, and had been planning this moment since before Jesus was born. Not only had Simeon been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Lord's Messiah, but he was also moved by the Holy Spirit to go to the temple on this day. This is a beautiful depiction of how God is always at work, orchestrating divine encounters which can take many years to come to fruition.

**Prayer** Lord, help us be in tune with your Spirit as you weave our stories together. Help us be patient in times of waiting and ready to follow you whenever and wherever you lead.

**December 6**

## **The Gift of Waiting**

Jon Limmer, Covenant Community Christian Church, Penetang



**Verse** Luke 5:21-25

I emailed someone yesterday. They haven't replied! I texted someone an hour ago. I haven't heard back!! I sent a Snapchat a few minutes ago. No response!!! What's wrong with people?!

I only half jest. This is often how we react. We live in an instant society.

God doesn't work that way. Biblical wisdom describes maturity as a seed growing into a deeply rooted tree. Paul describes the world waiting for God's rescue with pregnancy language – a metaphor that Zechariah and Elizabeth were now living through. Healthy growth takes time.

After decades of waiting, Elizabeth had nine more months of waiting before she could hold this gift of God's grace. Her response? She celebrated God's kindness. She embraced the waiting. We tend to view waiting as a nuisance. (Or time to be on our phones.) But Zechariah and Elizabeth, after waiting for decades, received this waiting as more time to grow – this time alongside baby John.

Advent is a season of waiting. It may be the hardest part, but when we push past waiting we miss out on how God wants us to grow during this time. Let's join Elizabeth in receiving this season of waiting as God's kindness to us – waiting for the birth of something beautiful.

**Prayer** Lord God, please help me receive this season of waiting as kindness from you. In my waiting, shape me. Help me grow so I am better equipped to receive and celebrate the gift of Emmanuel.



**December 7**

## God has an Assignment for You!

Elise Robitaille, Retired BIC Pastor



**Verse** Luke 1:29-30 (The Message)

“She was thoroughly shaken, wondering what was behind a greeting like that. But the angel assured her, ‘Mary, you have nothing to fear.’”

I can certainly relate to Mary being “thoroughly shaken”, “greatly troubled” (NIV), “confused and disturbed” (NLT) by having an angel come calling. I think that would have been my reaction, too.

I can also relate to her questioning the plausibility of becoming pregnant and giving birth to a baby since she had never slept with a man. (v. 34 - But how? I’ve never slept with a man).

This unexpected message and extraordinary assignment from God certainly put a wrench in Mary’s plans. I think of how often I am paralyzed, filled with dread when my plans have to change, or when there is uncertainty in my future. It’s hard for me to give up control, to let life unfold, to trust that God will work all things together for the good. So, the part of this story that challenges me the most is Mary’s posture of openness to the possibility - when she says, “Let it be with me just as you say.” It challenges me to reflect on how many of God’s invitations I might be missing out on.

What about you? Are you open to the assignments that God invites you to accept?

**Prayer** Lord, help us to trust you and to be open to the unique assignments you may have for us.

**December 26**

## Jesus Presented at the Temple

Rachel Bernard, Fallsview BIC



**Verse** Luke 2:21-40

“On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.”

Even after the extraordinary events Mary and Joseph experienced, from the immaculate conception to their baby’s birth, they were still just Mary and Joseph from Nazareth on the journey of first-time parenthood.

After their baby was born, and the shepherds told of their wild experience of angels proclaiming the Saviour was born, life continued on. Even though their baby was the son of God, they had to learn how to be first-time parents within their culture at that time. This required them to bring their newborn son to be circumcised and named on the 8th day. This was the custom. It’s what Jewish parents did, and yet, in the midst of this ordinary act we are reminded that this baby is no ordinary baby.

There are many customs for naming a Jewish baby, but these were not followed by Mary and Joseph because they had been given a name by an angel before he was conceived. This is just one of many seemingly ordinary experiences for Mary and Joseph that collide with the supernatural. Which, I suppose, should be expected when you’re raising the son of God.

**Prayer** Lord, help us to see where the supernatural collides with the ordinary in our lives today.

# Merry Christmas

from Be in Christ Canada



**December 8**

## **The Holiness of the Ordinary**

Elise Robitaille, Retired BIC Pastor



**Verse** Luke 1:26-28

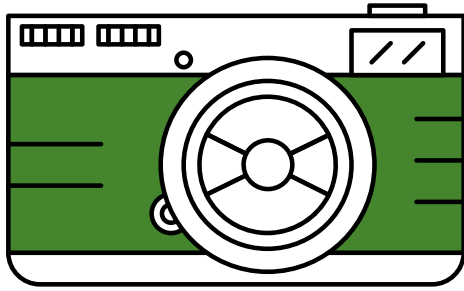
"In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you!'"

I wonder what Mary was doing when the angel 'went to her'. The text doesn't say. Mary doesn't seem to be doing anything special - she isn't praying or worshipping or engaging in anything that we might qualify as 'spiritual'. She was just going about her regular, ordinary life in a nondescript little town called Nazareth. It was a place that had no special religious significance like Jerusalem or Bethlehem did.

Yet, it's in this very ordinary setting that the angel declares to Mary, "The Lord is with you". It's this very ordinary context that God uses to deliver the most extraordinary message. God turns this very ordinary moment into something most holy.

How often do we get preoccupied at Christmas, striving to create the perfect ambiance for something special and spiritual to happen, forgetting that God is always "with us" – and it's his presence that makes the ordinary moments holy.

**Prayer** God, this Christmas, will you help us to stop our striving for perfection. Help us to appreciate the holiness of every ordinary moment – because you are with us.



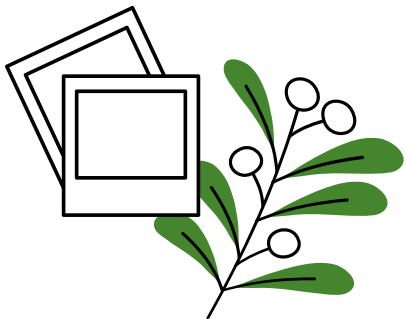
# Capture the Moment

## SATURDAY DECEMBER 9TH

It's time to capture your own Christmas moments. Each Saturday you are invited to take pictures and post them on a social media site, Facebook or Instagram, with the hashtag #capturethemoment and or #BICadvent.

**Advent is a season of light and decorating fun. This week choose one or two of the following and snap some pictures.**

- Go for a walk or a drive and find an outdoor light display that catches your attention. Take a picture.
- Decorate your Christmas tree and post a picture of the finished product. (or post pictures while the project is in process)
- A favourite Christmas ornament or decoration
- String popcorn or make a paper garland. Show us your creativity.



DECEMBER 24

# LOVE

On this 4th Sunday of Advent we light the candle of Love. The whole meaning of Christmas can be explained in one little 4-letter word... LOVE.

"So the Word became human and made his home among us He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son."

John 1:14

"For God love the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world but to save the world through him."

John 3:16-17

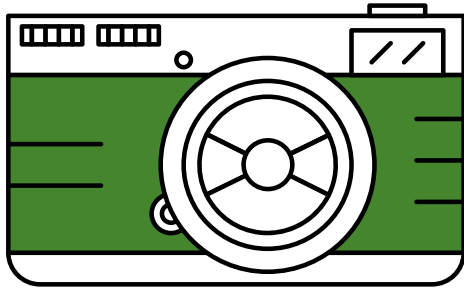
"But – When God our Saviour revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Because of his grace he declared us righteous and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life."

Titus 3:4-7

### Prayer for Love:

Father, please help us to see every person the same way that You see them. Help us to love them the way that you love them – even when they don't love us back. Please show us how to walk continually in Your love, that perfect love which casts out fear. We love you, Lord.





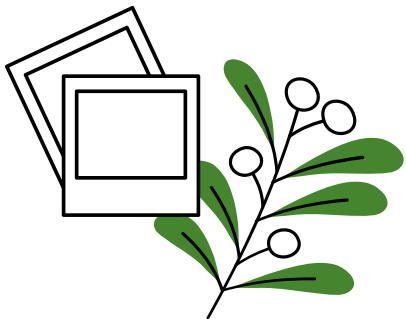
# Capture the Moment

## SATURDAY DECEMBER 23RD

It's time to capture your own Christmas moments. Each Saturday you are invited to take pictures and post them on a social media site, Facebook or Instagram, with the hashtag #capturethemoment and or #BICadvent.

**Advent is a season for parties and gathering with family and friends. Capture the moments of your gathering.**

- A moment with a good friend.
- Capture your favourite food from your gathering.
- Take a group photo.
- Capture laughter and love.



DECEMBER 10

# PEACE

Today we light the candle of Peace. Peace from God, biblical peace, allows us to trust in God's promises through restful, tranquil faith, despite the dark, scary world around us.

"For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6

"Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God with us!'"

Matthew 1:23

"I am leaving you with a gift – peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid."

John 14:27

### Prayer for Peace:

Heavenly Father, You are the God who gives peace. Help us remember that because of Jesus we can experience a Christmas free from turmoil and chaos. Regardless of our circumstances or our situations, you offer us peace that passes understanding.



**December 10**

**Peace**

Paul Kiss, New Life Church, Collingwood



**Verse** Psalm 85:8

“Are you happy to see me, or do I still owe you something?” There are times when you probably asked that question to yourself when thinking of another? The answer to that question reveals the level of peace between you and the amount of work needed to restore peace or shalom.

According to Bernard Ott, in a little book entitled, God’s Shalom Project, when we can laugh and say “Everything is all right between us!” we have peace, or shalom. Shalom is God’s desire for all of creation. God wills that we can look him in the eye and know, “things are all right between us,” and that we can say the same to each other, or that we can even look creation in the eye and smile.

Is Psalm 85:8 you will read, “I listen carefully to what God the LORD is saying, for he speaks peace to his faithful people...” God wants us to enjoy his peace/shalom. The theme of peace during this Advent season, is a reminder that the incarnation of Jesus is God’s plan to ensure that we always know we can look him in the eye and together say with a smile, “Everything is all right between us.”

**Prayer** May your prayer of peace this Advent be that of Julian of Norwich.

“All shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.”

All because of Jesus.

**December 22**

**Longing for a Saviour**

Curtis Zoerb, Massey Place, Saskatoon, SK



**Verse** Matthew 2:1-12

Today, we draw our attention to who the Magi were looking for. First, they asked Herod the foreign King, “where is the King of the Jews?”. Unknowingly slighting him and his tenuous rule over Judea. Next, Herod asks his Jewish advisors where the Messiah would be born, he obviously knows the Israelite prophecies about a Saviour who would rescue them. Then we read the prophecy in verse 6, stating that a Ruler of Israel would come, who would also be a Shepherd of the people.

King. Messiah. Ruler. Shepherd. Four different descriptions for the child who was born, under that star many years ago. Today, our star isn’t in the sky, but it’s these same scriptures that draw us toward the light of Jesus. Our needs are the same as these Magi and those anticipating the birth of a King. That he would save them, a leader who would rule and protect like a shepherd cares for their sheep. We long for the same person today - King, Saviour, Ruler, Shepherd. I know I long for the return of this same child – to rule our broken world, to save me, to protect us and to be our King, the King of all Kings, this is what I long for, how does Jesus fulfill your longing this advent season?

**Prayer** We come before you, longing for the coming Saviour. Until then we trust in your plan, your path, your love.



**December 21**

## Moments Of Longing

Curtis Zoerb, Massey Place, Saskatoon, SK



**Verse** Matthew 2:1-12

I'm seeing this familiar passage with new eyes this Advent season. These past few months have been filled with unexpected pain, laments of sorrow for family and friends and a deep longing for a better world. In this passage I am seeing a longing that I have never noticed before.

The Magi likely heard about the prophecy of a King of the Jews whose birth would be marked by a special star in the sky. As they watched the night sky and saw the star, I imagine their hearts were filled with excitement at meeting this new King. As they journeyed over what would have been weeks or months, this anticipation would have built, like a child's anticipation leading up to Christmas day. Searching for someone great, longing for something more.

I too have been longing for a better world, waiting for the return of the King of Kings. Knowing that this isn't the way it was created to be. I find a certain affinity with the Magi today, knowing that there is something great just over the horizon, journeying towards the long-awaited King.

**Prayer** God as we journey through this season, we carry with us the joys and sorrows of the past, and we long with anticipation for the future, in which all is made new. We look ahead to the day when the King is revealed for all weary travellers to worship.

**December 11**

## God in Us

Amber Reesor, Reunion Stouffville



**Verse** Luke 1:39-56

“. . . the baby in my womb leaped for joy.” Luke 1:44 (NIV)

I blinked my way through the shock of a positive pregnancy test. I was going to be a mom, a calling I hoped would happen someday but didn't imagine would be now. After telling my husband, I did what most women would do: I called my sister.

My sister was pregnant, too, just six weeks ahead of me. On each step of the journey, she guided me through my fears, not just as a cheerleader but as someone who could completely relate to it all — a true gift from God.

Elizabeth was six months ahead of Mary in her pregnancy. Imagine the comfort she brought to Mary! On top of being pregnant for the first time, Mary was carrying the Son of God, a significant and isolating task. In Elizabeth, Mary had someone who could celebrate, assure, and guide her, but most importantly, relate to her journey.

Mary's pregnancy was divine, but Luke's account notes that God also touched Elizabeth's pregnancy. When Elizabeth hears Mary's voice, the baby in her womb leaps with joy, and she is filled with the Holy Spirit, providing a taste of what is coming through the life and death of Jesus.

You have this gift of God dwelling within you, too.

**Prayer** God, thank you for the gift of Jesus, God with us. And thank you also for the gift of the Holy Spirit, God in us.

**December 12**

## **Mary's Song**

Amber Reesor, Reunion Stouffville



**Verse** Luke 1:48 (MSG)

“God took one good look at me, and look what happened — I’m the most fortunate woman on earth!”

Do you have one person with whom you can truly be yourself? Maybe it’s a partner, a sibling, or a friend. Elizabeth was this kind of friend to Mary, and we get a deeper glimpse into their friendship through Mary’s song.

Luke 1 gives us an honest glimpse into Mary’s heart as she verbalizes her feelings about the situation unfolding around her through her song. Take a minute and put yourself in Mary’s shoes. God is doing a miraculous thing through her. She is carrying God in the flesh within her own body. She trusts in His plan and is willing to serve Him. But she is still a human being in a challenging environment.

*Liar. Loose. Heretic. Attention-seeker. Lunatic.* I’m sure she heard them all. Yet when she enters Elizabeth’s home, she is given a safe space to let out all the emotions she is experiencing.

Mary is a woman bursting with joy for being used for God’s glory. She sees the role God has given her in His greater story. And she’s not afraid to let her cousin and all of us know exactly what she’s thinking.

**Prayer** God, thank you for the role you have given me to play in Your greater story. Give me a heart like Mary’s, willing to rejoice in the opportunities I’ve been given to serve your kingdom.

**December 20**

## **Treasure and Ponder**

Stephen Roy, Board Chair BIC Canada



**Verse** Luke 2:8-20

There are some experiences in life that we just do not forget. There is no point in listing them because I suspect they will be different for all of us. Whatever they are, it is good to carefully remember and think through all that happened. The memories may be ones that bring joy or deep pain but whatever they are, they cannot be forgotten.

I am struck with what is said in verse 19 that Mary treasured all these things that the shepherds had told them. Things about what they had experienced and of their quest to discover the newborn child announced by the angel. She treasured or kept all these things — what an interesting description! She responded positively to what she heard and took time to carefully consider and think over what she heard. Some things are hard to believe and take in and I suspect that is what she is doing, going over what she heard, saw, and tried to make some sort of sense out of it all.

In the rush of Christmas, when the pressure is on to get everything ready and prepared, those moments when we can slow down, take time to remember how the birth story of Jesus unfolded are precious. This Christmas, find those moments, take that time to do just that. Just like Mary.

**Prayer** Lord, thank you for the activity of Christmas but help me find those moments to remember the story and think carefully about what happened.

**December 19**

## Meeting the New Baby

Stephen Roy, Board Chair BIC Canada



**Verse** Luke 2:8-20

Can you imagine seeing the baby for the first time? It must have been an amazing experience for the shepherds. Earlier this year my wife and I became grandparents for the second time. Two days after she was born, we got to meet her, hold her and revel in the joy of a new life. What an amazing experience. The shepherds were directed to the town of Bethlehem and given some clues about how and where they would find this incredibly special baby. While not part of the immediate family, they could not stop talking about what they had seen and experienced. Who could blame them? It is hard not to share with others the experience of seeing a new baby, especially after seeing them for the first time. The shepherds returned to their flocks on the hills full of joy and praise to God for what they had heard and seen. I am struck by their joy and as a grandparent, I can fully appreciate that.

Life can and is often hard and it brings disappointment and sadness. There are other experiences that provide the opposite response and create joy. I am struck afresh with the realization that the birth of Jesus brings joy, expressed here in praise to God.

**Prayer** Thank you, Lord, for the news of the birth of baby Jesus. Fill my heart with joy at the news of his coming and help me to share that joy with others.

**December 13**

## A Surprising Message

Brandon Claveau, Wainfleet BIC



**Verse** Matthew 18:18-24

When we read the Christmas story, it's easy to gloss over the strangeness of Joseph's situation.

He's pledged to be married to woman who, it turns out, is pregnant with a child that isn't his. He's about to divorce her (quietly, refusing to shame her publicly), when he's visited in a dream by a divine messenger and told to go through with the wedding and raise the child (who happens to be God-incarnate!) as his own. So, Joseph has a choice make: divorce Mary, as he would have been expected to do, or trust the messenger—even though the whole thing seems nuts—and go through with the wedding. In the end, Joseph's faithfulness wins out.

The message of Christmas is a surprising one. Are we really expected to believe that the creator of the universe came to earth as a human baby in a backwater town in rural Palestine? Like Joseph, we too have a choice to make. Will we be open to the surprise of the incarnation, even when it forces us to rethink our assumptions about how the world works? Or will we let what we think we know about the world blind us to God's work within it.

**Prayer** Dear God, may we be open to the surprising message of the incarnation—that You took on human flesh and walked among us—and may we be obedient to the call to follow You, even when it may seem foolish. Amen.

**December 14**

## **Any Room?**

Todd Lester, BIC Canada



**Verse** Luke 2:1-7

“(She) laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

The manger story is the quintessential Christmas scene. To this day, even for secular people, nativity sets represent Christmas. Last year, while at the Christmas markets in Munich, Germany, I noted that there were mangers everywhere, in every shape and size. Merchandisers are clearly making the most of the Christmas spirit. However, the point of the manger is that it represents that Jesus was not born in a palace like other kings. Jesus was not even born in a motel ... there was no room for him. The hymn says, “Let every heart prepare him room.” The hymn presents a challenge. We must examine something that is all too familiar and capture the moment like it is the first time we have read the story and prepare him room in our heart.

To prepare him room is not easy, especially at Christmas. Our minds are too busy with presents, parties, and pageants; our activities are too satisfying with family, friends, and food; and our hearts are too crowded with traditions old and new. It is easy to miss the moment when that which was transcendent became touchable ... in a manger.

**Prayer** Our Father, help us strip away the things that cloud our vision so that we can see clearly our humble King and loving Saviour, born for all in a manger.

**December 18**

## **The Angel Messenger**

Stephen Roy, Board Chair BIC Canada



**Verse** Luke 2:8-20

The evening began like any other evening. The sheep were settling, and the shepherds were looking forward to a quiet night. Then, suddenly, without warning, the sky lit up and an angel of the Lord appeared to them. Their reaction was one of terror. The appearance of an angel was not on the bingo card for that evening I suspect. One of the questions that comes to mind is how did they know this was an angel? I guess they may have been familiar with stories about angel appearances in their scriptures but still, this was an amazing experience that none of them had had before. The angel tells them not to be afraid and then shares with them news of a birth. Not just any baby, but a baby who is described as the Messiah, the Lord. Then the angel is joined by a great company of the heavenly host who praise God.

When the angels leave, the shepherds also leave their sheep and go to find this baby. They find him and in turn become messengers, sharing with the new parents and others they met what they had experienced.

Like the shepherds, Advent is a time when we too become messengers, sharing with others the good news of the birth of the Saviour.

**Prayer** Gracious God, thank you for the way I heard about Jesus. Please give me the strength and courage to share the news of Jesus with someone this Christmas.

**December 17**

## **The Fullness of Joy!**

Dennis Ball, Sixth Line BIC, Stayner



**Verse** Matthew 2:10-11

"When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him."

My early Christmas memories are of a home adorned with twinkling lights, and a crackling fire. A beautifully decorated Christmas tree stood in the corner, adorned with colourful ornaments.

I remember eagerly tearing open presents with my siblings, revealing toys, books, and treasures. Our eyes lit up with wonder and happiness, and our unrestrained joy spilled out as we discovered many new delights. I imagine this is what the Magi experienced when they were in the divine presence of the Savior, the promised Messiah.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we encounter a beautiful scene where the Magi, guided by a star, journeyed from distant lands to find the newborn King, Jesus. As they finally reached their destination and saw the star shining over the place where Jesus lived, the text tells us that they were overjoyed.

The Magi's joy was not a result of their own achievements. Instead, it came from their encounter with Jesus. Similarly, our joy is not found in pursuing worldly success or material possessions. True joy is found in knowing Jesus and experiencing His presence in our lives.

**Prayer** Lord, I want my eyes lit up with wonder and happiness, with unrestrained joy spilling out from me as I eagerly await Your return. Amen.

**December 15**

## **Come and Worship**

Todd Lester, BIC Canada



**Verse** Luke 2:1-7

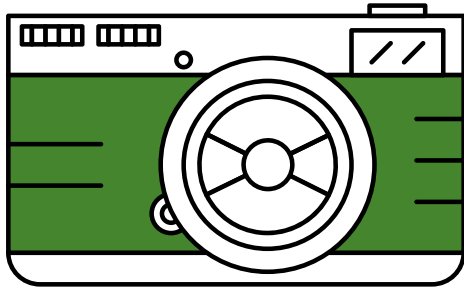
"(She) laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

As important as the nativity scene is to our celebrations, I think we oversentimentalize it. A manger is where they put the cattle food. The cattle stick their noses in it, saliva comes out. It's not exactly a sanitary place for a newborn. Yet, that's where God was born. It foreshadowed what was to come. Jesus was not the type of king people expected. He was born in a manger and he would die on a cross, the suffering servant foretold in Isaiah.

Despite the irregularity of it all, those who captured the moment trusted the revelation they had been given and came to worship the newborn baby Jesus. Christmas is a moment when worship is required. As said previously, the risk is that our minds and hearts are filled to the brim and there is no worship, no room for Him. It might be good for us to simplify our Christmas activities and ensure that we too ... come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ the newborn King. I like the people of Whoville. Even when the Grinch steals everything, they know what to do. They continue with their carols filled with the harmony, happiness and hope stemming from a deeper sense of what Christmas is really about.

**Prayer** Father, restore the centrality of Jesus in our lives so that in this season, and all seasons, we can worship our King and our Saviour.





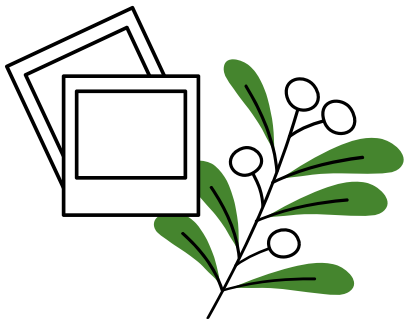
# Capture the Moment

## SATURDAY DECEMBER 16TH

It's time to capture your own Christmas moments. Each Saturday you are invited to take pictures and post them on a social media site, Facebook or Instagram, with the hashtag #capturethemoment and or #BICadvent.

**Advent is a season for acts of kindness. Capture moments of kindness this weekend.**

- Catch someone doing an act of kindness and take their picture.
- Donate a new toy to a local charity. Capture the moment you drop the toy in the box.
- Donate a food item to a local food bank or a grocery store drop box. Capture the drop-off.
- Go carolling and take a picture of your group.



DECEMBER 17

# JOY

On this 3rd Sunday of Advent we light the candle of Joy. This candle reflects the joy that comes through Jesus' arrival and the salvation he has gifted us.

"Those who have been ransomed by the Lord will return. They will enter Jerusalem with singing, crowned with everlasting joy. Sorrow and mourning will disappear, and they will be filled with joy and gladness."

Isaiah 35:10

"Sing for joy, O Heavens! Rejoice, O earth! Burst into song, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on them in their suffering."

Isaiah 49:13

"...but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said, "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Saviour – yes, the Messiah, the Lord – has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David."

Luke 2:10-11

### Prayer for Joy:

God of joy, we seek you. As we bring light to dark places in the world, we pause in this advent season to prepare anew for the birth of your son, Jesus, a sign of your love for us: joy and assurance when we need it most.

