

# Advent-ures With God

Join us on an ADVENT-ure at Toowong Uniting Church. Starting December 1, would you commit to doing five things:

**ONE: Pray Daily** – set yourself the challenge of spending a consistent length of time in prayer. Whether 10 minutes or two hours, the length matters less than your resolve to devoting some uninterrupted time to just being with God.

**TWO: Daily Nourish Your Soul from God's Word** – take some time each day to read the bible and ponder its word, As part of these adventures with God we will suggest a passage and provide a short reflection on it for each day but reading our notes is much less important than thinking carefully about the scripture passage looking for ways to put what you read into practice and seeing how it might inform your prayers

**THREE: One Act of Fasting per Week** – Advent was once, like lent a time of fasting. Fasting normally involves abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. It is not so much that we deny ourselves in order to earn spiritual credit and favours from God. Rather the act of abstinence expresses our love for and devotion to God, expecting nothing in return. Advent-ures with God challenges us to one act of fasting per week. Depending on your past experience, this might be fasting for one day each week, or one meal per week, or like lent doing without a different luxury each week (chocolate, soft drinks etc).

**FOUR: A Weekly Act of Worship** – Commit yourself to joining with God's people once each week for corporate worship. This is important because when we commit ourselves to personal devotions it is easy to assume this is all we need. But it is not. We must also worship in the company of one another. Of course there are times when we simply cannot get to church.

**FIVE: A Daily Act of Service** – find an opportunity each day to intentionally serve someone else through word or action. It might be as simple as offering a compliment where you would have kept silent, sending a card of encouragement, inviting someone for a meal, lending a helping hand, picking up a piece of rubbish.

The ADVENT-ure: I will commit to

1. Pray every day
2. Nourish my soul daily from God's Word
3. One act of fasting per week
4. A weekly time of worship
5. A daily act of service

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Toowong Uniting Church  
Advent 2010—Week 4



## The Bad (or Good) News About Jesus

The day after Christmas can be disappointing. Maybe some part of the holiday didn't meet our expectations. Maybe we just don't want it to be over. Maybe the new year frightens us. Perhaps Mary and Joseph felt similarly after Jesus' birth. In the days to come they had to face the bad news with the good.

*Adapted from Bible Study Material by Mark Mitchell and JoHanna Reardon*

# Week 4 Day 1

## Core Reading

## Luke 2:22-38

We don't always think a lot about what happened during the days after that wondrous night in the stable. The Gospel writer, Luke, tells us that Mary and Joseph presented Jesus in the temple, where they were met by the prophets Simeon and Anna.

In the 14th century, an Italian artist named Ambrogio Lorenzetti painted this scene. Simeon and Anna are at the altar. Mary and Joseph look on in amazed silence. The prophetess Anna has her eyes fixed on the child. The bearded Simeon, with a solemn look on his face, stares down at the baby in his arms. Yet the baby Jesus at the center of the picture surprises everyone. They all gaze awe-struck at him because he's sucking his thumb! The family may marvel, the aged Simeon and Anna may prophesy, but this little child—this thumb-sucking baby Jesus—is not exactly what was expected.

Luke doesn't really tell us that Jesus was sucking his thumb. But there are some surprising things about this scene. This study will look at some of these surprises.

## Discussion Questions:

- [Q]** What are some misconceptions you might have (or have had) about the Christmas story?
- [Q]** How have artwork and media affected the way you look at Christ's birth? How have they helped you? How have they given you false impressions?
- [Q]** Is there anything about Jesus' birth that surprises you?

Today I will pray for:

## Postscript

As I think about Simeon and Anna beholding the baby Jesus, their eyes widening in awe that they have been allowed just to see God's promised salvation; as I picture Simeon taking the baby Jesus in his arms I see an image of the Old Testament holding the New, the Old Covenant beholding the New – the best of what God has previously done delighting in the new thing that God now plans to do.

We approach the end of 2010 - a year that we can never have again, a year that has brought both joys and sorrows, tragedies and triumphs, pain and pleasure, at least for most of us. This old year is about to pass into a new year – and I hope that all of us could join with Anna and Simeon in our willingness to embrace whatever God has in store for us here at Toowong Uniting Church.

I don't know what the new year will hold for us together, but I'm convinced that God wants to do the same two things that Simeon and Anna did. To prophesy and to preach, to witness and to worship, to revere God (Simeon's act) and then to reveal him to others (Anna act).

But even more importantly, my prayer is that each of us could say with them, "Lord, I've seen Jesus, (Not physically like they did), but I understand who he is and what he's done for me. I've prayed and I've fasted and worshipped day and night if necessary to work out who Jesus is, I've watched and looked and sought with all my strength – seeking the consolation not just of Israel, but of the whole world and because the Lord has answered my prayers I can say with Simeon, 'Sovereign Lord, now dismiss your servant in peace for my eyes have seen your salvation.'"

Today's intentional act of service:

## Week 4 Day 2

### Core Reading

### Luke 2:25-32

Luke took pains to describe Simeon. He was an ideal Jew. He embodied everything God intended for his people. He was righteous and devout. He operated with integrity toward God and others. He had also been waiting for the consolation of Israel, which is another way of saying he was waiting for the Messiah. This Messiah would bring consolation—comfort to people who were anxious and oppressed. The Holy Spirit, who is also called “the Comforter,” was upon Simeon, and had revealed to him that he would actually see the Messiah before he died.

Have you ever waited anxiously for a letter that would bring some kind of important news? You knew it would come, but until you held it in your hand, you could not rest. You checked your mailbox daily. We can imagine Simeon entering the temple each day, wondering if this would be the day—in a sense, waiting for the letter God had promised. And one day he sensed the Spirit leading him into the temple, when Mary and Joseph entered with their baby. He took the child in his arms, thanked God, and began to pray. He could now die a contented man—the letter had come; the comfort had arrived; his dreams were fulfilled.

**[Q]** Mary and Joseph discover who Jesus is in bits and pieces. What must have been their understanding at this point?

**[Q]** What new thing did Simeon reveal to them (v. 32)? Why would this be significant?

**Note:** *Even though the angel Gabriel had told the shepherds, “I bring you good news of great joy, which shall be for all the people,” it was assumed he meant the people of Israel. But here it is clear: Israel’s glory is that the Messiah*

comes through them, but his coming is not just for them—it's for Gentiles as well. In these days of equal opportunity, that may not mean a whole lot to us, but you can be sure it was a shock to Mary and Joseph. Even though they might not understand it all, they could understand enough to see that their son would be more than just a national hero. His impact would be worldwide.

**[Q]** In what way was Jesus the fulfillment of everything the Old Testament prophets had hoped for?

Today I will pray for:

Today's intentional act of service will be:

## Week 4 Day 3

**Core Reading**  
**Secondary Reading**

**Luke 2:34-38**  
**Romans 8: 18-28**

Imagine the pride Mary and Joseph felt at Simeon's prophecy. But then Simeon spoke again, and they must have wondered if they heard him right. Read Luke 2:34–35.

For the first time in Luke's Gospel, a dark thread is woven into a bright tapestry. Mary and Joseph's faces must have fallen upon hearing these words. Their first thoughts might have been: *But wait a minute, we're doing everything right. We're doing everything by the book. How can this be? Where have we gone wrong?*

Who wants to have their son described like this? He'll cause "the falling and rising of many in Israel." No one will stay the same.

## Week 4 Day 5

**Bringing things together**  
**Reread Luke 2:22-38**

If you are satisfied with life as it is, if you have no longing in your heart for consolation or redemption, this good news of Christ will ultimately be bad news. He'll be a stumbling block over which you will fall; he'll be a sign you will oppose; he'll expose your heart, and you will refuse to stay in the light.

But perhaps God has been graciously and tenderly frustrating you with a life that is not centered on Christ. Maybe he's been filling you with longings and desires that cannot find their fulfillment in cars or houses or careers or relationships or anything else this world has to offer. Maybe he's been exposing your own heart, and you see there a need for someone beyond yourself to comfort and redeem you.

To give new plants the best chance to survive, we have to be a little ruthless with them. When we take them out of their plastic container, we inspect the soil ball. If the plant has been growing in its pot so long that the roots are circling the bottom, we must untangle the roots. If the whole pot is filled with circling roots, we have to be merciless. It's better to break the roots than to allow the roots to become bound and worthless.

Maybe you feel like you have been roughed up a bit. That could be God's severe mercy, because through that you may come to long for comfort and redemption. If this is true of you, then the coming of Christ is good news. The good news is that Christ has come and will come again, and only he can bring you consolation and redemption.

**Action Point:** Take a few moments to silently meditate. Ask yourself how you should respond to Jesus Christ: Do you need to trust him? Let him draw his light into your darkness? Let him "untangle your roots"? Be honest before God and ask him to begin to do a new work in you.

Today I will pray for:

the woman, but agreed. He walked off with his cash, and the woman walked home, opened the cage, and let the birds go. What a good illustration of how Christ redeemed those destined for destruction, not with a few dollars, but with his own life.

**[Q]** Simeon and Anna looked, longed for, and waited for God.  
How can we do that?

**[Q]** How has Christ brought consolation and redemption to you?  
Give practical examples.

**Today I will pray for:**

**Today's intentional act of service:**

Those who stand up and reject him will fall; those who humbly receive him will rise up. By their reaction to him, Jesus will split the nation in two. Some will see him as “a sign [to] be spoken against.” He won't be winning “Most Popular” at the middle school in Nazareth.

But why would he garner such opposition? Simeon said that the thoughts of many hearts will be exposed. People don't like to be exposed. People who prefer to stay in hiding resent exposure. No wonder they would oppose him.

There will even be a cost to Mary. A sword will pierce her soul. Maybe that means that she will endure what every parent fears most—she'll bury her son. Or maybe it means that Mary herself would have to make up her own mind about him, that her own heart would be exposed and divided.

Simeon's words are mysterious. But you don't require a Ph.D. in literature to figure out that there is something ominous going on here. But we shouldn't be surprised. When you turn on a light, it creates shadows. To be a savior assumes that people need saving. Some people embrace that; others resent it. Some people rise; others fall.

But the story doesn't end there. There are some people for whom the bad news is good news after all. Read verses 36–38.

Like Miriam and Deborah in the Old Testament, Anna is a prophet. She is from the tribe of Asher—one of the lost ten tribes. She's 84 years old, and most of that time she's been a widow. When it says she never left the temple, it may mean that she lived in one of the rooms of the many buildings on the temple hill. Anna is the kind of woman who is devoted to the church, serving the Lord with fasting and prayers.

We don't know how much of what Simeon had to say she had been able to hear, but at any rate she gives thanks to God and starts spreading the news to those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. Perhaps Anna had lived long enough to know that what is bad news for some is good news for others.

**[Q]** Why is Jesus Christ good news for some but bad news for others? How do our decisions determine whether he is good or bad news to us?

**[Q]** How does Jesus expose your heart?

What makes that either good or bad?

**[Q]** Give an example of a time when you've observed Jesus be a dividing line for someone.

**[Q]** Why would Simeon and Anna have been happy, in spite of knowing that Jesus would be such a controversial person?

**[Q]** How does knowing this about Jesus give us perspective on others' reactions to him?

Today I will pray for:

Today's intentional act of service will be;

## Week 4 Day 4

**Core Reading**  
**Secondary Reading**

**Luke 2:25,38**  
**Isaiah 52:7-10**

What makes the difference? Why is the coming of Jesus good news for some and bad news for others? The answer lies in Simeon and Anna. We've seen how Luke takes pains to paint a vivid picture of these two. And the thought that jumps off the page in verses 25 and 38 is that both were looking and hoping for God to do something. Verse 25 says Simeon was "waiting for the consolation of Israel." Verse 38 says Anna spoke of the child "to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem," which no doubt she was doing also.

Simeon and Anna saw the coming of Christ as good news rather than bad because they were looking, longing, and waiting for God to break into history again and bring consolation and redemption. In the back of Luke's mind might have been an ancient prophecy from the prophet Isaiah. Read Isaiah 52:9.

In the coming of Christ, this prophecy was fulfilled. The Lord has consoled his people—that's what Simeon was looking for; and the Lord has redeemed Jerusalem—that's what Anna was looking for. Consolation speaks to our longings for healing and restoration from all of the past losses and miseries of life. Redemption delivers us from powers that hold us in bondage. It could be the power of sin. It could be the power of death. It could be the power of Satan.

A woman met a young boy on the street; he was carrying a rusty cage in which several birds fluttered nervously. The woman asked, "Son, where did you get those birds?" The boy said, "I trapped them out in the fields." The woman asked, "What are you going to do with them?" The boy said, "I'm going to play with them, and then I guess I'll just feed them to an old cat we have at home."

Then the woman offered to buy them, and the boy tried to talk her out of it because they were good for nothing. The woman said, "I'll give you ten dollars for the cage and the birds." The boy felt bad for