

# FAITH MATTERS



## Journey to Bethlehem

Christmas is a time for generosity. The gifts don't need to be expensive or extravagant. Like the shepherds, who only had their awe and devotion, the best gift we can give is the gift of our hearts. In Jesus, God gives us the most precious gift of all. Whatever this Christmas looks like, whoever we may or may not be celebrating with, God's gift is for everyone. From the lowly shepherds to the wealthy Magi, we are all invited to the birth of Jesus to delight in God's grace.

We pray that Christmas brings blessing and that as you journey towards Bethlehem, you'll experience the joy and peace of knowing Jesus.

Every Blessing

EPCS Leadership Team

## Keeping in touch

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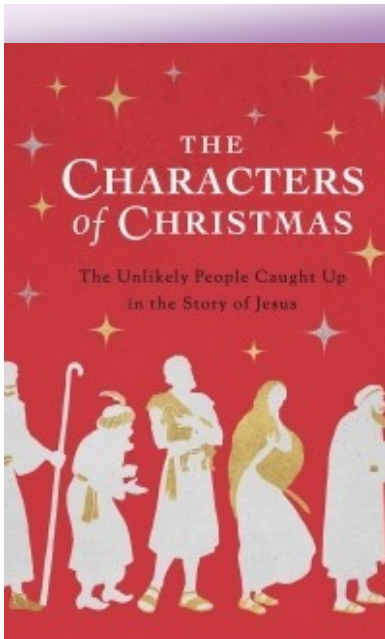
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## Inside this issue

Current Programme .....	2
Characters of Christmas.....	2,3
Mary, did you know.....	3
Farewell Thanks.....	4
Daily Verse.....	4
What's On Dec.....	4
Finance .....	5
Children's Church./SYC...	5
And Finally.....	6



## Reflections: The Characters of Christmas

During November, we began to consider the characters that feature in the Nativity. In 'The Characters of Christmas', Daniel Darling invites us to take a fresh look at the Nativity through the ordinary characters who represent each of us so well. We are becoming familiar with them not because their lives are the point of the story, but because their lives point ultimately to the one character whose birth changed

the world: Jesus Christ. He is the light that illuminates their lives and for those who believe, He illuminates our own. We are called to reflect that light to those around us. As we study these characters, we can be inspired. Just as these ordinary people played a role in one of the most life transforming events, so to can we play a role in the transforming those around us.

*“Often the personalities in Scripture we think we know the best are the ones we least understand.” Michael Card*

### December Programme

#### Sunday

11am Sunday Celebration in the building and live streamed on Facebook

12noon After Service Catch Up Zoom.

#### Wednesday 7.30pm

2nd and 16th Prayer Meeting

9th Reflections

#### Thursday

Throwback Thursday

#### Mon to Fri

Daily Advent Devotions provided by 24 Elim Ministers

(Facebook Page)

Daily Verse (Text)

**Joseph** (Matthew 1:18-25) We meet Joseph as an engaged man who surely had plans yet in the midst of this dreaming his life, his future and his faith would be tested. We don't know how the news of Mary's pregnancy was broken to him and can only imagine the shock and betrayal he may have felt. He was just faithfully living his life, building for his future family and trusting his fiancée to be devout and faithful. His options were to publicly shame her to the religious authorities, possibly resulting in her stoning, or to privately divorce her. Either way, he would face questions from his family and friends and endure embarrassment in his community. Yet, he did not respond out of anger; he showed grace and poise as he considered his response. He was righteous, committed to following the law yet in a selfless compassionate way. A quiet divorce.

However, God sent a heavenly messenger, this time in a dream. God has chosen Joseph to steward His Son. He refers to Joseph as a 'son of David'. This title has authority, reminds Joseph of his royal lineage and prepares him for the task ahead. He is reminded of scripture, how this child will be the fulfilment of prophesy.

The angel appealed to Joseph using his legacy and scripture. We see that Joseph knew who he was and knew his scripture.

Joseph's response to God's call, he immediately obeyed. He said yes to giving up his reputation, to bearing the shame for sins he did not commit, to lose the comfort and safety of his home, being a refugee in Egypt, to ensuring the welfare of God's son.

## The Characters of Christmas cont.

**Zechariah and Elizabeth** (Luke 1) God had not spoke through his prophets for 400 years. Israel had been shaken by revolution and war. God's people were scattered. The Romans ruled, with the ruthless Herod as king. We meet Zechariah, an ordinary priest and his wife Elizabeth. God ends his 400 years silence by choosing this man who's name means 'the Lord has remembered'.

Here was a devout couple who were faithful in their service, 'counted as righteous'. Yet they suffered the pain of being childless.

As Zechariah is in the Holy place, lighting the incense, an angel appears. He speaks of the birth of a child, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to point the people to Jesus, the long awaited Messiah. Zechariah's response 'How can these things be?', encrusted with cynicism and doubt. In punishment for this sin he is struck mute. In a way, this was a gift, an opportunity to sit in silence before the Lord. Sometimes God needs to silence us so we can hear him. By the birth of his son and his direction that the child be named John, it is evident that Zechariah experienced a renewal of obedience and faith. Just as God had birthed life into Elizabeth's barren womb; He would birth new life in his people thought Jesus.

**Mary** (Luke 1 26-56) Luke presents to us Mary, a teenage, Jewish, peasant girl. There was nothing special about her. You could say she was insignificant. She came from Nazareth, a back water town in Judea, the least desirable part of Caesar's empire. You could say it was insignificant. God's people were scattered, downtrodden and weary. Their culture overturned by the conquering Greeks then Romans, ruled by the ruthless Herod. You could say they were insignificant. Yet it was Mary God chose to birth the Son of God.

The appearance of the angel Gabriel and his greeting 'you are highly favoured' shakes Mary. She knew she was not worthy of his favour, aware of her sinfulness and God's holiness. She did not deserve and had not earned His favour but was graciously accepted but God. Mary's question 'How can this be' was not one of doubt but of curiosity. How could a virgin give birth? The natural process of procreation could in no way produce a child who is God. Only God, through the Holy Spirit could bring about this new life. The human impossibility is overcome God's immeasurable power.

Mary's response to God's call was one of faithful submission. She said yes to the weight of responsibility of raising God's son, to shame and scorn, to witnessing miracles but seeing her son sacrificed. Yet God would sustain this insignificant girl in her role as she played her part in one of history's most significant events.

### Mary Did You Know

Mary did you know that your baby boy will one day walk on water?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?

Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new? This child that you've delivered will soon deliver you.

Mary, did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy will calm a storm with His hand?

Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod? And when you kissed your little baby you've kissed the face of God.

Oh, Mary did you know?

The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the dead will live again. The lame will leap, the dumb will speak the praises of the Lamb.

Mary, if you knew, how wonderful for you that He'd choose you to bring to us the King of Kings. God bless you Mary.

Mary, did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy will one day rule the nations?

Did you know that your baby boy is Heaven's perfect Lamb. This sleeping child you're holding is the Great I Am.

Mary did you know, did you know He's Lord of all creation?

Did you know, did you know He's the ruler of our nations?

He walks where angels trod, He is the Son of God.

Oh Mary did you know, did you know

## A Selection of Novembers Daily Verses

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up  
Galatians 6:9

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.  
Jeremiah 29:11

'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.' Jeremiah 33:3

For where you treasure is, there your heart is also.  
Luke 12 34

## Farewell...

It was great to see so many attend Pastor John's Farewell Services, a celebration of his time here. He was touched by the numerous video messages and has asked that we pass on his thanks for the gifts and cards he received. As a fellowship we presented him with a financial gift and a printed photo album containing pictures of events and

activities we've shared together over his 8 years of service.



## What's On: December

We praise that Lord that despite being in Tier 3 we can still gather physically in the church building. The same conditions apply as previously (hands, face, space) with no congregational singing. We appreciate that many will wish to remain at home, even some that may have attended over the summer. With this in mind, from Sunday 6th Dec we have decided to hold one service at 11am which will also be live streamed. Booking will once again be essential for those physically attending.

From 1st Dec, on Facebook, Advent daily devotions from 24 Elim ministers.

Sunday 6th Dec Journey to Bethlehem: Inn-Keeper

Saturday 12th Dec Children's Christmas Service 2.00 pm

Sunday 13th Dec Journey to Bethlehem: Shepherds

Sunday 20th Dec Nativity (prerecorded with individual families). Message J. John

Christmas Morning Online Celebration at 11am. Message Chris Cartwright

Sunday 27th Dec online only.

### Volunteers needed

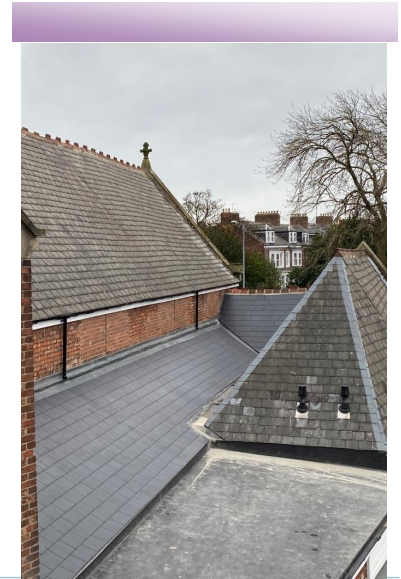
Are you available between 17th and 19th Dec? Could take a street around the church and deliver a card and newspaper? Please help us deliver the true message of Christmas to our community?

Please use this opportunity to share God's loving gift, our Lord Jesus, and invite friends and family to take part in our Christmas celebrations whether they be in person or digitally this year.

## Finance & Thanksgiving

We thank God for His financial provision and for your continued financial support. The repairs to the roof are complete and our building is once again water tight. A huge thanks to Windsor Roofing for a job well done.

We have ordered Christmas literature including the Christmas edition of the New Life Paper to distribute to the surrounding community. Please pray for the Foodbank Team in the run up to Christmas. We are already aware of 40 families who will need parcels Christmas week. If you would like to donate please contact the church mobile to arrange delivery or collection.



*“Follow me and I will make you fishers of men .” Matthew 4:19*

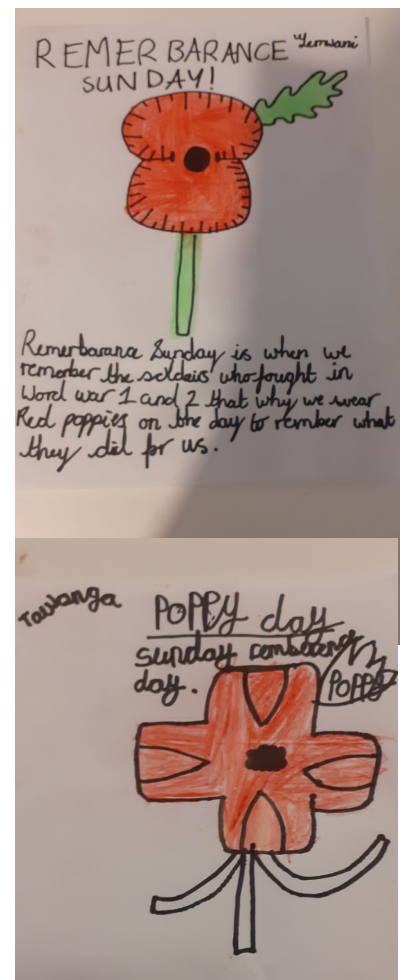
## Children’s Church and Sunday Youth Church

It has been wonderful via Zoom to have the opportunity to see each other and catch up on what is happening at school, with their lessons and friends, and take the opportunity to have games, teaching, bible quizzes and prayer online. Life is quite different in school and yet many things are still the same. They are all getting used to the new norms, so please pray that our Lord takes away all anxiety they may feel when they are out and about or in school, and for God’s protection.

It has been lovely to hear that the children are enjoying their weekly worship and teaching videos by their wonderful parents sending us photos; we have heard some of SYC are enjoying the weekly worship videos too! Children’s Church has been looking at the life of Jesus. We have

examined His baptism, time in the desert, calling the first disciples, Sermon on the Mount and Jesus calming the storm this month. SYC have learnt about and reflected on the lives of God’s people in Genesis, including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and this week will be Joseph. We will be popping round to drop off a small reminder of Advent to all our children and young people this weekend.

Currently, we are preparing to record our digital Nativity Story for Christmas. We are very grateful for the support our amazing parents are giving us. The build up to Christmas and celebrating Jesus birth is an exciting time and full of hope.



Elim Pentecostal Church  
Sunderland

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We passionately believe that God has a plan and purpose for you He loves you and wants you to come to know him through Jesus. We are a Christian community for all generations and nationalities.

We would love to hear from you too, so please send in any news, stories, prayer requests or praise reports.

Thank You..

## And Finally..

Life was tough for Datha and her family. At 39, she had a heart attack and bypass surgery, and was told she had coronary artery disease. A year later her daughter, Heather was paralysed in a car accident. Datha quit her job to care for Heather but the bills soon started piling up. Shortly, she would face eviction. Datha was so angry with God, she stopped praying.

Christmas came and a girl knocked at the door and wished her Merry Christmas passing over an envelope. Inside a note read, "Please accept this gift in honour of the man whose birth we celebrate this season. He had a shelter problem too." Inside was enough money to cover a month's rent.

Jesus understood Datha's troubles. He brought her hope and met her needs through others who had the funds to support her.

We can cast all our cares on him ( 1 Peter 5:7)

In Christ we find shelter and refuge (Psalm 61 3-4)

Elim Pentecostal Church  
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