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# DAILY DEVOTIONS

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A thought to comfort and encourage you



Light Lutheran Church  
Pastor Geoff Kuchel

January 2025  
Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> -Saturday 17<sup>th</sup>



**LUTHERAN CHURCH**

OF AUSTRALIA

*where love comes to life*

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I know well (paraphr.) from Solomon's words,  
Verily certain sayings I have heard much  
have I as iron trees grown up; In them I  
of darts (as it) have found wisdom.  
Of experience & knowledge together ally with  
the power of applying them critically with  
practicality, maturity, prudence, common  
sense & wise sayings (pour forth ~ W-  
Solomon, abbe. Wisd., W- of Jesus  
Apocrypha); ~tooth, molar, ~ally  
for 20 years of age (cut one's own teeth  
with discretion). [OE (OS) ~ of persons  
having (of action, course, speech, opinion  
etc.) dictated by or in harmony with  
or showing, experience & knowledge  
judiciously applied, sagacious, prudent,  
sensible, discreet; having knowledge  
after the manner of]

## ON THE MOUNTAIN

by Jim Strelan

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above all the hills and all nations will stream to it (Isaiah 2:2).

Read [Isaiah 2:1–5](#)

Which is the highest mountain in the world? Which is the highest mountain in Australia? In Adelaide (I spent most of my young life there), there's Mount Lofty. When we would come home on leave from Papua New Guinea, I would look forward to seeing Mount Lofty, only to be disappointed. Compared with the mountains in PNG, let's face it, it doesn't rate. Sorry, Adelaideans, that's not a mountain. That's a hill! But then, Brisbane people can't talk. We have Mount Gravatt, which should be called Mound Gravatt!

In the Bible, mountains are significant. Moses goes up the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments. You go 'up' to Jerusalem. Jesus gives what we know of as the Sermon on the Mount – although that was probably really just a small incline. Jesus is transfigured on the mountain. Jesus gives the Great Commission and ascends to heaven from a mountain. Mountains are important.

The grand Gothic cathedral in Cologne, Germany, once towered above everything else surrounding it so that it could be seen for many kilometres. Like a beacon. A calling point. Like a towering mountain. God is here. Everyone can see it. Isaiah speaks of a time when the temple will be established on the hill, raised so that 'all nations will stream to it' (Isaiah 2:2b). All nations. Jews and non-Jews.

Jesus comes down from the mountain to dwell among us. To live the life we live. To rub shoulders with us. But then he is taken to a hill, Golgotha, and there he is lifted up to be crucified on a Roman cross. John 12:32 has Jesus saying, 'And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.' All people. His arms are stretched out for you, for me, for all people, all nationalities and cultures.

If there is a mountain near you, or even a hill that is called a mountain, look up. See it. Acknowledge the presence of God. Or if there is only flatness around you, still look up, away from yourself. God is there. God is near. Not just for you. Not just for your community. For all. And thank him.

*Thank you, God, for your presence. I lift my eyes to the hills. I know where my strength comes from. Draw me and all people to yourself. Amen*



## A THOUGHT TO COMFORT AND ENCOURAGE YOU

### STARGAZERS

by Jim Strelan



We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him (Matthew 2:2b).

Read [Matthew 2:1–12](#)

Do you ever read your stars in the newspaper or magazines – if anyone still reads those things? I mean, just for fun. So vague that what they say could be true for anyone! Some people take them seriously. They know their birth sign and enjoy learning others' signs so they can read their character. Gazing at the stars to determine direction for their lives.

Some stargazers looked to the skies, and they pointed to Jesus. Men from the east, probably from modern Iran, not kings but astrologers, finding meaning in the stars. They follow an unusual star, and they go to the house where Jesus is with his mother and Joseph, and they present their extravagant gifts. And they bow down and worship him.

Quite extraordinary, really. Not people steeped in the Jewish religion. Not among those awaiting the coming of the Messiah. Not those who had studied the Hebrew Scriptures. But stargazers. Finding meaning in the stars.

We tend to think that there are set ways to find Jesus. We can create a list, and it's not very big, but it's exclusive. No other way. However, that puts things into a box, and God can never be boxed. He has several ways to reach seekers, and we might consider some of them unusual. Like writing in the sky. In a star. And this visit from these astrologers is perhaps a precursor, a pointer – this Jesus is not just for some, but for all. Where do you look to find Jesus so that you can worship him? In the word? In a bit of bread and a sip of wine? In one near you in need of your help? In a broken relationship healed, shame and guilt taken away, in the face of a child who looks up at you with complete trust and faith? In the sky, the light of the sun, the moon and the stars, reminding you of the One who is light in our darkness? These Iranian astrologers found their way to the feet of the Christ-child, gave their precious gifts and worshipped him. Will you?

***Jesus, I search for you. But you found me. In all the circumstances of my life, you found me. My looking and searching are now only to affirm your finding of me. Thank you. Shine your light like a bright shining star so that I can come and worship you. Amen.***

## A THOUGHT TO COMFORT AND ENCOURAGE YOU

### ONE LORD

By Jim Strelan



On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name (Zechariah 14:9b).

Read [Zechariah 14:6–11](#)

This is a difficult passage. And it's the kind of passage that some Christians use to justify every action of Israel in the current Middle East tragedy. Texts like this confirm their belief that Jerusalem will stand whatever is thrown against it. It must stand. And everyone will acknowledge God as the one and only ruler of all. The 'day of the Lord' will come, so Israel and her actions must be justified at all costs! We are still in the post-Christmas period when we celebrate the birth of the Saviour, God's chosen one, who came into the world to draw all people to God. His birth is a 'day of the Lord'. As Jesus began his ministry – and throughout his ministry – he was rejected by many and welcomed by many. Some wanted him to be king, but Jesus rejected their notion of kingship. Instead, 'he became obedient to death – even death on a cross' (Philippians 2:8b). And then God raised him and gave him a seat of honour and gave him 'a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow' (Philippians 2:9,10).

Jerusalem was considered the 'holy city' – holy because it was where the temple was, and the temple is the dwelling place of God. But Jesus reminds us that a building made of stones can crumble – in fact, it did. But God dwells not in the confinement of a building, but with his people, wherever they are. In various places, Jesus refers to himself as the temple of God. Where Jesus is, there is his calling to come, to follow, and his promise is to be with us always.

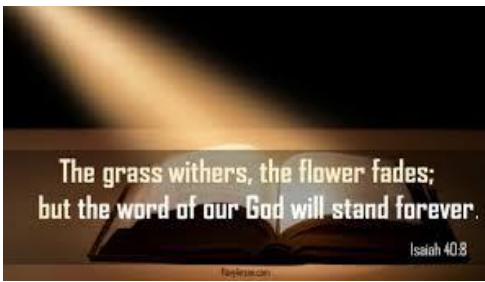
The 'day of the Lord' is God's day. He's in charge. Whatever that means, whenever it refers to, the issue for you and me is this: Is there one Lord for you? Is there one name above all other names? And are others welcome to know that one Lord, one name?

*Dear Jesus, help me to hold fast to the things I know and not be misled by what I don't. I acknowledge you as Lord of all and my Lord. Amen.*

## A THOUGHT TO COMFORT AND ENCOURAGE YOU

### KNOWING GOD

by Jim Strelan



If you knew me, you would know my Father also (John 8:19b).

Read [John 8:12–20](#)

How do you know God? How do you know God's nature, what he is like? The Old Testament testimony to

the nature of God tells us that he is Creator, that he is powerful, that he wants a relationship with his people, that he is 'slow to anger, abounding in love' (Psalm 103:8b), that he is a deliverer, a rock and fortress, that he has our names carved on the palms of his hands (Isaiah 49:16a) and many other wonderful attributes. But it also shows God as righteous, a punisher, almost a warring God who demands allegiance, a God who is sometimes more hidden than revealed. So, how do we know God? How do we know what he is like?

The best way to know God is to know Jesus. Jesus says that if you know him, then you know the Father. Jesus shows us the Father's heart. If the God of the Old Testament is sometimes a bit puzzling for you, then look at Jesus. In John 14:9,10, when Philip asks Jesus to show his followers the Father, Jesus says: 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?'

So, what do we learn about God by looking at Jesus? He wants to be a part of our lives, so much so that he comes as a baby born in ordinary circumstances. He is willing to suffer scorn because of the kind of company he keeps, because he wants 'sinners' to come to him. His will is for healing and restoration rather than sickness and brokenness. He is prepared to suffer, be put on trial and experience the shame of the cross for us. The presence of Jesus is all around us in the Spirit whom the Father sends in Jesus' name. We don't need to be anxious about our dying because Jesus has prepared a place for us in his Father's mansion and waits for us to come home.

The devotion from a few days ago says the same thing, and we can't hear it enough. Look to Jesus. See how he is and who he is. And you will know God.

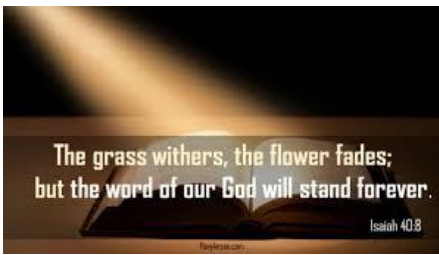
*Thank you, God, for showing yourself in the person of Jesus. I see him, and I see you. Thank you. Amen.*



## A THOUGHT TO COMFORT AND ENCOURAGE YOU

### LORD OF ALL

By Jim Strelan



For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’ (Romans 10:12,13).

Read [Romans 10:11–17](#)

Consider how major this was for the writer to the Romans to say. No difference, in a society where there was every difference. Some were called, chosen, and some not. Some were recipients of God’s covenant, some not. For a Jew and a Gentile to share food was a no-no. Don’t even let the shadow of a Gentile pass over you if you are a Jew, lest you be contaminated. Gentiles were excluded from the temple. Assisting an injured or dying Gentile was a mistake because it just added to the possibility of Gentiles surviving. No difference? You must be joking. Just consider what the Early Church had to deal with as it came to terms with a statement like this.

Over time, Christians have had to work through similar issues. What do we do about slavery? How do we deal with attitudes that separate people because of the colour of their skin? How do we view people whom we almost consider to be of another faith, even though they consider themselves Christians? What role do women have in the life of the church?

What do these words say? First of all, ‘the same Lord is Lord of all’. Of all. Not just those who meet the criteria. All – whether they recognise it or not. Jesus came to draw all to himself. To show them the way to the Father. He crosses boundaries and is scorned and rejected because of it. He frequently goes into Gentile territory; he eats and drinks with ‘sinners’; he elevates women to a status previously denied them. He is Lord of all. Secondly, he ‘richly blesses all who call on him, for ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’. I often say that when we get to heaven, there will be a lot of surprises. And, of course, the biggest surprise is that we’re there! We don’t need to make calling on the name of the Lord more complicated than it is. The thief on the cross called on the name of the Lord. The father, who said he believed but needed help with his unbelief, called on the name of the Lord. Many who brought their sick to Jesus only asked for help – that’s all. They called on the name of the Lord, and they received healing. God blesses all who call on him.

This is such a different approach to the status quo of the time. Perhaps our starting point when we try to come to terms with issues of our time is just this: there is no difference; Jesus is Lord of all. I wonder what impact that might have.

*Lord of all, thank you for crossing all the boundaries. That ‘crossing’ also means I am a recipient of your blessing. As you are gracious, please help me to be the same. In your name, Amen*

## A THOUGHT TO COMFORT AND ENCOURAGE YOU



### THE VOICE OF THE LORD

By Jim Strelan

The voice of the Lord is powerful, the voice of the Lord is majestic (Psalm 29:4).

Read [Psalm 29](#)

Don't you wish that God would speak to you directly, like it seems he did in Old Testament times? Then you would know. Know what his will is. Know what he wants for you. Know how to respond to your present situation. Know what is ahead of you. That would be something.

This psalm is a song of praise. It's a call to worship a God who is powerful and majestic. Interestingly, this psalm presents the voice of God as being heard in the lightning, thunder and wind. See the power of those things, see what they can do, and hear God. And worship him. We have no excuse for not acknowledging God. Romans 1:20 tells us that 'God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen'. Look around you, and there's something wrong if you can't see God.

The trouble is that the power of nature, while awe-inspiring, is also destructive. So, if you want to fully grasp the nature of God, what we see around us leaves us confused. There are cyclones and roaring fires, floods and tsunamis. Powerful, yes, but leaving us a little in fear of this powerful, majestic God.

Hebrews 1:1,2 tells us: 'In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son.' You want God to speak to you? Listen to Jesus. He is the Word of God in human form. His voice is God's voice. And it's majestic and powerful. Hear him say, 'Come.' Hear him say, 'Your sins are forgiven.' Hear him say, 'This is my body/blood for you.' Hear him say, 'I am with you always.' Hear the many, many promises he makes. Hear him and trust his word. It's the voice of God. When the Transfiguration happened, a voice from the cloud repeated the words Jesus heard at his baptism: 'This is my Son whom I love; with him I am pleased.' And added are the words: 'Listen to him!' (Matthew 17:5).

God speaks. And his speaking leads us to worship.

***Lord, open my ears and heart so that I can hear you speaking. Amen.***



## WHEN GOD JOINED THE QUEUE

by Jane Mueller

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptised by him (Matthew 3:13).

Read [Matthew 3:13–17](#)

John saw him coming and froze. The line at the Jordan was full of ordinary sinners – farmers, labourers, tax collectors – all waiting their turn to be washed clean. And then Jesus joins the queue. No entourage, no special treatment. Just the Son of God, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the very people he came to save.

John can't take it. 'You should be baptising me,' he blurts out. But Jesus insists, 'Let it be so now.'

Let it be so now.

It's one of the most quietly disruptive moments in Scripture. The one who has nothing to confess stands among the confessors. The one who created water submits to being washed in it. Holiness doesn't hover about human mess – it wades right into it.

That's what grace does. It doesn't operate at a distance. It moves toward us, joins the queue and stands behind us in all the mess we'd rather hide. The baptism of Jesus is about solidarity. God doesn't save by staying clean; God saves by stepping in.

If being human has started to feel like a competition or a performance, maybe the invitation is the same: step down into the water. Stand where everyone else stands. Get in line with the people you've been comparing yourself to and the ones you've tried to impress. Let grace even the playing field.

When Jesus rose from the water, heaven tore open, and the Spirit descended. Maybe that's what happens when we choose humility over hype, presence over performance and love over comparison. The same sky that opened over the Jordan still opens for moments like these.

In this week's devotions, we won't just read about baptism – we'll see that something's changed. We'll get on with living like resurrected people. Every piece of Scripture in the days ahead is a reminder that grace moves, water breaks, God keeps making all things new, and heaven is here, now.

***Jesus, you could stay distant, but you don't. You step into our mess, into our fears and into the queues we stand in. Teach me to do the same – to meet people where they are, not where it's comfortable – and strip away my need to appear strong or right. Let my life and presence look like your love – close enough to get wet. Amen.***

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*Jane is a former Lutheran school principal and now serves as Governance Leadership Director for Lutheran Education SA, NT & WA. Jane has a keen interest in psychology, enjoys hiking and loves learning about and trying new things*



# **SERMON- EPIPHANY 1**

## **A WORD FROM THE WORD**

God speaks first to the people of Israel about his chosen one, the Messiah.

*Look at my servant, whom I strengthen.*

*He is my chosen one, who pleases me.*

*I have put my Spirit upon him.*

*He will bring justice to the nations.*

Then God speaks to his chosen one, the Messiah, My Servant.

*"I, the LORD, have called you to demonstrate my righteousness.*

*I will take you by the hand and guard you,*

*and I will give you to my people, Israel,*

*as a symbol of my covenant with them.*

*And you will be a light to guide the nations.*

What do you value about Jesus and his influence on our society, on societies and governments throughout the world? I can identify three.

- Jesus has changed how we relate to each other, culturally—every individual is valued, irrespective of their status in society.
- Jesus has changed the focus and purpose of Justice—the law is to provide justice for every individual, especially the lowly. All are equal before the law and before God. However there is an interesting time in history when kings and rulers refused to be accountable to anybody, because they ruled by Divine Right. God had put them in authority and only God could remove them.
- The grace and mercy of Jesus has brought Hope to people from all nations, even those who don't believe in him. There are so many societies who look to the forgiveness and compassion of Christ as a beacon of hope and light.

That doesn't mean that we always get it right. In most Christian communities and societies there are Christian leaders who have sought to manipulate society for their own benefit, usually by making the justice system work for them, and protecting their own power through the political system.

There is another question to consider—Is Jesus' role in our world, more globally focused through his direction and guidance of governments and leaders more important than how he touches each individual through his Spirit? Which is more important for you?

The exile to Babylon was an absolute catastrophe for the people of Israel. According to the prophets the exile was a consequence of the total abuse of power by its shepherds, its rulers. Added to that abuse, the ruling elite had thoroughly rejected the social and spiritual contract that Yahweh had established with his people. It was at this time that Isaiah, Ezekiel and other prophets were given the task of presenting an image of leadership and society which was radically different from what they were experiencing. What was promised was radical and life changing. It was intended to change the way people lived and how they understood God in their lives. And the focus of this new experience of life was ***The Messiah—My Shepherd—The Good Shepherd***. Pick your own title for the Christ, the anointed one.

The words of Isaiah 42 speak of God's promises to his people Israel, and they focus specifically on the role of the Messiah. In these verses the Messiah is titled "***My Servant***". This is a title that he was also given in Isaiah 49, 50 and 52-53. It is very clear that in all of these promises a very specific role of the Messiah is being set out for us to follow. As an aside, these verses are among the promises that Jesus often referred to when declaring that "**the Law and the prophets speak about me**."

In the words of Isaiah 42, there are two very specific tasks to be given to "***My Servant***"—Bring **Justice** to the nations (especially where there is suffering) and to demonstrate God's **Righteousness** (so that God's will is fulfilled in the fullness of blessings that we experience in our lives).

In any discussion about God and his relationship with his people, justice and righteousness are always drawn together. Justice and righteousness express how God deals with the world, how he deals with us individually and how he deals with the communities and societies that we live in. Because God is God—his will is holy and perfect....(you could add to those descriptions, love mercy and compassion are all expressions of his righteousness)—his actions fulfill all that is righteous and just. However, there are nuances in different contexts.

Firstly, when society is functioning as it is intended, when the field is fruitful, the righteousness of God is revealed. On the other hand, when society is flawed and broken, there are massive inequities. These inequalities occur when those with power, wealth and authority abuse their place in society and take advantage of their resources so that others are squashed without any way of relieving their suffering, then God reaches into our world and seeks to bring justice to the oppressed, however you would identify them.

In this promise, it is Justice that is focused on and Isaiah describes Justice this way:

***He will not shout or raise his voice in public.***

***He will not crush the weakest reed or put out a flickering candle.***

***He will bring justice to all who have been wronged.***

***He will not falter or lose heart until justice prevails throughout the earth.***



Or later on, when identifying the role of “***My Servant***” among the nations, justice which comes from the hand of the Messiah is described in these terms:

***You will open the eyes of the blind.***

***You will free the captives from prison,  
releasing those who sit in dark dungeons.***

***"I am the LORD; that is my name!"***

This is what God expects of both **the Messiah** and those who live under the wings of his grace. Or you could say, “live in the light of his love.”

But then Isaiah makes two very definitive statements about “***My Servant***” which have a significant impact on the role of Christ in our societies. The first is that “***My Servant***” is the fulfilment of God’s covenant with Israel. The people of Israel looked Yahweh for justice and righteousness, but it is Christ whose life, death and resurrection has fulfilled all the promises made by God to his chosen people.

The second, and in many ways, the most far reaching for the nations, no matter whom they worship is that “***My Servant***” is the Light shining for all nations, sent to give hope to those who don’t even know of the creator.

It is this role in our world which so many people fail to recognize, even when they can see the differences which they so desperately for.

The impact of Christ’s role in our world has been felt throughout history and across all nations. His life as the carer for all human beings, no matter how insignificant that person might be, has given hope to all who seek a new, better life. The Samaritan, the deaf and the speechless, the terminally ill, the paralysed and even the tax collectors (public servants) were all beneficiaries of the mercy of Christ. And societies have long looked towards Christ’s example of justice and mercy as a beacon of hope and light in a world where pure power and greed have always devastated communities and shattered lives.

The righteousness of the Father and the grace and mercy (justice is the word used in Isaiah) of “***My Servant***” are the Light that Christ shines on the world, the hope that many in our world cling to, even when those people still won’t recognize Christ as the Son of God. The Light shines and his Hope inspires—all because of the Christ-child born in Bethlehem.

## A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

### THE SERVANT SONGS

ISAIAH 42:1-4

*"Look at my servant,  
whom I strengthen.*

*He is my chosen one,  
who pleases me.*

*I have put my Spirit  
upon him.*

*He will bring justice to  
the nations.*

*He will not shout or  
raise his voice in public.*

*He will not crush the  
weakest reed or put out  
a flickering candle.*

*He will bring justice to  
all who have been  
wronged.*

*He will not falter or lose  
heart*

*until justice prevails  
throughout the earth.*

*Even distant lands  
beyond the sea will  
wait for his instruction."*

*I want to take you along a slightly different path this week. I want to share with you a hint of the study that I do before I write my message for each Sunday. And the OT text for this week is a great way to start.*

*When we read different books and letters in the Bible, we perceive of them as the work of this or that particular author, written by a particular person, in a specific time, with a single coherent message. What we find out is that over decades and maybe even centuries different writers and editors have had a hand in compiling the final product, the scriptures which we accept as the Word of God.*

*There are all sorts of reasons for editing. The best one revolves around the writings of Jeremiah. Baruch was a very close friend and also his editor and secretary. At one point, the king ordered that all of Jeremiah's writings be burnt. Baruch was given the task of writing down the prophecies all over again, from memory. There are indications that editing occurred in the process.*

*But it is the writings of the prophet Isaiah which give indications of compiling and editing. Sometimes messages which share a theme, but are spoken in quite different styles, are joined together. In other cases there are specific titles for the Messiah being used in quite different messages.*

**Our OT text for today is Isaiah 42:1-9. It is called a *Servant Song*, because in this message the Messiah is called My Servant as he is in other chapters (49, 50, 52:13-53:12). These servant songs have very unique characteristics yet are spoken into diverse situations.**

**At the same time, in Isaiah 42, Yahweh begins by talking about "My Servant". But after declaring the significance of God's role in creation, Yahweh directs his message to the Servant. Jesus quotes these words as proof that the prophets spoke directly about him.**

**I often wonder how the message would have been received by the people of Israel to whom Isaiah was speaking. To whom was he making this promise? "I, the LORD, have called you to demonstrate my righteousness. I will take you by the hand and guard you, and I will give you to my people, Israel, as a symbol of my covenant with them. And you will be a light to guide the nations".**

**Or who was he speaking about, in the past tense, when he described My Servant in these terms?**



*My servant grew up in the LORD's presence like a tender green shoot, sprouting from a root in dry and sterile ground. There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him.....*

*He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with bitterest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way when he went by. He was despised, and we did not care.*

*The words spoken refer to a past event. Yet their focus and meaning speak of Jesus, who lived and died 400 years into the future. And their impact is most powerful when they speak directly to us, 2500 years later as we reflect on how human beings have responded to Jesus.*

*For Isaiah, **My Servant** is the fulfilment of the Old Covenant and a beacon of hope for all nations.*

*Your shepherd-servant and brother in Christ.*

**Pastor Geoff**