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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 4<sup>th</sup> -Saturday 10<sup>th</sup>

These devotions reflect on the week's readings through a narrative retelling. As the writer reflected, meditated and prayed over the texts, she says a story started to emerge. This is an imagined dialogue formed between Matthew and a Bethlehem mother affected by Herod's massacre. The devotions follow this mother's reflections across the week, inviting us to consider God's compassion, faithfulness and hope.



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## THOUGHT TO COMFORT AND ENCOURAGE YOU

### REFLECTIONS WITH MATTHEW

by Libby Jewson



Oh, Matthew – how could this happen to the families of Bethlehem? All the little shrouds of little people lined up, side-by-side. Fear and fragility hovered over all of us on that day. I know many years have now passed since that happened, and while the memories fade, their vividness, too, is at times

overpowering.

When I think about my life and the lives of the other parents of those beautiful little boys, I think about how Herod killed our children, trying to kill the one called Jesus, whom he knew might be a threat to his rule. Yes, Jesus emerged in these parts as someone talking about extraordinary things. Many saw and heard this person, Jesus – I watched how the crowds followed him, how everyone talked about this person with wonder, with questions, trying to understand his stories and how they applied to those of us who listened.

Somehow, he broke the barriers of race, of wealth, of humanity and gradually encountered a completely new way of understanding the world – one of forgiveness and of peace. He rose again – a totally unbelievable event that showed that God had conquered death for all humanity.

I, too, experienced the reflection of how Jesus works in the hearts of people – with love, kindness and an authenticity that I have not encountered before. I know this because for many years after the tragedy of our little boys, love flourished in our community – somehow bread was baked and gifted, vegetables grown and given, a listening ear was shared and an encircling of strength caressed us. Words of despair and grief were never discouraged but were given time to rest and be absorbed by those who understood. Gradually, strength and joy returned, but life was never the same. Throughout my life, I could feel God's everlasting love and faithfulness. I know that God's love through Jesus and his Spirit is with the whole community of Bethlehem and me forever.

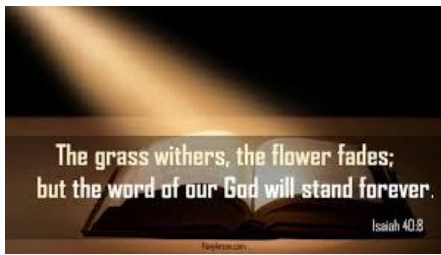
Thank you, Matthew, for listening. For opening up the story to share with others throughout the world, both in this time and for years and years to come. I look forward to chatting again tomorrow. I wanted to tell you, too, Matthew, that today, I can hear God through Jeremiah:

I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love.

With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself.

*Ever faithful, loving God, thank you for Jesus, the changemaker of the world. Thank you for Matthew and the other storytellers in the New Testament. Help us all to be part of the forgiveness, kindness and love in Jesus' story. Help us to encourage each other with your everlasting love and your continued faithfulness to humanity. Amen.*

## A THOUGHT TO COMFORT AND ENCOURAGE YOU



### GLIMMERS OF HOPE WITH MATTHEW

by Libby Jewson

That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him' (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Read [1 Corinthians 2:6–10](#)

Matthew, I have thought about these events over the years. The cruel death of our little boy and the deaths of the other little boys. The life of Jesus and all the things he said and did. How his message was new, different and overwhelming. And then after his death and resurrection, when everything seemed completely futile and hopeless. Those who knew Jesus well gathered for the ancient tradition of Pentecost, and the Holy Spirit hovered through them and continues to hover now through humanity.

I think about how I understand God and Jesus and the hovering, seeping Spirit those people talked about. My mind continually returns to the verses from Isaiah: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him' (Isaiah 64:4).

I think about how my life has changed, my way of knowing is something that I couldn't even describe or imagine before that day and yet here I am, trying to explain something that cannot be explained, something that has no sound, something that has no picture, but at the same time is beauty in the every day, in nature, in words and in music that fills me up – it is as if the spirit claws into my being and life goes on – even when it is too hard, when I can't imagine another day, when despair seems to overturn hope.

I know that in these vulnerable times, God's Spirit of love and hope is with me, consoling and encouraging. I hear the Spirit's words through those I love, through sharing and listening to each other's stories, through sharing with those other families. There God's love and light shine as a beacon of hope.

I long for the day when the mystery of life and faith is somehow revealed. Until then, I am content to listen, to love and to rest, knowing that in the depths of my sorrow is where I found the Spirit of love.

Thank you again, Matthew, for taking the time to talk and to listen, and not to judge me.

***Lord of love, and faith and hope, you come to me in my darkness, brokenness and loneliness. Help me show your love to those I know and love – that's where your light shines. Amen.***

## A THOUGHT TO COMFORT AND ENCOURAGE YOU



### FINDING JOY TOGETHER: MATTHEW AND ME

By Libby Jewson

O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth! Your glory is higher than the heavens (Psalm 8:1).

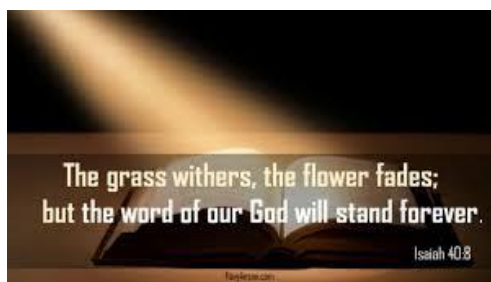
Read [Psalm 8](#)

The time you took to talk with me, Matthew, is so appreciated. Somehow, it has helped me to clarify my questions, look at things differently, and understand the impact of Jesus and his new way of being, which is also for us. I guess I have had time to reflect after each of our conversations, as I fetch water, bake bread and tend to my garden and family.

After our little boy's death, it took a long time before I could find things to be thankful about; however, I couldn't stop thinking about David's magnificent song of praise, where he exclaims, 'How majestic is God's name in all the earth.' I cried every time I tried to say these words. I couldn't reconcile my sadness with faith, hope and love. Yet here it was, that Spirit again infusing me with faith, learning from those I loved, understanding Jesus' story. I started by thinking of little things that brought me joy – the smell of bread from the oven, the sound of children laughing and playing in the street, the view of the hills behind Bethlehem, the rain watering those hills and the olive trees. Somehow, these little pockets of joy led me to thinking about God daily, and David's psalms, and over time, I could start to find words of praise – just like King David did. And today is the last day of the year. I feel like each day of this year has challenged me to search for the good and not dwell on the bad. 'O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth! Your glory is higher than the heavens.' I hear this passage, and I imagine the music and the singing of David, and I look to the sky and imagine the power and strength of the weather and the life all around me. I feel a responsibility to nurture and love the universe God has given us, and I guess I can do this by being thankful for everything I have, and everything I have had. Thank you, David, for opening up your psalms for me.

*Majestic God of creation, help me find joy in the smallness of my life compared with your creation. Thank you for this year of life and love and even the smallest joys that have helped me face hard things. Thank you for faith, hope and love, which have been my companions this year. Amen*

## A THOUGHT TO COMFORT AND ENCOURAGE YOU



### DEPP LISTENING WITH MATTHEW

by Libby Jewson

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2:19).

Read [Luke 2:15–21](#)

Happy New Year, Matthew! I am so surprised that you are interested in my story and want to spend time

learning about what has happened since our little boy died. I wonder what the new year will bring for you.

At the start of each year, I find myself reflecting on all the things I have learnt and seen and wonder what I will discover this year. I also find myself thinking about the amazing story of the birth of Jesus – here in Bethlehem, just along the road past my house, in an animal shed. The owner's wife is my friend. They kept in touch with Mary and Joseph from time to time and heard how they were getting on after the incredible things that happened there when Jesus was born in their animal shed.

My friend told me that Mary was quiet and kept her story to herself in her heart. She seemed to radiate wisdom, and yet she also knew and understood what was in store for her in her life and the lives of the rest of her family. Somehow, when our little boy died, I, too, kept things in my heart – Mary's response, one way or another, gave me permission to do the same.

And yet talking to you today has helped me to share some of my experiences and reflections like no other time. My friend said that Mary was also able to share with a few of her trusted women friends. They listened to Mary share all the things she had pondered in her heart over the years. And she said Mary listened like no other.

I also think about this new year and wonder about all those who have things pondered in their hearts – I hope and pray that, like you, Matthew, and like Mary, I can listen deeply to my friends and truly hear what they are saying.

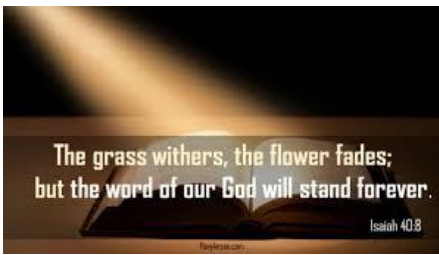
*I pray that God's Spirit will encourage and enable me to listen and learn, and together, we can share our faith stories with respect and love. Amen.*



## A THOUGHT TO COMFORT AND ENCOURAGE YOU

### THANK YOU, MATTHEW

By Libby Jewson



We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete (1 John 1:3,4).

Read [1 John 1:1–7](#)

So, Matthew, I know our time together is coming to an end. What a joy it has been to share, laugh, cry, eat and pray together. I know that what you are writing and all the stories you have gathered will be compiled into some sort of letter that will be good news to those who read it. What amazing stories you have collected – stories of Jesus, his birth, his life, his death and his resurrection. And we are now two older people, and much has happened in our lives for us to think about and consider.

As we were talking, and you shared all the things you have seen and heard, you placed me right there in the story. You used the Scriptures to help us all understand how God had foretold this mystery of Jesus. I heard you put us all in Jesus' unfolding story of God – how you describe God as Father, Spirit and Jesus, God's Son, both God and truly human. Somehow, you described the fulfilment of all those verses in Scripture through the life of Jesus. As I pondered our conversations, I wondered about all those who have so many questions, including me. I wonder how these questions will be answered, how humanity will remember this, and, more importantly, what they will do with this.

Somehow, I know in my heart that even if we don't understand it all yet, one day we will. In the meantime, together, we seemed to have found joy in sharing, learning and wondering. It has been like a light has radiated from your stories about Jesus, and especially how you explained that through Jesus' death and resurrection, we have received peace and reunion with God. Somehow, our brokenness is forgiven, and our joy is full. I look forward to learning more, discussing and sharing my faith, and every day finding some joy – some God joy to share with those I know and love.

*God of joy and life, thank you for the Gospel of Matthew and Matthew's unfolding story of Jesus' life. We know that the mysteries of faith, hope and love intertwine with their certainty. We know that you being both God and human, perfectly balanced, mystifies us; yet, at the same time, this completeness brings us joy. Thank you for the gift of joy. Amen.*

## A THOUGHT TO COMFORT AND ENCOURAGE YOU



### FAITH HOPE AND LOVE

By Libby Jewson

He strengthens the bars of your gates and blesses your people within you. He grants peace to your borders and satisfies you with the finest of wheat (Psalm 147:13,14).

Read [Psalm 147:12-15,\(16-18\)19,20](#)

If you were here today again, Matthew, I would share with you that finally, the gates that protect me feel stronger. Your time here blessed me with faith, hope and love.

Somehow, I felt the Spirit of peace descend on me and linger here. The home in my heart feels warm. I know that the story of Jesus will not go away. I know that my life here in Bethlehem, and the life of our son, and the lives of all those little boys, all those years ago, have also played a part towards restoration, despite the heartbreak. I now know that in among the rubble of this tragedy God was there with us all, always gently guiding us towards faith, hope and love.

I know that using our finest wheat to make our finest bread to share with our finest olives and cheeses with the people in our community of Bethlehem has been something that has restored our souls. Peace has found a home in our community and in our hearts.

And I suppose, too, Matthew, that while you write, your words of new life and love through Jesus help us to understand the completeness of the story and yet also the beginning of the story. You helped me understand the story in a way that spoke to me – in the context of my life and those around me – thank you. You encouraged and gave me reason to keep sharing God's story – the God who came, lived and died among us in Jesus. Wow, what a story!

***God of life, help us all to find our own Bethlehem places of peace and hospitality. Help us listen to others in ways that nurture openness and trust. Help us to foster faith, hope and love through your Spirit with those we connect with each day. Thank you for the gift of faith, hope and love to humanity. Amen.***

A THOUGHT TO COMFORT AND ENCOURAGE YOU

## GOD ON TWO LEGS

by Jim Strelan



**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us (John 1:14a).**

Read [John 1:10–18](#)

What do you think of when you think of God? Do you think of glory, power, majesty and ruling from on high? The story of Christmas shows us God as a baby. God for whom there is no room. God, the asylum-seeker, as his parents flee with the baby Jesus to Egypt. God, taking on human form and living among us. God on two legs.

The reading for today talks of glory: 'we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only' (John 1:14b). And it speaks in earlier verses of a witness to the light coming to the world (John 1:8,9). But this glory and this witness to light is God incarnate (God taking on bodily form). So, the most relatable way to think of God is to think of him in the person of Jesus: God on two legs.

This is God at a wedding feast, providing more than enough wine when the wine had run out, so that the festivities could continue. The God who blesses and gives joy. This is God who sees the maimed, the blind and the outcast leper, and brings healing. This is God who reaches down to the woman ostracised by the men, some of whom perhaps committed adultery with her, and helps her to stand with her head held high. This is God in the boat when the wind and waves were threatening, bringing calm and safety. This is God who takes the children upon his lap and blesses them. This is God who weeps when he sees Lazarus' friends weeping. This is God hanging from a cross and inviting the guilty thief next to him to join him in Paradise. This is God who says that he is with us always. Not far away, not just seated on his heavenly throne, but as close to us as breathing itself. God who comes to us as we stretch out our hands to receive bread and wine as we gather in communion. God become flesh. God living among us. As you go into this new year, God is with you. If last year was forgettable, God likes new beginnings. Let him walk with you, on his legs. That's where the light will be – and the glory.

***Thank you, God, for showing yourself in the person of Jesus. Walk with me today and all the days to come. Amen.***

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*Jim lives on Brisbane's northside with his wife, Ruth. He enjoys reading and listening to music, is a proud Brisbane Lions member and loves his children and grandchildren. Jim is passionate about the gospel and the freedom it brings*



## Sermon- Epiphany

### WE THREE KINGS VS 1

We three kings of Orient are  
Bearing gifts we traverse afar  
Field and fountain, moor and mountain  
Following yonder star

O Star of wonder, star of night  
Star with royal beauty bright  
Westward leading, still proceeding  
Guide us to thy Perfect Light

### MESSAGE—HONOUR THE KING

*The words of the well-known song “We Three Kings” are not necessarily accurate in every way. The wise men were most likely not kings, but scholars who studied the stars and sought wisdom in ancient writings. There may have been three wise men who searched for the Christ Child, but perhaps there were only two, or maybe far more than three. Very likely they did not come from the Orient, or Asia, but from a region of the middle east known as Persia or Chaldea. The song, however, accurately describes the three gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. We do not know why the wise men chose these three gifts, but they were searching for a newborn king, and these were rich gifts for a king, for our Lord and theirs, Jesus the King. The three gifts serve to remind us of just who Jesus is and why he was born among us.*

### WE THREE KINGS VS 2

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain  
Gold I bring to crown Him again  
King forever, ceasing never  
Over us all to reign

O Star of wonder, star of night  
Star with royal beauty bright  
Westward leading, still proceeding  
Guide us to Thy perfect light

### 1 Kings 10:14-15, 21 Solomon's Gold

Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was 666 talents of gold, besides that which came from the explorers and from the business of the merchants, and from all the kings of the west and from the governors of the land ...

All King Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon were of pure gold. None were of silver; silver was not considered as anything in the days of Solomon.

#### MESSAGE—GOLD FOR A KING

*Solomon, the son of King David, was Israel's wisest and wealthiest king. What do you choose as a gift for the king who has everything? Apparently, you give him gold, more than 40,000 pounds of gold. That's how much gold came to Solomon each year. There was so much gold in Jerusalem that silver was considered nearly worthless. In fact, Scripture comments that Solomon "made silver as common in Jerusalem as stone" (1 Kings 10:27).*

*Generations after Solomon, the wise men followed a star, searching for a new king in Israel. After a wrong turn through Jerusalem, they followed the star to Bethlehem and found and worshiped the holy Child Jesus. The wise men offered him a gift that would have pleased Je-sus' ancestor Solomon—a gift of gold. It was a fitting gift for King, a gift for the newborn Son of David. Yet this King would not wear an earthly crown of gold or sit on a golden throne. Jesus would be crowned with thorns and lifted up, not on a throne, but on a cross. Jesus our King offered up his life for us, taking onto himself the penalty of death that we deserved for our sins. We have been redeemed, "not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19). Amen.*

#### WE THREE KINGS VS 3

Frankincense to offer have I  
Incense owns a Deity nigh  
Prayer and praising, all men raising  
Worship Him, God most high

O Star of wonder, star of night  
Star with royal beauty bright  
Westward leading, still proceeding  
Guide us to Thy perfect light

#### Exodus 30:1, 7-8 Incense from Aaron

You shall make an altar on which to burn incense; you shall make it of acacia wood ... And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it. Every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, and when Aaron sets up the lamps at twilight, he shall burn it, a regular incense offer-ing before the Lord throughout your generations.

## MESSAGE—INCENSE FOR GOD

*God instructed the Israelites to build an altar for the tabernacle, or tent of meeting. This altar was to be made of wood overlaid with gold. Every morning and evening the high priest was to burn incense on the altar as an offering to God.*

*The wise men brought a gift of incense, a hardened tree resin called frankincense, to the new-born King in Bethlehem. With this gift, were the wise men acknowledging the divinity of the holy Child? Did they know that the newborn King was God in human flesh? We don't know if the wise men worshiped the Child Jesus as God, but we know and we worship Jesus as God and Lord. Jesus is true God and true man in one Person. He is the son born of a virgin, as the prophet Isaiah foretold, the Child who would be called Emmanuel, "God with us." We may not burn incense as an offering, but we offer up to our God and Savior our worship and our prayers. In the vision given to the apostle John, the throne of God is surrounded by "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (Revelation 5:8). Each day we can pray with the psalmist, "Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!" (Psalm 141:2). Amen.*

## WE THREE KINGS VS 4

Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume  
Breathes of life of gathering gloom  
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying  
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb

O Star of wonder, star of night  
Star with royal beauty bright  
Westward leading, still proceeding  
Guide us to Thy perfect light

## John 19:38-42      Myrrh for burial

After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

## MESSAGE—MYRRH FOR CHRIST'S SACRIFICE

*Myrrh may have been one of the most unusual of the wise men's gifts, at least as a gift for a baby, but it was a useful gift. Made from tree resin, myrrh could be used in perfume or in making incense. It was known to have healing and pain-killing properties and could be used as a medicine and mixed with wine.*

*This unusual gift is mentioned two more times in the life of Jesus. More than thirty years after Jesus' birth, at a place called Golgotha, Roman soldiers offered wine mixed with myrrh to the condemned victims that were to be crucified. The myrrh may have drugged the victims, making the soldiers' task of crucifying them a little easier. Jesus refused to drink the drugged wine. This was the purpose for which he had been born, and he willingly laid down his life for us. Finally, at the end of that dark day, the day we call Good Friday, Jesus was taken down from the cross. Once wrapped in swaddling cloths, the body of the Lord was now wrapped in a linen shroud, together with myrrh and other spices. But at dawn on the third day, those spice-stained linen cloths would be cast aside and left behind in an empty tomb. Myrrh, an unusual gift for a child, was just the right gift for a Sacrifice, Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Lord.*

*Gold, frankincense and myrrh—rich gifts for a Child, and in this case, perfect gifts. Gold for the King, frankincense offered to God and myrrh to anoint the Sacrifice who laid down his life for us and rose up from death to give us eternal life. "Glorious now behold him arise, King and God and Sacrifice." Amen.*

## WE THREE KINGS VS 5

Glorious now behold Him arise

King and God and Sacrifice

Alleluia, Alleluia

Earth to heav'n replies

O Star of wonder, star of night

Star with royal beauty bright

Westward leading, still proceeding

Guide us to Thy perfect light

PSALM 139:1-6

O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me.

You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my every thought when far away.

You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I am.

You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD. You both precede and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to know!

## A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

SOMETHING OLD—SOMETHING NEW

SAFE IN THE ARMS OF JESUS

*The end of the Church Year flows into the beginning of a New Calendar Year, almost effortlessly; except that we have chosen to recognize a beginning and an end, in the hope that the new will be an improvement on the old. ...*

*Although, the wise king Solomon suggested that there is nothing new under the sun.*

*Nevertheless, there is great value in reflecting—Facebook and Google keep reminding me of what happened 12 months ago or even five years ago. Mostly it is reminiscing; sometimes it results in serious reflecting on where I have been and where I have come to.*

*This year will involve some serious reflection on both the past and the future, for me, at least. There is a lot to reflect on, 70 years of blessings, 49 years of marital bliss, 46 years of ministry, almost 7 years of Light. But that is the past. Just as significantly, the next 12 months take on a direction of their own. And those months ahead bear serious consideration.*

*However, such reflections are not carried out in a void. Life is experienced and lived in the light of God's grace and love. Our journeys are shadowed by the care and compassion of a generous Lord.*

*This is the perspective of Psalm 139. The psalm writer reflects on the way that the hand of God plays a role in every part of our lives. On the one hand, that causes serious concern, if God is interfering in things that we hold dearly. (There is no place that can hide me from God.) On the other hand, there is unbelievable comfort and satisfaction knowing that God has showered grace on my life, especially at moments I have needed his love and compassion.*

*How are you going to journey this coming year? Will you run with purpose and boldness, even in a rush? Or will you step forward cautiously, always conscious of the inevitable roadblocks ahead?*

*Leigh Newton wrote a song based on this Psalm: **Search me, O God!** It has become a cry for God to search, to heal, to comfort, to encourage and to guide. The foundation of this confident prayer is that God's loving devotion and tender touch alone are the source of my confidence in life.*



*Our worship this New Year offered praise for God's care in the past and prayed for a peaceful future in the year ahead. Your life is always lived in the hands of our loving and gracious God.*

*Your shepherd-servant and brother in Christ.*

**Pastor Geoff**