

ADVENT – THE ROAD TO BETHLEHEM

WEEK 1 – ROME – A PLACE OF LONGING

MONDAY – Your journey starts here



Genesis 12: 1 & 2 *The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.*

Journeys: moving from one place to another. A process of experiences, challenges, and discoveries.

With the advent of the internet, planning journeys is easy. You can see what the place is like, and bookings are instantaneous. Planning my first trip to the United Kingdom, bookings had to be done via ‘snail mail’. It was such a process. Other than travel brochures, you had no insight into the place and no list of reviews. Much like the Biblical journeys, and much like our spiritual journeys now.

To grow in Christ we have to journey – move forward – with no internet. As we experience life, are challenged by it and make new discoveries about God and ourselves, we grow.

The planning and anticipation of travelling is half the fun. Are you excited and filled with anticipation about where your spiritual journey will take you next? Are you praying for God to take you further? As the song goes: “These boots were meant for walking.”

Advent is a journey to Christmas. At this season’s beginning, *“consider the longings you have for your life and our world. Sometimes we carry longings we don’t fully realize. Yet these longings shape the journey of our lives. Identifying our longings and what they have to do with God and God’s longings for us and our world begin to make this journey a life-changing one.”* *

Spend time now reflecting on your longings. Offer each one up to God.



Prayer: O Lord of wonder, star of light, star with royal beauty bright. Always leading, still proceeding, guide us to Your perfect light.
AMEN

**On The Way To Bethlehem*, Rob Furquay, Cokesbury.

TUESDAY – From Rome onwards



Romans 13: 1 *Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by*

God.

Rome – the seat of power. Why is Rome the beginning of this journey? Because a decree in Rome led to a birth in Bethlehem. Because of this statute, Mary and Joseph had no choice but to journey to Bethlehem. I am sure they longed for it to be different.

Your Rome is the place or person where decisions are made that impact your life beyond your control. Life-altering decisions are made and your circumstances don't matter. Decisions made by people who don't even know you. And there is a longing for things to be different.

What authority is driving your circumstances? What longings do you bring to this Advent? Don't let the 'Romes' of this world be your ruling authority. A decree in Rome could not stop the plans of God.

God has longings for the world and us. When we align with God and when our hearts break over the things that break God's heart, God gives us and calls us to be solutions.

The two most significant ingredients for change are courage and trust. We must have the courage to let God trouble us in the first place.Then we must trust that God empowers us and works through our faithful actions.
(Rob Farquay)

God is your Rome. He is your powerhouse.

You are seen and you are heard by the living God. Share your dreams and hopes with Him. Have the courage to let Him align your dreams with His. Be honest with Him now about how you are doing.



Prayer: Born a King on Bethlehem's plain, King forever, ceasing never, over us all to reign. Lord, empower me to journey forward with You. AMEN

WEDNESDAY – Surely the Lord is in this place



Romans 8: 24 & 25 *For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*

Advent is a journey of preparation and hope. Sometimes we wonder whether God really is in the confusion and pain of this world and our lives. And this may challenge our faith. *“That is when faith is required. That is when we choose to believe God is acting, even doing God’s greatest work, so that by the time we see a result we can say with Jacob, “Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!” (Genesis 28:16)* (Rob Farquay)

Faith often comes when we look back and see what God has done in our lives previously. Where we are reminded that if He was present then, He is present now. Faith is taking what we know, and choosing to believe that God is always at work even when this

seems so unlikely. What He has done for you in the past, He will do again. Mary probably wondered, why this? But she knew God had been with her at the beginning of this journey.

We can choose to believe that God is working in this world. We cannot bring our limited human understanding to what we think God is or isn’t doing. Can this Advent be the beginning of a journey where you make God your Rome – your powerhouse? Where you say “God I can’t possibly see this working out, but I trust that You will see me through it. Prepare me.”

Where do you need God to show up today?



Prayer: Come adore on bended knee, lay your burden at the feet of Christ the Lord, the newborn King. AMEN

THURSDAY – Be prepared



Proverbs 16: 1-3 *To humans belong the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the proper answer of the tongue. All a person's ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by the Lord. Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and He will establish your plans.*

The thing about our plans is that the Lord often changes them! I am learning to not make plans before praying about them. Also – make your plans but be prepared to change them.

Advent is a time of spiritual preparation for Christmas. But this year perhaps you could bring Christ into all your preparations for the festive season so that He truly becomes the centre of it all. Perhaps you could be open to changing the way you have always done things.

Last year our 3-year-old grandson instituted just such a change. We explained to him that Christmas Day was Jesus's birthday. The

next step was obvious! We had to sing Happy Birthday to Jesus at the lunch table. That is now a new, rather special, family tradition.

As you prepare to fellowship with family and friends and gather a bounty of food and gifts, what could you do differently to reflect the Christ who came to save all men?

The Christ who forgives freely – is there a need for reconciliation in your family this year?

The Christ who shines a light in the darkness – could you light the Christ candle on your lunch table as a statement of your faith?

Prepare to let Christ be the centre of this Christmas.



Prayer: Be near us, Lord Jesus we ask You to stay. Close by us forever and love us we pray. Lord enter our Christmas this year and establish Your plans in our lives. To You, we give honour and praise. AMEN

FRIDAY – God is up to something



Romans 1: 20 *For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.*

Caesar Augustus made a decree in Rome. God said no problem. The angels sang get ready!

Your Rome and the Romes of the world – the powerhouses, are often places where it is hard to have faith in God, but they are the very places where we realize our need for faith. Time and time again the world fails us. But God and His purposes always prevail. He has stood the test of time – more than 2000 years. *“If Rome is the object of our worship, we will too often quit the journey of Christmas before we ever get to Bethlehem.”* (Rob Farquay)

Your dreams may seem crushed, circumstances may be beyond your control. You have prayed and it just seems as if God is quiet. Yet in that seemingly unholy place of a stable, Christ was born.

What felt unholy is where holiness descended. What you feel is difficult is where you will find Christ. People under Roman rule longed for peace, justice, equality and a messiah. Christ came but not as they expected. In your difficulties and longing, Christ will come, but not as you expect. He has never stopped working. Let go of your expectations and cling to your Lord as you journey to Bethlehem.

May this Christmas journey be one where Christ is around your Christmas tree festivities and at your family table. May He bring you joy and peace.

There is hope.
God is up to something!



Prayer: Come, Thou long expected Jesus, born to set Your people free; from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in You. Born a child and yet a King, born to reign in us forever. AMEN