



Welcome to our Sunday Service (17/01/21)

Christmas Fragments

Prepared by Angela

Hello to you all and a belated Happy New Year. I hope you're keeping well and had an enjoyable, even though somewhat different Christmas. How are you faring with Lockdown 3? Even though we know what to expect by now, it's perhaps a bit harder in the winter months than the summer. I even found myself moaning at house group the other week, because we can't get out into the Lakes for our walks. But then felt guilty!! We are blessed with beautiful countryside around us, all within our locality, so I shouldn't have been grumbling! Recently I've taken a few walks along Askam Pier with the dog and discovered it has its very own cairn, with a mountainous backdrop.



My assumption that December would be less busy this year was totally wrong! But we still had a lovely time, tinged with some sadness due to the loss of a couple of friends. One of my Christmas highlights was our carol singing on Birkrigg. It was wonderful to praise God together, socially distanced outside. And to be blessed with a beautiful rainbow.



**Happy
Birthday to...**

**Pat (14th)
Pete C (19th)
Charlotte (21st)
Jo & Hattie (23rd)**



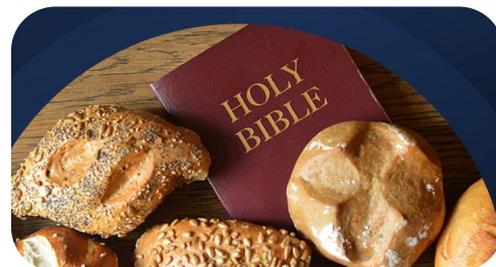
**My Jesus, my Saviour,
Lord there is none like You.
All of my days I want to praise
The wonders of your mighty love.
My comfort, my shelter,
Tower of refuge and strength,
Let every breath, all that I am,
Never cease to worship You.**

**Shout to the Lord all the earth, let us sing,
Power and majesty, praise to the King.
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar
At the sound of Your Name.
I sing for joy at the work of Your hands,
Forever I'll praise You, forever I'll stand.
Nothing compares to the
Promise I have in You.**

**We hope you all have
lovely birthdays, and
pray that God
would bless you all!**

One day prior to Christmas I was walking along Portland Walk in Barrow and noticed some homeless folk in a couple of doorways. It reminded me of “**no room for them at the inn**” and I returned to Bethlehem. First of all, its name. Bethlehem: beth (house) lehem (bread). House of bread. And I started to think of God’s names. Like Immanuel – Jesus – God with us. **WITH US**. I sometimes read it without grasping it! **WORD MADE FLESH** ie **JESUS**.

Jesus, appropriately born in Bethlehem, house of bread, also speaks of himself as **BREAD OF LIFE: THE LIVING BREAD** (John 6:35, 48, 51). “**Man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God**” (Deut 8:3) Jesus is the living **WORD** &



the **TRUE BREAD FROM HEAVEN**. My mind was now alerted to other names of God, but let’s stay in Bethlehem for a moment. Seeing the homeless on Portland Walk, also got me thinking about what an inn in Bethlehem would be like. Premier Inn, Holiday Inn, Days Inn.....nothing like any of them. There were basic inns, small 2 storey buildings. The ground floor was for the travellers’ animals, (camel, mule etc) with a feeder trough. The 2nd storey was for the travellers. There’d be a central communal well and several shared campfires. No innkeeper to supervise. Thieving was a bit of a concern, so when you woke up in the morning, you might find your camel or donkey had disappeared!

Other types of inn were probably a bit like B&Bs, with greater privacy than basic inns. They were usually owned by more wealthy people; even the animals’ stable, usually an empty cave at the back, would be kept clean by servants. This may well have been the sort of inn Mary & Joseph stayed at, initially using the stable because no rooms were vacant; later probably moving into a vacated room in the house. The magi following the star, “**on coming to the house, saw the child with his mother, Mary...**” (Matt 2:11).

There is another place where Mary and Joseph may have sheltered. I’m familiar with prophecy about the “little town of Bethlehem” in Micah 5, as it’s often read during the Christmas period. But my online daily bible study took me to this interesting passage in Micah 4:8. Tower of the flock is ‘Migdal Eder’ in Hebrew. The fields of Eder bordered Bethlehem. Here, specially trained shepherds from the priestly line of Levi looked

**As for you, O watchtower of the flock,
O stronghold of the daughter of Zion,
the former dominion will be restored to you;
kinship will come to the daughter of Jerusalem.**

after the sheep & raised their lambs to be sacrificial lambs, without spot or blemish. These lambs were spoiled with best food & care, even wrapped in fine linen swaddling at birth. It is as likely for Mary and Joseph to know of this place & to find haven there, as to finding an empty inn in Bethlehem. It was also known to local shepherds. Those who understood this messianic prophecy from the Torah would not need a star to guide them, like the magi. What a prophecy it is! Jesus, God’s perfect sacrificial lamb, born amongst Bethlehem’s finest natural lambs. Another name to ponder, as voiced by John Baptist: **Look, the LAMB OF GOD who takes away the sin of the world**. Wow!



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Another name of God leaps out from **Micah 4:8**. Migdal means tower, place of height, high honour. Migdal Eder: **TOWER** of the flock. I thought of the song which comes directly from **Proverbs 18:10** ***The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and they are safe.***

A place of refuge, as in **Psalms 46**. Here are **v1-7**

God is our REFUGE & STRENGTH, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall. God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;

He lifts his voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us, the God of Jacob is our FORTRESS.



What wonderful assurance in such troubled times. The Psalmist actually repeats **v7** at the end of the Psalm, reaffirming God is with us.

Psalm 46 also goes on to say “***Be still and know that I am God***” (**v10**). I was reflecting on that verse before going to sleep one night. At 5am I was woken with “***beep, beep, beep***”. It was a car alarm somewhere in the village. It stopped after a short while and I was just nodding off to sleep, when it started up again....then again. At that point I felt a nudge from God. Amidst all my Christmas busyness I needed to be still and spend more time with Him. How many times have I read this Psalm before and been reminded of that truth? Yet here I was AGAIN!! Sometimes God needs to grab our attention to stop. Remember Mark's peace/pace illustration, how the broken Peace decoration then read Pace, and how that's just like us (or maybe only me), when the pace of life breaks our peace. Stop, Angela. ***Be still & know***. Sometimes God grabs our attention with car alarms through the night; sometimes with a Covid pandemic. **STOP WORLD!**

BE STILL! Know I AM GOD!



Wealth isn't God, nor celebrities or footballers, nor stuff to do. Not even the scientists, as grateful as we are that they've worked diligently to develop vaccines.

Only God is God.

Another Christmas fragment. **BE**. A few days before Christmas I received a card and some mail from Pete W, including some bible thoughts God had given him, the keyword being "**Before**". It really blessed me, especially as some of it tied in with my own Christmas fragments. We can add other words to BE to get a different word. Here are 4 Christmas **BE** words, all in John ch 1, all associated with Jesus, God with us.



- **BE**came – the word *became* flesh (John 1:14)
- **BE**fore – He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was *before* me (John 1:15)
- **BE**gotten – “Very God, *begotten* not created” (O come all ye faithful), an old word which can be found in the King James version of John 1:18
- **BE**hold – *Behold* (look) the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)

Further reflections on **BE still and know that I AM God**. *I am* is the active form of the verb **to be**. God is timeless. He is Past, Present, Future: I was, I am, I will be. When God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, He revealed his memorial name YHWH (Yahweh), meaning: I am that I am, I will be who I will be.



In brief, He is the great I AM.

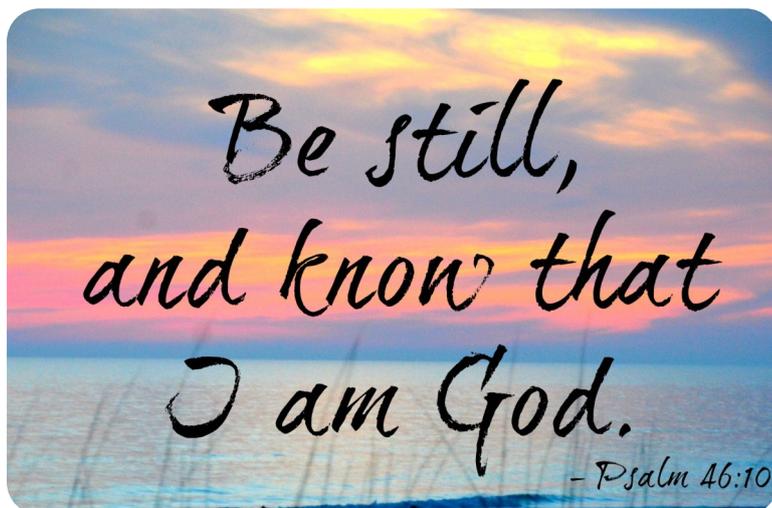
I was reminded of an expression (perhaps just Geordie, I don't know) for something of great value, absolute quality. Mam used to use it occasionally: *Look at that! It's the real 'I am'*. I never thought about it growing up, and I doubt she did, but it's actually another example of taking God's name out of context, at least this time for something special!

Only YHWH is the real "I AM". God always has been, always is & always will be. He is Alpha & Omega, who is & was & is to come. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday & today & forever. The one before John who came after him.

I believe God gave me these Christmas fragments to remind me of His awesomeness as revealed in His names. I hope this is true for you, too.

That the great **I Am** stepped into our darkness through Jesus, **Immanuel**, the **Living Word**, the **Bread of Life**, the perfect sacrificial **Lamb** who takes away the sin of the world. As **Psalm 46** reminds us, He is also our **Tower**, our **Fortress**, our **Refuge** even when the world is raging and chaotic. And in our personal darkest, stormiest moments He calls to us:

BE still, my child & know I AM.



Thank you, Lord, that you are our Faithful One, whose mercies are new every day.

Thank you that all our hopes and fears are met through Jesus, our Saviour and Redeemer and that through him we have forgiveness of sins.

Thank you that you are there with us, through good times and bad, and that you will never leave us nor forsake.

Teach us your ways, dear Lord, that we might grow in Godly wisdom, discernment and truth.

We thank you that we are blessed by God because JESUS IS, we are forgiven by God because JESUS WAS and we are not forsaken by God because JESUS IS TO COME.

We ask that you will continue to bless us and keep us safe, in the precious name of Jesus

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forever more.....AMEN.