



TOWARDS THE LIGHT

Advent Booklet
December 2017



December is that special time of the year when we prepare for Christmas. This is the time we reflect on the birth of Jesus, and celebrate the way his life shapes our lives. We offer one another gifts as a sign of joy and gratitude, gather as families to eat together, and pause in our busyness for a holiday.

Jesus was born at a time of great darkness. The Roman Empire had seen the battle for supremacy between Octavian and Mark Antony, resulting in Octavian's victory and his dismantling of the Roman Republic in favour of an all-powerful Emperor. He changed his name to Augustus, thus requiring the citizens to acknowledge him as supreme power over all the earth – something akin to claiming the power of God! Jesus is born, in such a time, as a light in the darkness. Jesus comes as a reminder that God still loves this rebellious world and longs for people who will follow God's ways.

Jesus was also born into a Roman Province that was plagued by rampant corruption and great poverty. Government workers such as Tax Collectors and minor temple officials supplemented their income by squeezing extra out of the poor working people. Jesus challenged these dark practices with the light of his teaching about God's Kingdom values. As John's Gospel observed: *The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness; the darkness couldn't put it out (John 1:5, Message)*.

Jesus' birth, life and death were not only significant for world history; he also gave people hope for the future with his resurrection and ascension. We who follow Jesus now have something to live for - our lives have meaning. His love did not



only beat the darkness in the world, it is the light that brightens every heart's darkness (Bryant McGill).

Christian churches traditionally celebrate the Season of Advent, when a candle is lit for each of the four Sundays in Advent. The wreath (a circle of greenery) reminds us of God's unending love for us and represents the life and new hope we find in Christ. The use of candles symbolizes the contrast between darkness and light - God being the light of the world. Lit on successive Sundays in Lent, the candles show our movement toward the light as we await Christ's birth (as did those who waited for the Messiah). The 5th candle is lit on Christmas day, and represents Jesus as the light of the world that darkness cannot defeat. All the lit candles represent the fulfilment of his promises to us. Jesus came in the past, is with us today, and will come again to bring his people into an eternity of love and blessings. He is the way and the light.



Simple Reminders
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In today's world of darkness, there is a desperate need for light. As we live in his light we need to show others the light. Bryanston Methodist Church has over the years been called "the light on the hill". We are called to be different, to stand out in the darkness. Our talk about Jesus must lead to a demonstration of the love and hope that the world is missing. May this period of reflection on his birth, and what it means for us today, point us toward his light! Then we will be ready to celebrate his birth, not just the party that surrounds it. We need to BE THE LIGHT!

God Bless you!

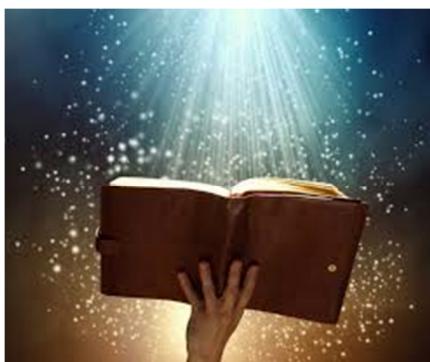
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Advent 1: The Creator of Light ... page 3
Advent 2: The Sustainer of Light ... page 4
Advent 3: Know the Light ... page 6
Advent 4: Follow the Light ... page 8
Christmas: Light Forever ... page 10

ADVENT 1 THE CREATOR OF LIGHT

Extracts off Genesis 1:1-5 (MSG)



Heaven and Earth

First this: God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss. God spoke "Light!" And light appeared. God saw that light was good and separated light from dark. God named the light Day, he named the dark Night. It was evening, it was morning—Day One.

Overview

"In the beginning"- these optimistic words are full of promise. Genesis, translated from the Hebrew *b'reishit* (בראשית), means “beginnings” or “origin”, and tells the story of the beginning of the faith-history between God and of the world. Genesis says that God is the creator of all life: the life of the universe, and therefore the life of our earth and its people. Before the beginning of time he chose to love us. Psalm 139 remarks on the fact that darkness cannot separate us from the light of God (Ps 139:11&12).

In the same way that God's Spirit formed the earth and all in it, God continues to form and change us though his Holy Spirit. The light of God that formed us in our mother's womb comes to fruition when we commit our lives to living Jesus' way. In making that choice to follow him, our light starts changing the world we live in. When we allow God into our lives, we change into the people of light he intended us to be. We are God's light in this world and our light can make a difference when we act on it. Know that God cannot imagine the world without you, but also that he separated the light from the darkness in the beginning and will do so again. Choose to reflect the light of the Creator.



Create an advent wreath with greenery and 5 candles. Read the verse for the day and light the 1st candle meditating on the words.

Daily Devotions (MSG)



Sunday 3 December: Exodus 4:10-12 Moses raised another objection to God: “Master, please, I don't talk well. I've never been good with words, neither before nor after you spoke to me. I stutter and stammer.” God said, “And who do you think made the human mouth?

And who makes some mute, some deaf, some sighted, some blind? Isn't it I, God? So, get going. I'll be right there with you—with your mouth! I'll be right there to teach you what to say."

Monday 4 December: Ephesians 3:17-19 My response is to get down on my knees before the Father, this magnificent Father who parcels out all heaven and earth. I ask him to strengthen you by his Spirit—not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength—that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in. And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God.



Tuesday 5 December: 1 Peter 4:1 It's judgment time for God's own family. We're first in line. If it starts with us, think what it's going to be like for those who refuse God's Message! If good people barely make it, what's in store for the bad? So if you find life difficult because you're doing what God said, take it in stride. Trust him. He knows what he's doing, and he'll keep on doing it.



Wednesday 6 December: Ecclesiastes 12:1-8: Honour and enjoy your Creator while you're still young, Before the years take their toll and your vigour wanes, Before your vision dims and the world blurs And the winter years keep you close to the fire. In old age, your body no longer serves you so well. Muscles slacken, grip weakens, and joints stiffen. The shades are pulled down on the world. You can't come and go at will. Things grind to a halt. The hum of the household fades away. You are wakened now by bird-song. Hikes to the mountains are a thing of the past. Even a stroll down the road has its terrors. Your hair turns apple-blossom white, adorning a fragile and impotent matchstick body. Yes, you're well on your way to eternal rest, while your friends make plans for your funeral. Life, lovely while it lasts, is soon over. Life as we know it, precious and beautiful, ends. The body is put back in the same ground it came from. The spirit returns to God, who first breathed it. It's all smoke, nothing but smoke. The Quester says that everything's smoke.

Thursday 7 December: Psalm 100:3 Know this: God is God, and God, God. He made us; we didn't make him. We're his people, his well-tended sheep.

Friday 8 December: Romans 8:2: The Solution Is Life on God's Terms With the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, that fateful dilemma is resolved. Those who enter into Christ's being-here-for-us no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud. A new power is in operation. The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has magnificently cleared the air, freeing you from a fated lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death.

Saturday 9 December: Matthew 16:18 Jesus came back, "God bless you, Simon, son of Jonah! You didn't get that answer out of books or from teachers. My Father in heaven, God himself, let you in on this secret of who I really am. And now I'm going to tell you who you are, really are. You are Peter, a rock. This is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out.

ADVENT 2 THE SUSTAINER OF LIGHT

Extracts from Psalm 27 (MSG)



A David Psalm. Light, space, zest—that's God! So, with him on my side I'm fearless, afraid of no one and nothing. When vandal hordes ride down ready to eat me alive, those bullies and toughs fall flat on their faces. I'm asking God for one thing, only one thing: To live with him in his house my whole life long. I'll contemplate his beauty; I'll study at his feet. That's the only quiet, secure place in a noisy world. The perfect getaway, far from the buzz of traffic. God holds me head and shoulders above all who try to pull me down. When my heart whispered, "Seek God, my whole being replied, "I'm seeking him! Don't hide from me now! You've always been right there for me don't turn your back on me now. My father and mother walked out and left me, but God took me in. I'm sure now I'll see God's goodness in the exuberant earth. Stay with God! Take heart. Don't quit. I'll say it again: Stay with God.

Overview

The darkness of our world can often overwhelm us: corrupt politicians collude with greedy businesspersons to gain power and wealth; illness and disease ravage the lives of people we love; the cost of living rises while our income diminishes; and our world's ecology is destroyed by uncaring human interests. It is as if the light is being extinguished by bad people and ugly experiences. This can lead us to live in fear, afraid of taking the next step, wondering what else could possibly go wrong. Often it seems that no matter the effort we put in, our circumstances are just not improving, and things just stay the same.



As you light the second Advent Candle, remember that Christmas is coming: The light of Christ invites us to take off our dark glasses of despair and to see God's bright vision of hope. God is our salvation, our stronghold, and our shelter in tough times. His light burns always and forever. By drawing close to his light and internalizing it, our own light catches fire again. Drawing closer to God – through prayer and worship – reminds us that we are loved. We are given courage to face whatever comes our way. Our light is also restored when we surround ourselves with life-giving people. Allow others to nurture the light of your own soul. In the same way we can nurture the wavering lights in the lives of other people who struggle. God promises us that the darkness will never overcome the light no matter how powerful it might seem – see John 1: 4-5.



Read the verse for the day and light the 2nd candle meditating on the words.

Daily Devotions (MSG)

Sunday 10 December: *Isaiah 40:28: Why would you ever complain, O Jacob, or whine, Israel, saying, "God has lost track of me. He doesn't care what happens to me"? Don't you know anything? Haven't you been listening? God doesn't come and go. God lasts. He's Creator of all you can see or imagine. He doesn't get tired out, doesn't pause to catch his breath. And he knows everything, inside and out. He energizes those who get tired, gives fresh strength to dropouts. For even young people tire and drop out, young folk in their prime stumble and fall. But those who wait upon God get fresh strength. They spread their wings and soar like eagles, they run and don't get tired, they walk and don't lag behind.*

Monday 11 December: *Deuteronomy 31:6 "Be strong. Take courage. Don't be intimidated. Don't give them a second thought because GOD, your God, is striding ahead of you. He's right there with you. He won't let you down; he won't leave you."*

Tuesday 12 December: *Psalm 91:1-10 You who sit down in the High God's presence, spend the night in Shaddai's shadow, Say this: "God, you're my refuge. I trust in you and I'm safe!" That's right—he rescues you from hidden traps, shields you from deadly hazards. His huge outstretched arms protect you- under them you're perfectly safe; his arms fend off all harm. Fear nothing—not wild wolves in the night, not flying arrows in the day, not disease that prowls through the darkness, not disaster that erupts at high noon. Even though others succumb all around, drop like flies right and left, no harm will even graze you. You'll stand untouched, watch it all from a distance, and watch the wicked turn into corpses. Yes, because God's your refuge, the High God your very own home, Evil can't get close to you, harm can't get through the door. He ordered his angels to guard you wherever you go. If you stumble, they'll catch you; their job is to keep you from falling. You'll walk unharmed among lions and snakes, and kick young lions and serpents from the path.*

Wednesday 13 December: *Isaiah 25:3-5 God's Hand Rests on This Mountain God, you are my God. I celebrate you. I praise you. You've done your share of miracle-wonders, well-thought-out plans, solid and sure. Here you've reduced the city to rubble, the strong city to a pile of stones. The enemy Big City is a non-city, never to be a city again. Superpowers will see it and honour you, brutal oppressors bow in worshipful reverence. They'll see that you take care of the poor, that you take care of poor people in trouble, provide a warm, dry place in bad weather, and provide a cool place when it's hot. Brutal oppressors are like a winter blizzard and vicious foreigners like high noon in the desert. But you, shelter from the storm and shade from the sun, shut the mouths of the big-mouthed bullies.*



Thursday 14 December: *Joshua 1:9 After the death of Moses the servant of God, God spoke to Joshua, Moses' assistant: And don't for a minute let this Book of The Revelation be out of mind. Ponder and meditate on it day and night, making sure you practice everything written in it. Then you'll get where you're going; then you'll succeed. Haven't I commanded you? Strength! Courage! Don't be timid; don't get discouraged. God, your God, is with you every step you take."*

Friday 15 December: Joshua 1:7 “Moses my servant is dead. Get going. Cross this Jordan River, you and all the people. Cross to the country I’m giving to the People of Israel. I’m giving you every square inch of the land you set your foot on—just as I promised Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon east to the Great River, the Euphrates River—all the Hittite country—and then west to the Great Sea. It’s all yours. All your life, no one will be able to hold out against you. In the same way I was with Moses, I’ll be with you. I won’t give up on you; I won’t leave you. Strength! Courage! You are going to lead this people to inherit the land that I promised to give their ancestors. Give it everything you have, heart and soul. Make sure you carry out The Revelation that Moses commanded you, every bit of it. Don’t get off track, either left or right, so as to make sure you get to where you’re going.

Saturday 16 December: Psalm 91:10-16 “God, you’re my refuge. I trust in you and I’m safe!” His huge outstretched arms protect you—under them you’re perfectly safe; his arms fend off all harm. Fear nothing—not wild wolves in the night, not flying arrows in the day, not disease that prowls through the darkness, not disaster that erupts at high noon. Even though others succumb all around, drop like flies right and left, no harm will even graze you. You’ll stand untouched, watch it all from a distance, and watch the wicked turn into corpses. Yes, because God’s your refuge, the High God your very own home, Evil can’t get close to you, harm can’t get through the door. He ordered his angels to guard you wherever you go. If you stumble, they’ll catch you; their job is to keep you from falling. You’ll walk unharmed among lions and snakes, and kick young lions and serpents from the path. “If you’ll hold on to me for dear life,” says God, “I’ll get you out of any trouble. I’ll give you the best of care if you’ll only get to know and trust me. Call me and I’ll answer, be at your side in bad times; I’ll rescue you, then throw you a party. I’ll give you a long life, give you a long drink of salvation!”

ADVENT 3 KNOW THE LIGHT

Extracts from Isaiah 9 & 11 (MSG)



9: A Child Has Been Born—for Us! But there’ll be no darkness for those who were in trouble. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. The abuse of oppressors and cruelty of tyrants—all their whips and cudgels and curses—is gone, done away with. For a child has been born—for us! The gift of a son—for us! He’ll take over the running of the world. His names will be: Amazing Counsellor, Strong God, Eternal Father, Prince of Wholeness. His ruling authority will grow, and there’ll be no limits to the wholeness he brings. “Things aren’t that bad. We can handle anything that comes. If our buildings are knocked down, we’ll rebuild them bigger and finer.

11: A green Shoot will sprout from Jesse's stump, from his roots a budding Branch. The life-giving Spirit of God will hover over him, the Spirit that brings wisdom and understanding, The Spirit that gives direction and builds strength, the Spirit that instils knowledge and Fear-of-God. Fear-of-God will be all his joy and delight. He won't judge by appearances, won't decide on the basis of hearsay. He'll judge the needy by what is right, render decisions on earth's poor with justice. Each morning he'll pull on sturdy work clothes and boots, and build righteousness and faithfulness in the land.

A Living Knowledge of God The wolf will romp with the lamb, the leopard sleep with the kid. Neither animal nor human will hurt or kill on my holy mountain. The whole earth will be brimming with knowing God-Alive, a living knowledge of God ocean-deep, ocean-wide. On that day, Jesse's Root will be raised high, posted as a rallying banner for the peoples. The nations will all come to him.

Overview

After the reign of King David and of his son Solomon, the Kingdom divided into two parts – the northern kingdoms of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. The ensuing conflict saw a moral and spiritual disintegration of the people of God. They longed for a return to the days of King David and the prophets began to speak of the Messiah who would come to restore the Kingdom. The words of Isaiah above are one such prophecy: Isaiah speaks of the one who would come as a great light in the darkness: “*those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness on them have light shined*”. This son of the nation would be “*a shoot from the stump of Jesse*” – in other words he would be a descendent of King David (David’s father was Jesse). The Spirit of the Lord would rest on him and he would rule with righteousness.



We too long for such a ruler. We see a country where our leaders fail abysmally. Our nation's moral compass no longer points to God. People let us down, trust is broken and hope is lost. Theft, hatred, abuse and destruction make up the stories in the news. Once again we pray for a shoot from the stump of David to bring light into our darkness.

This Christmas we light the third candle to remind us of the arrival of Jesus, the Son of Jesse – come to bring peace to the people of God. John 8:12 tells us that he came as a light into the darkness. When we choose to follow him we discover the light of God shines through us. God's Spirit rests inside of us and he delights in us shining brightly.

Read the verse for the day and light the 3rd candle meditating on the words.

Daily Devotions (MSG)



Sunday 17 December: Romans 5:3-5 There's more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we're hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we're never

left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary—we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!

Monday 18 December: *Job 8:13 That's what happens to all who forget God—all their hopes come to nothing. They hang their life from one thin thread; they hitch their fate to a spider web. One jiggle and the thread breaks, one jab and the web collapse. Or they are like weeds springing up in the sunshine, invading the garden, spreading everywhere, overtaking the flowers, getting a foothold even in the rocks.*

Tuesday 19 December: *Psalm 33:18 Watch this: God's eye is on those who respect him, the ones who are looking for his love. He's ready to come to their rescue in bad times; in lean times he keeps body and soul together.*

Wednesday 20 December: *John 8:12 Jesus the Light of the World. Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

Thursday 21 December: *John 11:9 You're Missing God in All This. Jesus once again addressed them: "I am the world's Light. No one who follows me stumbles around in the darkness. I provide plenty of light to live in."*

Friday 22 December *Philippians 2:15 Do everything readily and cheerfully—no bickering, no second-guessing allowed! Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. Carry the light-giving Message into the night so I'll have good cause to be proud of you on the day that Christ returns.*

Saturday 23 December: *Job 14:7 "We're all adrift in the same boat: too few days, too many troubles. We spring up like wildflowers in the desert and then wilt, transient as the shadow of a cloud. But men and women? They die and stay dead. They breathe their last, and that's it. But don't leave me there! Set a date when you'll see me again. If we humans die, will we live again? That's my question. All through these difficult days I keep hoping, waiting for the final change—for resurrection! Homesick with longing for the creature you made, you'll call—and I'll answer! You'll watch over every step I take, but you won't keep track of my missteps. My sins will be stuffed in a sack and thrown into the sea—sunk in deep ocean.*

ADVENT 4 FOLLOW THE LIGHT

Extracts from Isaiah 59 & 60 (MSG)



59: *Look! Listen! God's arm is not amputated—he can still save. God's ears are not stopped up—he can still hear. There's nothing wrong with God; the wrong is in you. Your wrongheaded lives caused the split between you and God. We long for light but sink into darkness, long for brightness but stumble through the night. Like the blind, we inch along a wall, groping*

eyeless in the dark. Our wrongdoings pile up before you, God, our sins stand up and accuse us. He'll make everyone pay for what they've done: fury for his foes, just deserts for his enemies. "As for me," God says, "this is my covenant with them: My Spirit that I've placed upon you and the words that I've given you to speak, they're not going to leave your mouths nor the mouths of your children nor the mouths of your grandchildren. You will keep repeating these words and won't ever stop." God's orders.

60: Get out of bed, Jerusalem! Wake up. Put your face in the sunlight. God's bright glory has risen for you. The whole earth is wrapped in darkness, all people sunk in deep darkness, But God rises on you, his sunrise glory breaks over you. Returning your children from faraway places, loaded with riches, with silver and gold, And backed by the name of your God, The Holy of Israel, showering you with splendour. All who looked down at you in contempt will lick your boots. You'll know that I, God, am your Saviour, your Redeemer, Champion of Jacob. I'll give you only the best—no more hand-me-downs! There'll be no more stories of crime in your land, no more robberies, no more vandalism. God will be your eternal light, your God will bathe you in splendour. Your sun will never go down, your moon will never fade. I will be your eternal light. Your days of grieving are over. I am God. At the right time I'll make it happen."

Overview

Isaiah speaks of people who live out of a place of darkness: "*your lips have spoken lies; your tongue mutters wickedness... no one goes to law honestly; they rely on empty pleas, they speak lies, they conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity... Truth is lacking*". These words, written 2700 years ago, seem to be as relevant for our world today! They do not only apply to the leaders of nations because if we look carefully we might find them speaking into our own hearts too. We ourselves often stumble and fall, and sometimes do not have the strength to get up again. We let down ourselves and others. We stray easily from God, as it

is painful to confront the darkness within ourselves. We know when our sins have separated us from God.



As you light the Fourth Advent Candle, say out aloud: "*Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you*". The good news is that Jesus comes as a light into the darkness. In the words of the Prophet Isaiah: "*the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory*". Christmas reminds us that we live as Children of the Light. Choose to make this Christmas a time where you choose to walk away from the darkness and embrace the light. And pray that others may encounter the light of Christ in the living of your life.

Read the verse for the day and light the 4th candle meditating on the words.

Daily Devotion (MSG)



Sunday 24 December: Matthew 22:36-40 *The Most Important Command. When the Pharisees heard how he had bested the Sadducees, they gathered their forces for an assault.*

One of their religion scholars spoke for them, posing a question they hoped would show him up: "Teacher, which command in God's Law is the most important?" Jesus said, "'Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.' This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: 'Love others as well as you love yourself.' These two commands are pegs; everything in God's Law and the Prophets hangs from them."



Christmas LIGHT FOREVER

Extracts from John Ch 1 (MSG)



The Word was first, the Word present to God, God present to the Word. The Word was God, in readiness for God from day one. Everything was created through him; nothing—not one thing!—came into being without him. What came into existence was Life, and the Life was Light to live by. The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness; the darkness couldn't put it out. John was not himself the Light; he was there to show the way to the Light. The Life-Light was the real thing: Every person entering Life he brings into Light. He was in the world, the world was there through him, and yet the world didn't even notice. The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood. John pointed him out and called, "This is the One! The One I told you was coming after me but in fact was ahead of me. He has always been ahead of me, has always had the first word. John answered, "I only baptize using water. A person you don't recognize has taken his stand in your midst. He comes after me, but he is not in second place to me. I'm not even worthy to hold his coat for him. The very next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and yelled out, "Here he is, God's Passover Lamb! He forgives the sins of the world! This is the man I've been talking about, 'the One who comes after me but is really ahead of me.'

Overview



We were a twinkle in God's eye before he formed the world. His goal is and was to spend eternity with us. Everything in our life happens with that purpose in mind. No matter what we face as individuals or as a country, His light cannot be extinguished. God was and is and is still to come (Revelation 4:8). He is our everlasting light. All things came into being through him and in him, and this is for all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it. On this day the true light came into the world and lived among us, and we have seen and felt this glorious light. It is our responsibility to be Christ's light on earth. We only have one life, one chance

of overcoming the darkness in us and around us! We are reminded that we have to come to Jesus as vulnerable as a little baby, ready to learn, so that our lights will not be extinguished, but will shine forever. With his light we can go out in the world and be God's disciples to spread grace upon grace in the world, making way for his coming.

May this special day remind you of his amazing love and how he changed our world forever by becoming real in our world! Praise God forever!

Read the verse for the day and light the last candle meditating on the words.

Daily Devotion (MSG)



Sunday 25 December: *Matthew 28:16-20 Meanwhile, the eleven disciples were on their way to Galilee, headed for the mountain Jesus had set for their reunion. The moment they saw him they worshiped him. Some, though, held back, not sure about worship, about risking themselves totally. Jesus, undeterred, went right ahead and gave his charge: "God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."*

SOURCES CONSULTED

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This book was produced and printed by the Grace of God, and with contributions from: Nadja Atkinson & Pete Grassow – Co-Writers, Kerry Wetton – Cover design, Carol Roodt – Proofreader and Bendi Jabulani Mashinini – Printer.

Bryanston Methodist Church, December 2017.