

Daily Readings

Advent 2023



AR  TAHI
HAND-CARVED MISSION

Advent prayer guide

Advent ('coming') is the time of preparation for Christmas, beginning on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. Advent scripture readings focus on preparation for the coming of the Messiah, and, anticipation for the second coming of Christ. This year we focus on stories. Stories from Jesus' lineage, our whakapapa at Arotahi, new stories from our friends working in the ends of the earth, and, we reflect on three of our precious Arotahi kauri who are no longer with us. Stories of people being woven into God's mahi, spreading light in the world.

Please join us in this global prayer journey from Advent to Epiphany, as we anticipate and proclaim the arrival of the one who brings love, identity and purpose to all people, in all nations. You'll find prayers, scriptures to journey with, and stories from our global friends and partners as we pray together, for God's world and for our part in it.

"A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots."

Isaiah11:1

Jesse was the father of David, Israel's greatest king. And Jesus is descended from the line of David. He is the branch God promised would grow from Jesse's family tree.

Lord God,
you have given us the example of these men and women.
In their lives, they sought & seek to give glory to you
and to live in your grace.
By the mystery of your love draw us ever closer to you.
Strengthen us with your grace
and raise our hearts and minds to heaven,
and to your call on our lives.
Amen.

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:

Abraham was the father of Isaac,

Isaac the father of Jacob,

Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,

Perez the father of Hezron,

Hezron the father of Ram,

Ram the father of Amminadab,

Amminadab the father of Nahshon,

Nahshon the father of Salmon,

Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,

Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,

Obed the father of Jesse,

and Jesse the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,

Solomon the father of Rehoboam,

Rehoboam the father of Abijah,

Abijah the father of Asa,

Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,

Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,

Jehoram the father of Uzziah,

Uzziah the father of Jotham,

Jotham the father of Ahaz,

Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,

Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,

Manasseh the father of Amon,

Amon the father of Josiah,

and Josiah the father of Jeconiah[c] and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

After the exile to Babylon:

Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,

Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,

Abihud the father of Eliakim,

Eliakim the father of Azor,

Azor the father of Zadok,

Zadok the father of Akim,

Akim the father of Elihud,

Elihud the father of Eleazar,

Eleazar the father of Matthan,

Matthan the father of Jacob,

and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

Matthew 1:1-16

I'm reading a novel at the moment where the central character, finding they can't get to sleep, decides to read the genealogies of the Bible. Most of the time I brush over them quickly. But, as I get older, I find researching my family history increasingly interesting. In fact, earlier this year I went to see where my family lived over a hundred years ago.

In my family and this list of Jesus' ancestors there are numerous stories. Each one triggered simply by remembering their name. There are faithful followers, well known leaders like Abraham and Joseph, sex workers, Kings, total unknowns, and unlikely people like Boaz. Boaz who becomes the second husband of Ruth to fulfil the Jewish custom of marrying so that the name of the dead would not be forgotten – a 'kinsman redeemer'. Jesus stood in this long line of the followers of God.

What is the 'Good News' of Christmas in this?

Jesus is born into his family's heritage. Each name in his whakapapa forms the basis of his human identity and provide his place in a bigger story of God's story. Jesus stands in this rich tradition, heritage, and legacy. So too do we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. Their stories can inspire us, give us courage and give our lives perspective as one more life following Jesus with all we have, and so adding to this rich tradition. This long line also speaks powerfully of Gods faithfulness for generations. This can be encouraging when we lose sight of what our lives are about or where they fit.

What is the invitation/challenge for growth in this Advent season?

I long that my name prompt encouraging stories for those who follow me. -Alan Jamieson

Lord Jesus

Please forgive my sin and selfishness
and help me sense my place in your bigger story
and encourage me to play my bit-part.
To carry my grain of sand for the building
of the city of God.
Amen

Prophecy of a Saviour Born in Bethlehem

*Marshal your troops now, city of troops,
for a siege is laid against us.
They will strike Israel's ruler
on the cheek with a rod.*

*"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times."*

*Therefore Israel will be abandoned
until the time when she who is in labour bears a
son,
and the rest of his brothers return
to join the Israelites.*

*He will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they will live securely, for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.*

*And he will be our peace
when the Assyrians invade our land
and march through our fortresses.*

Micah 5:1-5a

**Father in Heaven,
soon the glory of your son, Jesus
will make the night bright with light.
Prepare our hearts and minds.
Amen**

Tues 5 Dec

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favoured woman! The Lord is with you!"

Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favour with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

Luke 1:26-33

Pray for those in our world who are living in fear: Fear for their own lives, fear for the lives of those they love.

May the promise of Jesus' presence uphold them with assurance of peace and hope.

Mary's Song

And Mary said:

*“My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their
inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”*

Luke 1

God As we look at this world, we see some global leaders who are driven by power and greed. We echo Mary's song and her soul's cry to see the humble uplifted, the hungry satisfied & Your great mercy flowing. We pray that those who lead our countries would seek the best for their people & advocate for this world. We pray for peace. Amen

Thurs 7 Dec

Rosalie McGeorge – first missionary of NZBMS to India. Commissioned in 1886, from Hanover Street Baptist with the following speech:

"The work which lies before you is exceptionally hard and exhausting...Your heart does not and will not fail you - you may hear even within your heart the gracious voice of the all-gracious Lord, 'Be not afraid for I am with thee', 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee', 'Let not your heart be troubled', 'My grace is sufficient for thee'.

'Keep, I charge you, your heart and mind fixed upon Him, and your will in the subjection of love to Him: so will you find strength to labour and to endure, power to enable you to fill out the measure of service He appoints for you.

Go! in the assurance that His presence yields. Go! in the simple faith in the power of the Gospel of His love. Go! your heart over-brimming with love to all on whom His love is set, and for whom the blessing of the Lord Almighty, the Father the Son, and the Holy Ghost, rest upon you for ever.'
-Albert North

After 3 months traveling by boat Rosalie jumped straight into learning the Bengali language, enhancing her learning by listening to conversations on the street and playing with the children.

In 1889 Rosalie believed that God would bless a simple life of trust, so she wrote home to let the Baptist church know she would no longer be accepting remuneration while overseas. Rosalie felt that her local community viewed her as a government agent of sorts and this was hindering trust. So she moved in with a local family and earned her keep by teaching English and other subjects. Rosalie served faithfully in South Asia for 5½ years before dying at the age of 31. In such a short space of time she had, faith and zeal, trailblazed cross-cultural work for the generations that would come after.

Elizabeth to Mary...

"Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!"

Luke 1:45

Pray for people to hear God's calling on their lives.

May we also say 'yes'.

May our intentions, actions & operation be postured towards our Creator, aligned with Him and found in Him.

Rebecca – Student Sponsorship Coordinator

Sometimes good things happen slowly! Over the last year we have seen some cool changes in Sponsorship - Zoom meetings becoming established, starting Rangamati Home support, transitioning away from supporting St. Paul's home and receiving some great new promotion material from Kelly!

Mostly, it's been a slow, steady continuation of what is already happening. Sponsors are generously and regularly giving. Bangladeshi children live in the Homes and receive a better education and future. Bangladeshi staff are working hard to invest in the future generation.

'The hostel programme of BBCF (has) the aim of educating the boys and girls of the churches in rural, tribal and hilly areas... in a Christian education and developing them as strong people spiritually and morally. BBCF expects that these boys and girls ...will play a leading role in.. management and leadership, and become 'good citizens for their society and country.'

-Regun

God's hand is slowly tilling the soil, and providing what is needed for sponsorship. We'd love to see it grow and bless more children. We give Him praise for what He is doing and trust next year's work to Him. We enjoy the work and commit our plans back to Him.

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

1 Corinthians 3:6-8

In addition - as we approach Christmas, we'd love to be able to give towards some specific needs of the Homes. Eg Musical instruments! A dining table to eat from! Would you like to contribute to a special Christmas gift? If so, please email sponsorship@arotahi.org.nz.

Please pray for growth, both in sponsorships and in the children who are sponsored. Prayer for their futures as leaders in this world. Pray for the hostel parents. Pray for the people who support these young students both here and in Bangladesh.

Abraham and Sarah

God called this childless couple to leave their home to follow Him to the promised land of Canaan. God said, "Go from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land that I will show you"

Genesis 12:1

Despite their years of infertility, Abraham and Sarah left all they knew and trusted God's radical promise to birth a nation as numerous as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:2-5). What a promise to long for! This revelation must have pricked their hearts and unearthed deep wounds, hope, and wonder, as well as confusion and fear. But God promised to be with them and to provide

Genesis 15:1

The astounding truth is that all believers are part of this radical promise, including you and me.

Those who have faith are blessed with Abraham, who had faith.

Galatians 3:9

God. Thousands of years ago, Abraham and Sarah looked ahead for You to reveal Yourself and make a way for Your people to be reunited with You and with each other. This hope was fulfilled at the cross of Christ.

Thank you that believers from all nations, more numerous than the stars in the sky, are united in Jesus Christ. Together, as a family across time and space, we are fueled by our ultimate longing—for Christ to return, make all things new, and complete the redemption and renewal of all creation.

Amen

Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Cleaning Up The Mess – Peter & Dasha

In our neighbourhood, there are a group of elderly neighbours who process the rubbish waste for our community. Surrounded by densely-packed multi-storey apartment buildings, they have their work cut out for them.

Somewhere along the line, a certain tension arose in my relationship with them. I would go silently to put out my recycling, food waste, and other rubbish, but each time I went, they seemed to get more and more irritated, sometimes yelling at me loudly. I wasn't sure what had gone wrong. No matter how carefully we separated the rubbish into the right categories, the tension increased. It got to the point where I dreaded going to take out my rubbish.

Eventually, with God's help, I realised things had to change. I decided to go and see each of these people one by one, just to talk. Keen to break whatever cycle things had gotten into, I went empty-handed - I wasn't coming to throw out my rubbish, I was coming to engage with them personally. I asked whatever questions I could think of, making an effort to strike up conversation. With one of the ladies (who had previously been quite frustrated with me) we could see a visible change come over her. Her body language completely changed, and her facial expression softened, as she realized we could engage in a friendly way. The next time she saw me, her eyes lit up, as she enthusiastically asked us to bring down any broken appliances we might have, which she can sell for parts. It was a complete transformation.

On reflection, I think that the way I had been so silent and uncommunicative each time I went to take out my rubbish had been communicating disrespect for these neighbours of mine. With God's guidance, a new alternative had become possible - friendly chit-chat that communicates respect and consideration for each other.

This experiences reminds me that we are, every one of us, woven into His story. My neighbours - as they engage in the ongoing story of creation stewardship. But also in our relationships. He built us for connection. To relate to each other with kindness and dignity, as image-bearers. And crucially, to know and walk with Him. As we celebrate the one who stepped down into our mess, keep in mind the elderly neighbours who manage the rubbish in our neighbourhood - that we could relate to them in a way that reflects His love, and that in time, they might come to know their Maker.

"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"

John 13:35

E te Atua

At Christmas we are reminded that you stepped down into our mess.

Thank you for meeting with us face to face/kanohi ki te kanohi.

Thank you for reminding us that we are to meet others the same way: with respect, expressing kindness, as bearers of Your image.

May we learn from our friends, whānau and neighbours.

Their stories are Your story too.

Help us weave people, story, love, light, hope and truth.

Amine

Joseph

Matthew 1:18-25

“Sooner or later, if we follow Christ we have to risk everything in order to gain everything. We have to gamble on the invisible and risk all that we see and taste and feel. But we know the risk is worth it, because there is nothing more insecure than this transient world.”

-Thomas Merton

One of the most striking things about Joseph’s story is that he was not one of the main characters in the story—his was a supporting role—and yet his choices mattered so much! We might think that our ability to walk in faith doesn’t matter all that much. We might think we can play it safe, let others take all the risks and it won’t affect anything. But Joseph’s story tells us that nothing could be further from the truth!

Joseph’s story tells us that our willingness to take the journey of faith affects everything. It tells us that the walk of faith will require something of us, perhaps more than we thought we were capable of. But it also tells us that as we say yes to the walk of faith, we too can find our place in the greatest story ever told—the story of God’s purposes lived out in and through our simple existence. We, too, can experience God-with-us like we have never experienced him before. We, too, can recognize the coming of the Divine into our hearts and call his name Jesus.

- Ruth Haley Barton

Advent 4: Joseph and the Walk of Faith

This Advent-time we remember Mary and Joseph, giving thanks for their faithfulness, courage and obedience, stepping out into the unknown in the strength of your Spirit, playing their part in the fulfilment of your plan to bring your prodigal people home again. We pray that their example might be the pattern of our lives, that when your gentle whisper breaks through the clamour of this world and into our small corner, we might be ready to listen, and having listened, to act. Amen

Tues 12 Dec

Rahab is the second woman named in Jesus' genealogy, as recorded in Matthew.

Joshua 2

The people of Israel were about to enter the land of Canaan. Joshua sent two of his men, saying, "Go, look over the land . . . especially Jericho."

The spies met Rahab, who had faith in their God, and she hid them in her home. When the king sent some men to seize the spies, Rahab said they had already left. Later she said to them, prophetically, "I know that the Lord has given you this land" verse 9.

Physically, Jericho appeared impenetrable. But this city would soon lie in a heap of ruins.

God opened Rahab's heart so that she could see the invisible.

Today we think of, and pray for, Priya and the mahi she does for Love Calcutta Arts. God has also opened Priya's heart to see the Holy Spirit's inspiration and what could be possible. We are thankful for Priya's faith and courage.

Father

We pray that the eyes of our hearts may be opened to see you and your plan for our world.

We thank you for the remarkable woman in Jesus' whakapapa and the impact they have on us as we read their stories.

We also thank you for the remarkable women in your work in the world now, like Priya, who see your heart and carry your light and hope in the places they live and the people they serve. We pray for rest and moments of refreshing for Priya as she manages this inspiring & creative business.

In Jesus' name

Amen.

Wed 13 Dec

Remembering Shirley Smith who passed away 05 August 2023–

Today's and tomorrow's devotions are written by Karen Haines, eldest child of Shirley and Brian Smith. Waiting.

'Biblically, waiting is not just something we have to do until we get what we want.

Waiting is part of the process of becoming what God wants us to be.'

-John Ortberg

Shirley's life in India was one of waiting;

waiting for visas

waiting for her Bengali to improve

waiting for plane flights

waiting for babies to be born

waiting for the monsoon rains

waiting for news from family in NZ

waiting for her children to come home from boarding school

waiting for trams in Calcutta

waiting for the New Testament to be printed.

A lifetime spent waiting patiently, open to the will of God. Shirley's acceptance reminds me of Mary.

"I am the Lord's servant," said Mary; "may it happen to me as you have said."

Luke 1:38

"My Lord God,

I have no idea where I am going.

I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone." -

Thomas Merton, Thoughts in Solitude

Weaving

Shirley learned to weave in India. It takes a Mizo woman a month or so to make a patterned puan (a length of weaving that is worn round the waist). Shirley's Mizo friend, Zomawi, taught her to weave using a backstrap loom. They sat on the floor and a sash went behind Shirley's back, while bamboo rods held the warp cottons in front of her, in tension with the wall. Flowers are a traditional design for puan, and Shirley had chosen the local flame flower and worked out her intricate design on graph paper. The different coloured shuttles were threaded in and out as the flower pattern grew.

Shirley's life in India was a domestic one. Known as Karen Ma, after her eldest child, she cooked and sewed, and shared her life with other women in her community, the wives of the Indian pastors that Brian worked with. She looked after her three babies, using a puan as a sling, and taught them to read and write as well as to love, to sing and to pray. As Brian learned to speak Tripuri in a small village, Shirley made dinner on a kerosene stove and washed the families' clothes in the local stream. When she lived in Calcutta, she shopped at a market where she spoke Bengali to the shopkeepers, and would regularly give rice to the beggars who came to the door. Shirley's fifteen years of being a missionary wife is one of prayer and faithfulness, woven into the fabric of God's purposes for New Zealanders as part of his story in Tripura.



Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.



Fri 15 Dec

Jo & Charlie from Joyya

We sit in their room, eating cold but spicy curry made with potato and chicken necks, and hot flat breads stuffed with soyabean chunks. It's been made with care and love by their 17 year old daughter, who pretends to not care, but actually does, and cannot suppress her joy when we compliment her cooking.

While we eat, we keep up chatter, both daughters swinging through teenage moods quicker than we can rip pieces of bread to soak up the curry! The TV silently showers us with a riot of colour and scenes as the younger daughter flicks through channels like she is scrolling social media. She settles on a show which we can see the humour in, even without the commentary or dialogue to add. The girls' dad is unwell, having been off work for a week now, suffering the fever and body aches which seem to be afflicting at least one or more in every family we know of. He is up and about, but not anywhere his normal chirpy self this evening. We commiserate with him, and also ask how his finger is, still bandaged after getting caught a few weeks ago. He is worried the building their room is in will be soon knocked down and modern flats built. It could be just rumours, or could hold truth. Regardless, there is unlikely to be any timeframe indicated ahead of de-construction – perhaps a week at best. Living with the uncertainty will both bother our friends until it happens, and also be just another thing to live with. The privilege of knowledge and time is a luxury only for the rich, a category our friends do not live in.

It is raining outside – a sudden heavy downpour, and blustery winds are snapping the plastic sheet that keeps the rain out. The matriarch of the house is still out, having been working at one of her house-maid jobs and we're not sure if she has an umbrella with her or not. She finally makes it home, not too sodden, but definitely keen to change into a fresh set of clothes. She finds what she needs and goes elsewhere to change.

Returning, she sits and chats for just 2 minutes before pulling out her homework book. This tenacious lady, who is in her late 30's is learning to read and write her own language for the first time. Opening the exercise book, she slowly but carefully reads the 10 words out loud, while her husband and both of us look on so proudly. We encourage her success with a small round of applause, and while we continue to chat, we watch her copy out the first 5 words with deliberate strokes of the pencil. 3 times, 4 times, she writes each word, concentrating and correcting herself. Her husband tries to offer advice from his slightly advanced knowledge, but she's not having any of it, choosing instead to write the letters with strokes that although awkward, make sense to her. I admire her greatly, understanding what it means to learn a new language, but not really aware of what it would be like to be learning to read a language I already speak fluently.

We are so often welcomed into this home with our friends. They open their arms, their hearts, their lives to us as best they can across language and cultural barriers. We lean into the sometimes-awkwardness, do our best to follow their rapid speaking, notice the patience they have when they explain a basic cultural concept to us, and keep doing what we can to build relationship with them.

We choose to spend time with them, and over time, have learnt how to be relaxed and be friends with the four of them. Our friends kind-of fit in a box for us now. We understand them so much more, we have a rhythm of how we spend time with them and doing so is a joy for us. Even though in the beginning it felt more like a chore, and something that we'd rather not do some weeks, we've learnt to move from seeking comfort at home, to now finding comfort and joy in spending time with our friends. It's easy to bypass others who don't fit in our 'boxes'.

When we read Luke 6, and the outline that J gives for His 'upside down kingdom', we are challenged. It's easy to think we are doing so well, making efforts to be friends with a family who are categorised as poor. But we are called to even more than that. What about the next family who are not so easy to be friends with right now? What about the ones who don't try as hard to make their language understandable, or who don't smile when they see us? We would so happily give our clothes from our cupboard, water from our bottles, food from our kitchen to our friends, without expecting payback. But what about those who aren't our friends yet? The ones who eye us with a mixture of curiosity and distrust when we acknowledge them. We don't spend so much time looking for those people, and sometimes pass them by.

It's easy to write off street dwellers who don't fall into the geographical area that we are more focused on. "Oh, I don't need to give that elderly lady anything – who so desperately needs something – because I pass her by every day and she'll become expectant of help from me. And anyway, she's not in 'our' neighbourhood." There are so many experiences of giving to those who seem needy, poor, downtrodden and the unexpected backfire that suddenly surprises the giver, undoing the good that was just done. We don't want to be caught in that.

It's easy to bypass those who don't fit in our 'boxes'.

This city is huge ... if we gave help to every needy person we passed, we would honestly never make a difference anywhere. There is wisdom in being strategic. Focusing on a neighbourhood, focussing on the transformation of that place and the people contained within it. But J didn't come to tell us to only be strategic. J came, born amongst farm animals and scratchy hay, to new parents who had little idea what they were doing, to be brought up getting his hands dirty, and to go on and become the most significant world-changer ever seen. He came to turn our comfortable world-view, upside down. To challenge us to live a life that is not made up of selfish motives and reasons that we tell ourselves, but a life that leans into transformation, allowing our understanding of the world and it's order to be shaken up by His words. To allow our ease and comfort to be turned upside down, to take the risk of giving something to the woman I pass by every day. Maybe she won't become expectant. Maybe it will be a joy and encouragement for her. I may not be able to transform her life, but I can still offer something. Give without expecting anything back....show mercy...show love...

Jesus left His home, both His heavenly home and His earthly home. He came that we would learn how to stop and see those who don't fit in our 'boxes'. To see them as people, not figures to bypass. People who have lives, have families, have hopes and dreams, who want to live. Who am I to hold back mercy, to hold back love because of my own failings and sins?

Jesus

Give me courage to step outside my box,
outside my comfort zone,
to give something to someone without expecting anything back,
to see all people as You see them,
and to lean on You as I make one small faltering step after another.
Amen

Waiting for the Lord with hope - Frances

Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Is. 40:30-31 (NRSV)

“Waiting for the Lord” is challenging whether we’re facing the storms of life or actual gale force winds that threaten to destroy our work, our home. Listen to Frances’ testimony of praying and waiting on God’s deliverance (East Asia): “Last week, we receive news that a typhoon was coming even stronger than [the one] 8 years ago. How worrisome the news! All our group know that the only thing we could do was pray...So, we gather together and pray so urgently. Thankfully, the Lord listen. The typhoon passed and we suffer heavy rain only. This prayer answered for whole city not just our complex. We are safe ...and nothing damaged.”

Frances goes on to share praises to God: “Students and school have recovered [from the devastating effects of Covid]. Thanks be to God. We survived! We are facing a huge challenge due to low enrolment in our schools [low birth rate in population]. We are waiting for God to send guidance for how to solve the problem.”

When we are tired, weary, or uncertain of the future, may we be like Frances and wait (with hope) for our Lord who will renew our strength and direct our steps. “...I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Josh. 1:5b (NIV)

Praise God for

- Frances’ health, feeling strong
- Deliverance from the typhoon.
- “We survived Covid!”

Pray for:

- Strength to meet the pressure of managing this outreach to kids, youth and their families.
- More workers and volunteers to come teach English at the school.
- Money to pay teacher salaries and rent.

Ruth and Boaz

Ruth 1:1-4:12

Ruth was from Moab, where Naomi's husband had chosen to take his wife and two sons when the country of Judah had a famine. The Jewish law forbade Jews from marrying Moabites (see Deut. 23:3), and yet Naomi's husband allowed his sons to marry Moabite women. One was Ruth and the other was Orpah.

While the family was still in Moab, Naomi's husband and two sons died. This left three childless widows. Naomi decided to return to her hometown of Bethlehem in Judah and gave her daughters-in-law permission to return to their mother's homes. Orpah agreed and went home. Ruth, on the other hand, pledged to remain with Naomi, and even chose to worship Naomi's God, Yahweh.

Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.

Ruth 1:26b

When they returned to Judah, Naomi sent Ruth into the field to glean some grain. When Naomi realised whose field Ruth had worked, she encouraged Ruth to make herself available to the owner of the field, Boaz. Apparently, Boaz was flattered and wanted to marry Ruth. However, he had to follow Jewish law of allowing the closest kinsman the first right to marry Ruth. When they refused, Boaz became the Kinsman-Redeemer for Ruth and Naomi. Ruth's Moabite heritage entered into the Jewish ancestry of Jesus.

The "little town of Bethlehem" has significance in Jesus' lineage too: It was in Bethlehem that Judah's tribe settled. It was to Bethlehem that Naomi returned with Ruth. It was in Bethlehem that Ruth and Boaz (a descendant of Rahab) married and had a son, Obed. It was in Bethlehem that Obed raised a family, including a descendant who would become king (and marry Bathsheba) It was to Bethlehem that Joseph traveled with his expectant wife, Mary. It was in Bethlehem that Jesus, the true King, was born. It was in the fields of Bethlehem that angels appeared to announce Jesus' birth to the shepherds

Today's reflective prayer...

There is a Redeemer
Jesus, God's own Son
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah
Holy One.
Jesus my Redeemer
Name above all names
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah
Oh, for sinners slain
When I stand in Glory
I will see His face
And there I'll serve my King forever
In that Holy Place
Thank you, oh Our Father
For giving us Your Son
And leaving Your Spirit
'Till the work on Earth is done



Pete & Joyce Majendie -Artists

Advent is a time of waiting.

There is a 400 year gap between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Waiting for the Messiah, only to miss Him or dismiss Him. No validation. No victorious conqueror, but a suffering servant. Oh the disappointment. A lot of waiting on God in the Old Testament; not so in the New Testament. The Gospel - the kingdom of God is with us, for God can't live without us. Don't wait on Jesus - He is already here.

What does this mean for you?

God, we wait
as Israel waited
stranded, scattered, exiled, shamed.
Waiting with the poor and captives,
waiting with the lost and lamed.

God, we wait
- as prisoners wait
for words to set them free -
for glimpses of your kingdom
in the midst of our debris.

God, we wait
as prophets wait,
for death to unfold into life
and signs of beauty to appear
in places torn apart by strife.

This Advent time, we wait, and hope... that, just as God was found on earth, so all that we've been longing for and waiting for shall come to birth.

Anon

John Takle 1870-1939
Missionary Emeritus

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20

In 1894 John Takle was accepted as a global worker in training with the NZBMS. He studied Greek and Hebrew, church history, theology and pastoral ministry as well as practical things such as first aid before leaving for India in late September 1896, leaving behind his fiancée, Maude Beavis. John sailed to Calcutta, and then by train and river steamer to Comilla. He moved to Chandpur in 1898, when the new mission house there was completed, and it was there that Maude and John were finally able to be married, moving to Brahmanbaria on their honeymoon. An area of relationship that became increasingly important to John was finding ways to share the gospel with the Muslim community.

With this in mind, he worked with William Goldsack, a Baptist missionary from South Australia to publish a Bengali translation of the Qur'an with a commentary in both Bengali and Arabic. John also wrote a book in Bengali appealing to the national church to do more to reach out to their Muslim neighbours. John began to write more books, both for Muslims and for those working among Muslims including *The Faith of the Crescent* which set out a concise summary of the main teaching and practices of Islam. The book was later published in multiple languages and used as a university text in comparative religions. Believing that India would be won for Christ by her own people, John set himself to train young Bengali Christians for evangelistic service. He rejoiced when qualified Indian pastors were appointed over churches in Brahmanbaria and Chandpur.

To John and Maude were given four girls and a boy. They had the sorrow of losing their only son after a brief illness.

In 1924 John & Maude Takle returned to New Zealand.

"The record of 28 years of continuous service has been a glory and an inspiration to all our people. We have constantly rejoiced in the strong missionary leadership of Mr Takle, and in the steadfast support of Mrs Takle, whose bungalow has been both to English and Indians in the district a directly Christian influence."

Grant, Father,

that Your Spirit may give us the will and the courage
to act to make a difference,

in order to make real Your kingdom among us,

so that we may we all live together

in truth, justice and love,

sharing the resources of the earth.

Help us to share the fire of Your peace with all people in all places at all
times. Amen.



I'm a worrier by nature, always anticipating potential dangers and disasters. I hate not knowing what might be around the next corner and spend a lot of energy scanning the environment for clues. There's plusses and minuses to this character trait, and as we journey through Advent, which is essentially a time of waiting for a cataclysmic event that will change the course of history (like God coming into the world as a person is kind of huge), it makes me think about how to best approach a time of waiting. Mary, who was a small town teenager, was pregnant. I don't think if you passed her in the street you would anticipate what she was carrying in her very ordinary body. We need to be looking hard to read the signs of what God is up to in our world. He may be working on something pretty incredible in some very ordinary places.

In the church of our times, and for us at Arotahi, we know these are times of change, and in one sense a time of waiting for the things God has next. We know the future will look very different to the past, and our prayer is for the courage to see where God is at work in places we may not expect. Are you open to a big change? Will you honestly be prepared for the unexpected? When Mick and I felt the invitation to go and live in the slums of Manila, it sure wasn't what we had in mind for our future, but I would not be the person I am today if I hadn't read the signs and done a huge pivot to follow up on that invitation.

Our God, may we have hearts of courage and the eyes of faith to see where you are. May we open our hearts to the possibilities of the future. May the pregnant teenage Mary give us cause to consider who and how you may want us to serve You and our world. Amen

Ruby Duncan, 2023

Thurs 21 Dec

*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.*

Micah 6:8

Today we are mindful of our young adults headed to Asia as global short term teams. Our first team went in October and the next team heads away in mid January. Please pray for these young people. Pray for those preparing to go. Pray for those who have returned and are asking God, "what next?". Pray for inspiration, guidance and a greater sense of God's work in the world and their place in it.

O Lord, open my eyes that I may see the needs of others
Open my ears that I may hear their cries;
Open my heart so that they need not be without aid;
Let me not be afraid to defend the weak because of the anger of the strong,
Nor afraid to defend the poor because of the anger of the rich.
Show me where love and hope and faith are needed,
And use me to bring them to those places.
And so open my eyes and my ears
That I may this coming day be able to do some work of peace for You
- Alan Paton

The Light that Pierces the Darkness – Peter & Leonora

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” John 1:5

How often do we feel overwhelmed by the darkness in the world? And yet there is a light that shines brighter than any darkness that we may experience. It is none other than “Jehovah Ori.” The Hebrew name for; “The Lord My Light,” Jesus himself. But the question is are we more impressed with the darkness, or by the light?

Deep in the heart of our district, friends of ours started a work amongst the village folk. Here the name of Jesus had not been heard. Together with their two sons they live in a simple home, and began a work in this remote place. Our pastor friend would get out his guitar and a crowd would gather!

From these simple beginnings a church began to grow. We came alongside this couple because they were pretty much on their own. We would meander through rice paddies and potato crops on rough roads. Travelling by auto, van or motor bike we’d reach a people who are hungry for the Good News. The villagers built a simple bamboo church structure. Oh how delighted we all were! And then the opportunity came to buy land and build a centre. Everything looked very forthcoming.

And then unexpectedly as the momentum was breaking forth, our young pastor friend unexpectedly died. We were in shock. How could this be? But together with his widow we chose to be impressed by the One who is the Light, and not the darkness. It is now one year since our friend’s passing and there have been many tears. But we keep gaining courage to go forth, because we know that God has not finished his work in this district. In fact, we believe that the best is yet to come.

As we near Christmas (Kirihimete), it is again a glorious reminder that in those fragile places of our lives, we are never without hope. God understands our pain and losses. Those struggles that we wrestle with. And in the midst of all this, he reaches out to us, and knows where we are at.

May you know the invitation of a loving Heavenly Father, to embrace the path where he walks before you. In fact, he lights the path for you to see! Did you take time to see it?

Here he calls us out from the darkness and into the purposes that he has created for us. How carefully he crafts in us courage and a passion for the things of God. To dream again beyond what we think is possible. His goodness and mercy following us all the days of our lives.

Christmas to me means extravagant love. This little baby born in the manger is the greatest gift of all. Thank you Jesus that you came. We are forever changed!

Prince of Peace, we seek you.
In far off lands, your children
flee their homes pursued by violence.
In our community, we know
not all our neighbours are safe.

Prince of Peace, we seek you.
You sent your son, Jesus, to bring
your peace and comfort to the world.
In this season of Advent, renew and strengthen us
in a commitment to your peace that surpasses all understanding.

Prince of Peace, we seek you.
May your peace fill our hearts
and grace our lips so that we might
be agents of your peace in the world.
Amen

An extraordinary birthday, written by Elizabeth Jones

Olwyn , A most beloved friend throughout my whole life, and in many situations, died on the morning of 16th August 2023. It was her 95th birthday.

Some days later I was given some of her precious possessions, among them her prayer journal, and an ancient "Daily Light" devotional inscribed by the giver, Dr JJ North, and dated March 1st 1942 with the instruction to 'Lay hold on Life Eternal.' Her whole life was a testament to having done that, weaving herself into God's story and finally being released from the frailty of old age. Early in the morning on that day in August she was translated into eternity as her family stood around the bed singing "Happy Birthday".

Olwyn was a woman of PRAYER

On the first page of her journal Olwyn writes about prayer.

*"Prayer has won victories over fire, air, earth, and water
Prayer has paved the way for the conversion of millions of
people. Because we pray God works through us in ways he
would not otherwise. God has made certain things dependant
on our prayer."*

The benefits of PRAISE were important to her.

*"Worship enhances our appreciation and love for God, Expands
our vision, Eclipses our fears, Energises our work,
Refreshes our spirits, Exhausts our enemy and Prepares us
for heaven."*

As we enter this 2023 season of Advent here is a final prayer from Olwyn's journal for us to pray together today.

*"We are about to celebrate your birthday when you came as
Emmanuel, God with us. A wonderful day when God came down,
became a man, and lived as we do. Sometimes I can't really
take it in, am full of wonder and full of questions. May our
hearts be open to understand, and the message of Christ's
coming be spoken throughout the world today."*

Lizzie from The Loyal Workshop

It's a strange reality awaiting the imminent arrival of your own child during Advent. I think it emphasizes the beauty and mystery of why the magnanimity of God was birthed through the strength of a woman, and made real to us in the wonder and messiness of a newborn.

The goodness of God deliberately chose Mary, motherhood,
and even those last days of monotonous waiting.

The goodness of God validated the seeking of a name,
the quiet pressing inwards,
the returning to her breath.

The goodness of God wove itself through the awareness of her body
and the hidden movements of another tiny body,
who wasn't just anybody.

The goodness of God reflected in her prayers and maybe even her
pain,

the peace

and even the pieces.

The goodness of God made home in newborn flesh
and held tenderly on Mary's chest.

The goodness of God given voice in newborn cries
and sight through freshly-opened eyes.

The goodness of God
within her.

The goodness of God
through her.

The goodness of God
in Christ, with us Good, Good Father,

Every child is precious to You.

We pray for the health of all Your children and their mothers.

We thank You for the work being done to help so many.

We pray that aid distributions would reach families who need it the most, and access would be provided to the resources to help even more little ones before, during and after their births. Heal and strengthen their tiny bodies so they may experience fullness of life.
Amen



Christmas Day, Mon 25 Dec

And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

Luke 2:6-7

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

John 1:14

**Father,
through all the ages
you have called your people from darkness into light,
making their gladness greater
and their joy increase.
As we celebrate a child born for us,
a son given to us,
make the light of Christ bright in our own hearts
that we may once more bring peace and reconciliation
to our families,
our communities,
and to our world.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Tues 26 Dec

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Saviour—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

*"Glory to God in highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."*

Luke 2:8-14

God

In this passage we see your Power, Provision, Presence & Promise:

The Power displayed in the armies of Heaven.

Your radiant, glorious Presence

The Provision of a Messiah

The Promise of great joy to all people and peace on earth

May we be more aware of You working in our lives and Your working in the lives of those You seek to save.

Thank you that we can be part of Your story; loving, serving and worshipping you, along with the shepherds.

Amen

Wed 27 Dec

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

Luke 2:15

In South Asian cities and towns, Christmas is either another day of school and work, or it is a time for shops and department stores to promote the western ideal of Father Christmas and gift giving. South Asia is very religious, with many festivals throughout the year. Irrespective of the religious festival of the moment, people are seeking peace.

McMullans

Pray that the Good News of the birth of the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, will be heard and seen in homes and on the streets. Pray for Christian communities giving witness to the reality of the Prince of Peace in their lives.



I love the bigness of time and the inclusion of the cosmos in the account of Christmas. The coming of Jesus is set on the biggest stage. John begins his gospel saying – “In the beginning”. Of Jesus who he calls - The Word; John writes “He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What came into being in him was life.” Then Matthew links in the wisemen who are guided by unusual signs in the cosmos. They asked “where is the child who has been born King of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising.” So, this baby who is about to be born is announced by the stars and is with God. Through him all things, including all life came into being, and now he is to be born a King.

Looking forward John tells us that Jesus is “the Alpha and the Omega, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty (Revelation 1 v 8).” The one Paul says “will be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15 v28). And who Paul tells us “is before all things, and in him all things hold together... For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things)

Colossians 1 v 17 -20

Isn't amazing. For the light from stars, possibly thousands of light years away from earth, to reach us just at the point of Jesus birth invites us into the bigness of God's planning. The coming of Jesus is a crucial point for the whole cosmos and for human history. The resurrection of Jesus sets a new era for humanity but also for the cosmos. At Christmas I read John 1 and often listen to Handel's Messiah from start to finish in one sitting. It invites me into the vastness of the Christmas event that we are anticipating.

As you ponder the linking of humanity and the cosmos with the birth of the baby who was the Alpha and will be the Omega point for all; please pray for our future too.

At Arotahi we are calling for, praying for and preparing people to take this wonderful Christmas story to the peoples of the world. specifically in the areas God has called us across the decades. We focus on the least reached and the most vulnerable knowing that the Bengali people are among the most vulnerable (measured by poverty and persecution) and are the largest unreached people group in the world. Will you consider going to bring this wonderful news to them? Will you pray for others to go? Will you give to enable them to go? -Alan Jamieson

Fri 29 Dec

Cindy - Bangladesh

When Herod realised that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

"A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more."

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

Matthew 2:16-20

The Christmas story, full of shiny things...stars, tinsel, angels, gold and gifts. It is a wonderful story, of joy, good tidings, peace, promises fulfilled and hope. And of course the baby, the special baby! So it is even more jarring when the bad bit comes. Yet another angel, but this time to Joseph, warning him to flee...and not even to somewhere close, but to Egypt. This new family, this special baby, is to run and live as refugees in Egypt.

I guess they needed the gold they were given. I bet they hadn't thought they would use the gift this way! But of course that isn't the worst bit. Herod! Why do there always have to be Herods? here are more babies in this story. Dead babies. There are other women, women weeping and wailing for their murdered children, refusing to be comforted. Never forget the war we are in, it is war, and it isn't nice. There is an enemy and there are casualties.

Please pray for those who have had to leave their homes.

117.2 million individuals will be forcibly displaced or stateless in 2023, according to UNHCR's estimations. Pray for health and safety for refugees. Pray for nations that will 'welcome the stranger', for communities that will embrace refugees, and governments that seek to bring peace, justice and advocacy to countries they lead.

Trevor Donnell, passed away 30 July 2023

Named the tōrea by a community he loved. With their long red bill, the tōrea will probe deep into the wet sand for kai, living their days by the coast year-round.

Trevor was a sea-man. Always on or by the ocean, I remember being a passenger as he captained us through some choppy seas. Peace-filled, head to the horizon, a mischievous sparkle in his eye.

Like the tōrea, Trevor was also a forager for information, for wisdom, for understanding. He was always probing and pressing deeper into God, consistently searching for guidance to wisdom. No more pain or suffering, now only the fullness of Jesus in front of you. Ka kite anō, tōrea.

*Where then does wisdom come from?
Where does understanding dwell?
It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing,
concealed even from the birds in the sky.
Destruction and Death say,
“Only a rumor of it has reached our ears.”
God understands the way to it
and he alone knows where it dwells,
for he views the ends of the earth
and sees everything under the heavens.
When he established the force of the wind
and measured out the waters,
when he made a decree for the rain
and a path for the thunderstorm,
then he looked at wisdom and appraised it;
he confirmed it and tested it.
And he said to the human race,
“The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom,
and to shun evil is understanding.”*

Job 28: 20-28

As we approach the close of 2023, pray for peace, wisdom, guidance and understanding.

May we all press deeper into God as we seek to serve the world He created.

New Year's Eve, Sun 31 Dec

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

Colossians 1:14-16

As we look toward 2024 we know that all is not well for this physical world God created.

Global warming, poor governance, food waster, plastic & air pollution, deforestation, food & water insecurity, fast fashion & textile waste, overfishing, and mineral mining - to name a few of the issues we face. May we seek God's guidance as we consider personal, professional and political responses to our groaning world that we were made stewards of.

Creator of our common home,
You fill the earth and sea and sky with life
Forgive us our neglect of your creation
The choking waste of our pollution
The damage done by careless habits
And our indifference to future generations.
Help us to amend our lives
To refuse more plastic if we can't reuse it
To lift our voice for lasting change
And to live well and gently on the earth
To the glory of your Son, the Living Word
Through whom you made this fragile world.
Amen.

-Rt Revd Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford

The Work of Christmas Begins

When the carols have been stilled,
When the star-topped tree is taken down,
When family and friends are gone home,
When we are back to our schedules
The work of Christmas begins:

To welcome the refugee,
To heal a broken planet,
To feed the hungry,
To build bridges of trust, not walls of fear,
To share our gifts,
To seek justice and peace for all people,
To bring Christ's light to the world.

- by Michael Dougherty, a variation on Howard Thurman's 'When the Song of the Angels is Stilled'

God of all time,
help us enter the New Year quietly,
thoughtful of who we are to ourselves and to others,
mindful that our steps make an impact
and our words carry power.
May we walk gently.
May we speak only after we have listened well.
Creator of all life,
help us enter the New Year reverently,
aware that you have endowed
every creature and plant, every person and habitat
with beauty and purpose.
May we regard the world with tenderness.
May we honour rather than destroy...
May the grace and peace of Christ bless us now and in the days
ahead.
Amen

- Vinita Hampton Wright

Grace – Orbit Community

Recently, I visited some fellow brothers and sisters in Christ in Ōtaki. They live on a farm with a multitude of tiny homes, converted buses and live in tree huts scattered over the property. People who are struggling in life are welcomed onto the property. A family member who permanently lives there spoke to a group of us young adults about what they do there. What struck me was his perception of people. He did not see the people who came to stay as people he ministered to, he didn't see them as less than, nor did he see them as too much. He saw each person as just right in God's eyes, an equal in Christ. The relationship he had with them was one of exchange where he spoke of their presence as a gift.

I thank God for the Orbit community that shows us such rich expressions of mission such as my friends on Ōtaki.

My eyes do this funny thing where I can read clearly for a few minutes and then they have to work really hard after that and everything goes blurry. They call it Astigmatism. Sometimes I think the way we view people is like my eye condition. We look at other people and we judge them. We judge them based on what they're wearing, whether they follow social queues, their life situation and the views they hold. But this whole time, our sight has been blurry. Sometimes what we perceive as a problem in another person is really a problem with the way we see them. This might have to do with what Jesus was saying in Matthew 7:5...

"How can you say to your brother or sister, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye."

A simple prayer

God, give us eyes to see people the way you see them.

Amen

Wed 3 Jan

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Matthew 28:16-20

We are thankful for all who have taken part in Renew Together in 2023.

As we look forward to this coming year, we pray that faith communities would be inspired to join us again in Renew Together 2024's Arotahi Appeal.

We hope to see many engaged, encouraged and equipped to Pray, Give and Go – to the ends of the earth!

God, You have commissioned us to go, disciple and baptise.

We know that you are at work in our world.

Help us to know where we are called to go to (our place), and who you are inviting us to call 'our people'.

Thank you for the promise of the Holy Spirit's constant presence.
Amen

Thurs 4 Jan

*Truly my soul finds rest in God;
my salvation comes from him.*

*Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.*

Psalm 62:1-2

Today we remember our team here in Aotearoa New Zealand, our team around the world, and the incredible supporters that enable and empower the work of Arotahi.

We thank You Lord, for this year

For the challenges, successes, and learnings.

Be with us as we spend our time with family and friends.

Keep us safe in our activities; give us good rest and good fun.

May we find moments of stillness, silence and solitude to be, and know that You are God.

Bring us back refreshed and ready for a new year. We thank you for our teammates here and afar, for our faith communities, the people we serve, and the places we are part of.

May we always be conscious of You in our lives.

May we rest in You

Amen



Whiria Kids – future whakapapa

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 1:8

We are dreaming of fresh ways to connect the future generation to actively participating in God’s mahi in the world, here in Aotearoa and to the ends of the earth. In April 2024 we are poised to launch Whiria Kids, a church based programme resourced by Arotahi.

Whiri as a verb means to weave, to plait or twist (a rope) Whiri as a noun is a flock (of birds) A wellknown whakatauki is: Whiria te tāngata|Weave the people together

We hope our children will be woven into God’s story in the world. We hope they will see the value of their part as they work together to see Kingdom projects in action. As we focus on birds of the world that migrate and return home, we pray our tamariki will see flowing from local to global mission as natural as the act of breathing in & out.

You give life, You are love
You bring light to the darkness
You give hope, You restore every heart that is broken
And great are You, Lord
It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise, we pour out our praise
It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise to You only
All the earth will shout Your praise
Our hearts will cry, these bones will sing
Great are You, Lord

Please pray for the funding, dreaming, & planning of Whiria Kids, as we seek to further engage our Baptist tamariki. Pray for God’s guidance, Holy Spirit inspiration & for young ears to be open to Christ’s call to, “Come, follow me”. We pray that our children would be weavers of God’s story, finding their centre & purpose in Him. We pray that they would see value in the part that they each hold, and as they flock together with others, small pieces can join together to make big differences to people and places here and afar.

Epiphany, Sat 6 Jan

Emma Beckingsale, a nurse specialising in midwifery, reached Calcutta on Christmas Day, 1895.

She spent 40 years working with women and children in Bengal. In 1925 Miss Beckingsale reported that 4,600 patients from 97 villages had paid a visits to the Dispensary, 221 visits had been made to 108 ppatients in 30 villages and 21 minor operations had been performed.

Excerpt from Gold of Tipperah, (p 7-8)

We who are left know something of the strain of life in the enervating and depressing climate of Bengal, and of the patience and heart's blood and strong crying unto God with which even the veriest speck of gold or tiniest gem is won from the black, hard rocks of idolatry, bigotry, and superstition for the adorning of the temple of our Redeemer. You who hold the ropes, and we who go down into the mine, are sharers together in this toil and in sacrifice. Together also we share the joy.

"The people rejoiced over the offerings, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord."

1 Chronicles 29:9 NLT

Today we reflect on the rich heritage of those who have gone before us. Their lives and journeys are a gift to us.

We also remember the gifts that the Magi brought to Mary, Joseph and Jesus: gold as a symbol of Jesus' kingship on earth, frankincense as a symbol of deity, and myrrh (an embalming oil) as a symbol of Jesus' future death.

God

Keep us in that wisdom which You revealed to the Magi. Grant us Your Holy Spirit, that we may always seek You and Your kingdom.

Enable us to follow Your Holy Word, as those from the East followed the leading of a star, and many have followed Your leading since.

Give us grace at all times and in all places to confess Your Holy Name to all people.

For Yours is the Kingdom the Power and the Glory, for ever and ever
Amen

Aroha noa me te rangimarie

*Grace and peace from
the Arotahi team*

AR  **TAHI**
HAND-CARVED MISSION