



12 Ways of Christmas

A CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL

12 Ways of Christmas

We are all missing being together in person this Christmas. So much of how we normally celebrate this season, packed out carol services, many, many Christmas dinners, gathering to turn the lights on, Christmas parties and SALT kids decorating the tree, are just not possible this year.

So we want to create a new tradition for our Orangefield family. For the 12 days leading up to Christmas Eve, members of our Church family in Orangefield have written and recorded Christmas devotions designed to lead our hearts towards Jesus, towards one another, towards the community around us and into the world. Sometimes in prayer, sometimes in generosity and sometimes in practice.

This is the 12 Ways of Christmas.

We are also inviting you to consider sending an “Alternative Christmas Gift” of a solar lamp to a child in Uganda or sleeping bags for refugees in Athens.

Go to our website (copy the link below) or contact our church office on 028 9079 9391 (9am-12pm)

Grace and Peace
Gareth

Alternative Christmas gifts :
<https://orangefield.org.uk/support/alternativegifts/>

12 Ways of Christmas

Way
1

Alternative Gifts by Noah & Suzi

READ - JAMES 2:14-17 NIV

In these verses James challenges his readers to show the fruit of their faith in Jesus through their actions.

At Helping Hands, the charity we serve here in Athens that seeks to love, bless and help Farsi speaking refugees, we have the privilege of living out this passage in quite a literal way. Even during these crazy times of Coronavirus we have the gift of being able to show the love of God through giving food, clothing and sleeping bags to the most in need around us.

And yet, we do all of this to point our guests and friends here to the ultimate expression of God's love which is found in Christ Jesus.

RESPONSE

Help us share Christ's love through meeting the practical needs of refugees by purchasing a sleeping bag from the alternative gift list. Together we can give the gift of warmth and light this Christmas. £20 buys a solar lamp for a child in Uganda or a sleeping bag for a refugee in Greece. <https://orangefield.org.uk/support/alternativegifts/> or tel: Church Office on 028 9079 9391

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Way
2

Stillness by Kirsten

READ - PSALM 25: 5-9

“For you I wait all day long”.

During this strange season, how are you spending your time? When we would usually be planning for all things Christmas: parties, dinner, presents, shopping, celebrations - how does this year look different for you?

What are you waiting for, and hoping for? Give yourself a moment to pause, think and be honest with yourself. What are you waiting and hoping for - a sparkly new Christmas gift, a vaccine to eradicate COVID - after a strange year of ups and downs, maybe you're just waiting and hoping for 2020 to be over full stop.

In Psalm 25, we hear the Psalmist cry out in prayer: ‘Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I will wait all day long’. The writer makes a conscious step to wait on the Lord. To place their hope in the God of salvation, and in him alone. In the midst of your waiting this year - what are you placing your hope in - and is this an opportunity to place your hope in the Lord once again?

RESPONSE

Through what might be a busy season, or a slightly quieter season than normal - take a moment today to pray and reflect. Like the psalmist, take time out to wait on the Lord. Ask him to lead you in truth and to teach you in this season. In the quiet and stillness, wait on the Lord.

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Way
3

Stepping Out by Robbie

READ - JOHN 1:9-14

The birth of Jesus was Him stepping out of heaven and coming to earth, stepping out of his home and going to where the people were. Jesus came and blessed the people He met, whether it was a high Jewish leader such as Nicodemus or a lowly social outcast such as the woman at the well.

We have a duty to bless the people we meet. By stepping out into the community, out of our comfort zones, as Jesus did leaving heaven, we can bless the area and people we encounter, being bold and sharing the love of Jesus with them.

RESPONSE

Take time today, either on your own or with your family, to walk around your neighbourhood praying blessing over the businesses, schools, homes and people you see. If you see someone, stop and talk, bless, even offer to pray for them.

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Way
4

Light in the darkness by Nicola

READ - ISAIAH 9: 1-7. JOHN 8:12

Did your family put their Christmas tree up earlier than usual this year? We certainly did and it seems everyone around East Belfast did too.

There was a sense that people needed some brightness and happiness in these uncertain times! And it has changed our streets – the lights shine out, it brightens up the area and brings a smile.

The night that Jesus was born, it changed the world. Light burst into the darkness. Jesus, the LIGHT of the world, stepped into a broken and sinful earth to bring hope and life to all who believe in and follow Him.

RESPONSE

Go for a walk tonight.

Count the Christmas Trees and as you do, pray for someone in your school / workplace / family who needs the light of Jesus in their life.

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Way
5

Church family by Elaine

READ - ISAIAH 40:1-5

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

What a year this has been so far; back in March none of us could have imagined what lay ahead. Our normal rhythm of life has been disrupted in so many ways, everyday circumstances have been challenging and many of us are feeling tired, fragile and perhaps discouraged. Where can we find comfort when life is uncertain, we are faced with ongoing difficulties and anxiety is heightened?

Today these words remind us to receive afresh, the comfort and tenderness of a God who loves and cares for each one of us, who has not forgotten us. He is with us, to strengthen and give us the courage to go forward. He speaks tenderly to our hearts, there is hope, Jesus is coming, to heal and restore. He is calling us to be still and know that He is God.

Good news, Jesus is the light of the world!

RESPONSE

In this season of loss and change, let us pray for one another to be comforted, to be encouraged, to stand firm. Who can we reach out to today with tender words of comfort that bring hope and healing to the heart? May God bless you this Christmas with His peace and His love.

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6

Bible by Gary

READ - PSALM 1

We've just read from Psalm 1 but at Christmas we often read from the first chapter of John's gospel. There we learn in v14 that 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us'. This verse speaks of the Word of God, Jesus Christ, being born on earth and of course, John goes on in his gospel to tell us of Christ living, dying and rising again amongst us.

At that first Christmas time the Word became flesh, but following his later ascension and the outpouring of his Spirit at Pentecost, there is a sense in which, for us, the flesh became Word. Jesus, Immanuel, is now amongst us by his Word and his Spirit.

We encounter Jesus now as we open ourselves to his Holy Spirit and engage with his living Word, just as the Psalmist assures us, 'Blessed is the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.'

RESPONSE

Let's enter into an ancient way of reading this Psalm again - Lectio Divina.

Read - the passage slowly

Meditate - what words or images within the text catch your attention?

Pray - allow praise, sorry, thank you & please to flow from the text

Contemplate - what one thing does the Lord want me to change in my life?

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Way
7

Stillness by Stephen

READ - ISAIAH 30: 15

In Chapter 30, Isaiah delivers a shattering rebuke of the Israelites for how they turned to Pharaoh King of Egypt, rather than God for help, when faced with the threat from the powerful Assyrians. Isaiah declares that they should have trusted in God, waited upon Him, spent time through quietness to seek His way rather than rushing their own misguided plans.

As we approach Christmas at the end of an unforgettable 2020, let's invest time and make space in our busy lives to sit quietly and listen to what God has been saying to us through this crisis and refocus our attention on Jesus.

RESPONSE

Intentionally set aside some timeslots before Christmas to switch off the TV/news, don't buy the newspaper, ignore/silence the social media feed. Simply sit quietly in the presence of God with no agenda, no list of prayer requests and just be still and listen to what God is saying.

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8

Alternative Gift by Naomi

READ - JOHN 1: 1-5

The metaphor of light and dark to describe the difference that Jesus coming into the world makes, is profound enough to study for a lifetime, yet simple enough for a child to understand.

The Christmas message is one of light breaking through and hope reaching into the darkest hearts, minds and situations. Hope for the sick, the weary and the broken. Hope for the hungry, the refugee and the poor.

The hope we have is that darkness does not win. The expression of God's love is not to avoid darkness, but to move towards it and fill it with light.

RESPONSE

Help us share Christ's light by purchasing Orangefield's alternative gifts. £20 buys a solar lamp for a child in Uganda or a sleeping bag for a refugee in Greece.

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9

Community by Elly

READ - PHILIPPIANS 2:3-11

Paul writes this letter to the Philippians, encouraging them to live both in obedience to God and in harmony with others. We imitate Jesus when we consider others as more valuable than ourselves. We should model Jesus in our relationships, both within our church family and in the local community where God has placed us.

We remember at Christmas time that Jesus valued us so highly that he was prepared to leave the glory of heaven and come to earth as a baby. Paul describes Jesus as making himself nothing and taking on the nature of a servant. He was born to a young unmarried mother in a dirty stable and had to flee as a refugee when Herod ordered the killing of baby boys.

In these verses Paul encourages us to see our neighbours through Jesus' eyes, disregarding our own interests and serving them sacrificially.

RESPONSE

Perhaps you could drop a Christmas card in with some of your neighbours with a Bible verse in it and invite them to tune in or come along to some of our Christmas services.

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Way
10

Make like the Magi by Amyee & Michael

READ - MATTHEW 2: 1-12

When the Magi saw the star, they dropped everything and embarked on a long journey to find the reason for it. Whether it took months or years, it was not overnight. When they did get there, they recognised the baby as the one to be born King of the Jews and fell to their knees in awe and worship.

When was the last time you recognised Jesus' hand in your life? When you do, do you stop to seek his presence? Is responding in worship and giving, your knee-jerk reaction? We know it should be.

What could it look like in your life if it was?

RESPONSE

Reflect upon your day. Your cooking, shopping, walking, talking... where have you been aware of God's presence with you? Leading you? His Blessing? Spend some time thanking him in prayer. Now put on some Christmas carols and bless him.

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Way
11

Family by Patricia

READ - ISAIAH 9:6

On that first Christmas Jesus was born into a family, He had parents, siblings, friends. He was all about relationships with one another & for his 33 years showed us how we should love one another.

His first miracle was at a wedding with his mum and his friends in Canaan. He knew how to celebrate on happy occasions. However, He also knew loss. When His friend Lazarus died, Jesus went to the house and saw his sisters grieving – this is when we read the shortest sentence in the Bible – JESUS WEPT. He knew of pain and loss just as we do. This year, we as a church family have known tears of both joy & sorrow Joy when families have welcomed little ones into the world; joy when weddings have been able to take place, but also sorrow as families have lost loved ones. In the strange year that's been 2020, we as a church family haven't been able to celebrate births, marriages or give thanks for the lives of those who have died like we normally would do, all of which has left us feeling bereft, sad, disappointed, gutted.

RESPONSE

In this Christmas season, let's pray for those we know in our church family who have been born, those who have got married and those who have lost loved ones through this year that's been 2020.

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Way
12

Christmas Eve by Gareth

READ - LUKE 2: 8-15

Tomorrow morning in church we will read this same passage, but for a moment, tonight, step outside or look out your window. You sit under the same sky the shepherds sat under. You wait in the same darkness. You look at the same stars, pondering the same questions about existence, significance and God.

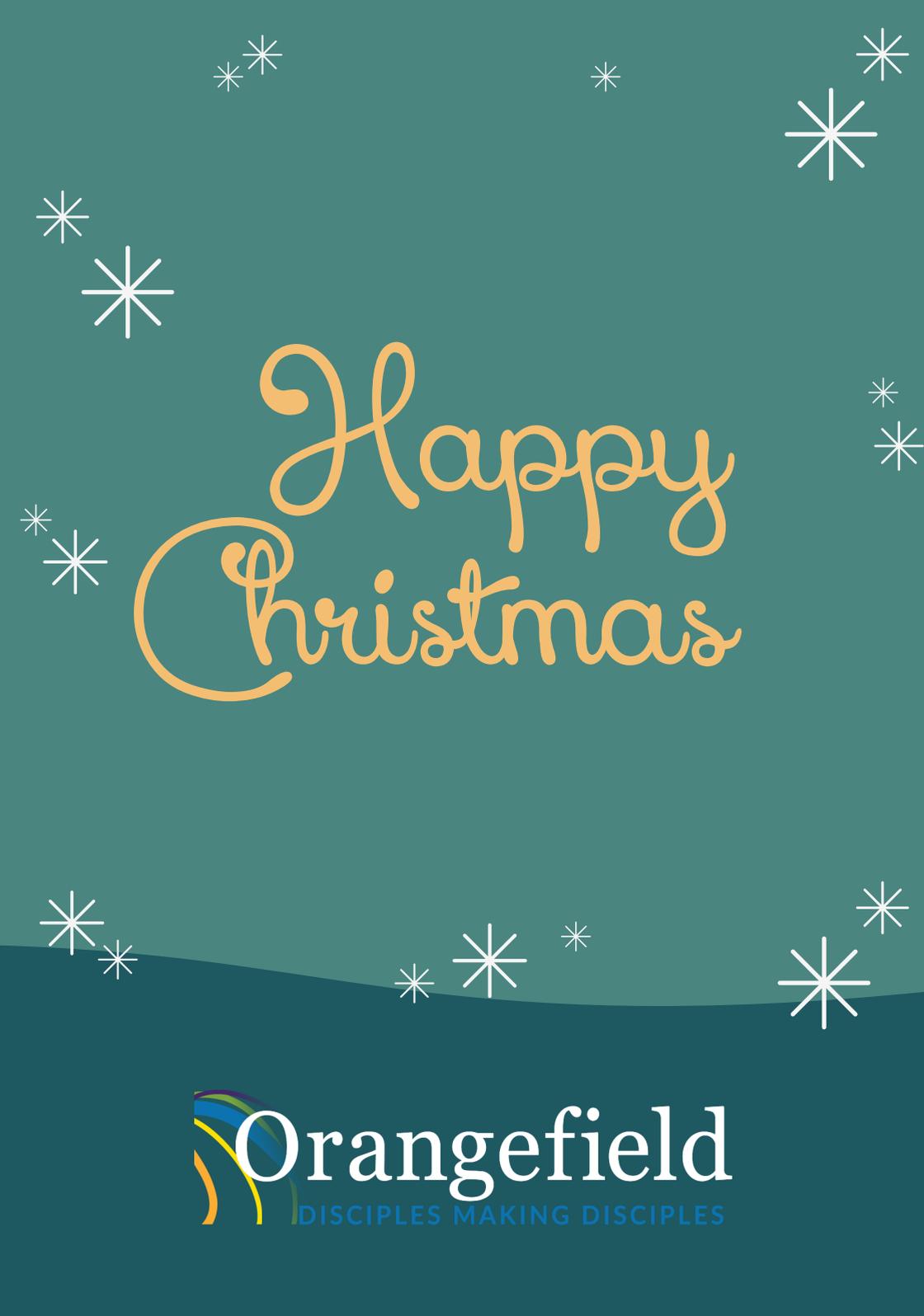
Does He see me? Like me? Love me? Have a purpose for me in the midst of all this? I wonder in the silent darkness tonight what questions, doubts, hurts, fears haunt you?

That night Jesus was born! That night heaven sang! That night the darkness- mankind's and mine, was interrupted as the love, forgiveness and peace of heaven interrupted our world.

God sees you! God knows you! God loves you!
This is Christmas.

RESPONSE

Step out into the darkness and as you wait join with the angels in praising God that "Light has come into the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it." If it helps, use the words of the song "So will I" (<https://youtu.be/C2U7ffUM5Ec>)



Happy
Christmas



Orangefield
DISCIPLES MAKING DISCIPLES