



Joining with Heaven's exaltation releases our expression!

We are getting ever closer to the big day. Christmas, a key celebration for the Church. Remembering the day that Jesus was born. No, it probably wasn't the 25th of December, but he was born, and we celebrate on that day. The word becomes flesh - God's great plan to save lives. Not through the front door – but coming quietly into a stable, at an overcrowded Inn in a small provincial town in rural first century Israel!

But as well as Mary and Joseph God did invite some others to join in his celebration, in heaven's celebration. The people God honoured were a group of shepherds – people of no repute, who were shunned by polite society and smelled of sheep. And then a bunch of Eastern Intellectuals who were not Jewish and had no call on Yahweh, but God wanted them to know a new king was born. For both groups the invitation was special. For the shepherds a host of angelic beings appeared, and the praise of heaven was heard – glory to God in the highest! For the wise men – the heavens themselves showed the sign! The stars moved! That's just mind-blowing. (You can read the full stories in Matthew Chapter 2 and Luke Chapter 2.)

For us too, God is inviting us into the privileged position of joining with the Exaltation of heaven. Inviting us into relationship with his spirit, not just so that we will be blessed, but that we will live out the incarnation of the son of God and then tell others about it. As we give ourselves to God in this, responding to his call to go higher and deeper into him, we will show more of his light and his love to those around us. We will express him to others, both within the body and those who are still looking. To express Him to the world.

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Monday: Read the story of the Shepherds in Luke 2:8-20. Thank God for the good news of great joy and rejoice with Heaven's celebration that still goes on over the birth of Jesus. Let this lift your spirit so that you "Arise and Shine" then ask for opportunities and look for places to express that good news to others in this week ahead that they might be "amazed". This might be with words, or it might just be an act of kindness.

Tuesday: You might want to read the story of the Magi today – (Matthew 2:2—12) Their invitation to join in the celebration was a much bigger undertaking. A much greater sacrifice of time, of effort and resources. There may be times when we maybe should put the priority of the kingdom higher than our own. (Matt 6:33) But God is inviting us higher and deeper into him to release his fullness in us and then into others. Take time to thank God that his invitations to us are the same things that release us. As we praise, he will enable us.

Wednesday: Pray about John's vision of us functioning like a wheel, drawing from the source (Jesus) at the hub (our gathering together – Sundays and small groups) and then as spokes transmitting this to the rim (where we interact with and impact others and the wider world around us). Ask God to reveal to you what each part is for you. Thank Him for your place in this. Transmit God's blessing and power outwards, and then, even if it's only a small thing that you see, bring your encouragement back to those in your hub. Let your testimony encourage others. And you know what, it doesn't have

to be something huge. Even a story about how you spoke a word of kindness to a stranger, for example, can be an encouragement.

Thursday: From the picture that God had given her, Marg reminded us that it doesn't matter who we are, God's invitation to us is to enter the courts of heaven. To seek intimacy with God, by surrendering our hearts to him, to be humble before him (Ps52:17; Is 57:15) As the Carol says; "What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb, If I were a wise man I would do my part, yet what I can I give him. Give my heart." Pause, pray and give your heart afresh to God today. Let his intimacy invade your life today.

Friday: Arise and shine for your light has come. Jesus is the light of the world, but as his body – we shine his light. As you get closer to Christmas ask God to create his light in you and let it shine out of you. And, if you haven't already, invite somebody to the Carols and pray for them to encounter Jesus this Christmas as you (and they?) join with Heaven's exaltation to release your expression!