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we're a noise...  
with unity  
we're a voice”



Steve Clifford, General Director

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**Running the race**

Advent reflections

27 November – 24 December 2011



# Running the race

## Advent reflections on the birth of Jesus

**The Christian life is like a race, and we are called to run it. The race will throw up various challenges; we will encounter hurdles along the way, but the Jesus whose birth we celebrate at Advent, is with us throughout the course.**

The coming few months will see the nation prepare to host the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, and as a Church we must also prepare to take up the opportunity this presents to show God's love in every situation we encounter.

These daily devotionals will look at different aspects of Jesus' birth and remind us to prepare for His coming again by committing our lives to Him and loving our neighbours. The prayer guide has been written by the team at More Than Gold – the umbrella organisation working to encourage and equip churches to make the most of the opportunity presented by the Olympic and Paralympic Games 2012.

For more information, please see [www.morethangold.org.uk](http://www.morethangold.org.uk)

### Sun 27 Nov COME LORD JESUS

**Matthew 25:1 – 13** *Keep watch because you do not know the day or the hour.* **Reflect:** Today is Advent Sunday. Advent is a time of waiting – waiting prayerfully and expectantly for the One who comes. He came that first Advent, the promise is that He will come again but He also comes today to meet with you as you wait on Him.  
**Pray:** Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Come Lord Jesus!

### Tues 29 Nov LIGHT OF THE WORLD

**Matthew 5:14 – 16**  
**Reflect:** Each of us has a sphere of influence whether at work, college or with our neighbours. We have the potential to change the spiritual climate through what we say or do. You are today the light of the world, for Christ is in you, the hope of glory.  
**Pray & Act:** Who can you encourage today? A smile can make all the difference. Pray for all with whom you will have contact.

### Thu 1 Dec ARE WE READY?

**Matthew 26:36 – 44**  
**Reflect:** With less than eight months to go, as a nation we should be encouraged that the preparations for the Olympic and Paralympic Games 2012 are well ahead of schedule but as a Church in this nation are we ready to take the opportunities for mission the Games present?  
**Reflect & Act:** Being ready for Christ's return is just as much to do with being ready to take the opportunities this day has to offer.

### Sat 3 Dec SIMPLY CONFESS

**1 John 1:9**  
**Reflect:** Sin entangles. We don't notice it at first... but before too long, sin – the selfish thoughts and behaviours that seem harmless at first – tangles our hearts and minds, chokes the life out of us. Confession is good for the soul. It resuscitates us, it begins the process of restoration and healing, of living again.  
**Pray:** Let us confess our sin to our gracious Father in heaven, and to trusted friends, and in doing so let us receive the kiss of forgiveness, and the healing of our souls.

### Mon 28 Nov ENCOURAGED ALONG THE WAY

**Hebrews 12:1 – 3** *We are surrounded by such a great crowd of witnesses.* **Reflect:** Consider those who have had an influence upon your life; who have cheered you along in the race of life. Give thanks for those who have encouraged you along the way.  
**Pray:** For those preparing for the Olympics, especially the athletes' encouragers – their coaches and family members. And for the More than Gold Homestay programme offering hospitality to athletes' families.

### Wed 30 Nov BURDENS LIFTED

**Matthew 11:25 – 30**  
**Reflect:** For Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress* the breakthrough came when he reached the Cross and was rid of that great burden on his back. You will never win the race running in that overcoat. Let the Holy Spirit reveal today anything that needs to go – good or bad.  
**Pray:** The invitation to all who are heavy laden is to come, lay your burden down and receive your rest in Christ .

### Fri 2 Dec PRESS ON

**Philippians 3:10 – 14**  
**Reflect:** The athlete will never achieve anything without perseverance. Paul talks of *straining towards what is ahead*. It's tough sometimes and the best of us are tempted to give up but the encouragement today is to press on – keep listening, keep holding on to the One who called you.  
**Pray:** When the going gets tough, help me to *press on and take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me*.

### Sun 4 Dec WELCOMING THE NATIONS

**Matthew 28:16-20**  
**Reflect:** In a few months, people from every nation on Earth will come to the United Kingdom to watch and participate in the 2012 Olympic Games. But these 'people from every nation' are also already here, living among us. Jesus calls us to go and make disciples of every nation... we don't have to 'go' very far to find them.  
**Pray:** For those preparing to welcome athletes, coaches and families from other nations. And let's pray for ourselves as well, to express the welcome of God to those from other nations already in our streets and communities.

### Mon 5 Dec PEACE BE WITH YOU

**John 20:19-23**  
**Reflect:** On the day He rose again, Jesus appeared in a locked room full of His frightened friends. "Peace be with you," He said to them. "As the Father sent me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit." And then He breathed on them. Wow!  
**Pray & Act:** Welcome Jesus, the Prince of Peace, into the 'locked rooms' of your life. Alone, or with friends, visit some places of fear and intimidation in your locality and pray 'Peace be with you'. As the Father sent Jesus, so He sends us.

### Wed 7 Dec RUNNERS IN TRAINING

**Hebrews 12:1** *And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.* **Reflect:** Our Christian journey is often described as a race. We need God's help as we endeavour to run well and those currently preparing for the Olympics model to us the commitment needed to run.  
**Pray:** We pray for all hoping to participate in the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics. We ask that God may help them in their physical and emotional preparation. May they know His strength, protection and peace. Amen

### Fri 9 Dec PERSEVERE

**When it's hard to keep going**  
**James 1:12** *Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him.* **Reflect:** As we think about perseverance, we may be convicted about times when we have felt like giving up. Let us say sorry and ask for God to help us keep following Him whatever circumstances we face.  
**Pray:** Lord, we are sorry when we have sometimes felt more like giving up than keeping going. May we remember Jesus' perseverance, even when opposed by others, and seek His help. Amen

### Sun 11 Dec REST

**Matthew 11:28-29**  
**Reflect:** Advent is all about the anticipation of Jesus' arrival. The word itself means 'coming'. Perhaps as we eagerly await Him, He is awaiting us. Why don't you come to Jesus afresh now? What burdens do you bring with you today?  
**Pray:** Pour a glass of cool water. Are you weary? Is there an area of your life where you're losing heart? Drink and ask Jesus to refresh you.

### Tue 13 Dec FEARLESS

**Ephesians 6:18-20**  
**Reflect:** Whatever stigma we face for following Jesus, it's likely nothing compared to the threat facing millions of our brothers and sisters around the world. Thank God today for the freedom He's given us, and pray for Christians around the world facing the rejection and suffering Jesus once knew.  
**Pray:** Father, please protect our brothers and sisters facing danger because they follow your Son. Give them the strength to follow and share His love with others despite the threat.

### Tue 6 Dec LET US RUN

**Psalm 84, Philippians 3:12-14**  
**Reflect:** Pause for a moment. Take five... or ten if you can. Read Psalm 84. Then read Philippians 3v12-14. And finally, read Hebrews 12v1. This is the pilgrimage of faith, the race of life that we set our hearts on, towards. Friends, let us run!  
**Act & Pray:** If you can, go outside and run for a minute (or an hour, depending on how fit you are!). And once you're out of breath, stop and pray. Ask Jesus, who has run and won this race of life, to give you strength to run too.

### Thu 8 Dec BLESSING

**Psalm 115:15** *May you be blessed by the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.* **Reflect:** Think about different sports facilities near to you; such as football stadiums or golf courses, community facilities like swimming pools or gyms or school sports halls or fields, or specialist sports from archery to mountain biking.  
**Action:** Pray God's blessing on these sports venues and clubs. Pray for participants, spectators and those who serve as employees or volunteers. You may also pray for a 2012 Olympic venue close to you.

### Sat 10 Dec MORE THAN GOLD

**Revelation 2:3:** *You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.* **Reflect:** We pray for perseverance for those involved in More Than Gold initiatives.  
**Pray:** Loving Father, we pray for all involved in the More Than Gold initiative – trustees, church leaders, ambassadors, teams and volunteers and ask that you would strengthen them over the next months. May they have godly wisdom as we pray that God's will is done and His kingdom comes through More Than Gold. Lord, in your mercy – hear our prayer. Amen

### Mon 12 Dec PEACE

**Isaiah 9:6-7**  
**Reflect:** 2011 has been a year of unrest; riots and wars have dominated the headlines. As the nations gather in the UK next year for the Olympics, let us stand as people of peace in our families, neighbourhoods and nation.  
**Pray:** For peace during the 2012 Olympics, for this nation to embrace those visiting with warmth not fear, and for the plans of those who may seek to do harm to be thwarted.

### Wed 14 Dec "DO NOT BE ANXIOUS"

**Philippians 4:4-8**  
**Reflect:** In the race there are many things that can hinder us and prevent us from moving forward. Fear can prevent us from fulfilling our God-given potential.  
**Pray:** Sit and reflect. What are the fears holding me back? Lord you love me and I can trust you. Help me to move forward confident that in you I will find peace.

### Thu 15 Dec WE WILL WIN

**Hebrews 12:1-3**  
**Reflect:** Jesus kept His eyes on *His* prize – us! So we can fix our eyes on *our* prize – Jesus! He's the author, pioneer, source of our faith; its perfecter, finisher, completer. There at beginning and end! Cheered on by forerunners, we're in a race already won, so we can – and we *will* – win. Team Jesus – together, we're *more than gold*.  
**Pray:** 'Father, thank you for Jesus' example. Keep my eyes fixed on Him.'

### Sat 17 Dec OPPORTUNITY

**Hebrews 2:10**  
**Reflect:** Jesus, the Author of salvation. No other, just Jesus. Unique, only and perfect. If He wasn't perfect, He wouldn't go near the imperfect to make them... perfect, *more than gold*, like Him. That's us! Christmas is another more-than-golden opportunity to share the Author's salvation message. The Author with all authority in heaven and earth...  
**Pray:** 'Father, who do you need me to send Christmas cards to?'  
**Action:** Pray for the people God leads you to send Christmas cards to.

### Mon 19 Dec A LISTENING GOD

**Jeremiah 29:12, Luke 1:13**  
**Reflect:** We have the promise that when we call on God, He will listen. God has not forgotten you. Look for signs today of God speaking to you.  
**Pray:** Pray for a listening heart; ask God to show you His glory. Pray for the Olympic Torch Relay; as the Olympic flame is carried through this land Christians will be praying for the light of Christ to fill this nation. God will be listening.

### Wed 21 Dec LOOKING TO JESUS

**Hebrews 12:2a**  
**Reflect:** How can we learn to fix our eyes more and more on Jesus today? Take time to stop and worship.  
**Give thanks:** for Jesus – His life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension; for the gift of forgiveness and adoption into the family of God; for His intention to transform us from one degree of glory to another.  
**Pray:** Lord Jesus, fill me afresh with your Holy Spirit so I can point others to you today. Amen.

### Fri 23 Dec "THE WINNING LINE"

**Matthew 6:9-13**  
**Reflect:** Imagine racing, full speed ahead towards the wrong goal. It would be really embarrassing to have spent a lot of energy getting somewhere that was a huge let-down. There is a King who reigns with grace, mercy and peace. Racing to Him is never a disappointment.  
**Pray:** Thank you that you are the fulfilment of all I can imagine. While I may not always understand you, I know that you will never let me down.

### Fri 16 Dec EYES OF FAITH

**Acts 3:15**  
**Reflect:** A baby, life's author, life's source – Jesus, born to die. But without death, no resurrection! Some saw the supreme conundrum of history with their own eyes, but we see through eyes of faith. As witnesses of this fact, we carry *more than gold*. More Than Gold seeks to share this more-than-gold at 2012's more-than-golden opportunity.  
**Pray:** 'Father, bless evangelistic opportunities at the Olympics and Paralympics.'

### Sun 18 Dec A HOPE AND A FUTURE

**Jeremiah 29:11, Galatians 4:4**  
**Reflect:** God's plan for the redemption of the world was to send Jesus. God has a plan for you. God promises you a hope and a future.  
**Pray:** Thank you Creator Father for making me in your image. Thank you that you have a perfect plan for my life. Thank you that you have set your hope in me. Help me to live to my full potential as your child.

### Tue 20 Dec SEEKING

**Jeremiah 29:13, Luke 18:27**  
**Reflect:** We come confidently to God knowing He is waiting. This is the communion of prayer. Be bold, bring large petitions to God, for there is nothing He cannot do.  
**Pray:** Forgive me when I don't believe you will answer prayer. I dare to pray that every person involved with the Olympic flame will be touched by your Holy Spirit.

### Thu 22 Dec SHARING JESUS

**Romans 12:11-13**  
**Reflect:** As the Christmas story unfolds, we see how the offer of a place to stay was so important to Jesus' parents.  
**Pray:** for those offering hospitality to the homeless in your community this week; for all the arrangements being put in place to provide accommodation for athletes' families and for overseas mission teams ahead of and during the Games.  
**Action:** Who could I offer hospitality to this Christmas time?

### Sat 24 Dec GIVING MY BEST

**Matthew 2:9-13**  
**Reflect:** Running the race involves determination, endurance and focus. There are ups and downs but think of the joy at reaching the winning line. Think about the joy of seeing Jesus, offering your gifts and falling at His feet. What will it be like when we see Him face to face?  
**Pray:** Lord like the Magi I bow before you, overjoyed, offering the best that I have. You have given all for me. You deserve my best.