

Winnowing our attitudes, beliefs, thoughts and actions by the wind of the Holy Spirit can be a difficult and painful experience. It is sometimes difficult to let go of the chaff that has been connected to us. Like the chaff of the wheat, as a person of the world it can serve as protection from the harm of insects and storms. When we accept Christ, we have no need for the destructive actions of our old life. In Christ, we are now ruled by love. The chaff must go.

The process of “threshing and winnowing” is a never-ending struggle. Each season of life brings a new day of evaluation. The “threshing” will separate another round of chaff and the “winnowing” of the Holy Spirit separates. Only then will we find the pure heart we so desperately need and seek.

Daily Readings

Please note: *This Sunday begins the season of Advent. This is the traditional season of preparation for Christmas. The following passages are some of the traditional Advent passages as we prepare for the coming of the Christ Child of Bethlehem. These readings allow you to dig deeper.*

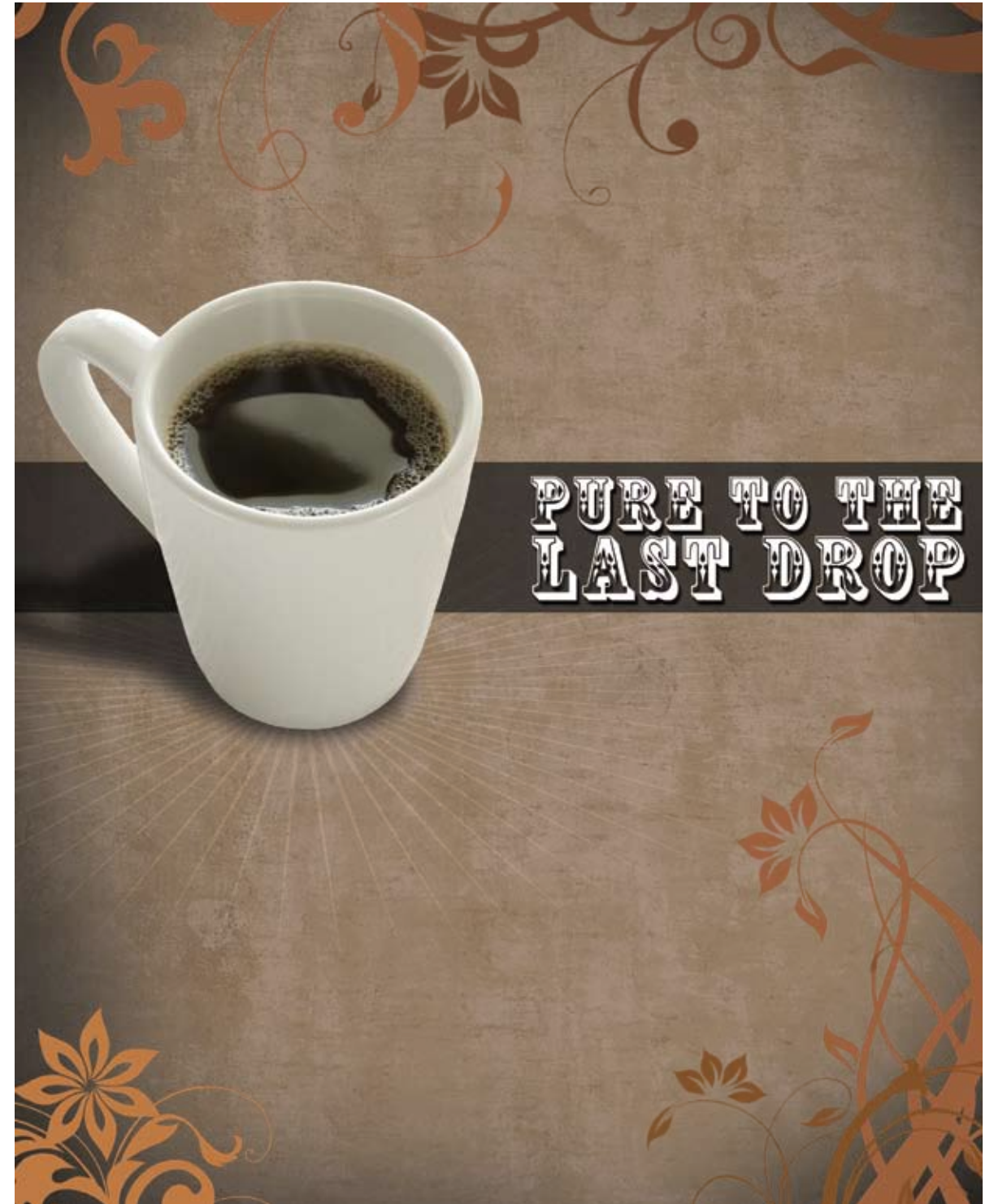
Monday, December 1 – Read *Isaiah 64:1-9*. Isaiah cries out to God for forgiveness and mercy. Verse one is a dramatic call for God to tear open the sky and come down to show the world God’s power. The prophet confesses the sins of the people in an effort to reestablish the relationship between God and humanity. As you read this passage, can you confess that which separates you from God?

Tuesday, December 2 – Read *Psalm 80*. The psalmist cries for mercy from God. In a season of preparation, purity is found in forgiving others and in the forgiveness of God. Who in your life do you need to forgive? Have you received God’s forgiveness for the failings of your life? Have you forgiven yourself?

Wednesday, December 3 – Read *Mark 13:24-37*. The gospel of Mark records these words of destruction from Jesus. But with the words of destruction comes a promise, **“then he will send out his angels to gather in the elect from the four winds.”** In the last verses of this passage we are encouraged to stay awake and watch, because no one will know the hour of Jesus coming. Are you ready for the coming of the Christ? In what ways do you watch and wait?

Thursday, December 4 – Read *I Corinthians 1:3-9*. As Paul begins this letter to the church at Corinth, he reminds us of God’s strength – God’s strength will be our strength. How have you experienced God’s strength in your life this week?

Friday, December 1 – Read *Psalm 122*. The readings for the first Sunday in Advent can concern many Christians. These readings often include predictions of the end days and the second coming of Christ. Christians have no reason to fear because the second coming of Christ is victory for all creation. In the second coming of Christ, everything that is wrong with creation is made right. True and everlasting peace is ours forever and ever. Use this prayer of King David as a prayer for peace for our time and for our world.





Pure to the Last Drop

Study Guide for November 30, 2008

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Luke 3:15-18

Everyone was expecting the Messiah to come soon, and they were eager to know whether John might be the Messiah. John answered their questions by saying, "I baptize you with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire. John used many such warnings as he announced the Good News to the people.

The Word from the Bible New Living Translation

Luke – Chapters 1-4

The first four chapters of Luke's gospel establish the identity of Jesus as the Son of God. In four parts, Luke covers the birth of Jesus, the words and deeds of John the Baptist, the genealogy of Jesus and the temptation of Jesus.

The passage from chapter three is from the section that includes the words and deeds of John the Baptist. Luke shifts quickly from the birth of Jesus to the appearing of Jesus in the wilderness as he begins his adult ministry.

The message of John the Baptist is two-fold – repentance and baptism. Luke sees repentance as synonymous with conversion, while baptism is the action which symbolizes the acceptance of the new faith. Luke focuses on John's message of doom which declares the wrath, or judgment of God. Dependence on being a descendant of Abraham is fruitless. Judgment is imminent, **"the axe is already at the root of the trees"**. Repentance and new faith is the only way to escape the coming judgment.

Luke 3:15-18

Of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), only Luke records the question of the people concerning John – Is John the Baptist the Christ? In Luke, the denial of John is much more explicit, claiming, **"...someone is coming soon who is greater than I am – so much greater that I'm not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals."**

John the Baptist continues by defining the work of the coming Christ as the one who brings in the eternal harvest. The image of gathering the wheat in **"His barn"** is also found in Matthew 3:12. Like **grain** at the threshing time, the worthy servants will be separated from the useless. The unworthy here are compared with the **chaff**, fit only for burning with **unquenchable fire**.

Luke also reports the words of John the Baptist describing the comparison of the baptism he uses (water) and the baptism of Jesus (Holy Spirit and fire). Notice that Luke uses the same language to describe the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as he records it in Acts 2. On the one hand, Luke describes the fire of judgment that will burn away that which is useless and unworthy. On the other hand, Luke describes the fire of Jesus' baptism that brings the Holy Spirit and power.

Wheat and Chaff

Threshing and winnowing is the process of loosening and separating the edible part of cereal grain

from the scaly, inedible chaff that surrounds it. The farmer would beat the wheat until the grain and chaff were separated. Wind winnowing would then be utilized as the farmer would toss the mixture into the air. The wind would blow the lighter chaff away leaving only the heavier grain.

The typical interpretation of the wheat and chaff is one of judgment. Those who repent and follow the way of Christ are like the wheat that is collected to be with God. Those who are unfaithful are like the useless chaff that typically was collected and burned.

Separating the Wheat and Chaff in Life

What if we view this passage from a personal view? Everyone struggles with issues that promote and destroy life. We all have the grain and chaff in our thoughts, beliefs and actions. No matter how good our Christian walk, we always fall short of the glory of God.

This is not a matter of salvation. Salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:8 states, **"For by grace you have been saved through faith, it is not any of your own doing but a gift from God."** To put it another way, only by the work of Jesus Christ on the cross for our redemption do we have any hope of being one with God and claiming the promise of eternal life.

This is a matter of living a better life through Christ. We have been saved by faith for a purpose. That purpose is to be more like Christ. By prayer, worship, study and service, we are winnowing the wheat from the chaff in our lives. When we separate that which is constructive from that which is destructive – when we burn away the destructive elements from our living – our lives are always better.

Pure to the Last Drop

As part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus shares what we have come to know as the Beatitudes. Recorded in Matthew chapter 5, these nine "blessed" statements are at the core of Jesus' teaching.

**Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.**

**Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.**

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.**

**Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.**

**Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.**

**Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.**

**Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

In verse 8 Jesus says, **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."** Jesus reminds us that a pure heart is necessary to see God clearly. As we see God, we see the person God created us to be, the life God intends us to live and the intended path to follow. As we follow that God-intended path, life unfolds as a wonderful journey full of God's promise of love, joy and peace.