

# Daily Readings

This week as we move toward Christmas day we read through the beginning of Luke. Often we miss these early passages because we want to skip to the “good stuff” about Jesus’ birth in chapter 2. The Study Guide readings allow you to dig deeper.

**Monday, December 13 – Read Luke 1:1-4.** Luke begins his gospel by citing the reason for his gospel. He informs us that his account is an “orderly” account that comes from the **“eyewitnesses and servants of the word.”** The gospel is addressed to someone named Theophilus. There has been much discussion about whether this is an actual person or symbolic of the early converts to Christianity. There is no record of a Theophilus among the early writings. The itself means “one who loves God” which seems to indicate that Luke might be using this name as a general representation for all believers. As you begin reading Luke’s account, would you consider yourself “one who loves God”? Would you be willing to be a slave for Christ? How far are you willing to go?

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**Tuesday, December 14 – Read Luke 1:5-25.** Luke begins his gospel with the story of the birth of John the Baptist. John’s parents are quite old, well beyond child-bearing years. Elizabeth is known to be barren and unable to have children. Elizabeth’s husband, Zechariah, shows some doubt that God can do what the angel has proclaimed. In response, Zechariah’s speech is taken from him until the promise of the angel is accomplished. How many times in our lives have we seen the things of God and yet because of our doubt have been unable to put them into words? Can you explain what God is doing in your life? Do you know?

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**Wednesday, December 15 – Read Luke 1:26-37.** Please refer to the notes for today’s sermon. This is the story of the angel’s revelation given to Mary the mother of Jesus. The affirmation of the angel, **“Nothing shall be impossible with God,”** and Mary’s response, **“Here am I, your slave,”** are our focus. Do you believe the words of the angel? Are you willing to be a slave for Jesus?

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**Thursday, December 16 – Read Luke 39-56.** During her pregnancy, Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth. She probably is looking to avoid the community scandal that an unmarried woman’s pregnancy would bring. The account includes the joyous response of Elizabeth to the holiness of Mary, but also the physical response of the child that Elizabeth is carrying to the presence of the child that Mary is carrying. It is a response we will hear more clearly when John the Baptist see Jesus for the first time and proclaims, **“Behold the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.”** Read verses 46-56. Reflect on the words of Mary. Do you see evidence of this affirmation in your life? When you first heard about Jesus, what was your response?

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**Friday, December 17 – Read Luke 1:57-80.** Eight days after the birth of John the Baptist, Elizabeth and the mute Zechariah take John to be circumcised. Luke indicates that rumors of the miracle of Elizabeth and Mary had begun to spread among the people. Now, the people hear Zechariah’s speech return and his words are filled with hope and promise for a new day. Read Zechariah’s prophecy. Meditate on the words and ask God to speak to you. Where is God’s presence in your life? What are you doing to make yourself ready to see the divine presence of God?

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## STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, December 12, 2010

### Glimpse the Divine: Nothing Will Be Impossible

**Luke 1:26-38 — The Word from the Bible (New Revised Standard Version)**

***In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings favored one! The Lord is with you.” But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”***

***Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”***

***The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.”***

***Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.***

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#### **Scriptural Basis — Luke 1:37-38**

Luke’s gospel begins by telling the story of John the Baptist’s miraculous birth. For Luke, John the Baptist and Jesus’ purpose are tied together. John the Baptist is the promised prophet who will come just before the messiah. This part of the story is just another sign for Luke of the identity of Jesus as the Christ.

But the story of Jesus’ birth begins with Mary. The angel Gabriel appears to Mary and proclaims she will conceive and give birth to the messiah and savior of the world. Mary’s response comes in two parts. First, she asked a question, “How can this be?” Mary is confused over the biological possibility of her becoming pregnant as a virgin. The angel answers her question with an description of what God is about to do, an illustration of God’s power that is already at work in her cousin Elizabeth, and a affirmation of the power of God – **“For nothing will be impossible with God.”**

The question Mary asked is one we have often asked when we glimpse the divine in our midst: “How can this be?” We are often confused by the supernatural nature of God’s providence among us. We easily explain away what God is doing and go about our merry way as if we have been the author of our own success. The question itself is not the problem. The problem arises in how we respond to the answer God gives us.

Mary’s response is one of total obedience. Literally she says in verse 38, **“Here am I, your slave. Do with me what you will.”** In these words we find the secret to a full experience with the incarnation of Jesus. God wants to be born in all of us, but will we let God be born in us. To let God have God’s way with us is to give up all control – not an easy task for the 21st century believer. Give up all control? - How can this be? - With God nothing shall be impossible.

### **Mary – Woman of Courage** *(from Interpreter’s Bible Dictionary)*

It is impossible to write a historical sketch of Mary’s life, so inadequate is the information in the gospels and so unreliable are the traditions of the church. Such data as we have are contained in stories whose purpose is not historical narration but theological affirmation: they declare that God has come to men in a child born of a virgin, that he may redeem them from sin and death and lead them into his blessed kingdom. Mary is depicted as the instrument of God’s gracious purpose (Luke 1:38).

We know very little concerning Mary’s background. She was a devout Jew, apparently living in Nazareth at the time when she conceived. Since both genealogies (Matt. 1:2-16; Luke 3:23 -28) are Joseph’s, we do not know whether she belonged to the Davidic line, though the angel’s words in Luke 1:32 would at least imply that the early church believed that she was so descended. Elizabeth, “of the daughters of Aaron” (Luke 1:5), is called Mary’s “kinswoman” (Luke 1:36). If the kinship was of blood and not from marriage, Mary would seem to be of Levite descent. It is not, of course, impossible that both lines lay behind her. Priests were not absolutely required to marry within their tribe, although it was held desirable that they should do so.

The Mary of the New Testament represents all that was finest in Jewish womanhood and motherhood. Her deep spiritual sensitivity; her purity, faith, and obedience to the divine will; her scrupulous attention to the training of her son in the religious traditions of his people; her loyalty to him, as evidenced by her presence at the Cross, even when she did not fully understand him – all mark her as a person of remarkable qualities.

That she was mystified by much that her son did is not strange. Jesus did not fit the traditional messianic pattern. His most sensitive disciples were confused. In the light of the Resurrection both they and she began to see through the veil of mystery and to discern the divine purpose in Jesus’ strangely wonderful life, death, and resurrection. For her as well as for them, he became “Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

### **Joseph – Man of Obedience** *(from Interpreter’s Bible Dictionary)*

This Joseph is mentioned only a few times in the New Testament and almost exclusively in the birth and childhood stories of Matthew and Luke. Mark nowhere refers to him, directly or indirectly (unless we should read in 6:3 “son of the carpenters”). In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is twice said to be the “son of Joseph” (1:45; 6:42). Since Joseph appears uniformly as the father or foster father of Jesus and the references to him drop out early in the gospel narratives, it is a likely inference that he died before Jesus’ ministry began. Otherwise he probably would have left a deeper imprint on the tradition.

The two genealogies of Joseph (Matt. 1:2-16; Luke 3:23-38), though discrepant, trace his descent through David. Their aim is to show that Jesus belonged to the Davidic line. Matthew and Luke wish to affirm, not that Joseph was Jesus’ actual father, but that he was his legal (foster) father. Both present the doctrine of the virgin birth.

Joseph is described as a just man (Matt. 1:19), by which is meant that he was a devout servant of God and regulated his life by the standards of the law. He was also kind and wise. Joseph’s deep piety is indicated by his glad response to the revelation which came to him through a dream: Mary was quite innocent of wrongdoing; she was to become the mother of the Savior of Israel, through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1: 20-21); he should have no fear of proceeding with his marriage plans.

Matthew pictures Joseph as frequently receiving guidance from angels in dreams: to flee into the land of Egypt because of the hostility of Herod, to return from Egypt after his death, and to settle in Galilee rather than Judea (2:13-23). Opinions differ concerning the historical value of these stories, but they at least agree with Luke’s in presenting Joseph as a man of deep piety and fine character.

## Prayer Focus

Trietsch is a praying church. This morning, as you worship, one of our prayer volunteers is praying for everyone in each section of our sanctuary. We believe prayer changes lives and hearts for good and for God. We invite you to join these volunteers by praying for those persons around you. **Remember... someone is praying for you.**

The prayers and verses below are to encourage you in your prayers this week.

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### **A Christmas Prayer**

*by Robert Louis Stevenson*

Loving Father, Help us remember the birth of Jesus,  
that we may share in the song of the angels,  
the gladness of the shepherds,  
and worship of the wise men.

Close the door of hate  
and open the door of love  
all over the world.

Let kindness come with every gift  
and good desires with every greeting.  
Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings,  
and teach us to be merry with clear hearts.

May the Christmas morning  
make us happy to be thy children,  
and Christmas evening bring us to our beds  
with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven,  
for Jesus’ sake.  
Amen.

### **Nativity Prayer**

*of St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)*

Let Your goodness Lord appear to us,  
that we made in your image,  
conform ourselves to it.

In our own strength  
we cannot imitate Your majesty, power, and wonder  
nor is it fitting for us to try.

But Your mercy reaches from the heavens  
through the clouds to the earth below.

You have come to us as a small child,  
but you have brought us the greatest of all gifts,  
the gift of eternal love.

Caress us with Your tiny hands,  
embrace us with Your tiny arms  
and pierce our hearts with Your soft, sweet cries.

**Invite someone to worship this week. You will be glad you did.**

**God is doing great things through the ministries of Trietsch.**