

Daily Readings

This week as we move toward Christmas day we turn our attention to the gospel of Matthew. Matthew focuses his account on Joseph and his obedience to God. Though it is not stated as directly as it is in Luke (nothing shall be impossible with God), we see from Matthew's perspective that not even the powerful Herod can stop what God is doing. The Study Guide readings allow you to dig deeper.

Monday, December 20 – Read Matthew 1:1-17 — Matthew tells the story of Jesus' birth from Joseph's perspective. Luke tells us much about Mary, but little of Joseph. Matthew wants us to know how God has been preparing Joseph for this moment from the beginning. He goes back 42 generations to tie Joseph to Abraham. Matthew wants to make sure we understand God does nothing by accident.

Tuesday, December 21 – Read Matthew 18-25 — Matthew includes few of the details that we find in the gospel of Luke. There is no stable, no shepherds, or angel's proclamation. The focus of Matthew is upon the willingness of Joseph to keep Mary as his betrothed. Joseph does ***"as the angel of the Lord commanded him."*** As we see how the story of Jesus' birth and early life unfolds, the story becomes more about the obedience of Joseph and his willingness to follow God's direction. How has God directed you this week? The Bible is full of God's clear direction for our lives. Are you willing to heed God's direction as Joseph did?

Wednesday, December 22 – Read Matthew 2:1-12 — This passage includes the visitation of the "wise men" or "kings from the east." Because they gave three gifts to Jesus, we assume that there were three kings. But Matthew gives us no indication of the number of visitors from the east. A certain amount of intrigue is included in this passage. King Herod wants to know the location of this Jesus who is born to be king, so Herod can have him assassinated. The wise men are warned in a dream of Herod's intention and avoid revealing anything to Herod. The wise men are an indication of the global impact Jesus will have on all creation. From the beginning, it was God's intent to share the gift of Christ with the entire world. What are you doing to share your faith with those outside your sphere of influence and living?

Thursday, December 23 – Read Matthew 2:13-18 — The threat to Jesus by Herod was very real. Not knowing when the child might have been born, Herod takes no chances. He has all the male children from Bethlehem under age 2 killed. Joseph is warned in a dream about the threat against Jesus, so he flees to Egypt until Herod dies. The ways of God are often opposed by the agendas and ways of humanity. When was the last time you saw or read of something of God that was threatened? How have you felt the threat of the world against you? Have you opposed the working of God in your life?

Friday, December 24 – Read Matthew 2:19-23 — The story of Jesus' birth ends with Joseph, Mary and Jesus returning to Nazareth. Matthew reminds us that the threat against Jesus remains. We can assume that Mary and Joseph lived quiet and private lives to protect the identity of Jesus. Matthew reminds us again that all this has happened to fulfill prophecy. How much time do you spend in the scriptures? The Bible is God's message for us today. Are there ways you can increase your knowledge of the Bible? What is God saying to you in this short passage?

Invite someone to worship with you on Christmas Eve. You will be glad you did.

God is doing great things through the ministries of Trietsch.



STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, December 19, 2010

Glimpse the Divine: Respond

Matthew 2:16-18 — *The Word from the Bible (New Revised Standard Version)*

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

***"A voice was heard in Ramah,
Wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
She refused to be consoled, because they are no more."***

Luke 2:29-33 — *The Word from the Bible (New Revised Standard Version)*

***Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
According to your word;
For my eyes have seen your salvation,
Which you have prepared in the presence of all people,
A light for the revelation to the Gentiles
And for glory to your people Israel."
And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.***

Frightened and Infuriated!

Harper's Study Bible says King Herod was the son of Antipater, who worked his way into the confidence of Julius Caesar. The Romans made him procurator of Judea in 47 B.C. and promoted him to the kingship in 37 B.C., when the last reigning descendant of the Maccabean dynasty, Antigonus, was executed.

Herod's wife was Jewish, and some sources believed Herod converted to Judaism since he financed and greatly improved the temple in Jerusalem during his reign. He was still king when Jesus was born in 5 or 4 B.C., but he died shortly after he ordered and followed-through on the murder of all the innocent infants in Bethlehem, according to the gospel of Luke.

Herod used clever political maneuvering to stay in power, despite the changing government of Rome. He was so evil that Augustus said of him, "I would rather be Herod's dog than his son." During his near 50-year reign in Judea, he

executed or assassinated anyone he even remotely saw as a threat to his power — including ordering the execution of many of his own family. The ancient historian Josephus described Herod as a small man who was driven by fear, anxiety and an intense need to control his surroundings.

The gospel of Matthew tells us that the birth of Jesus frightened Herod (Matthew 2:3). It seems strange that the birth of a child would frighten a man as powerful as Herod, however, the prophecies of the Old Testament had foretold the birth of Jesus would be more than just the birth of another king for the Jews. The coming of the Messiah would be an act of God unlike any other since creation. God was doing something new and different that could not be controlled, only revered. A man like Herod had reason to be afraid.

Matthew further relates that the “wise men,” by divine message, saw through Herod’s plan to kill Jesus (Matthew 2:12). Instead of reporting back to Herod the location of Jesus, they secretly avoided Herod to return home by another route. This infuriated Herod (Matthew 2:16). In his old age, Herod looks back to see his life as a lie. It seems his anger is not so much about the clever avoidance of the “wise men”, but his own realization that his life accounted for very little. His last ditch effort to stop God’s plan by the murder of innocent children fails. Soon after this, he dies a lonely and desperate man.

Amazed! — Luke 2:29-33

The irony of this passage is almost missed in the great proclamation of Simeon: **“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples and for glory to your people Israel.”** In reading this passage, Simeon’s prophecy is consistent with the message we read in all the gospels. The son of Mary and Joseph has been born as savior of the world.

The irony is in Mary and Joseph’s response — they **“were amazed.”** How can this be? Both Mary and Joseph have been visited by angels to explain the miraculous birth of Jesus to a virgin. Mary has heard the affirmation of her cousin Elizabeth, **“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.”** At the birth of Jesus, they are visited by shepherds, angels and kings. Each with the same basic message – with this child, the world will never be the same. God is doing something great for all people.

Really? Looking at the story from our perspective, we wonder how they were amazed. But our reaction would probably be very similar. Every day, we see glimpses of the Divine all around us, and we, too, are amazed. How deep is our faith? How willing are we to wait upon God? God is ready. Are we?

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 to the right are to encourage you in your prayers this week.

Psalm 25

from *The Message*

¹⁻² My head is high, God, held high;
I’m looking to you, God;
No hangdog skulking for me.

³ I’ve thrown in my lot with you;
You won’t embarrass me, will you?
Or let my enemies get the best of me?
Don’t embarrass any of us
Who went out on a limb for you.
It’s the traitors who should be humiliated.

⁴ Show me how you work, God;
School me in your ways.

⁵ Take me by the hand;
Lead me down the path of truth.
You are my Savior, aren’t you?

⁶ Mark the milestones of your mercy and love, God;
Rebuild the ancient landmarks!

⁷ Forget that I sowed wild oats;
Mark me with your sign of love.
Plan only the best for me, God!

⁸ God is fair and just;
He corrects the misdirected,
Sends them in the right direction.

⁹ He gives the rejects his hand,
And leads them step-by-step.

¹⁰ From now on every road you travel
Will take you to God.
Follow the Covenant signs;
Read the charted directions.

¹¹ Keep up your reputation, God;
Forgive my bad life;
It’s been a very bad life.

¹² My question: What are God-worshippers like?
Your answer: Arrows aimed at God’s bull’s-eye.

¹³ They settle down in a promising place;
Their kids inherit a prosperous farm.

¹⁴ God-friendship is for God-worshippers;
They are the ones he confides in.

¹⁵ If I keep my eyes on God,
I won’t trip over my own feet.

¹⁶ Look at me and help me!
I’m all alone and in big trouble.

¹⁷ My heart and kidneys are fighting each other;
Call a truce to this civil war.

¹⁸ Take a hard look at my life of hard labor,
Then lift this ton of sin.

¹⁹ Do you see how many people
Have it in for me?
How viciously they hate me?

²⁰ Keep watch over me and keep me out of trouble;
Don’t let me down when I run to you.

²¹ Use all your skill to put me together;
I wait to see your finished product.

²² God, give your people a break
From this run of bad luck.

Nativity Prayer

By Ian Webster, wonderingpreacher.wordpress.com

In a time of darkness and fear,
surrounded by uncertainty and malice;

Lord, you were born among us.

powerless at the whim of nations,
vulnerable for the sake of the helpless,

Lord, you were born among us.

Hidden from the blind and the powerful,
found among the poor and the fearful;

Lord, you were born among us.

Lord, in this day, where fear and malice preside,
where wealth and power rule, and the poor
and the weak are discarded;
Where brokenness and despair hurt us all,
though we pretend to be strong;

Lord come among us again; be born in our midst.

Open our eyes to see you;

open our hearts to your presence.

Take us from our comfortable spaces;

keep us from the lure of power and wealth;

Help us discover you again among the poor and the weak.

Help us, this Advent, to journey with Mary and Joseph
again to Bethlehem,

Take us to places of discomfort, of humility,
of poverty, of rejection, both in our community

and deep within ourselves,

that there, we might discover the Christ again.

**Set us free from our sins, bring sight to our blindness, and
enable the broken to dance. Amen.**