

Daily Readings

This is the fourth Sunday in the season we call Advent. Advent includes the four Sundays before the celebration of the birth of Jesus. This is the traditional season of preparation for Christmas. The following passages are some of the traditional Advent passages dealing with the nativity of Jesus. The Study Guide readings allow you to dig deeper.

Monday, December 21 – Read Luke 1:39-56. This passage is commonly called the *Magnificat* (the Latin word for magnify). Here Mary shares her praise for God in anticipation of what He is doing in the birth of Jesus. These are words akin to revolution where the mighty are brought down and the poor are lifted up. Clearly, God is turning our world upside down. But what are God’s plans? How does God want our world to look when this child is born? And most important — what is God trying to do in you this Christmas?

Tuesday, December 22 – Read Luke 2:1-8. This passage is Luke’s version of the nativity. Read and meditate on each word. Read again verse eight, *“and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn.”* The inn was the center of life in a community. Meals were served, people gathered for coffee and conversation, and weary travelers found rest. Where is the center of your life? What has the attention of your heart and mind? Is there room for Jesus?

Wednesday, December 23 – Read Matthew 1:18-25. This passage is Matthew’s version of the nativity. Matthew tells us, *“and he shall be called Emmanuel, which means, ‘God is with us.’”* Spend time in prayer this day sharing with God how you need God’s presence in your life. Is there a decision to be made? Are you worried about some situation or illness? Do you have some difficult person to with which to deal? Remember... God is with us.

Thursday, December 24 – Read Luke 2:9-20. This passage shares the message of the angels to the shepherds. They proclaim, *“Glory to God in the highest and peace goodwill to all!”* Where do you need God’s peace and goodwill today? Who in your life needs to hear a word of peace and hope? How can God use you to announce Christ’s presence today?

Friday, December 25 – Read John 1: 1-5. Merry Christmas! John affirms that God truly joins us as *“the word become flesh.”* How does the word become flesh in your life? No matter what your situation today, how can you be the word in the flesh for someone in need?



STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, December 20, 2009

Let It Be *Tales of Wonder, Week 4 of 5*

Luke 1:26-38— The Word from the Bible (TNIV)

In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.”

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me according to your word.” Then the angel left her.

Mary Mother of Jesus

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

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) (*Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*)

The Annunciation – Luke 1:26-38

In the dialogue between Mary and the angel Gabriel, the angel declares that Mary was “highly favored with God.” Perhaps because of her humility, we find Mary distressed by this announcement. She may have been thinking, “Why me? I’m too insignificant to find favor with God.” On the other hand, perhaps Mary comprehended something at the very heart of the mystery of God - God’s favor has nothing to do with perfection. God’s favor is offered to all regardless of our condition. It depends on our availability and willingness to respond.

Both Matthew and Luke tell us that Mary was a virgin. Luke, the physician, would of all people be the most skeptical about such a birth. As a doctor, he would have had an understanding of the birth process. And yet, he is the one who records in detail the angel’s message to Mary, that she, a virgin, was to be mysteriously impregnated by God’s Holy Spirit and that no earthly father was to be involved. For 2,000 years, the Church has reluctantly accommodated those who believe that Jesus had a natural father. On the other hand, essential to Christianity is the belief in the incarnation. You must, if you are a believer, believe that God was in Jesus as in no other human being.

In spite of any argument otherwise, the evidence strongly supports the doctrine of the virgin Birth. All four Gospels record the events of Jesus’ earthly life. Two of them say nothing about His birth. The two accounts that give us details concur that Jesus was born of a virgin. Luke tells us that it is his intent to give us the details of Jesus life and takes great efforts to give us the details of that which is at the heart of our belief.

It’s logical to assume that Luke had many visits with Mary and talked about all of these events. Mary outlived her son for an indeterminate number of years – how long we don’t know. There is evidence to support that she lived with the disciple John in his exile on Patmos. Luke, in writing his gospel, must have talked often to Mary, and we can imagine him saying, “Let’s go over the facts one more time. What really happened?”

The Old Testament prophecy was that Jesus would be of King David’s lineage. Now, while Joseph, Mary’s husband, was of the house of David, Luke again was careful to record that Mary was the kinswoman of Elizabeth, who was of the house of Aaron. Therefore Mary also was of the house of David and through Mary, the prophecy was also fulfilled.

One more note on the authenticity of the virgin birth. If one believes it’s impossible, then for a moment let’s re-view the nature and identity of God. We believe God separated the light from the dark. We believe God set the stars and the moon in the heavens and set the precise rotation of the earth for our existence. We believe that Jesus was horribly crucified and miraculously resurrected. Why would we want to limit our belief in God on any level? In the words of J.B. Phillips’s great book of 30 years ago, *Your God Is Too Small*, “We Christians believe in a God who is big enough to deal with our most pressing personal problems. He is big enough to deal with our most pressing national problems and the problems of our world. Our Creator and Redeemer is the God of the impossible.”

Let It Be!

Mary was chosen to bear God’s own son because she understood that with God nothing is impossible. Was she chosen over the more worthy or high-born or well-positioned? Or was Mary the one who was willing to respond? Could it be that God was offering the blessing of incarnation to all, and only Mary was open God’s incredible touch? Could it be that God is ready to offer that same blessing of incarnation to all today?

Mary had a choice. She responded, ***“Let it be to me according to your word.”*** God never forces love or direction on anyone. The angel announced God’s plan and purpose to Mary. Mary knew the cost, but she trusted God and responded in faith. Mary suffered the ridicule and contempt of being pregnant and unmarried in a small town full of gossips. Knowing all of this, she said, ***“Let it be to me according to your word.”*** God continues to come to us to offer incarnation. We fear the change. We fear the possible contempt. We fear the future. We miss the miracle.

Now is the time to join with Mary in this affirmation of faith – ***“Let it be, dear Lord, let it be. Let it be to me according to your word.”***

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 worship center. We believe that prayer changes lives and hearts for good and for God.

We invite you to join these volunteers by praying for those persons around you. We believe these prayers will have an immediate impact on those for whom you are praying.

Remember... someone is praying for you. Here are a few prayers to guide you. These prayers were written with the season of Advent in mind. They were listed on the Creighton University online ministry page. Often we feel rushed and anxious during December. Hopefully these prayers will help you focus on the presence of God as you start each day or as you face a day full of activities and pressure.

Working in the Kitchen During Advent

What joy this brings me, Lord. Thank you for guiding me into the kitchen for some time of silence with you. The room fills with wonderful smells and I share tastes and samples with my family as they make extra trips through the kitchen on days like this. Thank you for each one of these special people in my family. They are like the ingredients of my own life, adding spice and heat and wonderful flavor and melding together into a unique dish designed to glorify you.

You know, God, cooking is quite a bit like my life. It’s messy, I get careless and sometimes things don’t turn out as I had planned. But in the mess of my life, that’s where I can turn to you. Help me when I have to deal with being so imperfect. Bless me with humility when I grapple with my own poverty. Let me feel how deeply you love me, even when all I have to offer is scorched and humble.

Be with me Lord, in this kitchen today. Help me to take the time in this intimate silence with you, to pray for each person who will eat this food. Allow me to remember all of those around the world who have so little food, and bless those who share what little they have.

Wrapping gifts

Dear Lord, I am tired. I sit here surrounded by ribbons and paper, gifts and tags and I struggle to feel the spirit of giving. I can barely remember which gift is for whom and at moments it all seems so far from your birth. Help me to take this moment to think of the many gifts you have given to me, the many ways your grace has blessed my life. Help me to remember that each gift is a tiny mirror of the generosity I see so clearly in your life and of the many ways you shower me with such lavish and undeserved love. Let me sit here for just a moment and feel that joy in my heart. Thank you. Thank you.

Preparing for Christmas after the loss of a Loved One

Such a loss! Such a keen and tearing pain. Even when I am in a crowded room, there is a loneliness I never knew existed. Comforting God, I have turned to you so many times for solace, and I come again. While the world is bright and sparkling, my heart feels leaden and has an emptiness that cannot be filled.

Lord, how can I enter into this season of joy? In my head I celebrate your birth into this world, but in my everyday life, I am filled with a grief that runs so very deep. You blessed me with a loving relationship and now it is gone from my life. How can I be faithful to that love and the memory of that love and my sorrow in this season of “Rejoice!?”?

Tears are so close to the surface all the time and helpful friends who want to “keep me busy” don’t seem to really understand that I need to embrace my grief. I am afraid of letting go of the sadness and losing the deep love connection I had.

I ponder the name Emmanuel and know that it means “God with us.” With us. With me in this world, in this sorrow. If I look beyond my pain, I know that you, too, suffered so much in this world. I never understood so clearly before that Emmanuel is what your nativity is really about. You are in my world, in my pain.

Thank you, Lord, for the loved one you blessed my life with. Grant me now in my grief, a peace. Give me a comfort that might not make the tears go away, but that lets me feel your presence as you take up a place deep in my heart, with me.

Have a great week! See you on Christmas Eve! God is doing great things at Trietsch!

Hug your loved ones — Listen to their worries — Let them know how special they are