



**GOOD
NEWS
OF
GREAT
JOY!**

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, STARKVILLE 2016 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

**For Advent and Christmas Day,
November 27-December 25, 2016**

Daily Scripture Readings from Luke 1:5 through Luke 2:20, together with Daily Devotions and Prayers from some of the members and teachers of our FPC Family – based on the Scripture for the day – and Artistic Depictions by some of our FPC children for these devotions. [Pastor Martin Lifer – Editor and Additional Author]

INTRODUCTION: Advent is the first worship season of the Christian Year, including the four Sundays immediately prior to Christmastide, together with the final days from that fourth Advent Sunday through Christmas Eve. The title “**Advent**” is rich with meaning and inspiration, derived from Latin words meaning “**coming**.” The timing and message of Advent remind us to enter a personal and spiritual season of repentance and preparation – not only to be ready to worship our Lord during Christmas but also to be ready in the Spirit for when Jesus comes again.



Hayes Ferguson, *On the Way to Bethlehem*

In this year's FPC Advent Devotional – **GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY!** – we will follow the most familiar Advent and Christmas segment in all of the New Testament: Luke's “Birth Narrative.” The Devotional begins with Luke's recounting of the story of the Annunciation to Zechariah of the coming of his son (John the Baptist) and continues through Luke's account of the angelic host, the shepherds, and Mary's pondering of all these things in her heart.

We hope and pray that – *as you read and reflect upon the daily Scriptures from Luke, our FPC daily devotions and prayers, and our FPC children's art* – God will graciously open your heart and soul to his Good News. May the Lord indeed prepare us all (a) to celebrate Christmas once again and (b) to see Him face to face at his Second Coming!

Sunday, November 27, 2016

Luke 1:5-7 – *In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all of the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.*

After his opening salutation to Theophilus -- Luke begins the Gospel itself with what at first might have seemed to be bittersweet and even bad news. Luke tells us the setting is Judea during the reign of Herod. Herod was a false and evil "King of the Jews." He was NOT named "King of the Jews" by the Jews but, instead, by the Pagan Roman Empire, whom he served in its domination of Palestine.

Luke then introduces us to an old, childless priest, Zechariah, married to an old, barren wife, Elizabeth. In fact, both Zechariah and Elizabeth were upright in God's sight, obeying all his commandments, yet the couple remained childless. This couple's plight would have been inexplicable and a cause for great lament for most Jews. Faithfulness and blameless following of God's Law was supposed to bring blessings. Yet it seemed as if God was silent in the lives of the old priest and his wife.

In fact, God had not spoken to the Jews by a prophet for over 400 years. It would have been tempting to think that God was going to let Zechariah and Elizabeth die, and perhaps even let the Chosen People flounder indefinitely, with no further Word, prophet, or hope for deliverance.

But wait! Read on! The Lord was on the verge of acting in the lives of Zechariah, Elizabeth, and the Jews in ways no one was anticipating.

Prayer: Our Father, especially when the world and maybe even our own lives seem overrun with bad news, strengthen us to not to despair but to wait and look faithfully to your plans, intervention, and blessings. Lead us by your Spirit to pray for and to serve your Kingdom. May we be ready for You and for your miracles in our lives, when others have given up hope. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Monday, November 28, 2016

Luke 1:8-10 – *Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.*



At left –
T.W. Dabbs,
Advent Art



At right –
Giles Jones,
Zechariah
Burning the
Incense
Offering in the
Holy Place of
the Temple

There are many stories of good things happening when people were in the right place at the right time and some stories of good things happening when people were in the wrong place at the right time. *[continued on Page 3]*

[November 28 Devotion continued]

Many years ago, I was asked to teach a men's Bible class. For some time I refused; I was the youngest person in the class and probably the least knowledgeable. But at some point I gave in and began a 30-year Bible study and Lay Pastor period. Getting to know those men and hearing their comments and encouragements has to be the greatest blessing of my life.

Although reluctant, I turned out to be in the right place and the right time. God has a way of taking care of those things.

Prayer: Gracious and merciful God, thank you for these my many blessings. Help me to more easily follow your lead and be willing to do your will. Amen
Freddie Rasberry

Tuesday, November 29, 2016

Luke 1:11-13 – *Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him 'John'."*

These verses come at the beginning of Luke's account of the birth of Christ. God had not spoken to the Jews for 400 years, but God had a plan. These verses describe how God began his unbelievable communication with his people with the birth of John the Baptist through the Priest Zachariah [or "Zechariah"] and his wife Elizabeth. Later in the this chapter (in Luke 1:67-79), Zachariah prophesies that John would prepare the way for Christ to save the people of the world.

I believe that God has a plan for each of us. Our problem is to recognize the "message" and act upon it. In my life there have been several opportunities presented to me and somehow I realized action was required. I am sure I have missed many other opportunities. Also, I have had several "close shaves" that my survival was a truly a divine intervention. In my old age I can vouch for the "reality" of Christ. Following the Christian may seem difficult, but, in reality, is actually much easier, and, in the end, the promise of eternal life is icing on the cake. There are no incorrect instructions in the Bible.

Prayer: Dear Lord, We are eternally grateful that You have allowed us to be a part of your world. You give us strength to press on when times are difficult, wisdom to make our world pleasant, and compassion for others. AMEN
George Bennett

Wednesday, November 30, 2016

Luke 1:14-17 [Of John the Baptist] – *And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.*

In our passage for today, the Angel, Gabriel, is speaking to Zechariah of a son to be born to him and Elizabeth in their old age, telling him that he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before birth and will be great joy to them and multitudes of others. Zechariah is instructed to bring John up as if a Nazarite, separated unto God, to live a simple life in the wilderness, plainly clothed, abstaining from alcohol and having uncut hair. John's power of the Spirit will be likened to that of Elijah (Mal 4:5), bringing those who have strayed from God back to a baptism of repentance, thus removing obstacles and preparing the way for the coming King (Is 40:3).

a voice crying in the wilderness, to pave the way for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, Who is the Messenger of the new covenant. Advent season for us is anticipation of and preparation for celebrating the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[November 30 Devotion Continued]

In ancient times, when kings visited a city in their domain, a messenger was sent ahead to announce their arrival and prepare the way. John the Baptist was designated by God as a messenger (Mal 3:1), a voice crying in the wilderness, to pave the way for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, Who is the Messenger of the New Covenant. Advent season for us is anticipation of and preparation for celebrating the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Father in heaven,

Open our minds and soften our hearts by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in celebration of the coming of King Jesus. May we sing praises of adoration and thanksgiving unto You for the greatest Gift ever given.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Allen Johnson

Thursday, December 1, 2016

Luke 1:18-20 – *Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years." The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."*

Speechless – in our current day, we are shown images, told information and hear about shocking events which render us speechless. Zechariah saw Gabriel, spoke with this angel and heard amazing **good news**. When he questioned the Word of God, he was silenced and could not speak. He could not tell the good news. We can speak and tell people this good news every day. This is our season of joy -- go out and say, "Merry Christmas, Christ came for you and me."

Prayer: Father, by your Spirit, we received the message. We have good news. As you direct our steps this month, give us courage to tell others the good news. Like Zechariah, they may not believe, but help us to be messengers similar to Gabriel and firmly say – I am sent to speak to you and tell you this good news.

I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and my Savior, Amen.

Janice Kinard

Friday, December 2, 2016

Luke 1:21-22 – *Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.*



If your household is anything like mine during the Christmas and Advent season, it is filled with holiday parties, decorating, shopping, cooking, boisterous children, and....chaos. The hustle and bustle of the season sometimes takes our focus away from what we truly are celebrating.

In the passage today, as a muted Zechariah emerges from the Temple, it surely forced a sense of quiet in his personal and family life as he awaited the arrival of his child as well as the Savior of the world.

[Continued on next page]

Jack Aarhus, Zechariah emerges mute from the Temple Holy Place, making signs but unable to speak to the people.

[December 2 Devotion Continued]

Let us all be deliberate this advent season and pause to find moments of quiet reflection so we can focus on the true reason for the season- the arrival of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for this wonderful season as we celebrate and remember your great love for us displayed by sending your Son to earth. Even in the busyness, help us to find times of quiet so we can meditate on your perfect love and hear your voice. Edward Kemp

Saturday, December 3, 2016

Luke 1:23-25 – *When his time of service was completed, he returned home. After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."*

This scripture describes Zacharias [Zechariah] completing his work in the temple and returning home to his wife Elizabeth, who was never able to conceive a child. In those days, it was considered a curse to not have children, yet Zacharias and Elizabeth remained faithful to God even as she was past childbearing years.

We often hear, "God's timing is not our own." This is certainly true in the case of Zacharias and Elizabeth. It's so difficult to remember that God is good ALL THE TIME, EVEN if what we want does not come. There is a wonderful contemporary Christian song by Kutless that explains this truth of faith and that also serves as our prayer for today:

Sometimes all we have to hold on to
Is what we know is true of who You are
So when the heartache hits like a hurricane
That could never change who You are
And we trust in who You are
Even if the healing doesn't come
And life falls apart
And dreams are still undone
You are God, You are good
Forever faithful One
Even if the healing doesn't come. Amen

Amy Aarhus

Second Sunday of Advent, December 4, 2016

Luke 1:26-28 – *In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"*

These verses begin Luke's account of Jesus' birth. Luke sets the stage by telling us who came to see Mary and where it happened. We also hear that Mary was promised to a man named Joseph, who happened to be from the House of David, just as was foretold many years earlier in Isaiah and Jeremiah. The credibility of Luke's account is established immediately, because it confirms these prophecies.

To me, the most compelling part of these verses comes when Gabriel says, "the Lord is with you." Of all things the angel of the Lord could have said to Mary, he says this! And after he says this, Mary must have known that everything would be ok.

The same is true with us today as children of God. Things won't always go our way. There will be disappointments, losses, and setbacks, but even when things seem at their darkest, we can take heart that the Lord is with us, just as He was with Mary. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: Lord, lead us to believe and know that You are with us. Amen. Craig Aarhus

Monday, December 5, 2016

Luke 1:29-33 – *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 Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”*

Have you ever been “greatly troubled” when you heard God’s calling on your life? I must confess, at times, I have been greatly troubled and confused at the circumstances in my life. That was Mary’s initial reaction to Gabriel’s greeting, but after her confusion came consideration.

God’s favor does not automatically bring instant success or fame. His blessing on Mary, the honor of being the mother of the Messiah, would lead to much pain: her peers would ridicule her, her fiancé, Joseph, would come close to leaving her, and years later her son would be rejected and murdered. But through her son would come the world’s only hope. Her faithful submission was part of God’s plan to bring about our salvation.

If sorrow or troubles weigh you down and dim your hope, think of Mary and wait patiently for God to finish working out His plan. Like Mary, let’s meditate on this revelation that we may be overwhelmed with its glory, and bow down in adoration, praise and thanksgiving before Jesus, our redeemer and king.

Prayer: Father God, as we contemplate your will for our lives, as Mary did, we realize the miracle that occurred in Bethlehem needs to occur in our hearts as well. We need the Perfect to dwell within the imperfect, we need You to enter our lives miraculously, still and quiet, as You did on that Bethlehem morning. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen

Susan Gamel



Lydia Vinson. *Gabriel's Annunciation to Mary*

Tuesday, December 6, 2016

Luke 1: 34 – 37

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

And the angel answered and said to her:

The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she whom was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God!

When the circumstances of life seem to contradict what God has said, I, like Mary, often ask “How can this be?” Instead of believing what the world says about life, I need to make sure I trust the Word and power of the Most High God and let His Holy Spirit remind me that “nothing will be impossible with God.”

Prayer: Dear Lord, I pray that this song we learned as missionaries will ever be in my heart and on my lips:

Faith, Mighty Faith the Promise Sees
And Looks to God Alone
Laughs at Impossibilities
And SHOUTS “It Shall Be Done!”

Randell Foxworth



Chloe Hardin. *Gabriel Continues His Annunciation to Mary with the Good News that the Holy Spirit Will Bring the Conception and Birth of God's Son Through Mary, a Virgin*

Wednesday, December 7, 2016

Luke 1:38

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

During our first year in mission work in Papua New Guinea, we sometimes filled in as house parents at the various children's homes for the teenagers attending our high school. Not being a parent yet myself, I was surprised at the 24-hour job and the fact that we didn't have much privacy—plus it was difficult to please the kids. They came from about 17 countries, and the food I prepared wasn't often what they wanted to eat. In addition, they would always want to be with me in the kitchen!! I wasn't used to that! I was used to being with them in the classroom! I decided quickly that I would never be a houseparent!!! I actually told myself that.

Well, God started working in me. I finally realized that *whatever* I do isn't really very important; what *matters* is my willingness to do what *He asks* me to do. So, sure enough, the very next year, after we'd returned to Starkville to finish graduate work, our small group here at FPC prayed us right into being houseparents to the teenage boys at Palmer Home. And, there we stayed for the next four years!! But I must add that before we went, we had decided there were definitely some things we could learn and grow in by serving as house parents. God changed my attitude.

Have you ever done as I did--said you'd *never* do something? Have you set limits on what you are willing to do for God, or how much time and money you'll give to Him? Is there an area of your life where God is not welcome?

Mary responded immediately, for she hadn't set limits on what God could have of her. She knew God could be trusted with *all* of her life. Just like Mary, we need to see ourselves as the *Lord's* servants.

Prayer: God, we praise you as Lord of everything, including our lives. Thank you for letting us be your servants. May your Word to us be fulfilled. May we refuse to set limits for you in our lives. Help us to be faithful like Mary. Amen.

Jean Ann Foxworth



Elizabeth Ryder,
*Mary's Faithful
Obedience in
Response to
Gabriel's Message
from God*

Thursday, December 8, 2016

Luke 1:39-45

Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord!"

Joy, celebration and the Holy Spirit! The Advent season is a special time for all of these and in Luke 1:39-45 we are able to witness a family rejoicing in the coming of the Messiah. The anticipation of our Lord is more than Mary can keep to herself, and she rushes to the home of her cousin, who even before being told of Mary's pregnancy, is filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaims her faith and her love for the Lord. The Bible's depiction of this trinity of family members, Mary, Elizabeth and John (in the womb) should serve as our example of how to embrace this Advent season with joy and celebration with our family of faith, for the coming of the Holy One.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the joy in anticipation that you offer us each Advent season. We ask that you humble us in our faith so that we can be overwhelmed with your love, peace and grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Orly Hardin



Elizabeth Ryder,
*Elizabeth Greet
Mary*

Friday, December 9, 2016

Luke 1:46-50

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation.

Mary gives her trust to God. She believes and knows that God is using her as the chosen mother of the Holy Child. She also recognizes his miraculous grace and purposes in bringing new life to her barren relative, Elizabeth. *[Continued on next page]*

[December 9 Devotion, Continued]

Mary responds to Elizabeth's praise of her by praising God. Mary rejoices in God as *her* Savior. As the Lord's mere humble servant, she gives all praise to the Mighty One Who has specifically done great things for her – in her unique and high calling – and Who extends his mercy to all who fear Him through all generations.

Mary is able to fully submit her will to God's plan for her life, trusting fully in Him and recognizing God's Holy name. Mary understands God's love and regard for all His children, and she is able to trust in the fullness of his generational plans. Rather than choosing to worry and become fearful over her own situation, Mary continues to yield herself in trust and obedience to God, and she praises Him for His mercy, which is everlasting.

Prayer: Lord, help us to always trust in your love for us even when we cannot understand how You are working in and through each of us. Help us to rejoice in You as our God and Savior, and to remember the great things you do for us each and every day. And Lord, please help us be ever mindful of the holiness of your Name. Amen.

Nancy Lifer

Saturday, December 10, 2016

Luke 1:51-55

"He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors."

Mary understands the fullness of God's character as she continues to praise Him. She also understands God's faithfulness to his promise, and that his ways are full of mercy for his people. God does not care for worldly wealth or human wisdom. He rewards those who are willing to hunger after Him and who will be humble before Him. Because of His great love and mercy, God has a gospel plan to bring us back into communion with Him. He continues to help forever the children of His covenant.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You are faithful to all generations who trust in You. Even when we fail You, You continue to share your mercy to us through the saving gift you offer in Your Son. Help us to trust in Him in all our ways and all our days. In His Name we pray, Amen.

Nancy Lifer

Sunday, December 11, 2016

Luke 1: 56

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

God gave Mary, pregnant with Jesus, a three-month season of seclusion or refuge away from her hometown – as she stayed with, and presumably attended to, her much-older relative, Elizabeth. Mary was early in her pregnancy with Jesus, while Elizabeth was far along in her pregnancy with John the Baptist. *Some of the mothers of our church family have experienced for themselves the dual ministry of experiencing and growing through earlier stages of their own pregnancy while also helping a relative or close friend in the later stages of her pregnancy.* Perhaps Luke is further indicating that Mary stayed and helped with Elizabeth all the way through the birth of John; however, Luke does not say that specifically.

So Mary's visit of about three months with Elizabeth marked a season of waiting, growth, and preparation – not only for Mary but also for the Holy Child whom she was carrying. Let us, in turn, pray that we – spiritually – are waiting in faith, growing in the Spirit, and preparing for the Lord's coming.

Prayer: Lord, in these hectic days of December, may we wait, on You, serve your purposes, grow in faith, and be more and more ready for You. We pray in your Name, Amen.



Edie Kemp, *The Miracle of Christmas*

Monday, December 12, 2016

Luke 1: 57-66

When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy. On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John." They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name." Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

"God's Promises"

How glad am I that the Lord doesn't take away my ability to speak every time I doubt His promises? Needless to say, I'd spend a considerable amount of time mute (which may be a good thing, depending on who you ask)!

Gabriel, an angel of the Lord, had promised a son to Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth. Like his Old Testament counterpart Abraham, Zechariah doubted whether or not the Lord would really be able to make good on this promise of a son. After being made mute until the day of his son's (John the Baptist) circumcision, Zechariah's tongue was finally loosed and, "he began to speak, praising God." I can imagine that this time spent without speaking served as a time of silent reflection for Zechariah and certainly increased his faith in our mighty God and His good promises. Our God and all of his promises are so very good.

Even if we're not made mute during an encounter with an angel of the Lord, let's take time daily, and certainly during this season of Advent, to remember the good things our Lord has in store for us as believers. Let us believe in Him and in His promises. And a little silent reflection never hurt anyone either!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, during this season of Advent when we prepare for the coming of Christ the King into the world, please calm our restless spirits and silence our busy minds in order that we may reflect upon and rejoice in your eternal promises. Please bless us, and lead and guide us to be blessings to others. In your Son Jesus' name, Amen.

Wesley Ferguson

Tuesday, December 13, 2016

Luke 1:67-70

And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant- as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old,...."

Zechariah was overflowing with praise and thanksgiving for what the Lord was doing. The prophecy Zechariah knew so well was coming to pass, and he had a front row seat.

[Continued on next page.]

[December 13 Devotional Continued:]

His own son, John, would prepare the way for the Messiah. Zechariah and Elizabeth had lived lives of faithfulness. Luke 1:6 states of Zechariah and Elizabeth that “they were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord”. God had blessed them greatly with the birth of John, but more importantly, in allowing them to see the fulfillment of the coming of the Savior.

Prayer: Father, help us to live faithful lives, waiting expectantly for all you have for us, ultimately the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His name, Amen

Marquita Beaty

Wednesday, December 14, 2016

Luke 1:71-75

[Zechariah’s song, continued:]

“...salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us— to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, the oath He swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. ...”

At the beginning of the story of the New Testament, Zechariah, is the representative, really, of all the faithful across the generations under God’s Covenant with Israel (the Old Testament). Nevertheless – when surprised by Gabriel’s appearance and message in the Temple – Zechariah had questioned the Word and intervention of the Lord in Zechariah’s own life. Now though, as the old priest and new father holds his newborn son, John, Zechariah fully knows, believes and “sings” in accord with the Psalms and all of the Hebrew Scriptures:

- God is our deliverer.
- God always fulfills his promises – perhaps just not on the timetable we would set – and Zechariah celebrates the God has “remembered” and is bringing fulfillment to his covenant with father Abraham.

Prayer: Father, help me to trust that You will always fulfill your promises. Please lead me always to know and live in the salvation You bring. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Thursday, December 15, 2016

Luke 1:76-79

[Zechariah’s song, continued:]

“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high -- to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

This passage (taken from the Song of Zechariah) clearly names John the Baptizer as the one who will prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah by turning God’s people to repentance. This yet unborn child of Zechariah will play a critical role in delivering the promise of salvation made by God long ago and the complete fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

More notably, Zechariah proclaims a divine promise that through this world-changing event all nations will be blessed – and he does so in a beautiful reference to a sunrise overcoming the darkness. How fitting that in this season of Advent, we can likewise anticipate the faint light on the horizon as we await the full, dazzling light of God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Eternal God, just as we can anticipate the dawning light in early morning, let us turn to you for the promise of the fullness of light that expectantly lies ahead for us. In Jesus, you have delivered that very expectant light – and have done so to your glory and for our good. Praise be to the Father for His boundless mercy, grace and love. Amen.

Jim Beaty

Friday, December 16, 2016

Luke 1:80

And the child grew and became strong in spirit ; and he lived in the wilderness [or desert] until he appeared publicly to Israel.

John was the ultimate prophet, sent in the Spirit to prepare the way for the Lord's own coming. Even in Elizabeth's womb, John had been filled with the Spirit and had responded excitedly when Mary arrived, pregnant with Jesus. Now, as John grew up in a young man, he grew strong in the Spirit. Also – connected with the great men of God before him, including Moses and Elijah – John then had a long period of retreat and preparation in the desert, before emerging in a new season of prophetic ministry. Though there is some modern speculation that John may have spent part of this time of preparation with the Essenes, Luke gives no specific indication that John was connected with any group or individuals during his time in the desert. The clear point of God's Word through Luke is that the Spirit was preparing John for his appointed time of public prophecy.

Prayer: Lord, I confess that I am weak in faith and not well prepared to speak publicly to other people of your coming and your gospel. Please forgive me, and, even more, may I grow in the power of your Spirit to fulfill the calling You give to *me* to speak to others as your witness. I pray in your Name, Amen.

Saturday, December 17, 2016

Luke 2:1-3

Now it came about in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all were proceeding to register for the census, everyone to his own city.

In Advent, we look toward Jesus' birth, and many of us reflect on the Scriptures for new insight about God's great move in world history – the birth of the Messiah. The truth in our verses for today, Luke 2:1-3, reveals God's direction through world history in preparing the whole world for Jesus' coming. Recall that Paul revealed that Jesus' coming was God's eternal plan (Ephesians 3:9). Activating God's plan required His action in history. History records that Augustus Caesar (also known as Octavian, Julius Caesar's great nephew and heir) had come to be Roman Emperor by defeating Marc Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC. There is hardly a higher profile event in ancient history in those times. Augustus Caesar ended 100 years of civil war in the Roman Empire, expanded the empire and achieved 40 years of peace and prosperity for Rome. Part of the order he brought to the Roman Empire was the first census of the whole empire for the purpose of establishing uniform taxation. This Roman taxation program was the reason Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem. As the Scripture records, all men were to go to the city of their ancestral origin to be registered.

The Scripture further specifies when the census in Judea was executed by mentioning that Quirinius was governing Syria at the time. History tells us that Quirinius (also known as Cyrenius in the King James translation or Kyrenius in Greek) was a Roman senator who had worked his way up the Roman administrative ladder to finally be appointed Governor of Syria by Augustus Caesar and given the task of assessing property there and in Judea. All these events in human history were used by God to place His Son Jesus in our history so He could be the Savior that God had promised all those centuries ago. Praise God for His power and great faithfulness!

These verifiable arrangements in human history are part of the great message of Advent and Christmas. Jesus' birth was intended by God to fit seamlessly into human history so we could
[Continued on Next Page.]

[December 17 Devotion Continued:]

understand how intimate He is with us. Jesus actually came as God promised to save us. And the invigorating presence of Christ in our lives makes us know that because of our faith in Him we will be with Him for eternity.

Prayer: O God, at Advent this year help us to embrace a renewed, deepened understanding of your great salvation and a vision of Your mighty power to save all. Amen. Bob Daniels



Tate Ferguson,
*Joseph and Mary
(pregnant with
Jesus) Travel to
Bethlehem*

4th Sunday of Advent, December 18, 2016

Luke 2:4

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

As we read the Christmas story every year, images of stables, mangers, livestock, and shepherds often fill our minds. After all, that story is such a beautiful and simple story to understand. We even use simple nativity decorations to illustrate the night that Jesus humbly entered this world.

When reading the story, it is easy to miss some of the significant references. For example, at first glance it seems like a minor detail, but the statement “he belonged to the house and line of David” is actually a link to a promise that God made 28 generations earlier to David and Israel. Throughout II Samuel 7, God tells David that He will empower one of his offspring to succeed him. This offspring will build a “house” in God’s name and “establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”

The fact that Joseph, Jesus’s adopted father, was part of the royal family line of David is amazing proof that the upcoming birth of Jesus will fulfill centuries worth of promises from God. During this Christmas season, slow down and recognize that we are not only celebrating the birth of Jesus, but we are celebrating that his birth represents the establishment of God’s eternal kingdom that we are all invited to enjoy.

Dear God, we thank you for everything that this season represents. We thank you for inviting us into your house and welcoming us into your kingdom. Help us to use this holiday season as a way to show everyone your love and invite them into your house. In your name we pray, Amen.

Jeremy Murdock

Monday, December 19, 2016

Luke 2:5-6

He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born.

The time had come. It was here. The baby, our Lord Jesus, was coming. But there was still so much to do. Joseph and Mary, having traveled so many miles, needed rest. But the time had come. Being in a new place, they needed somewhere dry and warm to stay. But the time had come. Joseph and Mary found shelter in a stable, put all of their trust in God and His truth, and welcomed their child. Jesus came.

Many times during the holidays, we find ourselves with much to do before Christmas day. We have to find perfect gifts for each person on our list. Our houses must be decorated and perfect with every light shining in its place. Christmas parties fill our calendars, and our kitchens smell of cinnamon and peppermint. But friends, the time will come. On Christmas day, we will celebrate the birth of our Lord. If that perfect present isn't bought or the lights don't get put on the house, the time will come. Jesus will light the world. So instead of being focused on what we "must" do before we celebrate Christmas, let's put our trust in God, share the light of Christ, and await the birth of Jesus. The time is coming.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Thank you for the magical time of Christmas. Please help us to enjoy each other and your many blessings. But help us most of all to celebrate the birth of your son and wait for His coming. Amen

Ashleigh Murdock

Tuesday, December 20, 2016

Luke 2:7a

And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son;...

Luke uses such brief words and basic description to bespeak the Witness of the ages:

- **THE** point in history toward which all others bow;
- **THE** coming that all the Law and Prophets foretold;
- **THE** moment toward which all the faithful in the Old Testament yearned.

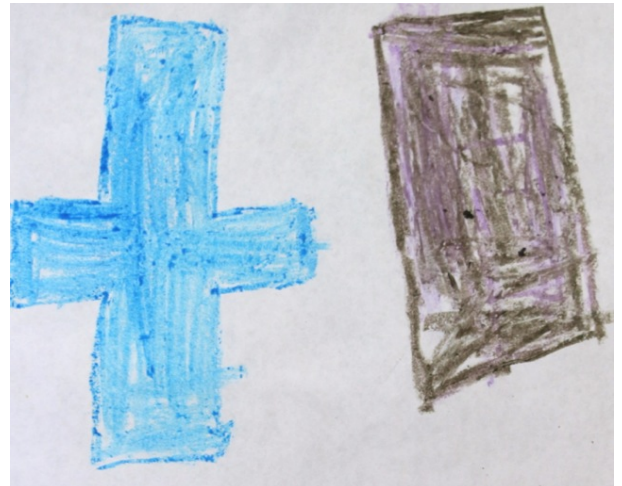
The clause in Luke 2:7a, devoid of personal names, could apply to countless births. Yes, each birth is a miracle of God's grace. Yet, in Luke 2:7a, "**she**," the new mother, is none other than the chosen handmaid of the Lord, Mary. "**Her firstborn**" – "**a son**" – is none other than Jesus, the Lord's Salvation, the promised Messiah, Immanuel, God with us!

God's Word here, especially, reminds us how our Lord came just like we all come into this world. He came fully as one of us. Amazing Grace!

Prayer: Father, we are in awe of your grace, that your own Son condescended to be born of Mary to save us. Set my heart aflame with love of Him and of You this season. In His Name, Amen.



Molly Kate Aarhus,
Joseph and Mary with Jesus Wrapped in Cloths and Resting in the Manger.



Tanner Chance, *From the Manger to the Cross.*

Wednesday, December 21, 2016

Luke 2:7b

... and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Jesus' arrival into this world was received very much as His presence is today, with no room in our lives or in our hearts. The few and precious who understood just who this Baby Jesus was, treasured Him and welcomed Him into this world with love, acceptance and an open heart. And today, the reception of Christ and what He brings for all of us is received very much the same way - the few and the precious welcome Him, wrap Him in acceptance and protect Him in their hearts, because there seems to be so little room for Him in this world.

Prayer: Dear Father, help open our hearts to receive your Son, to protect Him within our hearts and to live our lives with Him beating within us through this special advent season, but also throughout the entire year. Renew us now with His arrival for us, to serve us and to save us! In His holy name we pray. Amen.

Jimmy Hardin

Thursday, December 22, 2016

Luke 2:8-12

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Shepherds Keeping Watch Over Their Flocks By Night

Luke relates the story of shepherds in the field keeping watch over their flocks, and the angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. KJV – they were sore afraid (terrified). The angels told them not to be afraid for we bring you good tidings of great joy. Fear would be a natural response to a sight never seen before, a unique phenomenon. Often in the bible when men were presented with unexplainable events a heavenly presence would appear and dismiss their fears.

Yahweh was announcing to Israel that a savior who was Christ the Lord had been born in the city of David (Bethlehem). Christ was God's final word to mankind, the incarnation of his eternal love, and the sending of his only son as a savior for us, to sacrifice himself for our sins, that we may be able to commune with God directly without need for further sacrifices to justify ourselves before God.

God's love for man, his final creation, was without measure. He challenges us to spread abroad the gospel of salvation, that all may inherit eternal life and be cleansed by the blood of Jesus. Hallelujah.



Prayer: Eternal Father, you alone are worthy of our praise and worship. We present ourselves as humble servants, ready to go forth as You send us, knowing that You will equip us for the task, whatever You ask. Phil Gruchy

Simmons Brooks, *The Shepherds in Their Fields Keeping Watch Over Their Flocks*

Morgan Dabbs.

*The Angel of the Lord Appears to the
Shepherds Near Bethlehem*



Finley Murdock,
*The Appearance of the
Heavenly Host*

Friday, December 23, 2016

Luke 2:13-14

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

These two verses bring a lot of things for consideration. If you read just before these verses, you will see in verse 9 that an angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds, and they were terrified. Now a great company of the heavenly host (verse 13) appears to the shepherds. One angel will terrify you, so what would a great company do to you?

However, the shepherds recovered quickly, because, in verse 15, they leave to go to Bethlehem to see what has happened.

Also, while the heavenly host were praising God, they proclaimed peace on earth to men on whom God's favor rests. That means God's favor rests on some men, and they have peace. The Scripture is speaking of the peace that passes all understanding, which is a gift from God. The birth of Jesus allows us as believers to have this peace. For that, we are thankful!

Prayer: Thank God for the gift of your Son – Jesus.

Jack Forbus

Saturday, Christmas Eve, December 24, 2016

Luke 2:15-16

Luke 2:15-16 – *When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."*

They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger.



How many times do we hear about something and say "I have got to go see this" or "I've got to see it to believe it"? I know that I have. It is hard for us as humans to just take things on faith. But, that is exactly what the shepherds were doing. They did not travel to see the "this thing that has happened" because they didn't believe, but rather because they felt led to go see and honor this miracle. There was also no hesitation to go. They did not come up with 10 excuses to leave post haste.

[Continued on Next Page.]

William Henry, *A Shepherd and Joseph View
Jesus in the Manger*

[December 24th Devotion Continued:]

I wonder what my life would be like if I had that kind of true faith - to just drop everything and not question what I am being led to do by the Lord, or come up with 20 excuses to put it off? What wonderful things could be done if we all were able to do that? It is something to think about.... isn't it?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to have faith to follow you without question. Like the shepherd's I would like to not give excuses to follow where you are leading me. On this Christmas Eve help me have servants heart to be your true follower.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Vivian Cade

Christmas Sunday, December 25, 2016

Luke 2:17-20

When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.



Jack Aarhus, *Shepherds Rejoice at Seeing Jesus in the Manger.*

God's Word through Luke beautifully evokes the range of awestruck responses to the Holy One and the Sign of His lying in the manger: from the shepherds' joy and subsequent evangelism and praise, to Mary's pondering of her newborn son's being **THE** Son. Here He was, born as one of us, a fragile baby, wrapped in cloths there in the manger.

Our modern-day Christmases often tend to be filled with everything and everyone other than Jesus. May you turn from that temptation and fix your eyes and heart on Jesus. How is He inspiring you to respond to Him? In worship? In evangelism? In contemplation? I hope and pray your Christmas is fruitful with each of these faithful, joyful responses.



Carson Mullen
and
Ann Carlton
Holditch -

Christmas



Prayer: Jesus, How beautiful and awesome You are! Thank You for coming to fulfill your Father's will, to save us, and to redeem your creation. I love You and pray in your Name this Christmas, Amen.