



A Thrill OF
HOPE

15 day devotional

**TO PREPARE
YOUR HEART FOR CHRISTMAS**



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*Devotional writings
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A *Thrill* OF HOPE

The thrill of Christmas can escape us as busyness when the holidays kick in. As the holidays draw near, this devotion is designed to help you remain focused on the birth of our Savior. If a daily devotion is new to you, we suggest setting aside a specific time each day to pray, worship and maybe even journal as the Lord speaks to you. Here are some questions to help guide your time:

- 1. What is God saying to me today?*
- 2. How can I practically apply what I read today to my Christmas Season?*
- 3. How can I take what I learned today and impact someone else's life?*

THE *Goal* **OF THIS GUIDE**

The goal of using this guide is not to add pressure or overwhelm you, the goal is simply to help you focus on the true meaning of Christmas. As you add this to your Christmas season, we hope you find a new level of purpose, effectiveness and enjoyment in your relationship with God. As you do so, we trust that a sense of hope will fill your heart and homes this Christmas.



**A *Thrill* OF
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WEEK ONE

A Thrill OF HOPE

Week One Readings | Luke 1:1-56

Day 1: Luke 1:1-4 THE STARTING POINT

¹ Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³ With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught."

Reflection

Here we begin our study of the greatest gift humanity has ever received: the birth of Jesus Christ. Luke begins his account by explaining that his purpose in writing a narrative of the life of Jesus was to provide certainty of the wonderful news to

a man named Theophilus. Many scholars debate who this Theophilus could've been, yet aside from the title attributed to him by Luke, "most honorable Theophilus," and Luke's address to him in Acts 1:1-3, nothing else is said about him. It is however clear that Luke wrote this detailed account along with Acts to prove the authenticity of the stories Theophilus had been hearing (vs. 4).

Sometimes while studying the life of Jesus, or any narrative in the Bible, it is easy to read these stories like myths or fairy tales, distant from real events. But it is imperative at the start of this study that we remember and rejoice in the fact that these accounts are historical and were compiled for the purpose of supplying confidence in the reality of Jesus! Moreover, scripture implores us: "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly..." (Col. 3:16).

Prayer

Lord, thank You for giving us Your word that we would know with certainty that You love us. Prepare our hearts as we consider Your miraculous gift and study the lives of those who witnessed the birth and life of our Savior. Encourage our hearts today and make us more like You through our study! Amen.

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Week One Readings | Luke 1:1-56

Day 2: Luke 1:5-25 GOD PREPARES A WAY

⁵ When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. ⁶ Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations. ⁷ They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old. ⁸ One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. ⁹ As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying. ¹¹ While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. ¹² Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. ¹³ But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will

give you a son, and you are to name him John.

¹⁴ You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. ¹⁶ And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly.”¹⁸

Zechariah said to the angel, “How can I be sure this will happen? I’m an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years.”¹⁹ Then the angel said, “I am Gabriel ! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! ²⁰ But now, since you didn’t believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time.”²¹

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary, wondering why he was taking so long. ²² When he finally did come out, he couldn’t speak to them. Then they realized from his gestures and his silence that he must have seen a vision in the sanctuary. ²³ When Zechariah’s week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home. ²⁴ Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. ²⁵ “How kind the Lord is!” she exclaimed. “He has taken away my disgrace of having no children.”

Reflection

Zechariah and Elizabeth served during the tempestuous reign of Herod the Great, whose violent paranoia led him to murder members of his own family. Yet, despite the dangerous political moment, God was preparing the way. In fact, God decided to work through two people, who though devout in their faith, by human standards were completely unfit to bear the child who would be the forerunner to Christ.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were not only old, but Elizabeth was also barren. Yet, despite their physical inadequacy, God was preparing the way. It is also true that up to 20,000 priests served in the time of Jesus, so lots were cast to appoint who would serve at a given time. A priest might only serve once in his entire life! It is no coincidence Zechariah was chosen out of the multitude to have a divine meeting with one of God's messengers because, despite the incredible odds, God was preparing the way. In this context, it is completely natural that Zechariah responded in disbelief to Gabriel's news. However, his natural response to this supernatural news was unfitting. As God goes before us today and prepares the way for us to play a part in pointing to His Son, let us be reminded: God moves supernaturally. No human authority, nor statistical improbability, nor physical deficiency could ever stand in the way of our God!

Prayer

God, we praise You today for always preparing a way! You are greater than any human obstacle and choose to work through us despite our deficiencies. When faced with Your supernatural promises, would we respond in supernatural faith. Move in our midst and lead us to point others to Your Son. Amen.

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Week One Readings | Luke 1:1-56

Day 3: Luke 1:26-38

MARY ACCEPTS BY FAITH

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. ²⁸ Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!" ²⁹ Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. ³⁰ "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God!" ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!" ³⁴ Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin." ³⁵ The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God."

³⁶ What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. ³⁷ For the word of God will never fail." ³⁸ Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.

Reflection

Mary's response demonstrated two attributes often found cultivated in the lives of those recounted in the Bible as "favored" by God: faith and humility. Many women, if greeted by an angel of the Lord after their engagement, would assume that the promise of a child would come through natural means. Mary, however, somehow quickly recognized the immediacy of the angel's news and believed it would come to pass despite its absurdity. In extreme humility, Mary positioned herself as "the Lord's servant," and would submit to His plan regardless of the social consequences that awaited her.

Let us glean encouragement and wisdom from Mary's example. As we desire the favor of God, would we grow in our belief that God's words will never fail. Would we live consistently in humility, so that when we are met with God's plan, we would be able to say "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true."

Prayer

Lord, thank You for blessing faith and humility. For we need only to continue to gaze upon You to grow in both. We need only to remember Your faithfulness to be convinced that we can trust you. Lord, we would be nothing without You, so grow us today so that we would be able to respond as Mary did when You meet us with Your promises and plans. Amen.

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Week One Readings | Luke 1:1-56

Day 4: Luke 1:39-45 **THE FAITHFUL BLESSED**

³⁹ A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town ⁴⁰ where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. ⁴³ Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? ⁴⁴ When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. ⁴⁵ You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."

Reflection

It has always been about faith. Even before Jesus put into effect a new covenant, it was only through faith that anyone could be made right before

God. We glean this truth from the life of Abraham: he “believed the Lord, and he [God] credited it to him as righteousness” (Gn 15:6). Since the Lord spoke to Abraham, “I will bless you...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you,” Abraham very clearly prefigures Mary (Gn 12:2-3). As it was with Abraham, Mary was blessed because she “believed that the Lord would do what He said,” and literally bore the blessing to the world that God had promised would come through Abraham.

So, what do we do with this typology, other than marvel at how our God works? Take heart. Be encouraged. God blesses those who have faith that He will accomplish what He said He would accomplish. Moreover, He blesses other people through our faith!

Prayer

Lord, thank You for blessing our faith. We don't deserve blessing or right standing with You, yet You lavish grace upon us. Would we believe Your promises as You work in our lives and would we overflow with blessing and grace to those around us in our obedience to You. Amen.

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Week One Readings | Luke 1:1-56

Day 5: Luke 1:46-56

MARY RESPONDS IN WORSHIP

⁴⁶ Mary responded, "Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. ⁴⁷ How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! ⁴⁸ For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. ⁴⁹ For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me. ⁵⁰ He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him. ⁵¹ His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud and haughty ones. ⁵² He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble. ⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful. ⁵⁵ For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever." ⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back to her own home.

Reflection

The confirmation that Mary received from Elizabeth's word of knowledge ushered forth immediate praise from Mary's heart. Again displaying considerable humility, she identifies herself only in relation to God, "his lowly servant girl," and prophesied that generations to come would call her blessed because of His acknowledgment of her. In God's mercy, He grafted Mary into His master plan to bring salvation to the world; and with incredible awareness, Mary didn't waste a second to glorify God for what He was doing through her and had promised her people long ago.

It is incredibly appropriate that our response to encouragement, whether a promise fulfilled or confirmation that the Lord is working through us, would be to magnify our God. Only our relationship to Him makes us anything, and in Him we are deeply blessed.

Prayer

Lord, thank You that you are personal to us! Thank You that for some reason You delight to make the mystery of Your will known to us: to bring everything together in Christ (Eph. 1:9-10). From the very foundation of the world this was Your plan. As we magnify Your name, would people take note and turn to Your Son. Amen.



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WEEK TWO

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Week Two Readings | Luke 1:57-80,
Mt 1:18-25, Luke 2:1-7

Day 1: Luke 1:57-66

ZECHARIAH STEPS OUT IN FAITH

The Birth of John the Baptist

⁵⁷ When it was time for Elizabeth's baby to be born, she gave birth to a son. ⁵⁸ And when her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her, everyone rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹ When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. ⁶⁰ But Elizabeth said, "No! His name is John!" ⁶¹ "What?" they exclaimed. "There is no one in all your family by that name." ⁶² So they used gestures to ask the baby's father what he wanted to name him. ⁶³ He motioned for a writing tablet, and to everyone's surprise he wrote, "His name is John." ⁶⁴ Instantly Zechariah could speak again, and he began praising God. ⁶⁵ Awe fell upon the whole neighborhood, and the news of what had happened spread throughout the Judean hills. ⁶⁶ Everyone who heard about it reflected on these events and asked,

“What will this child turn out to be?” For the hand of the Lord was surely upon him in a special way.

Reflection

I wonder if during the eight days following the birth of John, Zechariah began to lose hope in Gabriel’s promise that his voice would return. His beautiful son, who was himself a promise fulfilled, now laid in his wife’s arms, and yet Zechariah remained mute. Perhaps he woke up, held his healthy son, and had a renewed sense of confidence in the angel’s prophecy: “my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time.” In any case, at the child’s circumcision Zechariah would not be swayed from proclaiming that his son would be called John, a name meaning *“Yahweh has been gracious”* or *“Yahweh is gracious.”*

In his obedience, Zechariah was given grace and no doubt a strengthened faith. This radical experience was preparing him to shepherd a radical man for the glory of God; and good leaders, according to scripture, are those that are humble and have faith in the power and efficacy of God’s words.

Prayer

Lord, thank You that you are faithful to grow us in preparation for Your calling on our lives, even despite our lack of faith. As You prepare a way to make Your son known, humble us and bring us into a deeper reliance on you. Go before us today and give us opportunities to step out in obedience in view of our friends and family for Your glory. Amen.

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Week Two Readings | Luke 1:57-80,
Mt 1:18-25, Luke 2:1-7

Day 2: Luke 1:67-75 THE COMING SALVATION

Zechariah's Prophecy

⁶⁷ Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy: ⁶⁸ "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people. ⁶⁹ He has sent us a mighty Savior from the royal line of his servant David, ⁷⁰ just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago. ⁷¹ Now we will be saved from our enemies and from all who hate us. ⁷² He has been merciful to our ancestors by remembering his sacred covenant— ⁷³ the covenant he swore with an oath to our ancestor Abraham. ⁷⁴ We have been rescued from our enemies so we can serve God without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness for as long as we live.

Reflection

Zechariah, filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesied of the awaited salvation to come. Pastor David Guzik notes that as rich a blessing and as miraculous as John's birth was, Zechariah's prophecy was firstly of the long-awaited Savior. Only the God of Israel could redeem His people, as promised centuries prior, and free his people to serve God without fear.

What does it say about the salvation that His people could serve fearlessly in holiness and righteousness? That physical enemies would relent in their persecution? Though Israel experienced periods of peace, her enemies remained. Here it is certain that Zechariah prophesied of the spiritual salvation of Jesus which would break every stronghold of darkness.

Today, this salvation is ours in Jesus Christ. More adversaries, physical and spiritual, will come, but we have already been rescued from them. We need not fear death, or physical or spiritual enemies, or the grip of sin which once dictated our lives. Fear has no place in the life of the believer because He who is in us is greater than He who is in the world!

Prayer

Lord, thank You for planning long ago to visit and redeem Your people. You promised salvation to Abraham and faithfully carried it out to completion, sending Your own Son to free us. Would we keep our salvation in the forefront of our minds so that we would serve You without fear today. Amen.

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Week Two Readings | Luke 1:57-80,
Mt 1:18-25, Luke 2:1-7

Day 3: Luke 1:76-80

THE MORNING LIGHT FROM HEAVEN

⁷⁶ "And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord. ⁷⁷ You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins. ⁷⁸ Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, ⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace." ⁸⁰ John grew up and became strong in spirit. And he lived in the wilderness until he began his public ministry to Israel.

Reflection

Here Zechariah prophesies that John would be the forerunner of Christ, preparing God's people that the Messiah they had been waiting for would bring a

salvation far better than a militaristic uprising. Rome and its many rulers had not caused the bondage and darkness of which God's people needed saving; their oppressor was sin, and they were condemned by the law. But God's forgiveness would be their salvation, and it was coming soon.

Renowned commentator and preacher Alexander Maclaren beautifully explained the symbolism of Christ as the "morning light": "As the dawn is ushered in by the notes of birds, so the rising of the Sun of Righteousness was heralded by song, Mary and Zechariah brought their praises and welcome to the unborn Christ, the angels hovered with heavenly music over His cradle, and Simeon took the child in his arms and blessed it." To put it more simply, I would add that John was the alarm clock, awaking His people to the light.

Prayer

Lord, this passage is the good news. You knew that the greatest evil and truest darkness was our lost communion with You. While we sat in our darkness, we looked at our physical enemies and oppressors and cried for help, but You knew that our battle was not against flesh and blood. The world suffered in darkness because of sin; because of separation from You. So, in mercy You allowed the morning light of heaven to touch down on earth to offer us salvation and a life of peace. The light of heaven be praised today and forevermore. Amen.

A *Thrill* OF HOPE

Week Two Readings | Luke 1:57-80,
Mt 1:18-25, Luke 2:1-7

Day 4: Matthew 1:18-25 **GOD WITH US**

The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

¹⁸ This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. ²⁰ As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet: ²³ "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'" ²⁴ When

Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

Reflection

It is unsurprising, yet still striking how God cared for Mary. On the one hand, it seems obvious that God would prepare perfectly for those who would bring His son into the world. On the other hand, His works are so marvelous, good, and just, that even His expected acts, especially those He told would happen ahead of time, leave us in awe. God didn't simply provide Mary with a man of integrity who would not disgrace her publicly, He provided a man of integrity who would submit to God's words, His pronouncement of Mary's innocence and His command to take her as his wife, though it defied logic and social customs.

In this passage we get a picture of the immediate, intimate care and guidance God grants His people alongside His master plan to rescue them as prophesied by Isaiah centuries prior (Is. 7:14). God was sending the one His people would call "God is with us," but clearly He always was and always will be Immanuel. That is not to detract from the exceptionality of God embodied in human form,

but to praise God that He is the same yesterday and today. He has always been working all things together for our good.

Prayer

Lord, thank You that You are with us. Thank You that You have always cared for us and in ways we don't know yet and may never know. You have been working for our good long before our existence and are working now in our lives. We praise You for what You have accomplished in Christ Jesus and what You plan to do in years to come. We are submitted to You today, Lord, use us in any way you see fit. Amen.

A Thrill OF HOPE

Week Two Readings | Luke 1:57-80,
Mt 1:18-25, Luke 2:1-7

Day 5: Luke 2:1-7 **THE LOWLY BIRTH**

The Birth of Jesus

¹ At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. ² (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. ⁴ And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. ⁵ He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was now obviously pregnant. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. ⁷ She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

Reflection

Here, we read that the gift to the world is finally born. A census causes Joseph to take Mary and travel to Bethlehem, the location of King David's ancient home. But Bethlehem was far from a splendid historical town to honor the mighty King after God's own heart. Bethlehem was now a small, humble town with ordinary people. It seems, then, aside from the fact that David had resided there, that the birth of the One True King in this small town was unfitting.

Moreover, it seems that Jesus' birth in a manger was a huge oversight! However, after reading of God's detailed care for his people, we know better. Clearly God could have opened the door to the best lodging in town for the couple, but He could have also had our Savior born to a royal family in a palace. Instead, God purposed His son to be born in the humblest circumstances in the lowliest of towns. We then ask, "why?"

Charles H. Spurgeon rhetorically asks of the birth of Christ, "If He thus endured degradation at the first, will He count it any dishonor to come to the very poorest and humblest of His creatures, and tabernacle in the souls of His children?" We should be encouraged that the King of the Universe reached out in humility to demonstrate His love. In this way,

we are reminded that if His love is in no way merited, it certainly cannot be hindered by any low social standing or weakness of our humanity.

Prayer

Lord, we praise You today for the birth of Jesus, that He stooped so low to meet us. He is the greatest gift the world has ever received. As we remember His birth today, we also acknowledge our great weakness and desperate need for Him. Praise be to Immanuel, for His grace in coming so humbly. Amen.



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WEEK THREE

A *Thrill* OF HOPE

Week Three Readings | Luke 2:8-20
& Mt. 2:1-23

Day 1: Luke 2:8-15 **HEAVEN REJOICES**

The Shepherds and Angels

⁸ That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. ⁹ Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, ¹⁰ but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. ¹¹ The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! ¹² And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger." ¹³ Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased." ¹⁵ 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."

Reflection

Probably one of the most glorious scenes in all of history was revealed to lowly shepherds tending their flock. It was in many ways a foreshadowing of the new covenant to come, as previously only high priests and God's chosen leaders witnessed the glory of the Lord. Now God was doing a new thing. The lowest of people would be given access to His presence.

Here, I would contend that the splendor these shepherds witnessed was even greater than had been revealed previously. For if this scene symbolizes in even a small way the new work God was doing, then Paul's words are entirely relevant: "Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!" (2 Cor. 3:7-9).

Prayer

What marvelous work You have done, Lord. How beautiful it is to know that You would reveal the rich rejoicing of heaven, Your glory, to regular people.

And now, under the new covenant of Christ, we get to experience Your glorious ministry that brings righteousness through Your Spirit. Thank You that we were graciously invited into this new covenant. Amen.

A Thrill OF HOPE

Week Three Readings | Luke 2:8-20
& Mt. 2:1-23

Day 2: Luke 2:16-20 **DIVINE ASSURANCE**

¹⁶ They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. ¹⁷ After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. ¹⁸ All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, ¹⁹ but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. ²⁰ The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

Reflection

Mary finds herself in an unfamiliar town, with her new husband and newborn son, in a stable. Though the Lord was with them, now literally in the flesh, and the visions given to them both of this divine

child must have been a wonder and intense comfort, the level of discomfort still must have been great. Then comes a group of shepherds, I imagine running up to their humble lodging, having already run through the town knocking on doors in search of the Savior.

Did they ask Mary and Joseph, in awe, a host of questions to corroborate what the angel had said, or did they run up, and upon seeing the child immediately bow low in worship? In either case, or a mix of the two, Mary pondered all these things in her heart, and must have sat in the straw as a new wave of assurance that the Lord really was with them washed over her.

David Guzik writes: "Mary had good reason to meditate. What brought her to Bethlehem? A Roman emperor's great decree and perhaps gossiping tongues in Nazareth. God works through all kinds of people and all kinds of events to accomplish His plan." We should remind ourselves of this truth often and remember that in uncertainty and discomfort the same God that rested at the breast of Mary, is closer still to us now.

Prayer

Lord, You work through regular circumstances and people, but Your work in our lives is nothing short of a miracle. The fact that You would promise to be with us and confirm it over and over again to us is a testament to Your love and great faithfulness. Give us eyes to see how You are moving and would we have an available heart to consider and treasure it. Amen.

A Thrill OF HOPE

Week Three Readings | Luke 2:8-20
& Mt. 2:1-23

Day 3: Matthew 2:1-12 **THE SEARCH THAT BRINGS JOY**

Visitors from the East

¹ Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, ² "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him." ³ King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. ⁴ He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?" ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they said, "for this is what the prophet wrote: ⁶ 'And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.'" ⁷ Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first

appeared. ⁸ Then he told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!" ⁹ After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! ¹¹ They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

Reflection

It seems worth highlighting the three main camps of people and their positions upon hearing the news that the King of the Jews had been born: the wise men, Herod, and the people of Jerusalem. The wise men, or magi, were expectantly in search of the Messiah that they might worship Him. Meanwhile, Herod, at first oblivious to the birth of this promised King, plotted the child's destruction upon hearing the news. He was a deeply paranoid man, to the point of murdering members of his own family, and the news of this new king who could usurp his throne was his worst nightmare. Sadly, the people of Jerusalem,

while perhaps also watching and waiting for the Messiah, were struck with fear at what political turmoil that might ensue.

It's fascinating that there is nothing new under the sun; that even today the news of Jesus is met by much the same responses, though our circumstances look different. There will always be those who see the truth, and come in droves as the magi did, to worship Jesus as king, for He will be praised. And those who search, as the magi and the shepherds did, will find true joy everlasting. However, there will always be stark opposition to snuff out the light. My prayer is that we would not fear the consequences of having Jesus as our king, for persecution will come, but relish in the joy that we have met Him.

Prayer

*Lord, it is true that You came and sought us out first, but there is a particular joy in searching for You and finding You. As a precedent for how accessible You would be to us, You came to us through a lowly girl in a stable. Lord, would that joy that came from finding You never be lessened in our hearts because Your message, and very existence, aggravates to extreme lengths the dark powers of this world. For since You are with us, who can be against us? Jesus be praised!
Amen.*

A Thrill OF HOPE

Week Three Readings | Luke 2:8-20
& Mt. 2:1-23

Day 4: Matthew 2:13-18
**GOD: WHOLLY SOVEREIGN,
WHOLLY GOOD**

The Escape to Egypt

¹³ After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother," the angel said. "Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." ¹⁴ That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, ¹⁵ and they stayed there until Herod's death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: "I called my Son out of Egypt." ¹⁶ Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men's report of the star's first appearance. ¹⁷ Herod's brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸“A cry was heard in Ramah— weeping and great mourning. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are dead.”

Reflection

This passage directly confronts us with God's complete sovereignty and goodness. We see God on the one hand preserve the life of His son and on the other allow the mass murder of the most vulnerable, even prophesying that it would happen beforehand. It seems inconsistent that a good God would allow such a thing. Why not save those children from such an atrocity? Why not stop every evil from happening and save the world? Excellent question. While the scope of this answer can be extensive, it is largely twofold: He gave us free will from the inception of mankind and He did save the world. From the Garden of Eden, God gave us the choice to choose a life-giving relationship with Him that requires obedience or a life where we seek our own desires which lead to physical death and spiritual death (that is, eternal separation from God). Herod, consumed with His own desires caused the horrific physical deaths of those children and I would contend faced both deaths Himself.

Praise God that He had a plan to save the world that He has since carried out. Praise God that His Son's life was preserved that at the appointed

time, Jesus Christ would save the world on the cross. Praise God that even knowing the pain and turmoil we would face because of sin, He gave us free will because He so valued genuine relationship and worship. He so valued freedom.

Prayer

Lord would we constantly remember Your sovereignty and goodness as we remember it right now. We rejoice in You today, knowing that You have and are and always will be working for our good. Amen.

A Thrill OF HOPE

Week Three Readings | Luke 2:8-20
& Mt. 2:1-23

Day 5: Matthew 2:19-23 **THE ENDING POINT**

The Return to Nazareth

¹⁹ When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. ²⁰ "Get up!" the angel said. "Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead." ²¹ So Joseph got up and returned to the land of Israel with Jesus and his mother. ²² But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod's son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee. ²³ So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said: "He will be called a Nazarene."

Reflection

We find at the end of this study that God is faithful. He was faithful to lead Joseph and Mary, faithful to call and equip Zechariah and Elizabeth, and faithful to prepare a way for The Way. To the very last detail, even that small detail that Jesus would be called a "Nazarene," what God said He would do and what He said would come to pass were so. Emmanuel, God with us, the One True Savior is who we serve. He so valued His creation that He orchestrated the most mysterious and wonderful salvation the world has ever known, and He worked through ordinary people. Moreover, He revealed the singular glory of His human embodiment to the lowest of people first!

Let us return to this story over and over again to remind ourselves of the unparalleled greatness, the unending faithfulness, and undeserved nearness of our God.

Prayer

Lord be praised, for all You've done and all You plan to do. I pray a blessing on all who read the story of how You made a way for Your Son. Would their faith in Your character and work in their lives be strengthened.

Would we be reminded and encouraged to live in humility as You lived in humility, for You bless those who are humble and use them to bless others. Thank

You for sending us salvation from our brokenness and sinfulness through Your Son. Jesus be praised for coming so near, both then and now. Amen.

*Devotional writings
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