





Advent ACCORDING TO LUKE

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What is Advent?

The King is coming. Jesus Christ has come and will come again. This is the hope of the Church whom He purchased with His blood. It is the eager expectation and desire of His people. His coming is our joy, for He is our treasure, our greatest good.

Advent, formed from a Latin word meaning “coming” or “arrival,” is about the coming of Christ. It’s the traditional celebration of the first advent of Jesus and the anxious awaiting of His second. The season is a time for remembering and rejoicing, watching and waiting, and a time to reflect upon the promises of God and to anticipate the fulfillment of those promises with patience, prayer, and preparedness.

Using the guide:

This guide serves as an introduction to the Advent season to awaken the angst of waiting, longing and yearning for Christ. The hope is to feel the ancient angst of Israel and allow that to inform our own anticipation. The guide consists of daily material with each day containing a scripture reading and personal reflection.

The guide will take us on a journey through Luke’s Gospel, to Christ’s first advent, and to the longing that we now experience for His return.

Please read the passage from Luke’s Gospel every day, read the reflection, and engage with how the Lord might move you as we journey through this Advent season. There are also passages every Sunday to be read before gathering with the church, and a place for sermon notes.

We pray this guide can add meaning to this 2016 Advent season.



DAY 1

Sunday, November 27

READ:

[5] In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. [6] And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. [7] But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

[8] Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, [9] according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. [10] And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. [11] And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. [12] And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. [13] But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. [14] And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, [15] 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. [16] And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, [17] 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."

[18] And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." [19] And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. [20] And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." [21] And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. [22] And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. [23] And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

[24] After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, [25] "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

LUKE 1:5-25

Sermon Notes:

DAY 2

Monday, November 28

READ:

[52] And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

LUKE 2:52

REFLECT:

Jesus grew in favor with man. It is easy to imagine why growth in favor with God was important because it shows His spiritual growth. But Jesus also grew in favor socially. Other people liked Him and began to respect Him as He aged. This was likely coupled with His growth in wisdom and stature. Jesus held both growing spiritually and socially in perfect harmony, not allowing Himself to grow more in the eyes of others than in the eyes of God. But it is such a terrible temptation to be drawn into focusing on our growth in favor with others, isn't it? Sometimes because we cannot always see God or because we have a deep desire for approval from our peers or our elders, we cultivate our own favor with others by people-pleasing.

When do you find yourself most drawn towards pleasing people, if ever? Spend a few minutes writing down why you feel drawn towards having others see you as well put together. Then take some time to reflect on the Gospel and your identity in God as His child rather than on your own ability to get others to like you. Write down what you think and feel.

DAY 3

Tuesday, November 29

READ:

[7] He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? [8] Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. [9] Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

LUKE 3:7-9

REFLECT:

As children and followers of God we are called to "bear fruit in keeping with repentance." John paints a very grim agricultural picture of what happens when trees do not bear fruit: they are chopped down. While the chopping down of bad trees is not the point of the passage, it serves as a reminder that effective faith is followed by bearing good fruit. But bearing fruit is not merely doing good things like going to church, daily Bible reading, Scripture memorization, praying daily for long periods of time, abstaining from swearing, or developing the fruits of the Spirit found in Galatians 5. Rather, the verses that follow 7-9 depict a picture of compassion for others and living a just life that takes no more from others than is allowed, and gives generously to others who are in need. Bearing fruit isn't simply right action, but an active and comprehensive lifestyle of compassionate justice that seeks the good of other people.

Are you actively seeking out ways to have compassion on other people? Can you and your family find ways to seek justice and dignity for those who have been wronged or rejected by society? Write down one way that you are bearing fruit currently, and why you are grateful for that opportunity. If you are not currently bearing fruit in this way, write down one way you can begin to do so, or talk with someone who can help you come up with an idea.

DAY 4

Wednesday, November 30

READ:

[1] And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness [2] for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry.

LUKE 4:1-2

REFLECT:

After Jesus' baptism and the public inauguration of His earthly ministry, He is led by the Spirit into the wilderness and experiences temptation at the hands of the Devil. The first temptation seeks to meet a genuine need (hunger) in an improper manner (using His power to turn rocks into bread). Temptation frequently operates in that manner when we are tempted to use improper means to meet a genuine need. Overeating of food attempts to meet the genuine need for emotional stability. Pornography attempts to meet the genuine needs of affirmation, affection, and intimacy. Heroin attempts to meet the genuine need of pain relief (physical or emotional). An eating disorder attempts to meet the genuine need for good body image. Controlling another person's behavior attempts to meet the genuine need for safety and security. And yet every improper manner of attempting to meet needs falls far short of fulfilling or meeting the actual need.

What "improper manners" are a part of your life that you would like to be rid of? Have you ever thought about what genuine need you are trying to meet? The key is not attempting to shut down that genuine need and desire, but to find ways that healthily meet that need. Spend some time thinking of the genuine need that lies underneath your specific "improper manner" and invite someone else into that process with you.

DAY 5

Thursday, December 1

READ:

[29] And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. [30] And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" [31] And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. [32] I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

LUKE 5:29-32

REFLECT:

The physician comes for the sick. The Savior comes for the sinner. Jesus did not come to this earth to pander to the religious elite who thought they had it all in the bag on their own. He did not come to gather followers who were perfect and healthy. He came to gather to Himself those who are sick, those who are broken, those who cannot live this life without Him. The picture is not of a man with a sharp button-up shirt, crisp and new jeans, a clean-shaven face and well-groomed hair, nor a woman with curled hair, a light and airy dress, heels, and carefully applied makeup. Rather, the picture might be of a man with unkempt hair, a scraggly beard that hasn't been shaved in months, dirt and grime caked on his face, a tattered sweatshirt, and ratty sweatpants, or a woman with matted hair, a coarse and heavy sweatshirt, a skirt worn thin from use, tennis shoes with no sole, and no makeup.

How do you stand before Jesus? Do you come broken and needing Him because you have no other person to turn to and to depend on or do you come presenting yourself as one put-together in no need of a physician? Stand before the Lord of the universe and confess to Him your brokenness and need for Him. Pray that He would grace you with the gift of Himself and remind you of your need for Him.

DAY 6

Friday, December 2

READ:

[27] "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, [28] bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

LUKE 6:27-28

REFLECT:

It is easy to love those who love you and those who act righteously towards you. It is much more difficult to love those who wrong you. Enemies are not casual people. They do not haphazardly oppose you, nor are they moderate in their opposition. Enemies by nature are wholeheartedly bent on our own destruction. Maybe a coworker or boss intentionally sabotages your efforts at work. Maybe an acquaintance is a vehement atheist who takes every opportunity to attack your faith. Maybe you view a specific ethnic group or different religion as an enemy. No matter how great of an attack a people or a person make on you, God still calls you to love them, him, or her radically.

Who has treated you like an enemy? Has an individual dedicated him- or herself to destroy you? Has a group of people attacked you? God calls you to love them, not with your own love, but with the love of Christ that is given to you and extended to them. Spend a few minutes reflecting on which enemy God might have you love explicitly and tangibly, and make a plan to do so, however minor it might seem.

DAY 7

Saturday, December 3

READ:

[8] For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." [9] When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." [10] And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

LUKE 7:8-10

REFLECT:

The centurion shows such astounding faith because he is a Gentile and because he believes that Jesus possesses authority such that His spoken word (without his physical presence or touch) will be sufficient to heal the servant. This is more applicable to our situation because Jesus is not physically present with us. We cannot reach out and touch him. But He possesses authority over this world and will send out His word to answer His people, just as He answered the centurion by healing the centurion's servant.

Sometimes, it is hard to trust and believe that God will answer our prayers, whether they are for physical healing or another request. We may lack faith and temper our prayers to be for less important things. May we be bold in our prayers, not lacking in faith or in courage to ask for big things, however improbable we may believe them to be. Take some time now to pray for something that has been on your heart with the Lord and make a request to Him, trusting that He has the authority and the power to answer it.



DAY 8

Sunday, December 4

READ:

[26] In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, [27] to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. [28] And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" [29] But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. [30] And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. [31] And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. [32] He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, [33] and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

[34] And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

[35] And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. [36] And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. [37] For nothing will be impossible with God." [38] And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

LUKE 1:26-38

Sermon Notes:

DAY 9

Monday, December 5

READ:

[11] Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. [12] The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. [13] And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. [14] And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. [15] As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

LUKE 8:11-15

REFLECT:

The parable of the sower speaks of the manner in which people receive the word of God. There are those who never receive it, those who receive it excitedly but quickly fall away when faced with opposition or pressure, those who are distracted by the values of the culture in which they live, and those who take it to heart where it grows deeply and richly. Jesus spoke these words categorically, meaning that each one of us will fall into a category of how we receive the word of God. But there is also a sense in which we respond each day to the word of God. Each day we can ignore, take an easier path, get distracted, or internalize His word.

How are you responding to the word of God recently? Has He spoken to you through Scripture? Or has He spoken to you through another Christian? Or has He spoken to you in the stillness of your heart? Have you given Him a chance to speak? Reflect for a few moments on where you are at in receiving the word of God.

DAY 10

Tuesday, December 6

READ:

[13] But he said to them, "You give them something to eat." They said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people." [16] And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. [17] And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

LUKE 9:13, 16-17

REFLECT:

The power of God is shown through one of Jesus' most recognizable miracles: the feeding of the five thousand. Luke emphasizes a particular detail, however. The disciples come to Jesus telling Him to send all the people away, but He tells them to fix the problem themselves using the resources at their disposal. Unfortunately for them, they possess a lunch that is too small and a crowd that is too big for a caterer. It seems impossible. The crux of the story, however, is not Jesus' miracle, but the fact that Jesus is the source of the miracle and the source of the solution. He is the provider. The resource the disciples forgot to call on was Jesus Himself.

We sing in church and hear sermons about Jesus being the provider of all things. We are intended to depend on Him for every need: physical, emotional, and spiritual. Yet most days it can be easy to forget to ask. Take some time now to meditate on Jesus as provider and ask God for something that you need Him to provide for you, whether it is for a car or a place to live or a sense of purpose for the day or a comment of encouragement from someone you love. Ask Him to provide what you need and then give you the eyes to see Him as He provides it for you.

DAY 11

Wednesday, December 7

READ:

[26] He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" [27] And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." [28] And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

[29] But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

LUKE 10:26-29

REFLECT:

The lawyer's simple question, "Who is my neighbor?", looks like a simple clarification of Jesus' command to him. But the phrase "desiring to justify himself" turns that idea on its head. This lawyer was not looking for the specifics of Jesus' command so that He could be totally obedient. He was looking for the minimum requirement. What could he do to just get by and be called obedient? Jesus refuses to approach this neighboring issue from a minimalist perspective, but through the parable of the Good Samaritan shows that a neighbor can be anyone; there are no limitations or conditions on who a neighbor is. There is no such thing as a "non-neighbor".

So who have you turned into a non-neighbor? Are there individuals or groups of people that you have chosen not to engage because it is uncomfortable or a little frightening? Spend some time talking to God about who you can neighbor well by showing them mercy, just as the Good Samaritan did to the man beaten and bruised lying on the side of the road.

DAY 12

Thursday, December 8

READ:

[9] And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. [10] For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. [11] What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; [12] or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? [13] If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

LUKE 11:9-13

REFLECT:

This passage does not guarantee a bigger house, a Ferrari, a Coach purse or a Vera Wang dress, and neither does it guarantee a spouse, kids, an adequate job, deep friendships, or a strong sense of community. God is not a genie who grants your wishes if you pray hard enough, but the sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient God who loves His children deeply and desires what is best for them. The point is not to get what you want, but to ask and depend on God for what He graciously gives. Does this mean we should stop asking God for what we desire? Absolutely not! In fact, much of this chapter is spent communicating to the disciples the need to be big and bold in what they ask for from God. So keep asking and asking big, knowing that God will be good in what He gives you, even if it isn't specifically what you requested from Him.

What do you want to ask God to provide? What is a desire that is embedded deep at the core of your being that you want God to give? Request that from Him, but also approach Him in humility and work to be satisfied even if He doesn't give you exactly what you request.

DAY 13

Friday, December 9

READ:

[34] *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

LUKE 12:34

REFLECT:

Ok, let's play a little word association game! Treasure...gold...jewels... shipwrecked Spanish galleon...pirates...of the Caribbean...Johnny Depp... end game. The word treasure denotes something of extreme value, and, most of the time, these treasured items of extreme value have some great monetary worth attached to them. Jesus says that our hearts will follow our vision of treasure, with the implication that our treasure is not a what but a who. When we see God as our treasure, our hearts desire and long to follow Him. We embrace God as someone of extreme value, the pursuit of whom begins to drive more and more of who we are and what we do. Viewing God as our treasure may seem a little cheesy or have a distinct odor of Christianese, but the lesson itself is relevant.

What do you view as a treasure of extreme value? Does it rival God in your heart and in your actions? What is one thing you can do to reshape your life to treasure who God is and your relationship with Him?

DAY 14

Saturday, December 10

READ:

[11] And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. [12] When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your disability." [13] And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God.

LUKE 13:11-13

REFLECT:

Miracles are God reaching into His Creation and acting in a way that is not normal, typical, or in line with the natural laws of the universe which He set into motion. And it is precisely because of their abnormality that we can be uncomfortable or skeptical about the miraculous. But what about praying for miracles? If we believe that God is the all-powerful and sovereign King over the universe, why wouldn't we (or don't we) ask God to intervene abnormally and atypically? Fear. We don't ask God for the miraculous, because what happens if He doesn't answer? What happens if we pray for healing on behalf of a non-Christian and God doesn't heal them? Will that ruin their opportunity to come to Christ? What will other people think of me?

Be on the lookout for opportunities to pray a prayer for something miraculous. Don't do it so you can see how cool it is to have that prayer answered, or so that someone else can be impressed by your extreme spirituality, but because you want to communicate and show someone else how much Jesus loves them and wants them to follow Him. Write a brief prayer 1) asking God for an opportunity to pray a prayer for a miracle, the faith to believe that He can and will answer you, and the courage to follow through on that opportunity, or 2) expressing honestly the doubts you have about God and/or yourself regarding prayer for the miraculous.



Advent

-- DEC 11 - DEC 17 --

WEEK 3

2016

DAY 15

Sunday, December 11

READ:

[39] In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, [40] and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. [41] And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, [42] and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! [43] And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? [44] For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. [45] And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

[46] And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

[47] and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

[48] for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

[49] for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

[50] And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

[51] He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;

[52] he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;

[53] he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.

[54] He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,

[55] as he spoke to our fathers,

to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

[56] And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

LUKE 1:39-56

Sermon Notes:

DAY 16

Monday, December 12

READ:

[7] Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, [8] "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, [9] and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. [10] But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. [11] For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

LUKE 14:7-11

REFLECT:

The Parable of the Wedding Feast teaches a lesson about humanity's hunger for honor rather than humility. At first glance, the parable may be teaching us that honor, attention, and honor are the bad guys. But Jesus doesn't say we shouldn't be honored, but that we shouldn't seek out honor for ourselves. An overwhelming desire for honor oftentimes points to a lack of confidence in one's own identity, particularly as a son or daughter of God. Humility seeks submission to Jesus which results in obeying His commands. If we receive honor and praise, it is by virtue of our obedience and submission to Him rather than our fight to get as much attention as possible.

Are you overwhelmed by a desire to receive honor from others? How can you be more submissive to the person and commands of Christ? Write a few sentences about your response to this issue and/or these questions.

DAY 17

Tuesday, December 13

READ:

[26] "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. [27] Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

LUKE 14:26-27

REFLECT:

Wow! Jesus says we have to hate our closest family members in order to be disciples? That sounds a bit extreme. Why must we hate our family and even our own life? Jesus calls awareness to the potential difficulties of following Him as a disciple. One should not approach this decision lightly. There is a cost to following Jesus, and sometimes that cost may be the relationship with a family member or even one's own life. We are to "hate" family members and our own lives when compared to how much we are called to love and care for Jesus. Jesus isn't talking about feeling animosity towards our family or ourselves, that would only contradict other passages in Scripture. He wants each prospective disciple, as well as those who have already committed to following Him, when forced to decide between Him and family or our own life, would say, "I choose Jesus."

So how about you? Would you be willing to let go of the relationships, people, possessions, even your health and very life, if you were forced to choose between them and Jesus? Reflect on what you are thinking and/or feeling in this moment and how this interacts with your relationship with Jesus.

DAY 18

Wednesday, December 14

READ:

[22] But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. [23] And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. [24] For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

LUKE 15:22-24

REFLECT:

The Prodigal Son has just returned to his father after completely disrespecting him, taking his inheritance, spending all of it, and partying it up. He has done everything wrong. But his father still delights in his return to the family. This parable shows the overwhelming grace God gives to those who repent. Not only for what we may consider less significant sin, but also for the shameful sin that we don't want to admit to others. For what sin, either past or present, do you experience overwhelming shame? Habitual lying? An addiction to drugs, alcohol, or pornography? Sexual promiscuity? Explosive anger and rage? Having an affair? Committing physical, sexual, or emotional abuse? Whatever it is, know that God forgives you and celebrates when you repent. You cannot control what is in your past, but you do have a choice about the present.

If you have sin in your past for which you have never repented and asked God for forgiveness, then spend the next few minutes doing so. Then write two action steps that you need to take (confess to a trusted friend, talk to a pastor about possible recovery options, apologize to someone you've wronged, etc.). If you have repented in the past but still experience shame from past actions, tell God what you are thinking or how you feel about that shame and ask for guidance to move forward. If you currently struggle with a recurring sin, repent to God and ask for forgiveness. Then take the courageous step to be vulnerable and confess to others your current sin, so that you can begin to experience freedom from that sin. Freedom only occurs in the context of community, so begin to invite others into your healing process. No matter where you are, remember that God celebrates repentance.

DAY 19

Thursday, December 15

READ:

[13] No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

[14] The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.

LUKE 16:13-14

REFLECT:

Serving two masters is impossible. Jesus' point is not that you should choose between serving God or serving possessions, but that those who profess to serve God cannot do so if they also love money. Money and possessions are not evil intrinsically. But they can quickly and easily divert our allegiances from God by setting themselves up as a master. Do money, the pursuit of money, building a portfolio, the accumulation of bigger and better possessions, buying equipment for hobbies, or anything similar distract you from serving God as your master? Do those things get in the way of being a part of the community of God's people at church? Or from building and developing your relationship with God through personal prayer, Scripture reading, or other spiritual disciplines? Or from things God requires of us as His followers like serving others, giving generously, or investing in family?

Spend some time talking with God about anything that may distract you from serving God wholeheartedly, and ask Him to help you serve Him fully.

DAY 20

Friday, December 16

READ:

[3] Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, [4] and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

LUKE 17:3-4

REFLECT:

Forgiveness within the community is Jesus' main concern here. Most Christians know that they need to forgive others. Christians also know that forgiveness can be extremely difficult and almost impossible in the case of extreme wrongs committed against them. Christians know that, coming from the other side, if they know they have wronged someone, they need to go to that person in repentance and ask for forgiveness for their wrongdoing. The problem with knowing all of this is that knowing doesn't necessarily lead to doing. Forgiveness begins with knowledge but is completed in action. And this goes for Christians who need to forgive and for Christians who need forgiveness.

What relationships in your life need to be touched by forgiveness? Is there someone who has wronged you? Have you forgiven them? Is there someone who doesn't know they have wronged you? Have you confronted them with their wrongdoing? Is there someone you have wronged? Have you asked them for forgiveness? Spend a few moments talking with God about those relationships and ask Him for the strength to forgive or to ask for forgiveness, which is pertinent to your specific situation.

DAY 21

Saturday, December 17

READ:

[17] Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."

LUKE 18:17

REFLECT:

How does one receive the Kingdom of God like a child? The culture of the 1st century dismissed children and often viewed them as unimportant, something our own culture sometimes does as well. But Jesus commends receiving the Kingdom of God in a childlike manner to His hearers. For what reason? Well, small children don't offer much as far as competency. They aren't independent beings and frequently need help or assistance to complete a task. If you are a parent, you well know the dependence your children have on you for food, water, clothing, and cleanliness. It is this simple dependence and trust that Jesus commends here. We are dependent on God for anything and everything that we need and receive, especially becoming a part of His Kingdom. A childlike faith is not a simple faith, but a robust faith that simply depends on God as the provider of entry into the Kingdom.

Take a few moments now and reflect on your dependence on God to enter His Kingdom and to be one of His people.



DAY 22

Sunday, December 18

READ:

[57] Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. [58] And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. [59] And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, [60] but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." [61] And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." [62] And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. [63] And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. [64] And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. [65] And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, [66] and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.

[67] And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

[68] "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people
[69] and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
[70] as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
[71] that we should be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us;
[72] to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
[73] the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
[74] that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
[75] in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
[76] And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
[77] to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
[78] because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
[79] to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace."

[80] And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

LUKE 1:57-80

Sermon Notes:

DAY 23

Monday, December 19

READ:

[10] For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

LUKE 19:10

REFLECT:

If you are a Christian for any length of time, you may face the temptation to forget the lost-ness in which God sought you and out of which He saved you. May we never forget this important truth. There are two reasons for its importance. First, salvation has completely changed our lives, and remembering the depravity out of which God saved us helps us to be grateful for His work in our lives. Second, the people at this moment who are in the greatest need of God and His work of salvation are the very people who least look like Jesus. May we be filled with compassion and grace for these people who are still lost. May we not avoid them because of their "lostness." May we engage and interact with them in the same way as Jesus would, with kindness and truth.

Spend a few minutes thanking God for saving you. Then think of a few people who may still be lost. Pray for them to receive Jesus as their Savior, and pray for an opportunity to share His love with them.

DAY 24

Tuesday, December 20

READ:

[1] One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up [2] and said to him, "Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority."

LUKE 20:1-2

REFLECT:

These first two verses represent the entire chapter in theme: the religious leaders (who also happen to be Jesus' opposition) question and interrogate Him in an attempt to discredit Him and to get Him to go against the political leaders at the time. Opposition happens, and for Jesus and His followers, it happens quite frequently. The established leaders of nations and of tiny cities can oppose the spread of the Gospel. It should not be a surprise when this opposition comes, but we should expect it.

Take some time to write down opposition to Jesus that you currently experience or have experienced in the past. Reflect on how you responded in the moment, and what you thought or felt during your experience. Pray for strength in the future and for strength for those who experience even stronger opposition in nations overtly hostile to Christianity.

DAY 25

Wednesday, December 21

READ:

[12] But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. [13] This will be your opportunity to bear witness. [14] Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, [15] for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. [16] You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. [17] You will be hated by all for my name's sake. [18] But not a hair of your head will perish. [19] By your endurance you will gain your lives.

LUKE 21:12-19

REFLECT:

Continuing on the theme from yesterday, Jesus tells His disciples that they will receive more than just opposition, but also persecution and hatred. But, Jesus says, this cannot and should not be avoided. Instead, Jesus says that persecution and opposition are the opportunity to spread the Gospel. We see this happen with the apostles throughout Acts and also in accounts of early church history. The apostles were bold in their witness to Jesus in the midst of their persecution and, for most of them, their executions.

Pray for boldness in your life. You will probably not face a hangman's noose or the guillotine today. But there will be opportunities to testify to the power of Jesus. Don't back down or shrink away, but pray that God will give you the courage and the strength to stand up as His witness.

DAY 26

Thursday, December 22

READ:

[41] And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, [42] saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

LUKE 22:41-42

REFLECT:

Jesus models the perfect life lived in submission to the Father. He knows exactly what He wants: the removal of the cup, which symbolizes death and suffering. But He also knows His position and role in this life: living in submission and obedience to the Father. Jesus doesn't want to suffer, but who would? But rather than taking any opportunity to avoid suffering that He can, Jesus willingly accepts that this is what God desires of Him. He must be obedient to the Father.

How do you respond when God asks something difficult of you? Are you defiant or reluctant? Do you submit to Him? Do you acknowledge the difficulty and walk through it anyway? Take a few moments to reflect on submitting to God even when obedience costs something. Pray to God in whatever way you feel led after doing so.

DAY 27

Friday, December 23

READ:

[47] Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!"

LUKE 23:47

REFLECT:

From the lips of one of the men least likely to side with a religious Jew come the words that even the religious Jews could not utter: this man is innocent. Jesus was innocent of the false accusations leveled against Him, and He was innocent of any other sin as well. Yet He walked down the path God the Father had for Him until He died because He was obedient and because the purpose for which He died was important. That purpose was redemption for the entirety of Creation, but even more specifically it was for you. Jesus' purity, sinlessness, and death all happened so that you might be able to take hold of the promises that God offers to you through His Son. You are pure, you are washed, and you are forgiven because of Jesus' innocent life.

Take a few moments to reflect on the innocence of Jesus that God gives to you through the work on the cross of Jesus Christ. Pray a prayer of gratitude and thanksgiving to Him for that work.



DAY 28 - CHRISTMAS EVE

Saturday, December 24

READ:

[45] Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, [46] and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, [47] and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. [48] You are witnesses of these things.

LUKE 24:45-48

REFLECT:

Yesterday we talked about the mission of Jesus Christ on this earth to live a perfect life and die a perfect death, all for the benefit of those who would call out to Him in faith for forgiveness. Today's passage also talks about the message of repentance that leads to forgiveness. But today's passage pushes us as readers to go beyond only taking hold of that forgiveness and experiencing it. Jesus tells the disciples that they are witnesses of these events. They have seen them and experienced them firsthand. They know that these events are true. But they also are testifiers to the truth of these events to others who did not see and who did not hear. Just like you. If you have responded to Jesus Christ in repentance and experienced His forgiveness, then you also are a witness who has experienced Jesus Christ and a testifier who proclaims Him to those who have not heard.

On the eve of the day we celebrate Jesus' birth and the good news that His birth was for Israel, take some time as well to celebrate the good news of His death and resurrection. Pray to God and ask Him to help you take on the identity of a witness and a testifier, both of His birth and of His death and resurrection.



DAY 29 - CHRISTMAS DAY

Sunday, December 25

READ:

[1] In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. [2] This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. [3] And all went to be registered, each to his own town. [4] And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, [5] to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. [6] And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. [7] And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

[8] And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. [9] And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. [10] And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. [12] And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." [13] And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

[14] "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

[15] When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." [16] And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. [17] And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. [18] And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. [19] But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. [20] And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

LUKE 2:1-20

The background of the page is a soft, light blue-grey gradient filled with numerous small, white, out-of-focus circular spots, resembling a starry night sky or snow. At the bottom of the page, there is a faint, ethereal illustration of a manger scene, showing a baby lying in a manger with a star above, all rendered in a light, glowing style that blends into the background.

REFLECT:

Today is Christmas! Today we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Read through Luke's account of the Christmas story with your family, your friends, or whoever you are celebrating with today. Sing a Christmas carol or two as part of your worship today, and enjoy the time that you spend celebrating and giving glory to God for His provision. Merry Christmas!





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