

Prayer and Study Guide

Daily Scripture Readings – 12/16/18

Monday – Read Luke 1:13-14, 24-25, 57-58. **The Birth of John the Baptist.** Each part of the story of the birth of John the Baptist confirms the fulfillment of what the angel Gabriel had told Zechariah in the Temple. Elizabeth's neighbors and relatives saw the great mercy that God had shown to Elizabeth. After so many years of what felt like unanswered prayers, Elizabeth finally experienced the joy of holding her newborn baby boy in her arms, and her friends and family rejoiced with her. They saw God at work in her life because of the way Elizabeth talked to them about what God was doing. She gave God the glory for this blessing and miracle. We join in prayer with the people in our church who are journeying through difficult times, and we rejoice with each other when we experience long sought-after answers to our prayers. Pray for someone who is going through a difficult time and find a way to encourage that person.

Tuesday – Read Luke 1:13, 18-20, 59-66. **His Name is John.** God's people believed that a child's name said something about the kind of life the child would live. To obey God, Zechariah gave up the highly prized privilege of naming his son after himself and named his son *John* which means *Yahweh has shown favor or Yahweh is gracious*. Once again, the angel Gabriel's words in the Temple were fulfilled. Unable to speak for over nine months, Zechariah finally regained his speech, and he begins to praise God. Zechariah and Elizabeth's family and neighbors responded with fear and amazement at what God did and began speculating about the life and future of this child. What are your hopes and dreams for the children in your life? Spend some time praying for the children in your family, our church, and our community.

Wednesday – Read Luke 1:16-17, 67-71 and Isaiah 9:6-7. **The Promise of a Mighty Savior.** Gabriel told Zechariah that John would come before the promised Messiah. John was born six months before Jesus, and Zechariah at his birth, Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke a prophecy. This prophecy is not so much a prediction as it is a Spirit-event, a moment of God's Holy Spirit breaking into the ordinary, mundane world and bringing with it God's preferred and promised future. Zechariah sees that Jesus will fulfill what Isaiah and other Old Testament prophets promised about the coming Messiah. Jesus will be a Mighty Savior *who is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*. What aspects of who Jesus is does each title and phrase communicate? Which name or title do you value most right now? As you pray, remember that Jesus is bigger and more powerful than your problems, and ask Jesus to give you peace and comfort even in the midst of your trials and struggles in life.

Thursday – Read Genesis 12:1-3 and Luke 1:72-75. **God Remembers.** God remembers God's promises, and God always keeps the promises God makes to God's people. God is a covenant-maker, and this is what it means to live in covenant with God. God may not always work on our time, but God is always faithful in God's time. God has promised to bless you so that you may be a blessing to all of the families of the earth. Ask God to help you bless a person in need this Christmas through your generosity and kindness.

Friday – Read Malachi 3:1-2; 4:5-6; Luke 1:16-17, 76-77; 3:1-20. **Prepare the Way of the Lord.** Though Jesus had not been born yet, Zechariah saw that John would become the prophet of the Most High who would prepare the way of the Lord. John's ministry would call people to repent of their sins and receive God's forgiveness. It is through repentance of our sins and seeking a right relationship with God and with others that we begin to experience the peace of God. What sins are keeping you from experiencing God's peace? From whom do you need to seek forgiveness? To whom do you need to offer forgiveness? Pray that God would put forgiveness in your heart.

Saturday – Read Isaiah 9:2 and Luke 1:78-79. **The Way of Peace.** In Isaiah's day, Israel faced the looming prospect of darkness. Babylon's armies would defeat them. Many of them would die; Babylon would carry others away as exiles. That darkness ended, but dark times are still a regular part of the human condition. We still need to hear that the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. In what ways do you need God's light to shine in your life? Zechariah saw that God was going to work through Jesus to bring peace to the world in a way that would allow God's people to serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness all our days. Israel was an occupied state, so in one way, peace meant that Jesus would save them from the violence of Rome, but Zechariah also saw that Jesus would offer us peace in a way that goes beyond our geo-political situation. A life without Jesus Christ is a life without peace, and a life with Jesus Christ brings the peace that passes all understanding. Ask Jesus to guide your feet into the way of peace.

Lectionary Readings: Zephaniah 3:14-20; Isaiah 12:2-6; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-34.

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