

Prayer and Study Guide

Daily Scripture Readings – 12/23/18

Monday – Read Matthew 1:18-25. **Matthew’s Christmas Story.** Joseph obeyed God and nurtured and protected his bride and her child because he loved God and he loved Mary. As a father, he loved Jesus as his own son. How is God calling you to demonstrate your love for people this Christmas season? Matthew identifies the child three ways: the *Messiah* or *God’s anointed one*, as *Jesus* which is Greek for *Joshua* which means *God saves*, and as *Emmanuel* which means *God is with us*. Which of these three ways of identifying Jesus speaks most deeply to your heart? Pray that God will help you be obedient to God like Joseph was.

Tuesday – Read Luke 2:1-20. **Luke’s Christmas Story.** Love came down at Christmas. For many of us, this scene has a lovely glow about it. However, the reality is that when God entered humanity he was born not in a palace but in a humble stable and laid in an animal’s feeding trough. When God’s Son was born he was born to a devout but very poor young couple. What does this tell you about God? This week, the Advent Conspiracy calls us to Love All, and the way that the angels invited the lowly shepherds to come and see the newborn king demonstrate to us the way that God loves all. Spend some time thinking about the way that God’s love has come into your life this Christmas. How will you express your love to God and seek to love all of the people in your life?

Wednesday – Read Matthew 1:18-20 and Deuteronomy 22:20-24. **Joseph’s Obedience.** How do you think Joseph felt when Mary told him that she was pregnant with the Son of God? Whatever Joseph felt, Matthew says he “did not want to expose her to public disgrace.” What do you learn about Joseph’s inner qualities from his plan “to divorce her quietly”? *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* says Joseph was “a devout Jewish man willing to give up what was often perceived to be a Jewish father’s greatest privilege – siring his first-born son – in order to obey God’s will.” What cherished dream have you had to give up in order to serve God? How are you and God working to bend that loss to produce good results? Ask God to help you cope with a disappointment you are facing.

Thursday – Read Matthew 1:1-17. **The Messiah.** Family trees were very important in Jesus’ day. Matthew 1:1 refers to Jesus as *the Messiah*, *the son of David*, and *the son of Abraham*. The Hebrew word *Messiah* meant *anointed one* and is translated *Christ* in Greek. Why was Jesus’ link to Abraham and King David so key for Matthew? In what ways does it matter to you that God kept his ancient promises? In an unusual move for his time, Matthew named five women – Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary – in Jesus’ genealogy because God used each of them even when they faced obstacles and scandals in their lives. Does God still work through unlikely people? What is God doing through you? As you pray, consider how you might encourage someone else see how God could use him or her.

Friday – Read Matthew 2:13-16, 19-21. **Out of Egypt I have Called My Son.** In Jesus’ day, the population of Alexandria, Egypt was probably about one-third Jewish. There were also other Jewish communities in Egypt. This made Egypt a safe refuge for Joseph, Mary and Jesus. What people or places have given you safety or comfort in times of trouble in your life? God used dreams to guide Joseph as he did the Old Testament Joseph before him. Many Christians believe that God can communicate directly with our brains, without the need for sounds or visual cues. When have you sensed an *inner nudge* from God? Are you open to receive God’s direction, however it arrives? Ask God to help you hear God’s whispers and sense God’s nudges.

Saturday – Read Luke 2:21-52. **Mentoring the Next Generation.** Mary and Joseph were careful to obey God and do everything for Jesus that the law required. Take a moment to think about the huge responsibility that Mary and Joseph had to parent the Son of God. Now, think about the responsibility all of us have in the church to parent and raise the children in our church family. Working with children and youth brings some of the greatest blessings we may receive in our lives. Think about some of the ways you can make a difference in the life of a young person in the coming year. Luke tells us that Mary, Joseph, and Jesus returned to Nazareth where Jesus grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. Pray for God to give you wisdom and to help you share that wisdom with a young person.

Lectionary Readings: Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:46b-55; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45.

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