

Countdown to Christmas! 2011 Advent Bible Readings, December 5 – January 1

Family Friendly Edition – Prepare for the King’s Birth!

We recommend you have a notebook and pen for answering questions and recording your thoughts and insights. Bring this notebook with you to Faith Group for discussions and prayer times. Select a quiet place and consistent time to read and pray. We also recommend you pray for a moment before you read God’s word and ask for his illumination by the power of the Holy Spirit as you read. Be prepared to think carefully about what the author is conveying in the passage, what God’s word is saying, and how you might apply it. **Mondays will be readings from Old Testament prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. Tuesday to Friday will have readings from the Gospel accounts, with the weekends focusing on John 1, the Advent sermon series by the Pastors.**

Abbreviations: TAI – *Think About It* PP – *Prayer Point*

Monday, December 5 – Isaiah 40:28-31 and 11:1-2

TAI: Why is it a good thing to “wait” for the Lord? Has God ever failed to deliver on a promise? Who is the “shoot” or “branch” who will spring from Jesse? Does 11:2 accurately describe Jesus as we read of his life and ministry in the Gospels?

PP: Express thanks to God that waiting on him will result in renewed strength. Praise him for delivering on every promise. Ask him to help you keep Jesus at the forefront of all your Christmas celebrations and preparations.

Tuesday, December 6 – Luke 1:1-25

TAI: Who brought God’s special message to Zechariah? Were Zechariah and Elizabeth to be the parents of Jesus? What was the special calling of this child (see v. 17 in particular)? Why did God take away Zechariah’s speech for a time?

PP: Just as John came to “prepare the way” for the birth of Jesus (his first coming), so we through the proclaiming of the gospel prepare the way for Christ’s second coming. Pray for the preaching of the gospel at Faith Baptist, and through our missionaries to the peoples of the world. Ask God to help you live faithfully and expectantly, trusting in Christ’s return.

Wednesday, December 7 – Luke 1:26-38

TAI: What was the unique and special message Gabriel brought to Mary? Why did Mary find this news perplexing? Note: we believe in the virgin birth of Jesus. How does this passage teach that the Christ was born of a virgin? Who was the baby’s true father?

PP: Pray a prayer of praise and adoration to God for the uniqueness of Christ, using words from vv. 32-33 (“we exalt your Son Jesus for *he is great, he is the Son of the Most High...*”). Mary is a wonderful model of complete submission to God’s will; ask God to help you trust him completely and submit fully to his loving Lordship in your life.

Thursday, December 8 – Luke 1:39-45

TAI: Special note: Baby John actually jumped in his mother's womb when Mary, pregnant with Jesus, came near. One inference: this passage speaks powerfully against the idea that babies in the womb are mere "fetuses" without personhood until birth. Talk over this idea, with reference to our present-day abortion culture in America. In v. 43, Elizabeth refers to "the mother of my Lord" – what does that infer about the child in Mary's womb?

PP: Ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit (see v. 41). Praise God that the anticipated child was truly "Christ the Lord" and Mary's Lord, though not even born as yet. Pray for some in your sphere of life who do not recognize or acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Friday, December 9 – Luke 1:46-55 Often called 'The Magnificat'

TAI: The verbs Mary uses from the beginning tell us that this is a worship song or poem. Identify the attributes of God contained in this worship song of Mary. What great things has God done for you in your "humble estate"?

PP: Praise God: "magnify" the Lord and "rejoice" in all that he has done for you in Christ Jesus. Praise him for his attributes and actions on your behalf. Thank God that mercy is not for the rich or mighty, but for those who humble themselves and love and trust him. Pray for your testimony to others during this Christmas season.

Weekend, December 10-11 – John 1 The passage for our Advent series

TAI: Reread the opening of the gospel, substituting "Jesus Christ" for "the Word." Recall Pastor Vilhauer's message of last Sunday, and consider the uniqueness of Jesus as declared in these words. Ponder also the unique place of John the Baptist in God's plan and his role as a witness to the Light. Consider John's humility in declaring "I am not the Christ." Upon whom was John to spotlight and draw attention, according to God's plan for him?

PP: Ask God to help you spotlight and draw attention to Jesus Christ. Confess areas of pride in your life, and ask God to give you the humble attitude of John the Baptist. Praise God for the supremacy and glory of his son, Jesus Christ. Sing a song of praise which honors Jesus.

Monday, December 12 – Micah 5:2-5a and Luke 1:56-80

TAI: (More on Micah 5 tomorrow!) Zechariah and Elizabeth seemed to break a cultural custom by naming the baby John; what was that custom? When God allowed Zechariah to speak again, what did he do? In his prophecy, was Zechariah referring to his own son John as the "horn of salvation"? Zechariah seems to fully grasp son John's role; what is that role?

PP: Praise God for raising up for us a Savior, Christ the Lord! Rejoice in the "preparatory" ministry of John the Baptist, thanking God for the way John pointed people to Jesus. Thank God for the "tender mercy" (v. 78) he has shown you in Jesus Christ. Ask God to help you guide people to Jesus Christ, the living Lord and Savior.

Tuesday, December 13 – Micah 5:2-5a and Luke 2:1-7

TAI: Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth; can you explain why the child Jesus was born in Bethlehem? What prophetic word did this fulfill? What do we learn about the Messiah in Micah 5:4-5a? What does Luke seem to be strongly emphasizing in v. 7?

PP: One of the strongest evidences validating our faith in Jesus is the remarkable, and divine!, fulfillment of prophecies concerning Jesus. Exalt God in prayer and thank him for all the prophecies fulfilled through Jesus Christ. Praise God for sending his Son, born in such humble circumstances, to be our Savior. Rejoice in your salvation.

Wednesday, December 14 – Luke 2:8-14

TAI: Why would the angels make this dramatic pronouncement to shepherds? Why would the angels' appearance provoke fear in the shepherds? What was the good news of great joy? How does the detail of v. 12 continue the theme of v. 7? How does that detail contrast with v. 14?

PP: That God would deliver the most important news in the world to a group of shepherds reminds us why we should be so thrilled: a Savior has been born, not for rich folks or educated folks or a certain culture or class, but for sinners like you and me! Express thanks to God! Pray for those on your Sacred 7 list, that this Christmas the Holy Spirit would reveal to them, and that you as a witness would say to them, the gospel truth of Jesus the Savior of the world.

Thursday, December 15 – Luke 2:15-21

TAI: Reflect: what were all the treasures which Mary pondered in her heart (v. 19)? What was the response of the shepherds to all they had heard and seen? How is our response to be the same as the shepherds? What does the name 'Jesus' mean? Why was it given to the baby?

PP: Take a few moments to ponder all the things which Mary pondered! Thank God for Dr. Luke's faithful account of the Christmas events. Ask God to give you the worshipper's heart of the shepherds on that holy night, glorifying and praising God. Determine to tell someone what Jesus means to you personally, and pray for that person right now.

Friday, December 16 – Luke 2:22-40

TAI: Who was Simeon, and why does Dr. Luke tell us his story in such detail? Why was this baby the fulfillment of all he had been anticipating? What does his 'song of blessing' in vv. 29-32 tell us about Jesus? Also, what does his prophetic word to Mary about this child foreshadow in the events to come? Who was Anna, and why does Dr. Luke tell us her story?

PP: Ask God to help you 'anticipate' the second coming of Jesus with as much passion as Simeon anticipated the first coming. Thank God for the cross, the sword which pierced Mary's own soul, for their Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. Ask God to enable you by his Spirit to have a heart similar to Anna: the heart of a worshipper, praying and even fasting for God's glory.

Weekend, December 17-18 – John 1:1-37 The passage for our Advent series

TAI: Reread vv. 9-14, but every time you see a masculine pronoun (he, or him) substitute the name 'Jesus.' [for example, v. 10 would read "Jesus was in the world, and the world was made through Jesus, yet the world did not know Jesus"] Does this help you grasp all that John is saying in these verses about the Savior? What does John say about all who 'receive' Jesus by faith, believing in his name? How are these believers 'born'?

PP: Have you received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior by believing fully in his name? Thank God for that great salvation! Or if you have not, ask God to help you understand the gospel of Jesus Christ and consider turning from your sin to trust Jesus for forgiveness and salvation. Pray for the choir as they present the Christmas gospel in music, and for Pastor Dana sharing thoughts from this chapter, John 1, this Sunday at Faith Baptist Fellowship.

Monday, December 19 – Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6-7 (if time permits also Matthew 1:1-17)

TAI: What does Immanuel mean? What does this prophecy have to do with the *incarnation*? What do the Isaiah 9 verses teach us about the Messiah? Try to think of at least one incident from the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) where Jesus reveals himself as a Wonderful Counselor...as Mighty God...as Everlasting Father...as Prince of Peace. What Old Testament stories come to mind as you read through the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1?

PP: Rejoice that Jesus came to earth to dwell among us, God in the flesh (in-carne), or Immanuel ("God with us"). Express thanks to God that Jesus has been to you a wise Counselor, the powerful, healing God, a spiritual Father, and that truly he has brought you peace with God and forgiveness of your sin. Thank God for the whole, amazing fulfillment that is Jesus' birth!

Tuesday, December 20 – Matthew 1:18-25 and once again Isaiah 7:14

TAI: Marriage customs then differed quite a bit from today; how does the account reveal this? Why does Matthew emphasize that Joseph was a *just* man? What was the shocking revelation the angel made to Joseph? How does this passage lead us to the belief that Jesus Christ was *born of a virgin (the doctrine of the virgin birth)*? Why is this important?

PP: Men, ask God to enable you, by his Spirit, to be a just and honorable man like Joseph! Thank God for the virgin birth of Jesus: born of a virgin with the Holy Spirit as his father. With Christmas now days away, pray by name for unbelievers with whom you will spend Christmas, and ask God to help you wisely witness to them. "Help me keep Christ the center of Christmas!"

Wednesday, December 21 – Matthew 2:1-12 We will also read this again tomorrow.

TAI: Why would the question asked by the magi bother Herod so greatly? Why would these magi want to worship this newborn king? Is it remarkable that the scholars and religious leaders of Jerusalem would answer correctly by quoting Micah 5? Did Herod truly want to worship the newborn child king?

PP: Over and over again "worship" is mentioned in these Advent passages. Express your worship to God with praise and adoration for the remarkable, true story of the Messiah's birth.

Thank God for bringing you a Savior! Thank God that Jesus is the Savior King who will reign over you and on his throne for all eternity! Pray for missionaries bringing the news of the Savior to peoples who have never heard. Pray for Regan and Becky Beauchamp and Prison Lighthouse Fellowship.

Thursday, December 22 – Matthew 2:1-12 once again

TAI: Why did seeing the star bring the magi such joy? What was the magi response to seeing the Christ? Ponder: what is the significance of these three gifts brought to Jesus?

Gold

Frankincense

Myrrh

PP: Sing a carol which reflects your own heart of worship this Christmas! Not a singer? Say the words, hum them, or sing them badly! There is no greater treasure God seeks from you than this: that you love him with your whole being and trust him completely. Express that in prayer to God.

Friday, December 23 – Matthew 2:13-23 and Jeremiah 31:15

TAI: The sword that Simeon said would pierce Mary's soul now pierces many a heart, the fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:15. How did God protect the Messiah/Child from harm? What motivated Herod to order the murder of these children? Why does Matthew put such a great emphasis in his narrative on showing the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies? How did Joseph and the family end up back in Nazareth?

PP: Take a moment to think deeply about what those mothers and fathers must have felt in losing their children in such an horrific way, then pray a prayer for parents you know who have lost a child to death. Thank God for protecting the child Jesus, so that he could be our Savior. Thank God for fulfilled prophecies. Pray for homeless or hungry people in our city this weekend, and for ministries which serve them.

Weekend, December 24-25 – John 1:1-37 The passage for our Advent Series

TAI and PP: Don't forget our special schedule this weekend: Christmas Eve at 4 and 6 pm and also one service only Christmas morning at 9:30 – not our usual time! Please honor the Lord on Sunday by attending worship, whether here or wherever you are visiting with your family for Christmas. Christmas Sunday morning: ***what a super time to gather to worship Jesus Christ!***

Pray for Pastor Dana speaking at Faith, and for musicians and others helping to lead us in worship. Pray for our military service men and women far from home on Christmas weekend! Pray for our Faith members serving Christ overseas in missions as well. Thank God for your salvation in Christ.

Monday, December 26 – Zephaniah 3:14-20

TAI: Ponder this: ‘He will rejoice over you with gladness’ (from v. 17). And this: ‘He will quiet you with his love.’ And this: ‘He will exult over you with loud singing.’ Now imagine this for a moment: God singing a loud song of joy over you! Why? Because his Son, Jesus the Messiah, is your Lord and Savior and you are God’s child! That’s why Jesus came into the world.

PP: Thank God and rejoice for all of this. Ask him to quiet you with his love today.

Tuesday, December 27 – I Timothy 1:12-17

TAI: What is the trustworthy saying that deserves our full acceptance? Why did Jesus come into the world? Why was he born on earth (why Christmas)?

PP: Using the words of v. 17, pray a prayer of praise to God. Thank him for his mercy to you. Pray for your family members today to know the trustworthy saying and to fully accept it.

Wednesday, December 28 – I Peter 1:13-21

TAI: Take a few moments to really think about verse 20. “Made manifest” – *that’s Christmas*. Now ponder vv. 18-19. The “precious blood of Christ” – *that’s the cross*.

PP: Rejoice in the gospel news of this passage...for Christmas and Good Friday and Easter...for Christ making you holy by his blood and the Holy Spirit making you holy by his gracious work in you. Ask God to help you share this powerful message of life and salvation with others in 2012.

Thursday, December 29 – I John 3:1-10

TAI: Take a few moments to really think hard about v. 5. When it says “he appeared” – that’s Christmas! When it says “to take away sins” – that’s the cross. Why did Jesus come on Christmas, according to v. 8? The Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil. PTL!

PP: Thank God that you do not have to fear the devil, and that Jesus destroyed his works by his coming, righteous and miraculous life, death on the cross, and resurrection from the dead. Ask God to make our church powerful in the truth of the gospel during 2012.

Friday, December 30 – Hebrews 1:1-5

TAI: The baby born in Bethlehem and laid in a manger was the Son of God, heir of all things!

PP: Pray a prayer honoring the supremacy and glory of Jesus using these verses.

Weekend, December 31-January 1 – Hebrews 1

TAI & PP: Why read Hebrews 1 now? To get over thinking about Jesus as a babe, and think of him as he is now: the supreme reigning King and Creator of the Universe! He existed before Christmas, exists now as King and Lord at the Father’s right hand, and is the coming King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He reigns in 2012, no matter what the circumstances. Hallelujah! Worship him! Commit your way to his loving leadership and lordship in the new year.