

Reading Schedule for December 11-17, 2017

I promised you some specific Advent readings for the 10 days before Christmas, as well as readings the week after Christmas that pertained to Christ's birth. We are finishing our story of David in the first two days of this week and we will launch into some of Isaiah's prophecies about the coming of the Messiah. May you join Mary in pondering all these things and treasuring them up in your heart as you prepare to celebrate Christ's birth.

December 11 – 1 Kings 2: “I am about to go the way of all the earth,” he said. “So be strong, act like a man . . .” (v.2) Yesterday at church, I challenged parents who were dedicating a child to the Lord. We had two children dedicated in the service, along with their commitment to be the parents God is calling them to be. David is giving a similar challenge to Solomon to be the king he is supposed to be. He uses the word “if” a couple of times because it is Solomon's decision to follow the ways of the Lord with all his heart. God does not make Solomon follow him. Solomon can surrender himself to the Lord in such a way that God directs his life. This challenge will continue to affect all the kings who serve God. If they honor the Lord and obey him, he will bless their leadership among the people. But if they disobey, they will be vulnerable to attack, to be overthrown and the people would likewise be affected in a negative way. It is still true today for you and me. Each day we have the opportunity to surrender to the Lord or live for ourselves. One will be blessed by God; the other is a toss-up. Which road will you choose? Psalm 1 highlights the significance of being in fellowship with God or living on my own.

December 12 – 1 Kings 3: “So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?” (v.9) I wanted to include this part of the story because it is so significant that Solomon asked God for wisdom. The Lord put a silver platter before Solomon and said, “You can ask anything you want.” Solomon chose the right thing, which pleased God, and the Lord was quite willing to grant his request. James 1:5 tells us that we can ask God for the same kind of wisdom. If we truly believe, he will impart his wisdom to us. Solomon is known as the wisest man ever to live. That was only because he had the wisdom of God. The wisdom that will really make a difference in your life is God's wisdom. How do you respond to this story? In what ways do you need God's wisdom?

December 13 – Isaiah 40:1-11: “A voice of one calling: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’” (v.3) Tradition has placed this Scripture as the first reading of Advent. It points to someone that we know from the New Testament; his name is John the Baptist. He was the one preparing the way for the Lord. There are so many inspiring statements in this prophecy that I could have chosen four or five more of them that stirred my heart. But I am drawn to verses 10 & 11, which reveal that God is both powerful and tender at the same time. He will show this clearly through his one and only Son, Jesus Christ. Isaiah 40 begins prophecies about the hope of the future, and many of them point to the Messiah. What aspect of this first reading gets your attention? Why? How can you make Advent a spiritually enriching time in your life?

December 14– Isaiah 52:7-12: I did not reference one verse for such a short reading, but I have always appreciated the message from verse 7. I remember praying verse 12 at times, asking God to go before me, and also be my rear guard. I need the Lord's protection. I am sure you would agree. The announcement of good news is fulfilled in Jesus. We read those specific words that are used in this text as we open the New Testament and hear Jesus proclaiming the good news of the Gospel. This is known as the second reading of Advent. How does it inspire you?

December 15 – Micah 5:2-5a: “And he will be our peace . . .” (v. 5a) The words of Advent that have been highlighted time and again are: hope, joy, love and peace. I have told several friends that Christmas means peace to me. I could try to gain approval and work so hard to make a name for myself, and yet in Christ I can have total peace. I have peace with God, and I can experience the peace of God. But this prophecy is so special because it was written 700 years before Christ. It is such a clear message about Jesus being from Bethlehem and that his origins are from of old; meaning he always was and always will be. And we have the promise that his greatness will reach the ends of the earth. This is a marvelous prophecy and it is quoted in the context of Jesus being born in Bethlehem, as we will celebrate in just 10 days. How do you respond to this prophecy? Which characteristic of Advent blesses you the most: hope, joy, love or peace? Why?

December 16 – Isaiah 9:2-7: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (v.6) This might be the most well-known prophecy about the coming of Christ. It is clear that he would be born as a child, and yet would have all the characteristics of God. Again, it points to his peace that he gives which will have no end. It is important to realize that we are wandering in darkness apart from the light of Christ. But his coming to us is the light of God shining into our world. He gives us hope in a hopeless world. I think you could focus on the names that are associated with the child born to us . . . the Messiah, in verse 6. Which title inspires you the most? Why does it bless you? How is God speaking to you through this passage?

December 17 – Isaiah 11:1-10: “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.” (v.6) The prophecies of animals that usually devour each other, but are lying next to each other always gets my attention. It points to a time of peace when children could play safely around dangerous animals. This moves past the first coming of Christ, to his second coming, which makes all these things possible. Advent is the anticipation of Christ's coming. But we have already experienced Christ's first visit to mankind, and now we anticipate his second visitation. This one will be powerful and glorious and eternal. He will come with judgment to rule, and we will live under his authority forever. Advent has not just been about anticipating Jesus' birth, but also the anticipation of his triumphal victory over all the earth as he will reign as Lord of Lords and King of Kings. How does this 700 B.C. prophecy from Isaiah inspire you? Why?

Prayers: Pray that eyes will be opened and hearts will be softened to Jesus, the Savior of the world, as we live out Christmas.