

Reading Schedule for December 18-24, 2017

Somehow I want this week to be very special to you. It is indeed a special time of the year. I want these readings to stir your heart and nourish your soul. These are some of the most primary readings about Advent and the birth of Christ. We will continue in the Old Testament with prophecies that point to the Messiah, as well as the main story of the first Christmas found in the Gospel of Luke. May every part be especially meaningful to you.

December 18 – Isaiah 61: “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners . . .” (v.1) This verse says it all, as we progress through this amazing chapter in the Old Testament. This Scripture has always been thought of as a messianic text. Jesus quoted these very words in Luke 4:18. Verse 10 has been interpreted as the Messiah, who is anointed by God and clothed with garments of salvation. It is interesting to think of the Messiah as the bridegroom because we have the image of the body of Christ as the bride. The bride will also receive new garments because of our faith in Christ, the Messiah. These are very inspiring words. I wonder which ones stand out to you? How does this point to the Messiah? What do we learn about Jesus in this passage?

December 19 – Psalm 89:1-4: “I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.” (v.4) God promised to make David the mightiest on earth and to keep his descendants on the throne forever. But we know that Jerusalem was destroyed, and the king no longer even reigns there. So these verses can only look forward prophetically to the future reign of Jesus Christ, David’s descendant. That is how I am using them in this reading today. It is a short reading for you to contemplate how Christ will reign forever. He enters our world as the Christ child, and all the promises connected to him are about how his reign will last forever. You may choose to read more of this Psalm, but the main Advent passage is focused on these four verses, with the Messiah being born in the line of David, which we read in both Matthew and Luke. How does this short reading stir your heart?

December 20 – Malachi 3:1-6: “I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty.” (v.1) There are two messengers in this verse. The first is usually understood to be John the Baptist. The second messenger is Jesus, the Messiah, for whom both Malachi and John the Baptist prepared the way. This is often thought of as the last Advent reading in the Old Testament. That makes perfect sense since Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament. I’ve always been drawn to the message about the theme “refiner’s fire.” It likens Jesus the Messiah to a refiner’s fire. I am sure you understand the meaning of this text. God may allow difficult things into your life so that you will be strengthened through those trials, as gold is refined of its impurities. Part of the message that God would send a Messiah is one of confronting the religious leaders that had pride and self-righteousness. We know that a part of Jesus’ ministry was to confront the Pharisees. There was evidence of this in Malachi’s day, and we know specifically through the Gospels that the religiosity of many of the leaders was insincere and self-motivated. Jesus would confront such motivation. He came to change the hearts of people. How do you respond to this Advent prophecy?

December 21 – Luke 1:1-25: “Zechariah asked the angel, ‘How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.’” (v.18) In my study of this account, I recall Mary having a similar response to the angel Gabriel. But we can understand that Zechariah’s question was full of doubt. Mary’s question was full of curiosity. But God never let go of Zechariah, and we will learn later in the story of how he is delivered. Zechariah’s son would play a very significant role in God’s plans. Even with Zechariah’s doubts, the Lord would not allow his plan to be appended. This is an exciting reading because it begins the story of the coming of Jesus with John being the forerunner. How do you respond to this beginning Gospel text?

December 22 – Luke 1:26-56: “In a loud voice she exclaimed: ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!’” (v.42) I have thoroughly taught on Mary’s interaction with Gabriel and the implications of her song, but I haven’t mentioned much about her visit with Elizabeth. I am drawn to the character of Elizabeth as she blesses Mary. There have been a few people in my life who have shared extravagant words of affirmation that were very sincere. I don’t want to accept flattery as a vehicle of affirmation; but when someone is exuberant about their love for another, as well as affirming of their life in one way or another, this is to be taken in. Mary would be questioned by most, but blessed by Elizabeth, and Elizabeth’s blessing would carry Mary through. Don’t underestimate the power of a word spoken into the life of another that is from God. I see that in Mary, and I want to follow Elizabeth’s example. How do you respond to Elizabeth’s affection and affirmation to Mary?

December 23 – Luke 1:57-80: “Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.” (v.64) The first thing that Zechariah did was to affirm the name of his son as John, and then he began praising God. We see the specific words of his praise beginning in verse 68, but I am encouraged by Zechariah’s immediate response of praise to God. Zechariah knows that the prophecies of the Old Testament were coming true. The messiah would come in Zechariah’s lifetime and his son had been chosen to pave the way. He was ecstatic. What aspect of Zechariah’s praise stirs your heart?

December 24 – Luke 2:1-20: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” (v.14) One of my favorite words of Advent is peace. Christ is the Prince of Peace. The angels announce the peace would flow to those who receive God’s favor. Those who receive God’s favor are those who respond in faith. I have responded in faith, and so now I have peace with God, and am experiencing the peace of God day by day. Christ paid the price on the cross that I could have access to God and the hostile barrier that separated us was broken down. I appreciate the fact that my sins are forgiven in that I will go to heaven one day because of what Jesus did for me. But I also love the truth that peace within is a gift from Christ as I place my faith in him. The troubling aspects of life and the challenges that face me day after day do not have to defeat me. I can be assured that Christ will walk with me and give me strength in the midst any situation that has the possibility of overwhelming me. As I trust in the Lord I experience more of his peace. How might you experience deeper peace? What stands out to you in this nativity story?

Prayers: Pray for the meaning of Christmas to come alive in our family and friends; in the lives of those who especially need Jesus.