

Reading Schedule for December 24-30, 2018

Many people believe this is the high point of the year. So it seems that we should read about what makes it so special. I think Luke's account of the first Christmas is the most thorough and inspiring. We will continue reading on in Luke as we prepare for the New Year.

December 24 – Luke 1:57-80: “Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.” (v.64) The Lord has a way of turning things around. Zechariah had been speechless for the whole pregnancy, and nothing would change that, even though his heart was softening and his response to God was true. Sometimes things don't change until a step of obedience takes place. He obeyed God by naming his child John, which was very interesting and surprising to all those that surrounded him. But he did that because he knew that is what God wanted. The Lord intervenes in our lives to help us learn. It says in Hebrews that Jesus learned obedience through suffering. The same is true of us. It was definitely true of Zechariah, and we see his godly response and his powerful prophecy about the significance of what God was doing through his child and the one to come. What part of his prophecy gets your attention?

December 25 – Merry Christmas! Luke 2:1-20: ““Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” (v.14) These are the words of a great company of angels as they announce the birth of Christ. The offer of peace to people is connected to relationship with God. We receive peace from God when we put our trust in him. It is a message of hope and invitation. Jesus paid the price for sin and opened the way to peace with God. He is the way, the truth and the life. You are very familiar with these words. You might even be reading them to your whole family as a way of keeping Christ as the center of your Christmas. What aspect of this amazing text stands out to you the most? Celebration was obvious. Mary reflected on what this meant (pondered). I hope you have a few moments to slow down and reflect about Christ's coming and your relationship with him.

December 26 – Luke 2:21-40: “Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required . . .” (v.27) I like this character of Simeon. He was close enough to the Lord to receive guidance of the Holy Spirit. When we talk about the Holy Spirit's nudges, we are referring to words like “moved by the Spirit.” Simeon was moved by the Spirit, and he shared some amazing words about Jesus because he would be the Messiah to more than just the Jews, but to the whole world. No wonder Joseph and Mary marveled at what he said. It is amazing that this man would recognize the identity of Jesus as the hope of the world. How do you respond to this account of Jesus' parents dedicating Jesus to the Lord in the temple?

December 27 – Luke 2:41-52: “When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.” (v.39) This is also a well-known event in the life of Jesus. He is twelve years old, and he is growing in wisdom and stature. He is eager to be a part of the spiritual discussions among the religious leaders. It is interesting that it says

that Jesus was asking them questions. Jesus wouldn't stop doing that. When he chose his disciples, he had the same approach to their discovery. I want to tell people everything I know, but Jesus wanted people to discover what was true. This is an interesting story, and I am glad that it is included in our introduction to Jesus. How does this familiar event inspire you today?

December 28 – Luke 3:1-20: “John answered them all, ‘I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’” (v.16) I am most drawn to John's explanation of his role and who Jesus is. We learn in the beginning of this chapter that John is the one who Isaiah prophesied about that would be used by God to prepare the way for the Lord. We were introduced to John earlier in chapter 1, as he was of miraculous birth to Zachariah and Elizabeth. But now we see his ministry unfolding in this chapter. What impresses you about John? What does John say about Jesus? What does it mean that he will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire? Could it be that it is about the power of God and judgment concerning sin?

December 29 – Luke 3:21-38: “Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph . . .” (v.23) There are two parts to this short reading that I wanted to emphasize. We have the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph all the way to God, which is in the reverse order as compared to Matthew. Matthew's genealogy goes back to Abraham, and shows that Jesus was related to all of the Jews. Luke's genealogy goes back to Adam, showing that Jesus is related to all human beings. I liked that subtle difference because Matthew was writing to the house of Israel, and Luke was more interested in the advancement of the Gospel to the Gentiles, as he also wrote the Book of Acts. We also get to read about the baptism of Jesus, with the most concise report from Luke. Take this day to slow down and reflect on the words, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” Put your name in that verse. You are my son, Barry . . . What does that mean to you? Do you understand that God is still saying that to his children, those who have put their faith in the Savior Jesus?

December 30 – Luke 4:1-13: “The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.’” (v.3) You are familiar with this story as well. Jesus is preparing his heart and mind for the ministry ahead, and he feels led to go to the desert for 40 days of fasting. Obviously, he would be weary and hungry. What is the first thing the devil tempts Jesus to do? Eat . . . bread. And to show his true power and identity, he could turn a stone into bread. He wouldn't waste his energy on the devil. Instead he resisted him through the Word of God. He does that three times, as you know. The devil arrogantly hoped to succeed in his rebellion against God by diverting Jesus from his mission and winning his worship. How foolish of him! May the devil be just as foolish to try to get us to give into sin and weaken our allegiance to Christ. Do exactly what the Scriptures say – resist the devil, use God's Word, and stand firm in faith. The devil will flee. How does this event in Jesus' life help you to resist the devil?

PRAYER: Pray prayers of gratitude for the previous year and dedicate yourself to God as you prepare for the New Year.