

Reading Schedule for December 25-31, 2017

I was contemplating how we might begin the New Year. In my opinion, the Gospels are always the focal point for Christian living. Jesus is our example and the Gospel of John is one of the most important records of Jesus' life. The writer John was unique in his approach in expressing the life of Jesus. We will enjoy launching 2018 with John and his emphasis on Jesus being the "I Am."

December 25 – Matthew 1:1-25: "Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly." (v.19) The genealogy of Jesus is impressive because it leads up to the man, Joseph. Joseph was my focus on December 17 during the Sunday morning message. His strong and soft characteristics intrigued me the most. How was he able to be just and merciful at the same time? I think God gave me some insights into how that could be true for me as well: He put God first and others second. I think that is the simple formula of having both obedience and compassion in full force as you relate to people. I want to be a person who has both tough and tender love at the same time. I want to be bold and gentle, because that's the way Jesus was. I see this in Joseph and I pray we all become more like him. How do you respond to Matthew's account of the birth of Christ?

December 26 – Matthew 2:1-12: "'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'" (v.2) This is also a very intriguing aspect of the first Christmas. We think of the three wise men, which are better described as Magi, or astrologers. They see a star and they follow it to Jesus so that they can worship him. We don't know very much about the Magi, and we don't know very much about the star. There are lots of ideas about the star. The Magi said they saw Jesus' star, which could refer to the star out of Jacob in Numbers 24:17. Some say the star may have been a conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn and Mars in 6 B.C. and others have offered many different explanations. I like the aspect of the star being God's miraculous work, for he is in charge of the universe. He would want something special to signal the arrival of his own Son. I think that is the best explanation. I purposely had us read this after Christmas day, because it says in the Scripture, "On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary . . ." Their arrival to Jesus was somewhat after his birth, which makes sense because their travel was so far. How do you respond to the story of the Magi?

December 27 – Matthew 2:13-23: "After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt . . ." (v.19) I mention something else that I spoke on during my sermon about Joseph. This is the third dream that we see recorded in Matthew that directs Joseph according to God's plan. Each time Joseph is obedient. I suggested in my sermon that the first time was the most important because it would lead to God continuing to reveal himself to Joseph. I really believe that principle. Some people say to me that they don't really feel God, or don't sense his guidance in their life. I believe that many times they have ignored the Lord previous so now they really want him to speak to them but He is silent. If you get a nudge from God and you sense it is the Holy Spirit, obey it. It will lead to more opportunities. God is looking for a listening heart who will obey. Do you agree? How do you respond to these verses?

December 28–John 1:1-18: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father,

full of grace and truth." (v.14) I think I always pick verse 14 when I am reading the first chapter of John. The Message paraphrase says something like, "Jesus pitched his tent among us and stepped into our neighborhood." These are the words of the incarnation, which means "God in flesh." When Christ was born God became a man. He was not part man and part God. He was completely human and completely divine. Before Christ came, people could know God partially. After Christ came, people could know God fully because he became visible and tangible through Christ. This is the marvel of the incarnation. How does it inspire you? What aspect of these first 18 verses touches your heart?

December 29 –John 1:19-34: "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (v.29) It is interesting to meet John as we learn about his birth through Luke chapter one. John's introduction of John the Baptist is even more compelling to me. Plus, John is preparing the way for the Lord, and when he sees Christ for the first time he calls him the Lamb of God. This is very illuminating. Isaiah 53:7 prophesied that the Messiah, God's servant, would be led to the slaughter like a lamb. John is telling us that Jesus would pay the penalty for our sin. We hear so much in this one sentence about the purpose of Jesus, and John proclaiming his entry into the world. I am inspired by the John's Gospel, even though this is only our second day of reading in this text. How are you responding?

December 30 – John 1:35-51: "'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked. 'Come and see,' said Philip." (v.46) I have been to Nazareth, and also to the Sea of Galilee. It is an interesting place. I was especially inspired knowing that Jesus walked there. There isn't much to Nazareth that is noteworthy, nor even to the beautiful Sea of Galilee, which is actually very barren. Mary and Joseph were from Nazareth. They took Jesus back there for his childhood. Nazareth was despised by the Jews, possibly because of the large Roman garrison there. But also it could be that there was a reputation of immorality and other religions. Most of Jesus' disciples were from that area as well. I think it is fascinating that Jesus grew up in Nazareth. Jesus identifies with the obscure way more than the celebrity. What stands out to you in this reading today?

December 31 – John 2:1-11: "What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him." (v.11) This is a well-known story about Jesus turning water into wine. We always make a lot about the aspect of Jesus making an alcoholic beverage, but wine was the common drink of that day because there was no refrigeration. The interesting part about this miracle is that it is so common. I think we will start seeing a theme here about Jesus. The miracle showed his power over nature and revealed the way he would go about his ministry: helping others, speaking with authority, and being in personal touch with people. I read a book about hosting a party for people to get to know each other and for Christians to spend time with people who may be far from God. This seems to fit because Jesus was with the people. How do you respond to this story? What stands out to you?

Prayers: Pray for the New Year as it is about to be opened before us with so many wonderful possibilities.