*DEVOTIONAL*

December 24 - 29

*Destiny*

**Monday, December 24 Matthew 1:18-25**

*“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about”*

 In Jewish marriage there were three steps. The first was the engagement, a contract arranged by family members who determined whether the couple would be well suited for each other and for a future marriage. Second, there was the betrothal, with a period of one year for the couple to become known as belonging to each other, but not having the rights of living together as husband and wife. The third stage was the marriage itself.

 It was during the year of their betrothal that Mary made known to Joseph that she was with child by the miraculous act of God. Joseph is referred to as a just man with special love and consideration for Mary. Confronted with the problem of his betrothed being pregnant, he contemplated how to end the betrothal in a divorce. As he was pondering, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph with a message from God. Accepting the direction which God gave him, Joseph took Mary as his wife and did not enter into marital relations with her until after the birth of Jesus.

*Thank you, Father, for this beautiful story of the birth of your Son. Amen.*

**Tuesday, December 25 Luke 2:1-7**

*“She gave birth to her first child, a son”*

 The circumstances of Jesus’ birth are so basic and unassuming in origin that it is hard to appreciate just who it is that is born here. Most regal figures are born with great ceremony and celebration. But Jesus’ birth is as average as it comes. His birthplace is determined in part by the need to fill out a census – probably a means to register for paying taxes. So Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem because of Joseph’s lineage. Mary, who did not have to go, goes anyway, possibly because Joseph wants to be present at the birth of her child, soon to happen.

 The birth takes place in humble circumstances, for the child is probably born in a stable. The wrapping of his fragile limbs in cloths was common in the ancient world to keep them protected and in place. They are in this strange birthing room, “because there was no room for them at the inn.” Such inns would have been either the second story of a house that housed animals below or a one-story building with a stable next to it. Jesus’ first hours of human existence are spent in a manger. The Son of God lives without pretense.

*In humility you came to earth, Lord, and in humility I accept you as my Savior. Amen.*

**Wednesday, December 26 Luke 2:8-14**

*“Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them”*

 In the ancient world, if anyone had asked if there was a more important person than Caesar, the emperor and ruler of the vast Roman Empire, the answer surely would have been “No.” Yet it is the birth of a little boy in a rural Judean village that causes angels to appear. Creation has no more mysterious and exalted beings than angels, the heavenly messengers of God. Moreover, there are no more “normal Joes” in ancient culture than shepherds. They represent the lowly and humble who respond to God’s message.

 Thus, heaven meets and greets the average person through the angelic announcement. Jesus’ birth is more than a private family affair. The announcement of “good news of great joy that will be for all the people” indicates that God desires to speak to every person about the coming of Jesus, since all humanity is impacted by his appearing. The visible presence of heavenly authority makes the shepherds nervous, but the angel calms their fears. Humanity has nothing to fear when God moves in grace.

*Father, you sent your Son into the world and his coming is Good News. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONAL*

December 24 - 29

*The Destiny of Christ*

**Thursday, December 27 Luke 2:15-20**

*“Let us see this wonderful thing that has happened”*

 The shepherds decide to go to Bethlehem and see what God is doing. They find the child in the manger, just as the angel had said, and they share their story. They responded to the angel with obedience and now they cannot contain themselves from testifying to what God has done in making Jesus’ presence evident to them. So it should be for us who name ourselves followers of Christ: having accepted for ourselves what God did at Bethlehem, we gladly share this Good News with others.

 As is often the case when God’s work is reported, those who hear the shepherd’s testimony are amazed. Mary, we are told, ponders it all. The rest of the world will go on living as if nothing has happened, but for Mary, and for all who accept Jesus by faith, things will never again be the same. The event closes with the shepherds’ returning to their flocks and giving glory and praise to God, for things were just as he said. God will always do what he has promised. This is yet another truth that Jesus’ birth affirms.

*Every promise you make, Father, comes true through your Son. Amen.*

**Friday, December 28 Luke 2:21-35**

*“Now there was a man named Simeon”*

Jesus is circumcised, as any eight-day old Jewish boy would be, and is officially given his name, Jesus. The journey of Jesus’ parents from Bethlehem to the temple in Jerusalem combines three separate ceremonies: the purification of a woman after the birth of a child, the presentation of the firstborn to God, and the dedication of the firstborn into the Lord’s service. The rite of purification involved the offering of a burnt sacrifice. The mention of doves indicates that Joseph and Mary could only afford the offering of the poor.

 While in the temple, Joseph and Mary meet a pious old man, Simeon. He has not given up believing that God will complete his promise to deliver Israel. The Spirit, the source of all revelation and testimony, has told him that before he passes away he will see “the Lord’s Christ.” Therefore, when the child arrives, Simeon is there and is led by God to offer a chorus of praise. In that song, which includes prediction, not all the notes are happy, for the career of the Lord’s Christ, though glorious, is not absent of trial and disappointment.

*As did you, Jesus, I will face both joy and distress in my life. Amen.*

**Saturday, December 29 Matthew 2:1-12**

*“After Jesus was born . . . wise men came”*

 Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, a small town five miles south of Jerusalem, previously called Ephrath. It was here that Jacob had buried Rachel (Genesis 48:7), and it was here that Ruth had lived when she married Boaz (Ruth 1:22). More significantly, Bethlehem was the home of David (1 Samuel 16:1-13), and it was from this city that the Jewish community expected David’s greatest descendant, God’s appointed Messiah, to be born (Micah 5:2).

 The wise men represent Gentiles coming from distant areas of the world to worship the Christ. Apparently they took some length of time after the birth of Jesus to arrive in Bethlehem. Based on Herod’s attempt to destroy Jesus by having all the boys aged two years old and younger killed “according to the time which he had determined from the wise men” (Matthew 2:16-18), it was probably close to two years after his birth that they arrived and found Jesus. Further, we are told that they came to a house where they worshipped the “young child.”

*I worship you, Jesus, as the One sent by the Father to live among us. Amen.*