*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

December 23 - 28

*Christmas*

**Monday, December 23 Luke 1:1-38**

*“Two Angelic Birth Announcements”*

 Luke begins his story by placing it in an established historical setting – the reign of Herod. The angel Gabriel’s announcement of the birth of John the Baptist has three aspects to it: the revelation that God has a plan to direct the affairs of humanity and restore his relationship to it, the outline of the career of John himself, and the disappointment in the lives of Elizabeth and Zechariah, two righteous people who had lived with the reality and frustration of being childless.

 Gabriel’s announcement to Mary parallels the announcement to Zechariah, but the differences are also significant. Whereas the first announcement takes place in the temple in the center of Israelite culture, this one takes place in an obscure Galilean village much to the north of the capital. The humble nature of the announcement parallels the humble nature of Jesus’ birth and ministry. Luke identifies Mary as a virgin, engaged to Joseph; that is, she was pledged to him but they were not yet married. A Jewish betrothal involved two steps: the formal engagement, and then about a year later, a wedding.

*I trust you, Lord, to complete your promises in your time and in your way. Amen.*

**Tuesday, December 24 Luke 1:39-80**

*“My soul magnifies the Lord”*

 The meeting between Mary and Elizabeth takes place in the hill country of Judea, somewhere outside of Jerusalem, a three-day journey of some eighty to one hundred miles from Nazareth. The meeting demonstrates Mary’s obedience, since it reflects her desire to observe the sign the angel had told her about in verse 36. Mary’s song comes in two parts. She gives personal praise for her specific situation as she rejoices in the action of God on her behalf, and she praises God’s activity in more general terms.

 When God acts, we should listen with ears of faith. When the birth of John was announced to Zechariah, he could not believe it, so the Lord gave him a sign for reflection. He would be unable to speak until all was fulfilled. Then he would know that God does what he says. Here we learn of the outcome of Zechariah’s reflection. As a righteous man, Zechariah has learned from his mistake. Through the pain of the discipline, he emerges a stronger man of God, and when his tongue is freed he speaks in praise to God.

*I praise you, Lord, for all the ways that you are good to me. Amen.*

**Wednesday, December 25 Luke 2:1-20**

*“The time came for her baby to be born”*

 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 the angels to launch into praise. The circumstances of Jesus’ birth are so basic and humble in origin that it is hard to appreciate just who it is that is born here, for the child is born in either a stable or a cave. They are in this strange birthing room, “because there was no room for them in the inn.” Finding shelter where they can, Mary gives birth to Jesus and the Son of God spends the first hours of human existence in a manger.

 The birth of Jesus is a lesson in God’s faithfulness to do what he has promised, but it also reveals God’s heart and character. God identifies with the human race, and this birth reflects such identification. The most humble birth for the most exalted figure ever shows that the key values of life are found in the life itself, not in the trappings that come with life.

 *Humbly you came, Lord, and humbly I come to you. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

December 23 - 28

*Disciples Who Make Disciples*

**Thursday, December 26 Matthew 4:18-22**

*“Come, follow me”*

 Jesus’ strategy was to develop a disciple community, to call a group of associates who would be with him and learn from him. A disciple is one who both identifies with and learns from his master. Jesus discipled people by being with them and modeling his truth rather than simply teaching them the Law, as did other rabbis of his day.

 Jesus began by calling Peter and Andrew, a report which is here given very briefly. In the Gospel of John we learn that Andrew, who had been a disciple of John the Baptist, upon meeting Jesus, went and found his brother, Peter, and brought him to Jesus (John 1:41-42). Matthew states that Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” He was moving these men from their occupation as fishermen to recognize the vocation to be disciples, heralds of the good news, who in turn discipled others. Jesus next called two brothers, James and John, sons of Zebedee, from their occupation of fishing, asking them likewise to follow him. These four made up the inner circle of Jesus’ larger group of disciples.

*You have called me, Jesus, and I follow you. Amen.*

**Friday, December 27 Matthew 28:18-20**

*“Go and make disciples”*

 The emphasis of these verses is on making disciples while going, baptizing and teaching. Their going is no longer to be only “to the lost sheep of Israel” but to the whole world. In the commission to baptize those who become disciples, Jesus institutes the threefold formula of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the three persons of the Trinity by whom God encounters us in his love from all eternity and to all eternity. To be baptized in the name of the Trinity brings a person into direct relation with God as he has made himself known.

 The commission is also to teach new disciples to observe all that Jesus has taught them. This statement is directly related to the content of Jesus’ ministry. He is our Savior, having rescued us from sin’s penalty which is death, and he is our Lord, the One whose teaching we are committed to following. Matthew concludes the book with the remarkable promise that Jesus will be with his disciples until “the end of the age,” that is, until his second coming when he returns to take us home with him.

*As your follower, Jesus, I will encourage others to do the same. Amen.*

**Saturday, December 28 Acts 2:42-47**

*“The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching”*

 We are told that about 3,000 people believed the message of the gospel as spoken by Peter on the day of Pentecost, and they were baptized and became a part of the church. Then, we learn that there was immediate, regular follow-through care of these first converts as they devoted themselves to four activities, that is, they continued in faithful adherence to the newly formed community. The first activity was the apostles’ teaching.

 Considering that Jesus spent so much time teaching the crowds and his inner band of followers, it is not surprising that teaching had an important place in the early church. Jesus himself instructed his disciples to teach obedience to those who had been baptized, as we saw in yesterday’s devotion. While Acts doesn’t give us a specific description of what was taught to the new believers, we can say that it likely included explanations of the nature of salvation, the person and work of Christ, the commands of Christ, other features of the Christian life, and the message of the kingdom of God.

*Thank you, Jesus, for those who teach us about you. Amen.*