*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

December 21 - 26

Birth and Prophecy

**Monday, December 21 Luke 1:1-25**

*“Your wife Elizabeth will bear a son, and you are to name him John”*

There were twenty-four divisions of priests in Israel at the time, far more priests than needed in the Temple. Each division took a turn yearly to serve for two weeks. Only one priest at a time had the honor of burning the incense at the altar, an important task since this was the symbolic representation of the rising up to God of the prayers of the people. There were so many priests that this special honor might come just once in a lifetime or perhaps not at all.

On this occasion Zacharias was chosen by lot as the one to burn incense before God. During this, his greatest moment, the angel appeared. Zacharias’ reaction was fear. You might think that this man, born of a priestly tribe and righteous before God, would have been delighted about seeing an angel. But when God intervened in his life personally, he was afraid and troubled. The angel said to Zacharias, “Your prayer is heard.” Zacharias had a hard time believing it. Given his wife’s and his age, and her inability to have children, he had probably been praying without conviction. Regardless, the angel tells him he will have a son and to name him John.

*You are powerful enough, Lord, to answer even the most unlikely prayer. Amen.*

**Tuesday, December 22 Luke 1:26-38**

*“You will conceive and bring forth a son, and shall name him Jesus”*

Mary was troubled when the angel told her that she was “highly favored with God.” Perhaps because of her humility, she may have been thinking, “Why me? I’m too insignificant to find favor with God.” I believe Mary was chosen to bear God’s own son because she had the faith to believe that nothing is impossible with God.

Mary had a choice, and her response showed that she had made a decision: “Let it be to me according to your word.” God never forces his love or his will on anyone. The implication here is that the angel was announcing God’s plan and purpose to Mary and it would not be carried out without her consent. When this teen-aged girl chose to serve God, it was not as a Joan of Arc, marching out clad in her armor to lead armies. A figure like Joan of Arc is glamorous. Mary, however, would suffer the ridicule and contempt of being pregnant and unmarried in a small town full of gossips. Knowing all this, she still said, “Let it be to me according to your word.” It is surely one of the most courageous statements ever recorded.

*Strengthen my faith, Lord, to accept whatever you ask of me. Amen.*

**Wednesday, December 23 Luke 1:39-56**

*“Mary travelled to the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth”*

Luke puts Mary’s divine encounter with an angel and her human visit with Elizabeth side by side. Mary had just had the most earth-shaking experience in the world. Nothing will ever surpass it. And what did she do? She immediately ran off to tell someone, in this case her cousin, Elizabeth. She couldn’t wait to share what had happened to her. You can just imagine Elizabeth’s response, “Tell me all about it. What happened? Then what did Gabriel say? And what did you say?” How much we need other human beings to share the watershed moments of our lives. To be a Christian is to believe in a God who is the God of the impossible and to belong to a family of brothers and sisters who are there when you need them most.

While Elizabeth had her own miraculous story to tell, she was not jealous. When she heard the good news, she acknowledged that the child Mary was carrying was greater than her own, and she rejoiced. How blessed we are to have even a few friends like that who, when we receive a great honor, enjoy our success and share our joy.

*Thank you, Lord, for my close friends with whom I share my life. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

December 21 - 26

Birth and Prophecy

**Thursday, December 24 Luke 1:57-80**

*“I wonder what this child will turn out to be”*

John the Baptist was chosen by the Father to prepare the way for his Son’s ministry. Jesus said of John that among those born of women, none was greater than John the Baptist. The first thing we realize about John is that his birth was unusual and totally unexpected. His birth delighted his mother and his father who, because of their age, had given up all hope of having a baby. His naming was also unusual. When his mother said, “He shall be called John,” family and friends were disapproving. There was no other John in the family. They expected the father to overrule Elizabeth in this strange notion. But remembering what the angel told him nine months earlier, Zacharias wrote on the table, “His name is John.”

As soon as Zacharias wrote these words, his tongue was loosed. Struck dumb because he doubted, he suddenly spoke after nine months of silence. As soon as he obeyed God’s instructions in the naming of the child, he was healed. With that, he burst into his marvelous hymn of praise to the Messiah, whose coming would be announced by his son John.

*Show me, Lord, what you have chosen me to do in your Son’s name. Amen.*

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

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

Luke begins the Christmas story with the mention of Caesar Augustus, arguable the most powerful of the Caesars. He transformed not just the city of Rome but the entire known world with his roads and his armies. At his funeral, his mourners comforted themselves with the belief that he was a god and therefore immortal. The man believed to be a god lived in time and space when the true God came to earth as a child. When the most powerful man of his time decreed that a census was to be taken, Joseph and Mary were forced to travel from their hometown of Nazareth to Bethlehem, the city of their ancestor David.

We might ask, “Who determines history – people like the Caesars, or God?” God is not only the ruler of all things, but also the ruler of human history. Micah of the Old Testament prophesied hundreds of years before Jesus’ birth that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. And so Mary gave birth to her son Jesus and laid him in a manger in Bethlehem, a town strange to her, rather than in her home in Nazareth, for all was in God’s hands; and, it still is today.

*I praise you, Lord, for guiding the history of the world. Amen.*

**Saturday, December 26 Luke 2:21-40**

*“Presentation and Prophecy”*

As any eight-day-old Jewish boy would be, Jesus is circumcised and officially given his name, “Jesus.” While Joseph and Mary are in the temple with Jesus to present him to the Lord, they meet a pious old man. We are told that Simeon is righteous and devout, and he is looking for the Messiah for he believes that God will fulfill his promise of a deliverer for Israel. Revealed to him by the Spirit of God that the baby Jesus is the Messiah, he offers a song of praise. In his song, which includes some prediction, not all the notes are happy, for the career of the Lord’s Christ, though glorious, is not absent of trial and disappointment.

The second prophetic witness in the temple is Anna. She has served God faithfully with worship, prayer, and fasting for years since she lost her husband. Like Simeon, she hopes for “the redemption of Jerusalem” and tells others that the baby Jesus is a reason for praising and thanking God, for the Lord is doing something special through this child. After these days of worship, Jesus’ parents return to Bethlehem and set about raising their child.

*As did Simeon and Anna, Lord, may I see how you are at work in the world. Amen.*