*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

December 28 – January 2

Wise Men

**Monday, December 28 Matthew 1:18-25**

*“Now this is how Jesus the Messiah was born”*

The story of Jesus’ birth is told in a beautiful and simple style, with matter-of-fact statements about the most mysterious aspects of the conception of Jesus. God became a human being by the agency of the Holy Spirit in the life of a young woman who was a virgin when she became pregnant. The passage tells us that Mary was betrothed to Joseph, and that they had been faithful to the will of God and not engaged in a sexual relationship.

In Jewish marriage there were three steps. The first step was the engagement. Second, there was the betrothal, the public ratification of the engagement, 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 only way a betrothal could be terminated was by a divorce. Mary and Joseph were in this second stage when she became pregnant. The third stage is the marriage proper. Confronted with the problem of Mary being pregnant, Joseph was contemplating how to quietly end the betrothal with a divorce when the angel appeared with a message from God.

*I wonder, Lord, at your amazing and, frankly, controversial birth. Amen.*

**Tuesday, December 29 Matthew 2:1-6**

*“The newborn king of the Jews”*

Matthew ended chapter 1 with Jesus being born and named. As chapter 2 opens, the narrative time frame has jumped ahead upwards of two years. Now this baby is a child, and the family is living in a house in Bethlehem, when wise men from the east arrive in Jerusalem seeking to worship the one born king of the Jews.

Herod knows he is not the rightful heir to the Davidic kingdom; he has usurped the throne by aligning himself with Rome and being appointed king by Caesar. So, with the wise men’s announcement that they are seeking the one born king of the Jews, he becomes deeply disturbed. Not only is Herod disturbed at the arrival of the wise men, but so also are the religious and political leaders in Jerusalem. They have aligned themselves with Herod and if his power base is threatened, so is theirs. One would expect the religious leadership to celebrate the report of the birth of the king of Israel, but the arrival of the true king of the Jews presents a threat to their corrupt leadership.

*You are my king, Lord, and your rule overthrows that of the corrupt. Amen.*

**Wednesday, December 30 Matthew 2:7-12**

*“They bowed down and worshipped him”*

Herod secretly brings in the wise men and asks when the star had appeared to them. The need for secrecy may have been to keep the Jews who were hoping for the arrival of the Messiah from warning the wise men of Herod’s intent to kill the child. Herod is confident he has deceived the wise men, because he does not send an escort with them to Bethlehem, and he has no reason to doubt that they will follow through and return to tell him the child’s whereabouts. It is divine intervention that will spoil his plans.

The star that led them to Palestine now reappears and leads the wise men the six miles south to the child in Bethlehem. The purpose of their journey to see the child is accomplished as they bow down and worship him. When approaching royalty or persons of high status, gifts were often brought, the value of which demonstrated the nature of the one being honored. Their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh were indeed gifts worthy of a king. Warned in a dream, they journey back to their own country without first returning to Herod.

*I worship you, Lord, and I offer you the gift of my life. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

December 28 – January 2

Wise Men

**Thursday, December 31 Matthew 2:13-18**

*“An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph”*

Once again Joseph receives a message from an angel in a dream, this time instructing him to take the child Jesus and his mother and flee into Egypt. The instruction is very explicit that Herod would seek to take the child’s life and that they were to stay in Egypt until God gave them the next word of direction. The flight to Egypt was not especially unusual for a Jewish family. Through the history of Israel, in numerous times of persecution, Jewish people sought refuge in Egypt. In every major city in Egypt there was a colony of Jews. As a consequence, Joseph and Mary would have had no problem finding associations amidst their own people for the brief period of living there.

We are told that Herod felt tricked by the wise men. Having inquired of the magi as to when they had first seen the star and begun their journey, in his anger he concluded that he needed to kill all the male children the age of two years and under in order to ensure that any child born to be king would now be dead.

*Human wickedness, Lord, will not ruin your plan for our salvation. Amen.*

**Friday, January 1 Matthew 2:19-23**

*“So they went and lived in a town called Nazareth”*

Once again, divine instructions led Joseph, and he took Jesus and his mother, Mary, and returned to Israel. Again, he was instructed by God in a dream not to stay in Judea, and he journeyed on to Galilee. Upon Herod’s death, the kingdom he had ruled was divided into three parts, one for each of his sons. Judea was left to Archelaus, Galilee was left to Herod Antipas, and the northeast region beyond the Jordan River was left to Philip. While Archelaus continued the pattern of violence of his father, Herod Antipas reigned with a more tolerant and peaceful authority.

Nazareth was a town located on the trade routes of the Middle East. The great western road led to the Mediterranean Sea where ships came and went from Rome, and “the way of the south” carried the huge trade caravans from Damascus in the north to Egypt in the south. Jesus’ boyhood days would have exposed him to the cultures and philosophies of people of all nations. Later, he would preach the good news of God’s grace, the gospel for all the world.

*As did Joseph, Lord, may I obey your directions for my life. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 2 Luke 2:41-52**

*“I must be in my Father’s house”*

While this is not an infancy story, it is still a part of the introduction to Jesus that Luke gives us. Here, Jesus gives us his initial testimony to himself. The annual trip for the Passover was one of the highlights of the Jewish year, one of three annual festivals that were celebrated in the capital. Most families that lived some distance from Jerusalem, such as Jesus’ parents, went to only one feast a year. The trip from Nazareth normally took three days, and people from the same village traveled together for both companionship and protection.

On this particular occasion, Jesus remains behind in Jerusalem. Only after a day’s travel do his parents discover he is not with the group. They return to Jerusalem and discover Jesus among the teachers in the temple, listening to them, asking questions, and giving reply. Even at this young age Jesus has amazing knowledge of the things of God. In response to his mother’s frustrated question, Jesus declares: “I must be in my Father’s house.” The reference to God as his Father infers that it is an intimate personal relationship with God that is governing his life.

*You are my Father, Lord, and being your child is the bedrock of my life. Amen.*