*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

December 19 - 24

“The Birth of Jesus”

**Monday, December 19 Matthew 1:18-19**

*“She was found to be with child”*

 As was the custom for young people anticipating marriage, Joseph and Mary were pledged to each other in a period of betrothal through a formal prenuptial agreement before witnesses. This was a legally binding contract, and it could only be broken by a formal process of divorce.

 Matthew states simply that during this period of betrothal and while Mary was still a virgin, the child was conceived through the Holy Spirit. Without knowing of the supernatural origin of the conception, Joseph naturally thinks that Mary has committed adultery. As a righteous man it was appropriate for him to obtain a certificate of divorce. This is the normal sense of “righteous” in the Old Testament – right behavior according to the law. Joseph could seek a public divorce, but then she would be subject to public disgrace as an adulteress. Instead, he chooses to divorce her privately (two or three witnesses), an act acceptable under the law. Thus, Joseph was able to maintain his personal righteousness according to the law and yet save Mary from being publicly shamed. The character and compassion of Joseph is revealed in this situation.

*When I believe I have been wronged, Lord, I will not seek revenge. Amen.*

**Tuesday, December 20 Matthew 1:20-25**

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

 Into Joseph’s dilemma comes the stunning appearance of the angel of the Lord who announces in a dream to Joseph the miraculous conception of the child. The angelic appearance provides the guidance Joseph needs. The angel addresses Joseph as “son of David,” the only time in Matthew’s Gospel that the expression is used of anyone other than Jesus. The regal line of King David will now be tested as Joseph is called to play a significant role in the arrival of the Davidic Messiah.

 Matthew informs us that the events of Jesus’ miraculous conception fulfill a prophecy from the Lord through the prophet Isaiah. When Joseph awakes from his sleep, he is obedient to the angel’s directive and marries Mary. At the conclusion of the marriage ceremony, Joseph takes Mary home to live with him as a fully married couple, except he abstains from sexual intercourse with her until after Jesus is born. After his birth, continuing his obedience to the angel’s instruction, Joseph names his son Jesus.

*May I be as obedient to your Word, Lord, as was Joseph. Amen.*

**Wednesday, December 21 Luke 2:1-7**

*“The Birth of Jesus”*

 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 will change the course of humanity’s relationship with God. 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. 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. Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem, “the town of David,” because of Joseph’s lineage in the family. The birth takes place in a stable, demonstrated by his being laid in a manger, an animal’s feeding trough. They are in this strange birthing room “because there was no room for them at the inn.” Jesus has entered the world in as unexciting a way as possible; the agent of God has arrived without pretense.

*Your birth, Lord, is a wonderful mix of the miraculous and the ordinary. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

December 19 - 24

“The Birth of Jesus”

**Thursday, December 22 Luke 2:8-12**

*“Good news”*

 The testimony to Jesus’ birth from the angelic host to shepherds is significant. Creation has no more exalted beings than angels, and there 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 family affair. This announcement of “good news of great joy” is for “all the people” indicating that God desires to speak to every person about the coming of Jesus.

 The announcement by an unnamed angel is the third such announcement in the infancy material (see the announcement to Zechariah in Luke 1:5-25, and to Mary in Luke 1:26-38). The narrative follows a standard form: appearance (v. 9a), fear (v. 9b), a “do not be afraid” remark (vv. 10-11), and the announcement of a verifying sign (v. 12). The angelic revelation of a sign implies that the angel wanted the shepherds to go and see the child for themselves. As with all prophetic declarations of a sign, a visible physical reality confirms the announcement.

*The sign of your love for us, Lord, is that you came to earth as one of us. Amen.*

**Friday, December 23 Luke 2:13-15**

*“Praising God”*

 As if the announcement were not enough, the heavenly host joins the angel and praises God, giving him honor for what is taking place. The angels’ refrain serves as a commentary on the flow of events. Glory should be given to God in the most exalted of ways, while on earth one should see that this child means peace for those “on whom his favor rests.” The picture of being a person of God’s favor was a Jewish way of saying that someone was numbered among God’s chosen people. This remark makes it clear that salvation and its fullness are not automatic for everyone. Only those who respond to God’s grace and follow the path laid out by the Son will experience the peace into which that path leads. Jesus comes for all, but not all respond to and benefit from his coming.

 The departure of the angelic host leaves the shepherds to consider the meaning of all they have seen and heard. They decide to go to Bethlehem in order to see the sign of which they have been told by the Lord through his messenger.

*I praise you, Lord, that by believing in you I might experience the peace of God. Amen.*

**Saturday, December 24 Luke 2:16-20**

*“The shepherds told everyone what had happened”*

 The announcement of the sign leads the shepherds not only to follow where God has led them, but also to share what God has shown them when they arrive to see God’s word come to pass. So also we should follow where God leads and with grace testify to his direction in our lives. When God guides us through a trial, or a decision involving our spouse, our children or grandchildren, or our future, we should be prepared to speak about how he has impacted our lives. Often we share this with fellow friends in the church, but a word to anyone who might listen should not be avoided.

 The variety of reactions to the birth of Jesus noted here should not surprise us. People respond to him differently. Some are amazed, but do not engage him at any deeper level. Others offer praise, while others ponder what Jesus means. There is no doubt that in this passage Mary and the shepherds are the central exemplary characters, reflecting the testimony that should characterized the people of God.

*We can count on you, Lord, for it will always be “just as the angel had told them.” Amen.*