*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

December 26 - 31

“The Early Life of Jesus”

**Monday, December 26 Matthew 2:1-12**

*“Jesus was born in Bethlehem”*

 Ambition, strength, and strategy are characteristics that we expect to find in those successful in politics, the military, entertainment, sports, or business. God can, and has, used those characteristics in his people throughout history as he has brought about his will on earth. However, the unexpectedness of the infancy account signals to us that God will turn those characteristics upside down as he initiates this crucial stage of salvation history.

 The picture that Matthew paints of the arrival of Jesus is breathtaking in its potential but alarming in its vulnerability. Jesus is King of the Jews, Messiah, and Ruler, who will shepherd his people Israel. Yet Jesus is just a little child. He has no royal courtiers to care for him, no military guard to defend him. He has no palace or army. In fact, this vulnerable, humble little claimant to Israel’s throne will be threatened by the conniving tyrant, Herod. Who will care for the little future king? Who will protect him? How can he possible survive to bring about those roles prophesied for him? The theme that underlies all of these events is that God is in control.

*Your hand, Father, was on every event that transpired in the life of your Son. Amen.*

**Tuesday, December 27 Matthew 2:13-23**

*“Escape to Egypt – return to Nazareth”*

 Once the Magi escaped safely, the angel of the Lord again appears in a dream to warn Joseph about Herod’s scheme to murder the child. The angel makes explicit what has been implicit in the narrative to this point – Herod’s paranoiac grasp of the throne drives him to attempt to kill the infant king of the Jews. The angel instructs Joseph how he is to care for the child and mother, and Joseph is again immediately obedient, escaping to Egypt by night with Mary and Jesus.

 Matthew returns to narrating the historical incidents surrounding the hideous murder of the infants at Bethlehem by Herod. Based on his earlier query of the Magi about the time of the appearing of the star, he orders all the boys in Bethlehem who were born within the two-year time period to be killed. Not long after ordering the grisly murder, Herod becomes deathly ill and dies at the age of sixty-nine. Upon his death, God speaks again to Joseph in a series of two dreams, resulting in the young family settling in Nazareth of Galilee.

*Evil men commit evil deeds, Lord, but your light continues to shine in the darkness. Amen.*

**Wednesday, December 28 Luke 2:21-24**

*“Jesus’ circumcision, naming, and dedication”*

 Jesus is circumcised according to the Law of Moses (Genesis 17:11-13) as any eight-day old Jewish boy would be and is officially given the name, “Jesus.” This probably took place in Bethlehem where he was born. The journey of Jesus’ parents to the temple in Jerusalem in vv. 22-24 combines three separate ceremonies as recorded in God’s law: the purification of a woman forty days after the birth of a child, the presentation of the firstborn to God, and the dedication of the firstborn into the Lord’s service. Though this dedication to service is like many others that took place in Israel for centuries, this one is unique because of the call of this child.

 The rite of purification involved the offering of a burnt sacrifice and sin offering. The mention of turtledoves indicates that Joseph and Mary utilized the offering of the poor. The sacrifice associated with this rite indicates how seriously Judaism took approaching God in worship and how prepared a heart and soul one should have as they addressed God.

*Yours were parents of faith, Lord; like them, I will follow God’s law. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

December 26 - 31

“The Early Life of Jesus”

**Thursday, December 29 Luke 2:25-35**

*“The prophecy of Simeon”*

 As Joseph and Mary came to the temple, they met a pious old man, Simeon. We are told that he was righteous and devout. Whereas the shepherds symbolized the average person on the street, Simeon represents the testimony of a wise elder who has walked with God. Part of his wisdom is seen in that he is looking for the hope the nation, the consummation of God’s promise – the Messiah who would come and rescue Israel. Saints in touch with God’s heart often await expectantly the completion of God’s promise. This revered saint is led to see what the arrival of this child means.

 The Spirit, the source of all revelation and testimony, has told him that before he passes away, he will see the Lord’s Messiah. Therefore, when the child Jesus arrives, he is there and is led by God to offer a note of praise. In that song, which includes some prediction, not all the notes are happy, for the career of the Christ, though glorious, is not absent of trial and disappointment. Once again, Luke has emphasized how God has performed his word.

*In touch with your heart, Lord, I eagerly await your promised return. Amen.*

**Friday, December 30 Luke 2:36-40**

*“The prophecy of Anna”*

 The second prophetic witness in this section of Luke is Anna. She is briefly introduced and her career summarized. She is now very old, having served God faithfully with worship, prayer, and fasting for years, ever since her husband had died after only seven years of marriage. Sometimes our most productive years in spiritual service for God come after our most productive years of earthy toil. Upon becoming a widow, she has given herself full-time to a ministry of serving God.

 Like Simeon, she hopes for the rescue of Jerusalem and tells others that the baby Jesus is a reason for praising and thanking God. While her words are not recorded in Luke, her testimony makes everyone aware that God is doing something special in this child. Those who are faithful to God will hear her report and share in her praise. Mary and Joseph return home after these days of worship and set about raising their child, who grows strong.

*Regardless of my earthly work, Lord, may I always be involved in yours. Amen.*

**Saturday, December 31 Luke 2:41-52**

*“Jesus aged 12, in Jerusalem”*

 The annual trip for the Passover was one of the highlights of the Jewish year, one of three annual festivals that were celebrated in Jerusalem. 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, with the people travelling in caravans for 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. By the time they find their son, he has been missing for three days. They 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. A frustrated Mary asks her young adolescent how he could have behaved this way. Jesus’ reply is just as direct: “I must be in my Father’s house.” The temple was not only a place of worship, but was also a place of teaching. Jesus has a call to instruct the nation. Though he is twelve now, a day is coming when this will be his priority.

*Teach me, Lord, that I may know the way of God. Amen.*