

Confidence in Providence

January 8 – Matthew 2:1-23

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Day 8 – 357 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

The wise men came to visit Jesus. While these unnumbered magi always end up in the manger scene at Christmas time, they did not arrive until long after Jesus' birth (v.11, 16). The men were not kings but advisers, philosophers, and astrologers, which explains why they were watching the conspicuous star (Dan. 5:11).

Though the magi were excited to find the newborn king of the Jews (v.2), their search unnerved King Herod and his family (v.3). But why? The magi assumed that Herod had a new son, but Herod was not a Jew but an Edomite, a descendant of Esau, appointed by Rome. In other words, he was not the rightful king in the line of David. So, when the wise men announced a new rightful king had been born, Herod felt threatened, and in his paranoia, he made life miserable for his family and all Jerusalem (v.3). That's why Herod later ordered the death of the baby boys in Bethlehem (v.16).

When the wise men found Jesus in Bethlehem, we witness a beautiful scene in which they "fell to the ground and worshiped Him" (v.11). Gentiles (non-Jews), who feared God and who were familiar with the prophets, worshiped Jesus? This was highly unusual. But remember, Christ the Savior would be for all people, men (Simeon) and women (Anna), rich (magi) and poor (shepherds), and Jews and Gentiles. Their gifts to Jesus were appropriate – gold for a king, and frankincense and myrrh, which were spices used in worship and burial (Jn. 19:39, 40).

With the Lord's help, Herod's evil plan was revealed, and Joseph took his family to Egypt. There are many connections between Jesus and Moses. Both were from Egypt. They escaped death as an infant, spent time in the desert (in increments of 40), saved women at a well, turned water into another substance, led people out of bondage into a "promise land," and more. Moses was a type or foreshadowing of Christ.

Daily Reflection

While this story is very familiar and bookends the Christmas narrative, did you notice all the ways in which God intervened to ensure that everything happened just as He planned? The entire nativity story is filled with signs of God's **sovereignty** (control) and **providence** (provision in advance, intentionality, and purpose). He sent angels with messages, He spoke to people in dreams, and He guided men with a star. All these things were fulfillments of ancient prophecy, promises and predictions He made long ago.

What do these events tell us about God?

What encouragement do you find in this story?
How can you apply these truths to your life?

God is good. He's in control, and **He is able to accomplish all that He wills** for His purposes.

Identity and Mission

January 9 – Luke 2:41-52

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Day 9 – 356 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus and His parents made a trip to Jerusalem to celebrate the annual Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, one of the three festivals in which all males were to appear before the Lord (Ex. 23:14-17; 34:23). Typically, families traveled together in caravans, and as Jerusalem would've been packed with people, there was confusion, or a breakdown in communication, between Mary and Joseph as to where Jesus was when they left. Can you imagine the panic that set in when they did not find Him in the group? They were entrusted with the Son of God yet lost Him in the city!

We do not know for sure if the three days of Jesus' "absence" were foreshadowing His death and resurrection, but Mary and Joseph were quite perplexed when they found Him. There is a hint of frustration in Mary's words, "Son, why have you treated us this way? Your father and I have been anxiously looking for you" (v.48).

But Jesus' response reveals one of the reasons why Luke included this story in His account. "Didn't you know that I had to be in My Father's house," He said (v.49). Though Joseph was Jesus' earthly father, here Jesus referred to His heavenly Father, which is evidence that even at a young age, Jesus knew His identity and mission. Furthermore, we see evidence of Jesus' maturity and godly wisdom, as He was listening to and questioning the religious teachers, and "all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers" (v.46, 47).

Another reason that Luke included this story in his account was that Jesus was a dutiful son who honored His earthly parents. He wrote that Jesus "continued in submission to them" (v.51), meaning that He obeyed their instructions, thus keeping the fifth commandment to honor one's father and mother. In other words, Luke was providing evidence of Jesus' sinlessness and fulfillment of the law.

Next, Luke skipped to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, so we know very little of His upbringing. However, he wrote, "Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (v.52). While Jesus was fully God, He was also human, and He naturally developed in stages as any other person would.

Daily Reflection

Today, I focused on the thought that **Jesus knew His identity and mission at such an early age**. I can't say that I knew who I was and what I was supposed to be doing until later in life.

What about you? Who are you (identity), and what are you to be doing in life (mission)? When did you come to these conclusions?

The Apostle Paul provides some help with our identity and mission. "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us..." (2 Cor. 5:20). **Your identity greatly influences your purpose in life**. Are you living life in light of your identity? Are you fulfilling your life's mission and purpose?

Christian in Name Only

January 10 – Mark 1:2-8; Matthew 3:1-12; Luke 3:1-18

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Day 10 – 355 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

John the Baptist began his ministry of “preparing the way for the Lord,” just as the prophets foretold (*Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1*). He was a bit of a throwback to the Old Testament, as he lived in the wild, dressed in a rough manner, and ate insects. It is likely that John was a member of the Essenes who lived near the Dead Sea. The Essenes were known for baptism, which is why John was called “the Baptist.”

However, John’s baptism did not save anyone. He only baptized people as a sign that they had repented of their sins and were ready for forgiveness or salvation, which Jesus would provide when He arrived (*Lk. 3:3*). In fact, John said, “I baptize you with water, but He (Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (*Mk. 1:8; Acts 1:4, 5; 2:33*). John convicted people of their sins, giving them the bad news, so that they would be ready for the good news of Jesus, that of the forgiveness of their sins.

John also spoke of Jesus baptizing with fire, a subtle reference to the coming judgment of God (*Matt. 3:11; Mal. 3:2, 3; 4:1*). He gives an illustration of the Messiah “holding a winnowing fork (pitchfork), clearing His threshing floor” (*Matt. 3:12*). Farmers used winnowing forks to throw wheat in the air so that the wind would separate the grain from the chaff or dust. John was prophesying of the coming judgment, when God would separate those who are His from those who are not (chaff). “He will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire” (*v.12*).

John’s sharpest criticism was aimed at the religious leaders, known as Pharisees and Sadducees. Pharisees were experts in the law of Moses and often prided themselves on their piety or self-righteousness. Sadducees were priests who managed the work of the Temple and acted as mediators between God and the people. However, because of their actions, they often got in the way and led people astray.

Daily Reflection

John also challenged people to “**bear fruit in keeping with repentance**” (*Matt. 3:8; Lk. 3:8*). To repent means to turn away from your sin. In other words, John urged people to prove the sincerity of their repentance by how they lived. But what shall we do, they asked? Re-read his suggestions in *Luke 3:10-14*, then summarize them into character qualities. Write them here.

John pointed out that just being a Jew or a “son of Abraham” does not please God (*Lk. 3:8*). Just being “religious” does not honor Him either. **We must be more than Christian in name only.** Often, our words and actions betray that name. What about you? Do your actions demonstrate that you are more than a name? How does your life exhibit fruit in keeping with repentance?

If your life is bearing rotten fruit, what does that tell you about your roots? Perhaps you have not really repented of your sin and given your life to Christ. Do it today.

A Picture of Salvation

January 11 – Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21, 22

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Day 11 – 354 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

The gospels skipped 18 years of Jesus' life to record the next significant event — His baptism. What exactly is baptism? The English word baptism was derived from the Greek word *baptizo*, meaning "to dip, to plunge, to immerse, or to submerge in water." Mark wrote that Jesus "came up out from the water" (1:9; see also *Matt. 3:16*). John baptized people as a sign of repentance, in preparation for the forgiveness of their sins (*Mk. 1:4*).

Why, then, was Jesus baptized when He had no need for repentance of sin? John recognized this predicament and argued that Jesus should baptize him (*Matt. 3:14*), but Jesus convinced John that His baptism would "fulfill all righteousness" (v.15). What does that mean?

Jesus' baptism was significant for several reasons. First, Jesus was affirming John's role as the forerunner to the Messiah (*Mk. 1:2-4*). Second, Jesus' baptism identified Him as the Messiah, the Promised or Chosen One. Third, though Jesus had no sins of His own, His baptism symbolized the purpose of His life and ministry — to exchange His righteousness for our sinfulness (*2 Cor. 5:21*). Fourth, Jesus' baptism prepared Him for His role as our Great High Priest (*Ex. 29:1, 4; Lev. 8:6-9; Heb. 4:14*). Next, baptism foreshadowed His death and resurrection (*Lk. 12:50*). Finally, Jesus' baptism set an example for His followers, whom He later commanded to be baptized (*Matt. 28:19*).

Two other significant moments occurred on this occasion. "The heavens opened, and the Spirit of God descended like a dove and lighted on Jesus" (*Matt. 3:16*), signaling that Jesus was anointed by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit (*Lk. 4:1; Acts 10:38*). Then, God the Father identified Jesus as His Son, in whom He was pleased (*Matt. 3:17*). Here, we see confirmation of our triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (*Isa. 61:1*).

Daily Reflection

Baptism is one of two ordinances that Jesus instituted for the church (the Lord's Supper is the other one). Baptism is not only an act of obedience to Christ's command, but it is also a public declaration of our conversion, **an external reflection of an internal change**, that of the forgiveness of our sin. We are baptized into the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and now walk in newness of life (*Rom. 6:3, 4*).

However, though our baptism is with water, our baptism as Christians is different than John's baptism. John baptized people before salvation, as a symbol of repentance, but we are baptized after salvation (*Acts 2:41; 8:35, 36; 16:14, 15*). Also, **baptism is not a requirement for salvation**, a work that we must perform to please God. Salvation is through faith in Christ alone, and baptism is a profession of that faith.

Have you been scripturally baptized? If so, recount the details of that special occasion. If not, what is keeping you from obeying the Lord?

Tackling Temptation

January 12 – Mark 1:12, 13; Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-15

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Day 12 – 353 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

The Holy Spirit led Jesus to the wilderness where Satan tempted Him. For Jesus to be the mediator between God and man, He had to fully represent both. As a human, Jesus had to be tempted in all things, as we are. But to prove His deity and to be the perfect sin sacrifice acceptable to God, Jesus had to be sinless. Thus, Jesus had to endure temptation without giving into it (*Heb. 4:15*).

Furthermore, as mankind's representative, Jesus is like Adam. But, where Adam failed in giving into temptation, Jesus would succeed by resisting temptation. Thus, He would be the better Adam and give us life rather than death (*Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:45*).

Also, notice the similarities between Jesus and Israel. Israel was led into the wilderness for 40 years without bread (except for manna) and failed the temptations in the desert. In a sense, Jesus is the better "Israel," obedient to God in all things and able to provide the way to a perfect and permanent Promise Land (heaven).

The three temptations recorded here are not exhaustive (meaning there were more), but they represent the categories of our temptation. Those categories are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life (*1 Jn. 2:15, 16*). As Jesus was hungry, Satan tempted Him to satisfy His hunger by turning stones into bread (lust of the flesh). Satan also tempted Jesus with the power and wealth of earthly kingdoms (lust of the eyes). Finally, Satan tempted Jesus to impress others and make a name for Himself (boastful pride of life).

We should be thankful that Jesus was tempted, but we should be more thankful that He resisted temptation. By being tempted, He relates to us in our temptations (*Heb. 2:18*), but by keeping free from sin, Jesus is the only sinless sacrifice acceptable to God on our behalf.

Daily Reflection

Temptation is not one of those things we like to talk about, but it's necessary because we are human and susceptible to temptation and sin. It's important to note that **temptation itself is not a sin**. It is when we give in to temptation that it becomes sin (*Jas. 1:14, 15*).

Notice also that Satan tempted Jesus with natural desires, but he used Scripture to justify conceding to the temptation. Just as he did with Eve, **Satan twists God's words to get us to take the bait**. But Jesus didn't take the bait, rather he saw through the lie and confronted Satan with the truth.

Resisting temptation is difficult but not impossible. What help is found in these verses?

Hebrews 2:18 _____

1 Corinthians 10:13 _____

Galatians 5:16, 17 _____

1 John 3:5-10 _____

Thank God that **Jesus won the battle over sin and temptation**. Ask Him to help you with both.

The Voice

January 13 – John 1:19-34

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Day 13 – 352 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Religious leaders attempted to discover John the Baptist's identity. As astute students of the Scriptures, these men were aware of the ancient prophecies and wondered how John might figure into them.

First, they asked John if he were the Messiah, the Chosen One (*Gen. 3:15*), for whom they were waiting to redeem them. John denied it. Second, they asked John if he were Elijah, who was to come before the Messiah (*Mal. 4:5, 6*). Again, John said no. Finally, they asked John if he were the Prophet of whom Moses spoke (*Deut. 18:15*). For the third time, John answered no.

Since John denied their three presumptions, the religious leaders asked John to identify himself. He responded by quoting *Isaiah 40:3*, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'"

John was correct in not claiming to be the Prophet or the Messiah. That person was Jesus, whom He pointed out as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," when He arrived on the scene (v.29). By pointing out the Messiah, John was, in a sense, fulfilling the role of Elijah who was to come before the Messiah, the foretold forerunner. In fact, the angel told John's father that he would go before the Messiah "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (*Lk. 1:17*). Furthermore, Jesus, who was the Prophet Moses mentioned (*Jn. 1:45*), later identified John as Elijah (*Matt. 11:14; Mk. 9:13*). So, was John or Jesus wrong here? No, both men were right. Though John was not Elijah in the flesh (as he said), he played the role of Elijah in identifying the Messiah.

An interesting sidenote here is that only priests could present a lamb to be sacrificed for sin (*Ex. 30; Lev. 23; Num. 6*). For John to present Jesus

as the Lamb of God he would have to be a priest. While John was not a priest by occupation, he was a descendant of priests by both his father and mother (*Lk. 1:5*), meaning John was eligible to present the Lamb of God.

Daily Reflection

In 2011, one of America's favorite reality shows, **The Voice**, aired for the first time. The Voice is a live competition where a panel of experts listens to singers who are "diamonds in the rough." The singers hope to make a name for themselves and secure their place in music history.

John the Baptist had three chances to identify himself as the one to fulfill three well-known prophecies, but he was a humble man, who knew his role, and chose instead to call himself "the voice" preparing the way for the Lord.

In a sense, we are to be like John the Baptist. God has given us a voice, not to make a name for ourselves but to point others to Christ. How are you using your "stage" or platform and your voice to glorify God and make much of Jesus?

God has given you a voice. Make sure to use it for Him.

Come and See

January 14 – John 1:35-51

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 14 – 351 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus began His public ministry by selecting five of His first disciples – John, Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael. John was the only person not specifically mentioned, but he is likely the second disciple that left John the Baptist to follow Jesus (v.37). In his humility, John did not like to mention himself in his gospel account.

A subtle transition takes place here as the focus moves from John the Baptist to Jesus. At first, it was about John (v.15-28), then John and Jesus (v.29-34), then Jesus and John (v.35-42), and finally Jesus alone (v.43-51). Once again, John the Baptist fulfilled his mission to point others to the Messiah, “the Lamb of God” (v.36).

We might expect the gathering of Jesus’ first disciples or followers to be supernatural or miraculous but notice that **each of them came to Jesus by simple word of mouth**. One person told another. John and Andrew followed Jesus because John the Baptist told them about Him. Then, Andrew told his brother Simon (Peter). Philip told his friend Nathanael, and so on.

In the process of gathering disciples, we immediately see glimpses of Christ’s divinity, His supernatural knowledge, wisdom, and foresight. For example, when Jesus first met Simon, He not only knew His name, but He changed it to Cephas or Peter (in the Greek), meaning “rock.” Jesus immediately impacted Peter’s trajectory and prepared him for his future ministry.

Another example of Jesus’ deity is finding Philip and Nathanael. Jesus not only knew that these men would be His disciples, but He also knew where to find them. He “purposed to go into Galilee to find Philip” (v.43), and He saw Nathanael under a fig tree before they ever met (v.48). Perhaps Nathanael had been pondering or praying, but Jesus revealed to him a private moment that no one else could have known.

Finally, Jesus exhibits His deity by recalling an Old Testament dream of Jacob’s ladder (*Gen. 28:12*) and relating it to Himself as the Messiah. “You will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (v.51). Jesus was revealing that He alone can and will grant men access to heaven.

Daily Reflection

The phrase that caught my attention today was “**come and see**.” When the two disciples asked Jesus where He was staying, He responded by saying, “Come and see” (v.39). When Nathanael said to Philip, “Can anything good come from Nazareth,” Philip simply said, “Come and see” (v.46). Perhaps even when Andrew told Simon that he had found the Messiah, he may have said, “Come and see.”

So often we are intimidated when it comes to sharing the gospel with others. We put pressure on ourselves to say the right words. We are worried about not having the answers to possible questions or objections. We fret over being rejected or humiliated. That is the enemy discouraging us from telling others about the greatest news in history.

In truth, there is no reason for pressure, for worry, for intimidation, or for fear. There is no reason to argue, debate, or say the right things. **All we must do is say, “Come and see.”** Simply introduce people to Jesus. He will do the rest.

John the Baptist told his acquaintances. Andrew told a family member, and Philip told a friend. Who are the people in your life right now that you could introduce to Jesus? Pray about saying to them, “**Come and see**.” The Lord will take it from there.