

The Light of Men

January 1 – Mark 1:1; John 1:1-18

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Day 1 – 364 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We opened the New Testament with those glorious words, "Here begins the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God" (*Mk. 1:1*). Why are those words so glorious?

First, it had been 400 years since God had spoken to anyone, and now the silence was broken. Second, the time had finally come for God to fulfill the multitude of Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. Third, people had felt the weight of the curse of the Fall since the beginning, and they eagerly awaited their deliverance. They were aware of their sin and separation from God. That was the bad news, and they were ready for some good news. Finally, the world was trapped in spiritual darkness and was waiting for the hope of light.

Throughout the Bible, there is a theme of light and darkness. It starts in the beginning, when the earth was cloaked in darkness and God said, "Let there be light" (*Gen. 1:2, 3*). After the Fall, mankind was enslaved in spiritual darkness, but God promised to send someone who would reverse the curse and redeem fallen men (*Gen. 3:15*). One day, "The people who walked in darkness would see a great light" (*Isa. 9:2*).

In His timing and in His way, **God sent forth His Son to be the Light of men**, to offer the gift of salvation. "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God..." (*Jn. 1:12*). "He rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son which dwells in brilliant light (*Col. 1:13; 1 Tim. 6:16*).

John the Baptist had the privilege of telling everyone about the Light, pointing Him out to the people in his day (*Jn. 1:8, 15*). God's "grace and truth," he said, "were realized through Jesus Christ" (*v.17*). This Light still sets people free from spiritual darkness, and it is our privilege to point Him out to others today.

Daily Reflection

As you start your journey through the New Testament, take a moment to reflect on your salvation experience. Describe your personal transformation from darkness into light. How did it happen? Who told you about Christ?

As one who is living in the light of the Gospel, you have the privilege of sharing that hope with others. How are you doing? How do your words and walk point others to the Light?

Thank God today for the Light of men.

A Tree Full of Rotten Apples

January 2 – Luke 1:1-4; Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23b-38

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Day 2 – 363 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Both Matthew and Luke provided a genealogy of Jesus. Typically, when we see long lists of difficult names, we skip over them and move on to the action, but we must not discount the importance of such historical details. If Jesus is the Messiah, the “Anointed or Chosen One” whom God promised to send to redeem fallen men, then His family tree is vital to the story.

After the serpent led a rebellion against God in the Garden of Eden, God prophesied that one day a man would be born who would crush the devil’s works and reverse the curse of sin (*Gen. 3:15*). This promise was the first of many regarding the salvation of men through this special person, the Chosen Seed. Thus, these records of Matthew and Luke are connecting the dots and revealing the identity of this Savior.

While the genealogies are similar, they are not the same. Matthew highlighted Joseph’s family tree, while Luke highlighted Mary’s. What specifically are we looking for in these genealogies? First, if Jesus was a man (human), he must be traced back to Adam (*Lk. 3:38*). Second, if Jesus was a Jew, He must be traced back to Abraham (*v.34; Matt. 1:1, 2*); and third, if Jesus was a king, He must be traced back to David (*v.31; Matt. 1:1, 6*).

Regarding David, God promised an everlasting throne and kingdom through his descendants (*2 Sam. 7:16*). Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise. Jesus is a descendant and legal heir of David through both the lineage of Mary and Joseph. Furthermore, since Jesus is God in the flesh, His reign and kingdom are everlasting.

The Lord met every Old Testament requirement, and Matthew and Luke wanted us to know. Such detailed records should give us confidence in God’s superintendence of Scripture, the authority and sufficiency of His Word, and the miraculous gift of Christ our Savior.

Daily Reflection

If we were to study the individuals in the line of Christ, we would discover that each of them fell short of the glory of God. Simply put, Jesus’ family tree was full of rotten apples. David, for example, committed adultery and murder, then tried to cover them up with a web of deception (*2 Sam. 11*). What about Solomon the idol-worshiper, Rahab the prostitute, Tamar the seductress, and Jacob the deceiver? **Not one person in the line of Christ deserved to be there, yet God used each one for His purposes.**

What does this truth tell you about our God?

How is God’s grace evident in your life? How has He used you for His work despite your past?

Praise God that **He uses imperfect people to accomplish His will.**

Whatever You Want

January 3 – Luke 1:5-38

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Day 3 – 362 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We were introduced to two important women — Elizabeth and Mary — and two miraculous conceptions. Though she was very old and without child, Elizabeth was given the news that she would bear a son, the forerunner of the Messiah. “He will precede the coming of the Lord, preparing the way for His arrival” (*Lk. 1:15-17 NLT*). She was to name him John.

Mary, though she was a virgin, was told that she would also bear a son. She was to call Him Jesus. “He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord will give Him the throne of His ancestor David; and He will reign over Israel forever. His kingdom will never end! The baby born to you will be holy, and He will be called the Son of God” (*v.26-33*).

As confirmation of the angel’s promise to Mary, she was told about Elizabeth’s pregnancy. She soon traveled to Judea to see if it were true. Two pregnancies and two miracles, how can this be? No problem. Can the One who created everything not also create life in a mother’s womb? God is all-powerful, able to do all that He chooses. “Nothing is impossible with Him,” the angel told Mary (*v.37*).

The virgin birth is significant for several reasons. First, it could only be achieved by God’s power and divine intervention. Virgins don’t have babies. Mary’s pregnancy was a supernatural occurrence. Second, since Mary was a virgin and the baby was conceived by the Holy Spirit, then Jesus was not corrupted by the sinful seed of man. He was the holy Son of God, having no sinful nature. Third, since He was conceived by the Spirit but born of a woman, Jesus is both God and man in one person. Finally, as the Godman, Jesus is the only person eligible to fulfill the role of mediator between God and mankind (*1 Tim. 2:5*). Mediators must represent both sides of a conflict. Only Jesus could stand in the gap and reconcile both parties.

Daily Reflection

I love Mary’s response to the angel’s news. She said, “I am the Lord’s servant, and **I am willing to accept whatever He wants**” (*v.38*). I have no problem saying to God, “I am your servant.” I want to serve Him in whatever capacity that is. However, I have difficulty saying, “I am willing to accept whatever You want.” But these two things cannot be separated. Why not?

Contrast Mary’s response with Zacharias, who said, “How can I know this will happen?” (*v.18*). Why do we struggle sometimes to accept God’s will and ways?

Both ladies were surprised by God with life changes, an unforeseen direction. Are you as faithful as Elizabeth to say, “How kind the Lord is”? Are you as courageous as Mary to say, “**I am willing to accept whatever You want**” for me, even if it’s inconvenient? Can you declare your service to the Lord without accepting His assignments? Are you ready to let the Lord upend your comfortable life to do His work?

You Are Blessed

January 4 – Luke 1:39-56

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Day 4 – 361 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Mary went to visit Elizabeth who was also experiencing a miraculous pregnancy. The Bible says Mary went in a hurry (v.39), perhaps to avoid the embarrassment of having a baby outside of marriage but also to confirm what Gabriel had told her about Elizabeth (v.36, 37). Whatever the reason, the visit was an encouragement to both women.

When Mary arrived, Elizabeth’s baby (John) got very excited, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit (v.41). Even before he was born, John was pointing others to the Messiah! His mother, too, filled with the Spirit, identified Mary as carrying her Lord (v.43). Both incidents had to be Spirit-led because Mary had not yet told anyone of her exciting news.

Upon receiving such an unexpected and overwhelming reception, Mary, too, was very encouraged, marked by her joyful poem or song. Her faith in the angel’s news had been affirmed by Elizabeth who said, “You believed that the Lord would do what He said” (v.45). What a stark contrast to Zacharias, who would’ve also greeted Mary but in silence.

As joy filled her heart, Mary responded with a song sometimes called “The Magnificat,” taken from the first line, “My soul magnifies the Lord” (v.46). Her words are humble and sincere, and they reveal great insights. For example, Mary referred to God as her Savior (v.47), indicating that she knew her own sinfulness and need for redemption. Second, she highlighted the Lord’s regard for the poor and contrite, in which case she could relate (v.48, 51-53). Third, Mary praised God for His mercy and faithfulness, for remembering His people and the promises He had made to them over the years (v.50, 54, 55). Finally, she thanked the Lord, “the Mighty One, for doing great things” for her (v.49).

Daily Reflection

Despite the persecution Mary would endure because of her pregnancy, **she counted herself blessed**. Four times in this passage, either she or Elizabeth used the word “blessed” (v.42, 45, 49). It is easy for us to be distracted or discouraged by our circumstances and overlook God’s blessings. You may be experiencing difficulty in your life, but you can always say, as Mary did, **“God has done great things for me.”**

Take a minute to recount your blessings. What has God done for you that you often overlook?

Like Mary, you have received God’s favor. Don’t allow the busy-ness of life to overshadow the blessings of God. **You can also be like Elizabeth, who used her words to affirm and encourage others.** Mary was blessed to be in Elizabeth’s presence. Can others say that about you?

God Is Good

January 5 – Luke 1:57-80

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Day 5 – 360 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Elizabeth gave birth to a son in her old age. Then, everyone gathered with the family to celebrate what God had done. During that time, there was a bit of a dispute about the child's name. In fact, Luke included five verses about the discussion, so it must have been a big deal. Though the family pressured the couple to name him after his father, Elizabeth and Zacharias were adamant about calling him John. Why?

The obvious reason for naming him John was to obey the angel's command (*Lk. 1:13*). The less obvious reason is the meaning of the name itself. In Hebrew, John means "God is gracious or merciful." In Greek, the name John means, "God is good."

To Elizabeth and Zacharias this name was fitting, as God was good to give them a child in their old age. However, the name was also appropriate for John's mission and purpose, to signal the arrival of the Messiah. John would emphasize the mercy and goodness of God to send the long-awaited Savior.

The other significant event in this passage was that God restored Zacharias' voice (*v.64*), to the astonishment of all those who were there. While the miracle itself is noteworthy, we must not miss the bigger picture. Because of John's miraculous birth, a host of family and friends had gathered to celebrate. Therefore, what a perfect occasion to begin his mission of pointing others to the Savior.

In other words, John's purpose of pointing others to Christ began immediately. However, John's arrival only provided the occasion. The message came from his father, Zacharias, whose "tongue was loosed" to tell everyone there of God's goodness in sending a redeemer. He wasted no time, saying, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people" (*v.68*).

Daily Reflection

God is good, and Zacharias took the opportunity at a great gathering to tell people about Him. Over the years, my wife and I have made it a practice to use holidays, birthdays, and other significant events to remember the goodness of God in our lives. It is easy in those moments to focus our attention on the person or event responsible for the gathering, but it's more important to be reminded of God's great love and provision.

What are ways that you have used (or will start using) events to glorify God for His goodness?

John's name is not the only one with meaning. God is intentional and purposeful with names. They usually reflect an event at the time, one's life purpose, or even a character trait. Do you know the meaning of your name? Write it here.

Thank God for His goodness today and for giving you opportunities to point others to Him. Be intentional to use the events in your life to remember and celebrate what God has done.

A Savior for All

January 6 – Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-20

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Day 6 – 359 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus was born! Certainly, this is one of the most read and most familiar stories in the Bible, but sometimes in our familiarity we miss the details of God’s providence.

Of all the men Mary could’ve married, God arranged for it to be Joseph, a descendant of David (*Matt. 1:20*), which was a fulfillment of prophecy (*2 Sam. 7:16*). Then, an angel confirmed the name of the child. He was to be called Jesus. Jesus means, “God is salvation,” or “God saves.” For short, Jesus was referred to as the Savior, for “He would save His people from their sins” (*Matt. 1:21*).

Then, as God would have it, the Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, ordered that a census be taken, so Joseph had to return to Bethlehem, the city of David, another fulfillment of prophecy (*Mic. 5:2*). While in Bethlehem, Jesus was born and laid in a manger.

His birth announcement was unbelievable, a host of angels proclaiming the good news to shepherds in the area. Their message was glorious, “**Good news of great joy, which will be for all people!**” Today in the city of David, there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (*Lk. 2:10, 11*). The word *Christ* here is Messiah, the long-awaited Promised One.

But why would God’s Son be laid in a manger, and why did He invite shepherds to be the first guests to see Him? Shepherds were seen as outcasts of society, lowly, poor, smelly, and shabby. Yet God’s Son, in all His glory, was laid in a humble manger, a sign that He would be **the Savior of both great and small**. Jesus was also born in the city of David, and David was a shepherd-king. Though Jesus is the King of Kings, He would refer to Himself as the Good Shepherd, once again **the Savior of all**. How fitting it was, then, for shepherds to be the first to tell others of His arrival.

Daily Reflection

The Savior is for everyone. It doesn’t matter who we are – high and mighty, lowly and meek, or somewhere in between. We are all sinners in need of a Savior. What does Jesus’ humble birth tell you about our God?

Just as God saves lowly shepherds, He also uses them to tell others the good news of His Son (*Lk. 2:18, 20*). At times, you may feel like a nobody, out “in the field,” unseen, unimportant, even outcast. But God sees you. He loves you. He sent His Son for you, and He wants you to have a part in telling others His good news. The Savior is for all of us, and all of us can “glorify and praise God,” just as the shepherds did.

Who are the other “shepherds” in your life, those whom people often overlook, whom you could encourage and tell others about the hope and good news of Christ?

Thank God that He is the Savior of all, even you.

Young and Old

January 7 – Luke 2:21-40

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Day 7 – 358 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Amazing things happened when baby Jesus was presented at the Temple. But why were Mary and Joseph at the Temple? They were following the laws of Moses in three ways (v.22-24, 27, 39). First, the baby was circumcised and named after eight days, a symbol of God’s covenant with Abraham (*Gen. 17:10*). Second, Mary had to be purified after giving birth (*Lev. 12:6-8*). Third, as a firstborn male, Jesus had to be dedicated to the Lord (*Ex. 13:2*).

Why are these events recorded in the Bible? Luke was providing evidence that Jesus was a Jew (son of Abraham), rightfully born under the Law, which was very important if Jesus was to be the sinless Savior of His people (*Gal. 4:4*). Luke was also subtly pointing out the social status of Mary and Joseph. The Law of Moses required a lamb and a dove or pigeon to be offered to the Lord, but in case someone was poor, a pair of doves or pigeons would suffice. Mary and Joseph offered two birds, evidence of the poverty in which Jesus was born.

Luke also recorded these events because they provided an opportunity for Simeon and Anna to meet and tell others of the Messiah’s arrival. What’s amazing is that neither Simeon nor Anna knew Mary, Joseph, or Jesus, but the Holy Spirit revealed to them that this child was the Promised One. Notice the descriptions used, “the consolation of Israel” (v.25), God’s “salvation” (v.30), a “light of revelation” (v.32), and “the redemption of Jerusalem” (v.38). Simeon even prophesied about the way people would respond to Jesus, even “piercing His mother’s soul” with His crucifixion (v.34, 35).

People were eager for the arrival of the Messiah, and here He was, a tiny baby. However, since He was a child, they would have to wait for Him to grow (v.40), a subtle way to emphasize the humanity of Jesus. **The God of the universe was now constrained by the hands of time.**

Daily Reflection

Three things stood out to me today. First, I liked Simeon’s statement, “Now I can die in peace because I’ve seen the Messiah” (v.29). Why do you think he would say that? What is it about knowing the Lord that gives us peace about departing this world?

Second, I was struck by the faithful service of Simeon and Anna in their old age, always in the Temple, praising God and speaking His words. How does this encourage or challenge you?

Finally, when Jesus was presented at the Temple, Mary and Joseph must have been so nervous. However, they did what they knew was right, and God honored their actions through the affirmation of Anna and Simeon. It was a reminder to them that God was in control. **Mary and Joseph just did their part, and God did the rest.** I remember experiencing that nervousness as a young parent; but as we did what we knew was right and honoring to God, the Lord showed us favor and confirmed our decisions. Parenting is hard. Do your part, and God will do the rest.