

My Prayer Journal

Use this weekly prayer to help you begin your time with God each day.

Prayer of Confession:

Dear Heavenly Father, we lower our heads before You and we confess that we have too often forgotten that we are Yours. Sometimes we carry on our lives as if there was no God and we fall short of being a credible witness to You. For these things we ask Your forgiveness and we also ask for Your strength. Give us clear minds and open hearts so we may witness to You in our world. Remind us to be who You would have us to be regardless of what we are doing or who we are with. Hold us to You and build our relationship with You and with those You have given us on earth.

My Prayers this Week:

Family Time:

We are able to have a personal relationship with Jesus and connect with Him through prayer and worship. However, as a family you can also have a hand in developing that relationship with the younger generations. Have a conversation with your kids about different ways you would be able to help them continue to build that relationship. Maybe it's praying as a family, doing a family devotion or maybe getting back into the habit of watching the church service together. As those are done as a family encourage your kids to continue to develop their own practices to help connect with Jesus.

MONDAY 1.11.21

Matthew 2:1-23

One of the major points of chapter two of Matthew is to highlight the contrasting reactions to Jesus from His earliest days, in the story of the magi versus Herod. It is a story of acceptance of Jesus versus rejection of Jesus—a motif that will continue throughout the Gospel of Matthew. It was commonly believed in that time that the births and deaths of great men were heralded by the appearance of a star, and it was also common for kings or a royal contingent from another country to arrive to pay homage to a new king. Although we conflate this story with Jesus' birth, no time referent is actually given other than "after Jesus was born" - but this is the first time, in Matthew's telling of the story, that we learn it all took place in Bethlehem, in the time of King Herod. And sadly, we see that there is a dark underside to the story—Herod's slaughter of the innocents. It has been said that celebrating the birth of Jesus is too easy when we ignore this part of the story. For the first time, we encounter the evil response to Jesus, but also, the divine guidance that protects the child Jesus, with the flight to Egypt and the return to Nazareth.

- On Saturday we talked about identity—what more do you learn about Jesus' identity because of these threats to Him?

TUESDAY 1.12.21

Matthew 3:1-17

Baptism was fairly common in the world of Jesus and John the Baptist. Ritual cleansings from violations of Old Testament purity laws were common, and baptism was part of the initiation rite for many communities, such as the Jewish Essene sect at Qumran. But those were all SELF-administered, and it is clear that John's baptism had no initiatory significance. John's connecting of water baptism and God's forgiveness was new and different—he became known as "John the Baptist" because the form and meaning of his baptism was truly his own creation, tightly integrating the call to repentance and the act of baptism. When someone submitted to John's baptism, it was a demonstration of one's readiness to repent, and to live a life acceptable to God. Quite possibly, for John, it symbolically represented the quenching of the fire of judgment with waters of forgiveness. It was a symbol, and a foreshadowing, of a penitent's "immersion" in the Spirit of God at the end times—hence his comment "I baptize with water, but one is coming who will baptize with the Spirit." But why was Jesus baptized? Jesus answers the question this way: "To fulfill all righteousness." To be baptized was perfectly in line with God's will, and demonstrated Jesus' complete solidarity with humanity.

- What declaration is made about Jesus' identity at the end?

WEDNESDAY 1.13.21

Matthew 4:1-25

Immediately after Jesus' baptism, Jesus "was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil." These temptations have been interpreted in a number of ways, each with its own merits. The first temptation is hunger—but remember that the Spirit led Jesus into the desert, so this hunger is part of God's will for him. Will Jesus be obedient to that will, or will He use His Messianic power to help Himself? The devil then tempts Jesus to leap off the Temple, and count on God to protect Him, suggesting that to NOT jump implies Jesus does NOT trust God. Will Jesus "jump" to safety, or take the route of hardship and difficulty? The final temptation is for ultimate power, glory, and authority in exchange for pledging allegiance to Satan. As God's Son, everything Satan offers is within Jesus' rights—but will Jesus grasp that right, or willingly set it aside? Jesus' response to each test demonstrates that his Messiahship is defined by humility, service, and suffering, not self-assertion, power, and authority. Now, Jesus can begin His ministry, proclaiming the Kingdom of heaven and recruiting others to the cause, as news about Him spreads.

- Do we have similar issues to settle through our choices, if we, too, are to engage in effective ministry?

THURSDAY 1.14.21

Matthew 5:1-26

Today's reading begins the long section of Jesus' teaching called "The Sermon on the Mount." The first twelve verses here are called the "Beatitudes," meaning "blessings." In the ancient world, to say "blessed are you because ..." was equivalent to us, today, saying "congratulations to you because" People are to be congratulated for living in such a way that it indicates they are in good standing with God—things like being merciful, thirsting for righteousness, making peace, and persevering through persecution for serving God. Remember that obedience to the Law of Moses was absolutely central to Jewish faith. With that in mind, see how Jesus's subsequent words about not coming to abolish the Law but to fulfill it prepare the way for His teachings in the coming sections. When Jesus says "You have heard ... but I say ...," He is not setting aside the Old Testament Law, but calling His followers to a higher level of commitment. The point is clear: Obeying Jesus is not easier than obeying Moses! Moses might have said "do not murder," but Jesus takes it to the next level—don't hold onto anger, but be reconciled with your adversary.

- How are anger and murder related? How does this command demonstrate the higher level of commitment Jesus demands? Why is reconciliation so important to Jesus?

