

My Prayer Journal

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

Prayer of Confession:

Come, joy, lighten our spirits.
Come, hope, lift us from despair.
Come, peace, ease our frantic worry.
Come, love, shine in all we do.
Come, Jesus, be born in us.
Come, grace, and forgive us our trespasses.
Come, Lord, set us free.
Come, God, rule in our hearts and teach us to sing with joy!

My Prayers this Week:

Family Time:

Out of all the people in the world, God chose a young woman named Mary to be the mother of the Messiah—someone who God had promised would come and save people from everything that separated them from a relationship with God. This Messiah's name was Jesus—and He is the one whose birth we celebrate on Christmas! How do you think it made Mary feel to be chosen by God in this way? Do you think she would have felt special? Do you think she would have felt afraid? Do you think she would have wondered why God chose her and not someone else? Sometimes we don't know why God chooses us and asks us to do special things that only we can do—but God does! Think about what God might be asking YOU to do, and whether you will say "YES!" like Mary did.

MONDAY 12.20.21

Luke 1:46-56

As we move into the final days of Advent, leading up to Christmas Day, we will read through both Luke's and Matthew's accounts of the birth of Christ. Last week, we ended with the story of the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary with the news of Jesus' coming birth, and yesterday, the Sunday Scripture was about the visit of Mary to Elizabeth, and her reaction to Mary's news. Today's reading, then, is Mary's reaction to *Elizabeth's* reaction! This poetic, prayerful passage has a special name—the *Magnificat* (Latin for "magnifies"). It is Mary's prayer acknowledging the greatness of God and His extraordinary grace in choosing a girl of such humble stature to be the mother of God's Son, when God certainly had the option of choosing a woman from a family of great standing. But Mary recognizes that God's choosing of her has even greater implications for the people of Israel. While the people of Israel might yet again be humbled, this time before the Roman Empire, the child she is carrying brings with Him the promise of socio-political reversal for not only Mary, but all people.

- How do words about "the bringing down of rulers" and "sending the rich away empty," while "lifting up the humble" and "filling the hungry with good things" strike you? Why?

TUESDAY 12.21.21

Luke 1:57-66

When Zechariah had first balked at the news that his aged wife Elizabeth was to bear a son, and that they were to name him John, he was struck mute by the angel Gabriel who had brought the news (see Luke 1:5-25). Now, Elizabeth has given birth to John, and at his circumcision on the eighth day, the child is about to be given his father's name. But when Zechariah affirms Mary's insistence that the boy's name is to be John, his muteness is lifted, and the entire vicinity is filled with wonder at God's hand in the boy's birth. The miraculous events surrounding the birth of John the Baptist foreshadow the miraculous birth of Jesus that is still six months away. Because John fulfills the vital role of the prophesied messenger and forerunner of the Messiah, his birth and the public and private reactions to it become important components of the Christmas story itself in Luke's Gospel. While we may want to jump ahead from Gabriel's visit to Mary to the birth of Jesus, for Luke, it is important for us not to skip the stories of John, but to read them in between. The ministry of John thus becomes inextricably bound up with the ministry of Jesus from the very beginnings of their lives.

- What does Luke's ordering of these stories suggest to you? Do you think ever think about John at Christmastime?

WEDNESDAY 12.22.21

Luke 1:67-80

Just as Mary's prayer in response to the conception of Jesus has a special name ("the Magnificat"), so does Zechariah's song of praise in response to the birth of John! This song is known as the *Benedictus* in Christian liturgy, from the Latin for the first word of verse 68 (meaning "Blessed"). Zechariah acknowledges that John will indeed fulfill the ancient prophecies of the one who would come to "prepare the way for the Most High," and to proclaim God's readiness to forgive sin. Like Mary, Zechariah too, sees God moving to save his people, to rescue them from their enemies, even referring to the birth of his son as evidence of God's remembering of His covenant with Israel. But notice that Luke refers to this entire song *itself* as prophecy, and that Zechariah was *filled with the Holy Spirit* as he sang these praises. Zechariah only recognized the importance and the impact his son, John, would have through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit revealed to Zechariah a prophecy that would have both near-term and long-term implications—the Lord was coming, shining a light on all those, for all time, who are living in darkness.

- What role does the Holy Spirit play in your life in helping you to recognize the movement of God around you?

THURSDAY 12.23.21

Matthew 1:18-25

Today, we move from following the story of Jesus' birth in Luke's Gospel to the much shorter account in the Gospel of Matthew. While Matthew will describe the ministry of John the Baptist in chapter 3, he has no account of John's birth or John's mother Elizabeth's relationship with Mary. And it is Joseph who receives an angelic visitation, informing him of the activity of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' conception, rather than Mary being visited by Gabriel. Even the story of Jesus' birth is related sparingly—Joseph "had no union with her until she gave birth to a son." For Matthew, the emphasis is on Jesus' birth as fulfillment of prophecy, and Joseph's obedience to God's command through the angel (see 2:13-16 for another story of Joseph's obedience to an angelic command). No shepherds, no manger, no travel to Bethlehem ... rather, a miraculous conception, an obedient descendant of David (see the genealogy in 1:2-16), a virgin birth, and the prophesied arrival of "Immanuel—God with us," whose Name is "The LORD saves" ... "Jesus." For Matthew, these are the most important aspects of the birth of Jesus.

- What does Matthew's account add to what we learn about Jesus' birth from Luke? What implications for your own life do you glean from Joseph's behavior in this story?

