



WEEKLY STUDY

CHRISTMAS

After a month of waiting, we celebrated Christmas this weekend. I hope you had a moment (or many moments) to sit in the most profound truth of our faith. God chose to come and dwell with us. No matter who you are, how you spent the holiday, no matter what you've accomplished or left undone, Jesus Christ has come to earth to reveal how much God loves us and offer us salvation.

Peace of Christ,
Pastor Mark Youngman

If you are studying with your Providence Small Group or Discipleship Group, you can share from daily readings as well as the additional questions at the bottom of this guide. If you would like to get connected visit prov.church/smallgroups.

Find a time each day to read the passage of scripture and follow the daily prayer prompt.

DAILY STUDY

MONDAY: LUKE 2.1-5 (ESV)

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

- Merry Christmas! Notice the way that Luke places the events of Jesus' birth in a particular time and place. These were the days when August was Caesar and Quirinius was governor of Syria. Because of the census, Joseph had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The journey might have been similar to Mary's trip to see Elizabeth. The time and place mattered because God was about to step into history. And God wants to step into your story—the very real situation that you find yourself in today. The big theological term we use for this is Incarnation. God came into the world, born through the virgin Mary on a day that could be circled on a calendar. **Can you circle a day on the calendar (past or future) where God showed up in a real way?**
- *God Who comes into my life, come and rearrange my plans so that I might circle the days of your incarnation! Amen.*

TUESDAY: LUKE 2.6-7

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

- Mary and Joseph were in a city that was busy because of the census. Their expectation would have been to find room to stay, but the city was too crowded. You may know that the city of Bethlehem is located in modern day Palestine. Most years, the streets of the city are teeming with people on Christmas, but this year the celebrations are low key or non-existent. No lights, no bustle, just quiet tension and a deep awareness of the impact of war. **Have circumstances in the world or in your personal life made it hard to celebrate the Christmas season this year? What adjustments in expectations might help you to navigate that shift?**
- *Jesus, I want to make room for your arrival into my daily life. Show me the way. Amen.*

WEDNESDAY: LUKE 2.8-15

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ *“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”*

¹⁵ *When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”*

- In a world at war it can be difficult to imagine great joy for all people. The promise of such a thing is shocking and can catch us off guard. In order for that to happen, parties of war would have to agree to lay down weapons, and focus on a God who was willing to offer them all life. For the shepherds, a sign of good news was to be a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. **What signs do you look for that God is present in your life?**
- *Jesus, like the shepherds, I run to the manger and look for the promised sign. Come and be born to me. Amen.*

THURSDAY: LUKE 2.16-19

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

- The shepherds shared the words that had been told them about who Jesus was. Imagine the scene...dirty shepherds talking about angels and a sign of great joy for all the people. The words were confirmation for Mary and created a sense of wonder for the others. Making known the

things of God is a calling for God's people. **Think about some of the things God has done for you. How are you making them known?**

- *God, you have been faithful to me even in difficult times. You have been present when it seemed like I was all alone. Show me the opportunities I have to make You known to others today. Amen.,*

FRIDAY: TITUS 2.11-14

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

- After this season of waiting (called Advent) we might be more in tune than ever with “the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” Titus reminds us that Jesus’ appearance at Christmas was a foretaste of his return and a call to live differently as we wait. **How does God’s grace teach us to say “no” to ungodliness and worldly passions?**
- *God of Grace, thank you for the offer of salvation that I have in Jesus. May my life be transformed as I live out of that salvation and into a godly life. Amen.*

SATURDAY: PSALM 96

Sing to the LORD a new song;

sing to the LORD, all the earth.

² *Sing to the LORD, praise his name;*

proclaim his salvation day after day.

³ *Declare his glory among the nations,*

his marvelous deeds among all peoples.

⁴ *For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;*

he is to be feared above all gods.

⁵ *For all the gods of the nations are idols,*

but the LORD made the heavens.

⁶ *Splendor and majesty are before him;*

strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

⁷ *Ascribe to the LORD, all you families of nations,*

ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

⁸ *Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;*

bring an offering and come into his courts.

⁹ *Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness;*

tremble before him, all the earth.

¹⁰ *Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns.”*

The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved;

he will judge the peoples with equity.

¹¹ *Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;*

let the sea resound, and all that is in it.

¹² *Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them;*

let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.

¹³ *Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes,
he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples in his faithfulness.*

- **During the Christmas season, we sang familiar carols that seem to connect differently during this time of year. They hold more meaning due to all of the other reminders of what is to come. The world contains songs of all kinds. Sometimes they seem to echo the story of salvation and hope, and other times they seem counter to God's glory and strength. What words from this Psalm help you to think through the ways you offer praise to God?**
- *God, I pray that my song heading into this new year will be itself new. Remove my cynicism and disdain for others. Fill my mouth with songs of praise. Amen.*

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Study the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer and consider how you might best live into this covenant in 2024. Bring your thoughts with you to worship on 12/31.

*"I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things
to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."*