

Getting What You Deserve?

“He had it coming,” we might say if something bad happens to someone we consider a bad person. It appeals to our sense of justice. On the other hand, a lot of people claim that all they want is what’s coming to them. They would be happy (so they say) just to get what they’ve earned; they speak as if they have no reason to fear that perhaps what they’ve earned is not really all that wonderful.

With God, what we deserve and what we get, happily, are two different things. Frankly, we just don’t deserve to have a relationship with the perfect God, but he lets us in anyway through the gift of his Son, a gift (like all true gifts) which we have not earned.

Because of this - the *first* Christmas gift - no one can look at those who belong to God and say, “Well, they had it coming!” Instead, they will see God’s gift to us and say, “Wow, look at what they got for Christmas!”

Monday – A Child of Prophecy

“The magi, as you know, were wise men--wonderfully wise men--who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger.”

O Henry, *The Gift of the Magi*

1. Please read Matthew 2:1-12. What did the Magi say about Jesus (see verse 2)? How about Herod (verse 4)? How about the priests (verse 6)?

Text insight: The word “Magi” comes from the same root that gives us the word “mighty.” Magi were members of a priestly caste from Persia whose origins go back a thousand years before Christ.

2. The Magi had traveled an enormous distance to reach Bethlehem. Compare their attitude and actions at the end of their search (verses 10-11) with Herod’s attitude (verse 7) and intent (verse 13).
3. Read Micah 5:2 (written about 700 years before Jesus’ birth). How does this differ from the version the priests read in Matthew 2:6? Now look at Micah 5:4. What does this verse tell you about Jesus?

Making it Personal: Micah, Magi, the priests and Herod all had ideas about Jesus. Which do you share?

Tuesday – Child of the Promise

“God does not give us everything we want, but He does fulfill His promises.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German pastor (1906-1945), sentenced to death for resisting Adolph Hitler during World War 2

1. Please read Genesis 17:1-6, 18:1-2, 18:9-15, and 21:1-3. What promise did God make in chapter 17? How did he carry it out? How can Isaac be considered the “child of the promise?”
2. Who is the promised child in Luke 1:26-38? How did Mary react to this unexpected promise? What similarity do you see between Luke 1:37 and Genesis 18:14?
3. See Acts 7:5 and Galatians 3:29; how is God’s promise to Abraham applied to us through Jesus?

Making it Personal: When it comes to trusting God’s promises in the Bible, do you identify more with Sarah (Genesis 18:13-15) or Mary (Luke 1:38)? How can your relationship with God become more like Mary’s?

Wednesday – Jesus in Prophecy

“There is no mystery in heaven or earth so great as this—a suffering Deity, an almighty Savior nailed to a Cross.”

Samuel M. Zwemer, American missionary (1867-1952)

1. Isaiah 9:1-7 is another prophecy pointing us to Jesus’ birth. What does it say about him? How does verse 6 compare with Micah 5:4-5, and verse 7 with Micah 5:2?
2. Isaiah 53:1-12 is a broad overview of Jesus’ adult life. How do verses 4-6 and 11-12 help you understand the nature of the victory promised in Isaiah 9:7?
3. See Romans 8:17-18. What can we expect to share with Jesus? How, then, do both Isaiah 9 and Isaiah 53 apply to you?

Digging Deeper: The Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53:10) is also the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). How do these concepts apply to the depiction of the Son of God in Isaiah 40:1-31?

Thursday – Jesus in the Manger

“He cried in the manger in wordless infancy, He the Word, without whom all human eloquence is mute.”

Augustine, 4th c. bishop

1. Please read Luke 2:1-20. What familiar scenes are described there?
2. Now read it again slowly. Which scenes are unfamiliar, the ones that don’t readily come to mind.

Text insight: Publius Sulpicius Quirinius, born about 50 years before Jesus, was a Roman aristocrat. He held a number of high level positions under Caesar Augustus and Tiberius Caesar, Emperors of Rome.

3. The shepherds probably had at least some familiarity with the Old Testament prophecies about the coming messiah (Christ). How might this have led to their response in verse 15-20?

Prayer Focus: Pray that people will see beyond Santa, mistletoe, etc., and will recognize God’s true gift.

Friday – Jesus on the Throne

“If thou be ever so exact in thy morals, and not a worshiper of God, then thou art an atheist.” William Gurnall, 17th c.

English pastor

1. Please read Revelation 21:1-8. What does Jesus declare in verse 5? How does this fulfill the prophecies and scenes from Jesus’ life that you’ve read this week, from Genesis through the New Testament?
2. Take a look at Isaiah 55:1-7 and find commonalities with Revelation 21 (there are several). For example, what hope does Isaiah give in verse 7 for those of us who see ourselves in Revelation 21:8?
3. Read Revelation 1:8, 21:6 and 22:13, Genesis 1:1, John 1:1-2 and John 19:30. What comfort do you find in the fact that God is from first to last, beginning to end?

Text insight: Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet; it’s like saying “A-Z”.

For the Weekend: Re-read Matthew 2:1-12 and Luke 2:1-20, and consider the ways various people responded to Jesus’ birth. With what you know about Jesus now, what is your response?