

Thoughtful Giving

A father and his son were shopping shortly before Christmas when something in the toy store window caught the father's eye. Entering, he left his son to look at some toys while he took the clerk to one side and said, "That train set looks just perfect. I'll take it!" "What a thoughtful gift," the clerk said as she looked over at the boy. "I'm sure your son will love it." "Do you think so?" The father paused for a moment. "In that case, I'll take two."

As we approach Christmas, we can be assured that our Heavenly Father knows exactly what we need, and has given us a gift that will last throughout eternity. This week, let's study together the true meaning of Christmas, a celebration of Jesus Christ.

Monday – Bethlehem's Babe

"A baby in God's opinion that the world should go on." Carl Sandburg, 19th-20th c. American writer

1. Please read Luke 2:1-7. What details does this passage reveal about Joseph, Mary and Jesus?

Text Insight: Being pledged to be married was a serious social commitment and legally binding. A person who did not go through with the marriage would have had to obtain a divorce, not just call off the wedding.

2. In Micah 5:1-5a, how is Bethlehem described? How does the description of the "Ruler" resonate with what you know of Jesus? What is the significance of the statement, "though you are small among the clans of Judah?"

Making it Personal: What is your relationship with the baby born in Bethlehem, the ruler "whose origins are from of old?" Ask God to guide you into a deeper relationship with the one who is your Shepherd.

Tuesday – Born to Die

Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto. Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen (translation: *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, and now, and always, to the ages of ages. Amen.*) 6th c. hymn

1. Please read Isaiah 53:1-6. In what way is this prophecy of Jesus consistent or inconsistent with Micah 5:4?

2. According to Jeremiah 17:12-14, when did God establish his throne? Why would this allow Jesus our King to take on the role of a "man of sorrows" (Isaiah 53:3)?

3. Now look at Revelation 7:17, where Jesus is depicted as the lamb. What is his relationship to the throne?

Making it Personal: What can you do to honor the one who sits on the throne from the beginning and throughout eternity, and yet was born to die for the sins of the world (including yours)?

Wednesday – Bearing Gifts

"Magi: ... word used for the Persian learned and priestly class." www.dictionary.com

1. Please read Matthew 2:1-12. Describe the Magi's actions and what this says about their character traits.

Text Insight: The Magi's gift of gold is traditionally seen as recognition of Jesus' royalty; the frankincense, one type of incense used in temple worship, was recognition of his being God; and the myrrh, a pungent embalming spice, was recognition of his ultimate sacrifice for us through his death.

2. How are the acts of the Magi consistent with the instruction in Hebrews 13:15-16?

3. In Romans 12:1-2, what type of sacrifice is pleasing to God?

Making it Personal: What gift can you bring to God, not just at Christmas but always? How, specifically, can you honor Jesus today? Pray that God will guide you in doing so.

Thursday – Bethlehem's Slaughter of the Innocents

"There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers." Proverbs 6:16-19

1. Please read Matthew 2:13-18. In light of yesterday's passage about Herod and the Magi, what can you discern about Herod's character traits?

Text Insight: The Herod who slaughtered the boys of Bethlehem was known as Herod the Great since he ruled over a united Israel (i.e. Greater Israel). At his death the kingdom was divided for his four sons to rule, one of whom was known as Herod the Tetrarch (tetrarch loosely translated means one fourth).

2. In Luke 23:1-25, how did Herod the Tetrarch help to finish what his father had started?

3. What assurance do you find in Romans 8:28 about the atrocities committed by both Kings?

Prayer Focus: Pray for those who suffer innocently, that they will know God's goodness. (The Voice of the Martyrs has a website devoted to prayer for those suffering persecution at www.persecution.com.)

Friday – Bearing Witness

"It is not for us to condemn others, but to witness to them of Him who is in our lives." Todd H. Wetzel, American pastor

1. Please read Matthew 2:19-20. How would you describe Herod's relationship with God at death?

2. Compare the views held by Simeon and Anna in Luke 2:25-38 with Herod's view of Jesus.

Making it Personal: If you assess your daily actions, is your relationship with Jesus more like Simeon and Anna or like Herod? How?

For the Weekend: Read Isaiah 9:6-7 and describe how these truths about Jesus affect your own life. Pray that God will bring you into closer and closer relationship with the one who came to bring you to himself, whose reign on the throne is from of old and will continue for all eternity.