

Christmas Presence

It was the day after Christmas and a pastor was looking at the nativity scene outside the church when he noticed the baby Jesus was missing from the manger. Just as he turned to go inside and call the police he saw a little boy with a red wagon, and in the wagon was the baby Jesus. The pastor walked up to the boy and said, "Where did you get the little infant?" Jimmy replied, "I got him from the church." "And why did you take him from there?" asked the pastor. "Well, about a week before Christmas I prayed to God that if he'd bring me a red wagon for Christmas, I'd give him a ride around the block in it."

That little boy apparently knew that spending time with God is important. This week we will read of others who sought to be with God, responding to the good news that the Savior is born. Let us seek God's presence as we go through this season, too. It's the best present to find Christmas.

Monday – Birth Announcements

"See Him in a manger laid whom the choirs of angels praise." Angels We Have Heard On High

1. Please read Luke 2:8-14. Think carefully on verse 11; how would you have reacted to this announcement if you were there with the shepherds?
2. According to verse 12, what would be the sign that the shepherds had found the right child? Why do you suppose God chose this to be a sign? How does this sign seem incongruent with verse 11? Knowing the identity of the child, what kind of sign might we have chosen instead?
3. Who delivered this announcement? How does this support the importance of the news?

Making it Personal: Keeping in mind that the angels' announcement is just as important today as it was at Jesus' birth, how have you responded to receiving that message?

Tuesday – On a Treasure Hunt

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it." Matthew 13:45-46

1. Please read Luke 2:15-20. How does verse 16 support verse 12?
2. Describe the type of search you would have performed if you had accompanied the shepherds to the small town of Bethlehem.
3. Look at verses 17-20 and describe the response of the shepherds, those who listened to them, and Mary.

Making it Personal: Are you more like the shepherds, Mary or the people around them? Ask God to guide you in responding properly to his gift of a savior.

Wednesday – The Wise Wanders

"Not all those who wander are lost." J.R.R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring

1. Please read Matthew 2:1-2. Why would the Magi go to Jerusalem to ask about the new King of the Jews?

Text Insight: This visit by the Magi may have taken place up to two years after Jesus' birth.

2. What could have prompted the Magi to travel from their own land to worship the king of a minor foreign country subjected to Roman rule? What prompts you to worship God?

Making it Personal: How far do you need to travel to worship Jesus? You can do it now right where you are. Spend some time in prayer thanking God for the gift of his Son, our Savior

Thursday – The Wise Worshippers

"Come adore on bended knee Christ the Lord, the newborn King." Angels We Have Heard On High

1. Please read Matthew 2:9-11. How did the Magi react when they realized they had found the right place? What did they do when they actually met Jesus?

Text Insight: We don't really know if there were two, three or possibly more Magi. The three gifts noted in scripture led to the common description of Three Wise Men (magi is plural for magus, an eastern priest).

2. Joseph and Mary had apparently been in Bethlehem long enough to move from the stable to a house by the time the Magi arrived. What might it have been like for a young family to receive such guests?
3. Compare the shepherds in Luke 2 with the Magi in Matthew 2. What does this tell you about the type of people God calls to himself? What does it say about your place in God's family?

Prayer Focus: The Magi who were foreigners, and the shepherds who were common peasants help us to understand that God has a heart for all people, despite their social status. Pray that this Christmas season God's people would have open hearts toward all kinds of people – and that we would be willing to tell others about our Savior, God's wonderful gift for everyone no matter who they are.

Friday – Seeking What God Has Already Revealed

"Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her King. Let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing." Isaac Watts, Joy To The World (1719)

1. Please read Isaiah 9:1-7. To whom does God reveal himself (v. 2)? Have you ever felt like that? When?
2. What do verses 3-5 promise for those who have lived in the shadow of death? What details do verses 6-7 fill in regarding the promises of the earlier verses? How does verse 7 assure us that this will really happen?
3. Take a look at Matthew 16:13-17. What did Peter realize that Isaiah had prophesied concerning Christ?

Text Insight: Even though Peter had known Jesus for a long time, Jesus said Peter got his superior understanding of Jesus' true nature not primarily by being around Jesus, but it was given to him as a gift from the Father.

For the Weekend: Read Luke 1:46-55; how does Mary touch upon the things described in Isaiah 9:1-7? When you look at Christmas, what do you see? According to Mary and Isaiah, what should you be looking for?