

Bible Challenge - January 1-7, 2017

Advent's weekly Bible Challenge is based upon the readings assigned for each Sunday. The Basic challenge is to re-read the texts that were read on Sunday morning and included in the Sunday bulletin. The Adventure and Explorer challenges are suggestions of different ways to deepen your knowledge of the Bible. The challenge is organized as one reading for each of five days, but find a pace or style that fits your schedule.

INTRODUCTION

From the beginning, by virtue of our baptism, we are called Christian. We were "Christ-ened" at the font. Bearing his name, we share the same Father and are invited to address him intimately: Abba! Jesus bears our sins in humble obedience to the will of the Father. Today we pray that the mind of Christ, whose name we bear, would be our own. It is a good way to begin, again, another year.

Epiphany means "manifestation." On this day we celebrate the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles—that is, to all nations. Some Christian traditions celebrate three great epiphanies on this day: the magi's adoration of the Christ child, Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, and his first miracle in which he changes water into wine. The word and sacraments are for us the great epiphany of God's grace and mercy. We go forth to witness to the light that shines brightly in our midst.

DAY ONE: Numbers 6:22-27

God commanded Aaron to say these words, known as the Aaronic benediction, in blessing the people of Israel. We too are marked with God's name and God's blessing as we are sent from our assemblies into the world.

²²The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ²³Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them,

²⁴The LORD bless you and keep you;

²⁵the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;

²⁶the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

²⁷So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.

Adventure Challenge: Numbers 6

Explorer Challenge: Research the meaning of שלום (*Shalom*), the Hebrew word translated *peace* in verse 26. What exactly is the Lord giving to his people?

DAY TWO: Psalm 8

How majestic is the Lord; in comparison to the heavens, humans seem insignificant, yet they are a wondrous part of creation.

¹O LORD our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!—

²you whose glory is chanted above the heavens
out of the mouths of infants and children;

you have set up a fortress against your enemies,
to silence the foe and avenger.

³When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,

⁴what are mere mortals that you should be mindful of them,
human beings that you should care for them?

⁵Yet you have made them little less than divine;
with glory and honor you crown them.

⁶You have made them rule over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet:

⁷all flocks and cattle,
even the wild beasts of the field,

⁸the birds of the air, the fish of the sea,
and whatever passes along the paths of the sea.

⁹O LORD our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 8.

Explorer Challenge: Compare this view of mankind with the perspective presented in Psalm 144, or that presented in Galatians 4 (the reading for Day Three).

DAY THREE: Galatians 4:4-7

Paul proclaims the ultimate significance of the nativity: Jesus was born the Son of God so that, because of him, we all may be God's children.

⁴When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. ⁶And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

Adventure Challenge: Galatians 4.

Explorer Challenge: Compare this text from Galatians with a similar passage, Romans 8:9-17.

DAY FOUR: Luke 2:21

Eight days after his birth, Jesus is circumcised according to Jewish law and given the name announced by the angel before his conception.

²¹After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Matthew 2:1-12

God's promise shines bright in the night as magi follow a star to honor a new king. Strangers from a faraway land, they welcome the long-awaited messiah of Israel.

¹In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage."

³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel."

⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." ⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Adventure Challenge: Matthew 2.

Explorer Challenge: For 2017, most Gospel readings will come from Matthew. Read an introduction to

Matthew to learn about (or review) the themes, organization, and style of this gospel.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYERS OF THE DAY

Eternal God, you have placed us in a world of space and time, and through the events of our lives you bless us with your love. Grant that in the new year we may know your presence, see your love at work, and live in the light of the event that gives us joy forever - the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Almighty and ever-living God, you revealed the incarnation of your Son by the brilliant shining of a star. Shine the light of your justice always in our hearts and over all lands, and accept our lives as the treasure we offer in your praise and for your service, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

At the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. (*Phil. 2:10*)

Adventure Challenge: Consider where in “the events of your life” you recognize God’s presence; where in the new year will you look to see God’s love at work?