

## Bible Challenge January 8 - 14, 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

*In the waters of the Jordan, Jesus is revealed as the beloved Son of God. Through this great epiphany, Jesus fulfills all righteousness and becomes the servant of God who will bring forth justice and be a light to the nations. In the waters of baptism we too are washed by the Word, anointed by the Spirit, and named God's beloved children. Our baptismal mission is to proclaim good news to all who are oppressed or in need of God's healing.*

### DAY ONE: Isaiah 42:1-9

*God's servant Israel is endowed with the Spirit in order to bring justice to the nations. The servant will not exercise authority boisterously or with violence, nor will weariness ever keep it from fulfilling its task. God's old promises have been fulfilled; the new assignment of the servant is to bring light to the nations.*

<sup>1</sup>Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. <sup>2</sup>He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; <sup>3</sup>a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. <sup>4</sup>He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching. <sup>5</sup>Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: <sup>6</sup>I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, <sup>7</sup>to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. <sup>8</sup>I am the LORD, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. <sup>9</sup>See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

**Adventure Challenge:** Isaiah 42.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Verses 1-4 is one of the four *servant songs*. Research this term.

*Option B.* The LORD is a translation of the Hebrew word *Yahweh*; research this name to learn when and how it is used in the Old Testament.

*Option C.* Verse 1 indicates this servant's chief responsibility is to bring forth justice. Research the possible meanings for *שָׁלוֹם* (*tezdek*) the Hebrew word for *justice*.

### DAY TWO: Psalm 29

*The voice of the LORD can be heard in powerful thunderstorms.*

<sup>1</sup>Ascribe to the LORD, you gods,

ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

<sup>2</sup>Ascribe to the LORD the glory due God's name;

worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.

<sup>3</sup>The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders;

the LORD is upon the mighty waters.

<sup>4</sup>The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice;

the voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor.

<sup>5</sup>The voice of the LORD breaks the cedar trees;

the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon;

<sup>6</sup>the LORD makes Lebanon skip like a calf,

and Mount Hermon like a young wild ox.

<sup>7</sup>The voice of the LORD

bursts forth in lightning flashes.

<sup>8</sup>The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;

the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

<sup>9</sup>The voice of the LORD makes the oak trees writhe

and strips the forests bare.

And in the temple of the LORD all are crying, "Glory!"

<sup>10</sup>The LORD sits enthroned above the flood;

the LORD sits enthroned as king forevermore.

<sup>11</sup>O LORD, give strength to your people;

give them, O LORD, the blessings of peace.

**Adventure Challenge:** Psalm 29.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Research any word or place that you do not know well.

*Option B:* Re-read this psalm, imagining what it might have been like for a person in the early iron-age (the date for this psalm) to be caught out in a powerful thunderstorm. Do verses 9b-11 differ from the rest of the psalm?

### **DAY THREE: Acts 10:34-43**

*Peter crosses the sharp religious boundary separating Jews from Gentiles and proclaims the good news of God's inclusive forgiveness in Jesus' name to Cornelius, a Roman centurion. As a result of Peter's preaching, Cornelius and his family become the first Gentiles to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.*

<sup>34</sup>Peter began to speak to [Cornelius and his household]: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup>but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. <sup>36</sup>You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. <sup>37</sup>That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: <sup>38</sup>how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. <sup>39</sup>We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; <sup>40</sup>but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, <sup>41</sup>not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup>He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup>All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

**Adventure Challenge:** Acts 10 (to read the whole story of Cornelius.)

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Read Acts 11:1-18 to learn how Peter responds to criticism from "circumcised believers" that he stayed and ate with a Gentile Roman soldier.

*Option B.* Research why Jews of Peter's time would object to him eating and staying with Gentiles. (For example, Google *eating with Gentiles*.) Was this based on Biblical rules or customs of time?

### **DAY FOUR: Matthew 3:13-17**

*Before Jesus begins his ministry, he is baptized by John, touched by the Spirit, and identified publicly as God's child.*

<sup>13</sup>Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup>John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" <sup>15</sup>But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. <sup>16</sup>And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. <sup>17</sup>And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

**Adventure Challenge:** Matthew 3.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Research what baptism meant for a first-century Jew.

*Option B.* Research what the Jordan river looked like (or might have looked like) in the area where Jesus was probably baptized.

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

O God our Father, at the baptism of Jesus you proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit. Make all who are baptized into Christ faithful to their calling to be your daughters and sons, and empower us all with your Spirit, 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**

A voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." (*Matt. 3:17*)

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Read what Luther says about baptism in the Small Catechism.

*Option B.* Research baptism or ritual washing to learn about practices in other religions and cultures.