

Bible Challenge March 26 – April 1, 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

Baptism is sometimes called enlightenment. The gospel for this Sunday is the story of the man born blind healed by Christ. I was blind, but now I see, declares the man. In baptism God opens our eyes to see the truth of who we are: God's beloved sons and daughters. As David was anointed king of Israel, in baptism God anoints our head with oil, and calls us to bear witness to the light of Christ in our daily lives.

DAY ONE: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

God instructs Samuel to anoint a new king from among the sons of Jesse. Samuel is surprised when God chooses David, the youngest and outwardly the least likely; the Lord sees David from a different perspective.

The Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.”¹ Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.” And the Lord said, “Take a heifer with you, and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’² Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.”³ Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, “Do you come peaceably?”⁴ He said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.” And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁵When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the Lord.”⁶ But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”⁷ Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.”⁸ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.”⁹ Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.”¹⁰ Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.”¹¹ He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.”¹² Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

Adventure Challenge: 1 Samuel 16.

Explorer Challenge: Option A: Research any name, place, or object in this story that is not familiar to you.
(Examples: *Samuel, Jesse, horn of oil, Ramah.*)

Option B: Read an introduction to the books of Samuel to learn about the sources and perspective of this key document of Jewish history.

DAY TWO: Psalm 23

The Lord guides me along right pathways; . . . my cup overflows.

¹The LORD is my shepherd;
 I shall not be in want.

²The LORD makes me lie down in green pastures
 and leads me beside still waters.

³You restore my soul, O LORD,
 and guide me along right pathways for your name's sake.

⁴Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I shall fear no evil;

for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
 you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is running over.
⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
 and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Adventure Challenge: *Option A:* see how much of this well-known psalm you can recite from memory.

Option B: Compare this psalm with Psalm 25.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* To enrich your understanding, read a commentary on this Psalm.

Option B: Research how shepherds traditionally used a rod and a staff, or the different customs related to anointing a person with oil. (Remember Samuel's use of oil in the reading for Day One.)

DAY THREE: Ephesians 5:8-14

Because we now live in the divine light that is Jesus Christ, we conduct our lives in ways that reflect the light of Christ, so that our activity is truly pleasing to God.

⁸Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—⁹for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Adventure Challenge: Ephesians 5.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Use a concordance or other reference tools to find out where and how the phrase *children of the light* has been used in Biblical literature.

Option B: The *unfruitful works of darkness* (verse 11) probably refers to the list of vices in Ephesians 5:3-5. Compare this list to similar lists in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and Galatians 5:19-21. What might you include in a short list of vices could preclude someone from inheriting the kingdom?

DAY FOUR: John 9:1-41

Jesus heals a man born blind, provoking a hostile reaction that he regards as spiritual blindness to the things of God.

¹As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." ¹²They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." ¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet." ¹⁸The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind;

²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." ²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" ²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. ³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. ³⁹Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" ⁴¹Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

Adventure Challenge: John 9.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* In verse 41 Jesus tells the Jewish leaders that, because they are not blind, they have sinned. Why or how did they sin? (Is their sin like the sins referred to in the Day Three reading?)

Option B: Choose one character from this story and re-live the events from that person's perspective. Try to imagine what would that person would see, feel, and think as the events unfold.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Bend your ear to our prayers, Lord Christ, and come among us. By your gracious life and death for us, bring light into the darkness of our hearts, and anoint us with your Spirit, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Jesus says, I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will have the light of life. (*John 8:12*)

Adventure Challenge: Spend a few moments pretending you are blind; close your eyes and try to do some everyday task like getting dressed, eating a meal, walking from one room to another. How does this experience affect your reaction to Jesus' statement, "I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will have the light of life."? What would it be like to a grown person and see for the first time in your life?