

## Bible Challenge December 25 - 31, 2016

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

*On this Christmas morning the people of God gather to celebrate the birth of the Word made flesh, Christ our Lord. Luke recounts the familiar story of shepherds and angels; John's gospel tells of the Word that dwells among us, full of grace and truth. The meaning of Christmas is made clear: the light shines in the darkness. It is in the liturgy that we encounter the Word made flesh—in the people of God gathered together as the body of Christ, and in the meal around the holy table. We go forth to be bearers of light as we proclaim this good news to all the ends of the earth.*

### DAY ONE: Isaiah 52:7-10

*A messenger races home to Jerusalem with the marvelous words: "Your God reigns!" In comforting the people, God proves to be the best brother or sister (redeemer) they have ever known. Everyone will witness the victory (salvation) of God.*

<sup>7</sup>How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,  
who brings good news,  
who announces salvation,  
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

<sup>8</sup>Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,  
together they sing for joy;  
for in plain sight they see  
the return of the LORD to Zion.

<sup>9</sup>Break forth together into singing,  
you ruins of Jerusalem;  
for the LORD has comforted his people,  
he has redeemed Jerusalem.

<sup>10</sup>The LORD has bared his holy arm  
before the eyes of all the nations;  
and all the ends of the earth shall see  
the salvation of our God.

**Adventure Challenge:** Isaiah 52.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Research *the Lord's arm* (or *the arm of God*), an image that appears in verse 10, in Psalm 98 (the reading for Day Two), and frequently in the Bible.

*Option B.* Research *anthropomorphism*.

### DAY TWO: Psalm 98

*Sing! The Lord is victorious and comes to judge with righteousness.*

<sup>1</sup>Sing a new song to the LORD, who has done marvelous things,  
whose right hand and holy arm have won the victory.

<sup>2</sup>O LORD, you have made known your victory,  
you have revealed your righteousness  
in the sight of the nations.

<sup>3</sup>You remember your steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel;  
all the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

<sup>4</sup>Shout with joy to the LORD, all you lands;

lift up your voice, rejoice, and sing.  
<sup>5</sup>Sing to the LORD with the harp,  
with the harp and the voice of song.  
<sup>6</sup>With trumpets and the sound of the horn  
shout with joy before the king, the LORD.  
<sup>7</sup>Let the sea roar, and all that fills it,  
the world and those who dwell therein.  
<sup>8</sup>Let the rivers clap their hands,  
and let the hills ring out with joy before the LORD,  
who comes to judge the earth.  
<sup>9</sup>The LORD will judge the world with righteousness  
and the peoples with equity.

**Adventure Challenge:** Psalm 98. (Option: in addition, read Psalm 99 or 100, which are similar.)

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A:* research *God's right hand*.

*Option B:* Compare the details in this psalm with those in the reading for Day One.

*Option C:* Psalm 98 is known as *an enthronement psalm*. Research what this term means.

### **DAY THREE: Hebrews 1:1-6**

*This letter opens with a lofty declaration of Jesus' preeminent status as the Son through whom God created the world and through whom our sins are cleansed. God speaks to us now through the Son, who is exalted even above the angels.*

<sup>1</sup>Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. <sup>3</sup>He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup>having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

[<sup>5</sup>For to which of the angels did God ever say,

"You are my Son;  
today I have begotten you"?

Or again,

"I will be his Father,  
and he will be my Son"?

<sup>6</sup>And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,

"Let all God's angels worship him."

**Adventure Challenge:** Hebrews 1.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Research *the right hand of God*.

*Option B.* Research commentaries on this important example of early Christian theology. (Example: Google *Hebrews 1 commentary*.)

*Option C.* Research *purification for sins*.

### **DAY FOUR: John 1:1-14**

*The prologue to the Gospel of John describes Jesus as the Word of God made flesh, the one who reveals God to be "full of grace and truth."*

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify to the light, so

that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup>The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

<sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup>He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup>who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

<sup>14</sup>And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

**Adventure Challenge:** John 1.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Research *Logos*, the Greek word translated “the Word.”

*Option B.* Trace how the key terms--*word, life, light, being, world, flesh, glory*--are connected or linked together in this passage.

## **DAY FIVE:**

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Almighty God, you gave us your only Son to take on our human nature and to illumine the world with your light. By your grace adopt us as your children and enlighten us with your Spirit, through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### **GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. (*Luke 2:10-11*)

**Adventure Challenge:** Pray or meditate on the Christmas message: in Jesus, God takes “on our human nature to illuminate the world.”

**Explorer Challenge:** Research *incarnation*.