

Bible Challenge July 17 - 23, 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 are 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

Perhaps the church, at its best, is "all ears." Almighty God urges the faithful, again and again, to "listen up!"—to heed the word from above. So it was with Abraham and Sarah, with Mary and Martha, and the early church at Colossae. So it is today as we join the assembly to hear the word of God, the words of life.

DAY ONE: Genesis 18:1-10a

The Lord visits Abraham and Sarah to tell them that the long-awaited promise of the birth of a child will be fulfilled for them in their old age.

¹The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ²He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. ³He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. ⁴Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." ⁶And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." ⁷Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. ⁸Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

⁹They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." ^{10a}Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son."

Adventure Challenge: Genesis 18: 1 – 15 and 21:1-7.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Read a summary of Abraham's life and his importance for Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

Option B: Compare this story (known by scholars as the J version) of the announcement to Abraham with the version or the same event that is told in Genesis 17 (known as the P version).

DAY TWO: Psalm 15

The opening lines of this entrance or processional psalm ask who is qualified to enter the sanctuary; the response lists requirements to be in the presence of God.

¹LORD, who may dwell in your tabernacle?

Who may abide upon your holy hill?

²Those who lead a blameless life and do what is right,
who speak the truth from their heart;

³they do not slander with the tongue, they do no evil to their friends;
they do not cast discredit upon a neighbor.

⁴In their sight the wicked are rejected,
but they honor those who fear the LORD.

They have sworn upon their health and do not take back their word.

⁵They do not give their money in hope of gain,
nor do they take bribes against the innocent.

Those who do these things shall never be overthrown.

Adventure Challenge: Compare Psalms 14 and 15.

Explorer Challenge: The opening half of verse 5 is often translated as a condemnation of those "who lend money at interest." Using standard references, research the social, historical, and religious grounds for the

Biblical prohibition (see for example Exodus 22:25 and Leviticus 25:36) against charging interest.

DAY THREE: Colossians 1:15-28

Sometimes Paul preaches with great attention to theological concepts. Here, however, Paul offers a mystical teaching, that the great mystery of God is "Christ in you." Because Christ is present in the church, Christians share in his life, suffering, and glory.

¹⁵[Christ Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

²¹And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²²he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him—²³provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.

²⁴I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. ²⁵I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. ²⁷To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Adventure Challenge: Colossians 1.

Explorer Challenge: The rich, poetic language of this “mystical teaching” has prompted much theological discourse. Using whatever reference material available, explore one or two of the phrases that you find most interesting or unusual. For example, what is implied or included in the phrase *thrones or dominions or rulers or powers* (verse 16)?

DAY FOUR: Luke 10:38-42

Jesus uses his visit to two sisters as an occasion to remind disciples that an important aspect of obedience is single-minded devotion to Jesus and his word.

³⁸Now as [Jesus and his disciples] went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." ⁴¹But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; ⁴²there is need of only one thing.

Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Adventure Challenge: Luke 10.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* This story of Mary and Martha immediately follows the parable of the Good Samaritan, which we read last week. Compare these two stories: one is a hypothetical tale about men travelers, the other an actual incident involving two women at home. Can you see reasons for Luke to put them side by side?

Option B. Compare this story of Mary and Martha with two other stories about them in John 11 and John 12.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY: Eternal God, you draw near to us in Christ, and you make yourself our guest. Amid the cares of our lives, make us attentive to your presence, that we may treasure your word above all else, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION: Blessed are those who hold the word fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance. (*Luke 8:15*)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Consider a time when you have entertained an important guest. Did you act more like Mary or Martha?

Option B: July 22 is the celebration day of Mary Magdalene; research who she was and why she has traditionally been one of the most venerated of Christian saints.