

Bible Challenge November 6 (All Saints Sunday) -12, 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

In holy baptism God makes saints out of sinners. In holy communion God forgives the sins of all the saints. In the assembly today we give thanks for all the saints "who from their labors rest," who have fought the good fight, who have gained the crown. In the same breath we petition our God for the strength to hear and to heed the admonitions of the Lord Jesus in today's gospel. Recalling that we have been sealed by the Spirit and sustained by the Savior's body and blood, we keep on keeping on as God gives us breath, to the praise of God's glory.

DAY ONE: Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18

The book of Daniel was written in the second century B.C.E., when the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes was severely persecuting the Jews. Daniel's vision of the four beasts serves to proclaim the message that human kings will come and go, but the kingdom will ultimately belong to God and to God's people.

¹In the first year of King Belshazzar of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head as he lay in bed. Then he wrote down the dream: ²I, Daniel, saw in my vision by night the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea, ³and four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. ¹⁵As for me, Daniel, my spirit was troubled within me, and the visions of my head terrified me. ¹⁶I approached one of the attendants to ask him the truth concerning all this. So he said that he would disclose to me the interpretation of the matter: ¹⁷As for these four great beasts, four kings shall arise out of the earth. ¹⁸But the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever—forever and ever."

Adventure Challenge: Daniel 7.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Read an introduction to or summary of Daniel.

Option B. Research Belshazzar and Antiochus Epiphanes.

DAY TWO: Psalm 149

Let the faithful sing and dance a new song to the LORD.

¹Hallelujah! Sing to the LORD a new song,

God's praise in the assembly of the faithful.

²Let Israel rejoice in their maker;

let the children of Zion be joyful in their ruler.

³Let them praise their maker's name with dancing;

let them sing praise with tambourine and harp.

^{9b}this is glory for all God's faithful ones. Hallelujah!

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 149.

Explorer Challenge: Research "dancing in the Bible," "religious dancing," or "religious bans on dancing."

DAY THREE: Ephesians 1:11-23

After giving thanks for the faith of the Ephesians, Paul prays that they might understand the wisdom, hope, and power of God that is embodied in Jesus Christ.

¹¹In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹²so that we, who were the first to set our hope on

Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

¹⁵I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Adventure Challenge: Ephesians 1.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Repetition is key to this passage. Re-read the passage at least three times, noting (underlining) the words repeated most.

Option B. Some of the language in this passage (for example *eyes of your heart*, or *all rule and authority and power and dominion*) may seem unusual. The strangeness may be a problem of translation or the result of cultural differences. (For example, in Biblical times, *heart* did not have quite the same meaning as it does today.) Explore the meaning of one of these phrases, using different translations and any reference tools available.

DAY FOUR: Luke 6:20-23

In echoes of the prophet Isaiah and Mary's song of praise, Jesus reveals surprising things about who enjoys blessing and who endures woe. He invites his disciples to shower radical love, blessing, forgiveness, generosity, and trust, even to enemies and outsiders.

²⁰Then [Jesus] looked up at his disciples and said:

"Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹"Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

"Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

²²Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

Adventure Challenge: Luke 6.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* The word *blessed* is key to this passage. Use a concordance to see other instances of how this word is used in Luke and the rest of the Bible. (One opposite is *woe*, which Luke uses several times in verses 24-26.) Do you agree with Jesus on what conditions are *blessed* and which cause *woe*?

Option B. Compare Luke 6 with Matthew 5.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, you have knit your people together in one communion in the mystical body of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Grant us grace to follow your blessed saints in lives of faith and commitment, and to know the inexpressible joys you have prepared for those who love you, 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

They are before the throne of God, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. (*Rev. 7:15*)

Adventure Challenge: Who are the people most important to your faith journey? Spend time identifying, remembering, and thanking God for the saints in your life.