

Bible Challenge
December 11 - 17, 2016 – 3rd Week of Advent

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

A note of joyful expectation marks today's worship. Isaiah announces that the desert shall rejoice and blossom. Jesus points to signs of God's reign: the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear. We wait with patience for the coming of the Lord, even as we rejoice at his presence among us this day: in word and holy supper, in church and in our homes, in silent reflection and in works of justice and love. We pray that God would open our eyes and ears to the wonders of Christ's advent among us.

DAY ONE: Isaiah 35:1-10

The prophet describes the return from the Babylonian captivity as a joyous procession to Zion. God's coming reign will bring a renewal of creation in which health and wholeness will be restored. There is no need for fear, for God is coming to save.

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus ²it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. ³Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. ⁴Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you." ⁵Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; ⁷the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. ⁸A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. ⁹No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. ¹⁰And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Adventure Challenge: Isaiah 35.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* In some translations, this passage is printed as poetry. As you read this section consider if it makes difference to you to think of language as a poem.

Option B. In Isaiah's time, to be blind, deaf, or lame was an unsolvable, hopeless condition, often interpreted as a curse or judgment by God. What situations or conditions do we consider this way (perhaps cancer, Alzheimer's, hate)? Re-read Isaiah's prophesy with the understanding that God will address conditions that you consider unsolvable or a curse.

DAY TWO: Psalm 146:5-10

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.

⁵Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their help,
whose hope is in the LORD their God;

⁶who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that ^lis in them;
who keeps promises forever;

⁷who gives justice to those who are oppressed,
and food to those who hunger.

The LORD sets the captive free.

⁸The LORD opens the eyes of the blind; the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;

the LORD loves the righteous.

⁹The LORD cares for the stranger;
the LORD sustains the orphan and widow,
but frustrates the way of the wicked.

¹⁰The LORD shall reign forever,
your God, O Zion, throughout all generations. Hallelujah!

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 146.

Explorer Challenge: Research the phrase “the God of Jacob”; what does it imply?

DAY THREE: James 5:7-10

In anticipation of the Lord's coming, Christians are called upon to cultivate patience rather than discontent.

⁷Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. ⁹Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! ¹⁰As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Adventure Challenge: James 5 (or James 5: 1-12)

Explorer Challenge: Research the life of Jeremiah or Job, as prophets whose example James may have had in mind.

DAY FOUR: MATTHEW 1:1-17

An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

² Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, ⁴and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶and Jesse the father of King David.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, ⁸and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, ⁹and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, ¹¹and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹² And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel, ¹³and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, ¹⁴and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

Adventure Challenge: Matthew 1.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research the four women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba) who appear in this genealogy (in addition to Mary). What does their inclusion imply?

Option B. Compare the focus of this genealogy with that presented in Luke 3:23-38.

Option C. Consult Biblical commentaries on this passage to learn how this passage may not have been intended by Matthew to be a literal (strictly factual) genealogy.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Stir up the wills of all who look to you, Lord God, and strengthen our faith in your coming, that, transformed by grace, we may walk in your way; 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

I am sending my messenger before you, who will prepare your way before you. (*Matt. 11:10*)

Adventure Challenge: Consider what you know about your ancestors and how important that information is to you.

Explorer Challenge: The introduction says: *We wait with patience for the coming of the Lord, even as we rejoice at his presence among us this day: in word and holy supper, in church and in our homes, in silent reflection and in works of justice and love.* Consider in your Christian life the relative importance of “waiting in patience” and “celebrating His presence.”