

Daily Devotions

Devotions – January 23-29, 2022

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Even though many of my Christmas decorations have been put away, I confess my stable figurines are still on the fireplace mantle. I can't put them away, not yet. They remind me that Mary, Joseph and Jesus had many days together before Jesus started his public ministry. My sister shared a book with me by Karen Kingsbury called *The Family of Jesus*. Although a work of fiction, it provides points to ponder on those years Jesus spent with his family- years we know so little about.

Sunday, January 23, 2022

Text: Matthew 1:19-20 (NRSV)

Her husband, Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”

Joseph knew his place. He would never be Jesus' father, but he may have often felt the weight of the responsibility he did have. We don't hear Joseph speak a word, but we see him take action to protect Jesus when it was needed, in a midnight escape to Egypt. Joseph obeyed God, protected Jesus, provided for him and taught him the family business.

I was blessed to spend years growing up with a protective stepfather who rescued me from the occasional disaster I got myself into. I knew I could call him no matter what. I'm thinking Joseph was that sure presence for Jesus; he was the ready hand to help him out of those human situations all kids find themselves in from time to time.

Let's pray: *God thank you for choosing kind, faithful, obedient Joseph. He protected Jesus and loved him as he grew into a young man. May we learn to recognize our place and embrace it as he did. Amen.*



Monday, January 24, 2022

Text: Luke 1:67, 76-79 (NRSV)

Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophesy:

“...And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Zechariah could have been treated like a wise old uncle to Jesus. He lived honorably before God with his wife, but they could not have children. Then his world was turned upside down by a visit from God's angel promising a son to bring joy to their lives! Filled with the Holy Spirit, Zechariah spoke of the work his son would have to prepare the way for the Lord.

I can imagine John would be taken to the temple for Passover and other festivals. Were those celebrations treated like family reunions when distant cousins have an opportunity to play around together? Did Zechariah see the special bond that developed between John and Jesus? Could he recognize Jesus as the Messiah that John would prepare people's hearts for?

Zechariah had an encounter with an angel of God and he learned to wait for God's time. He was given insight when he needed it: to see his role in the fulfillment of God's design.

Let's pray: *Knowing God, thank you for giving us all we need to know at just the right time. Amen.*



Tuesday, January 25, 2022

Text: Luke 1:80 (NRSV)

The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

Watching my grandchildren play together makes me wonder if John and Jesus grew up spending time together as cousins might. My kiddos don't see each other often, but they have a bond as cousins. Did John see Jesus when they traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover? Did they have a recognition of shared purpose? Perhaps they were just a couple of little boys playing together chasing sheep as they walked to the Temple. Luke tells us John grew and became strong in spirit. We may even see traits of a strong willed child in him. Exactly what he would need to boldly preach a baptism of life change that would prepare people's hearts for the Messiah.

Let's pray: *Lord, you have placed us in this moment for a purpose. May we be strong in spirit as John and complete the work we have in your kingdom. Amen.*



Wednesday, January 26, 2022

Text: John 7:3-5 (NRSV)

So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing; for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." (For not even his brothers believed in him.)

I'm a little sister. At my age that title may be hard to picture, but I grew up in the shadow of an older sister and she was the best! She could do all those things I could not, from picking up jacks and catching the ball with one hand to solving algebraic equations. She was my hero. Then she went off to college, lived far away and I was lost. I wonder about James.

James and Jesus were probably youngsters together doing chores, learning the family trade, maybe they were even best friends. Did James think about the future of the family business? Did he consider working with Jesus, building furniture, tools and other household items for the folks of Nazareth as their future? And then one day, Jesus walks off to begin his ministry, his real work, leaving James at the workshop. James may have had a suspicion that something like this could happen, but when it did I imagine his heart was wounded. He may have felt hurt and angry. Maybe even until the day when the risen Jesus appeared to him and James finally recognized him as his brother and his Savior.

Let's pray: *God, we trust the plans you have for us, even as we walk through times of hurt and disappointment. Your time is the right time for each of us. Amen.*



Thursday, January 27, 2022

Text: Luke 1:24-25 (NRSV)

After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, "This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people."

Elizabeth had been in seclusion – we know what that's like – probably a bit like quarantine, until Mary came. Mary knew the secret that Elizabeth and Zechariah had shared for those long months. And now this was too wonderful to keep to herself. Two special births announced by angels of God!

Elizabeth must have been comforted having Mary with her as they shared the final months of her pregnancy. Shared life experience draws people closer together.

I still have one Aunt alive today and we don't see each other often enough, but when we do spend time together it is special indeed. We have a level of shared experiences that comforts me and we pray for each other as we face new challenges in life. Did the relationship between Elizabeth and Mary continue like that? As they met for festival celebrations over the years did they compare notes on the growing boys? Teeth coming in, learning to talk – the usual things mothers of toddlers talk about? Or did they know these boys were set apart even as youngsters playing at family gatherings? In the years ahead was Mary able to comfort Elizabeth when John was killed or did they end up leaning on each other in their shared grief?

Let's pray: *God, thank you for those special family members you have given us to share our secret joys, to mentor us for the trials we face and to accompany us in our times of grief. You always provide for us before we even know what we need. Amen.*



Friday, January 28, 2022

Text: Luke 1:41-45 (NRSV)

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Mary had a secret. Did she have doubts about what the angel said? None of the verses give a hint that she doubted, other than her question, "How can this be?" She was a woman of great faith. Not only did the angel tell her she would give birth to the Son of God, but also that her old relative Elizabeth was also having a baby. Mary hurried off to be with Elizabeth and share in these miracles. It was probably common knowledge in the family how long Elizabeth had been waiting and praying for a child.

But when Mary arrived to be with Elizabeth, there was a grand "reveal party" beyond the expectations of either woman! Perhaps they shared their joys and concerns as first time mothers do. This time together may also have been a chance for Elizabeth to mentor Mary on childbirth, for neither woman knew the conditions in which Mary would give birth. Perhaps they learned together. They may have become companions on their journeys. And years later would they also share their grief as only a mother can who has lost a son?

Let's pray: *God, you send people into our lives when we need them. Thank you for these special people and the gifts they are to us. Amen.*



Saturday, January 29, 2022

Text: Luke 2:39-41 (NRSV)

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.

Only a few verses in Luke tell us about Jesus growing up in Nazareth. Perhaps his childhood was much like other boys in the neighborhood. Toddling around the house until old enough to do chores, then chasing the chickens or running after the sheep. Perhaps he studied at the synagogue and worked in the woodshop learning a trade from Joseph. After the early scare in Bethlehem, I get a sense that life in Nazareth was pretty safe, uneventful, even boring some may say. The high point may have been trips to Jerusalem for Passover or other religious celebrations where he traveled and spent time with family and friends. He could reconnect with Zechariah, Elizabeth and John until he was old enough to mingle in the Temple with the teachers. What conversations did he have with John when they walked the hills together? Years later John would have his followers ask Jesus if he is the one they have been waiting for. Does John then realize that Jesus was his Savior, or did he always know?

The people that were near Jesus as he grew up were in his life for a reason and a season. As his work began, some would follow and be with him as they came to believe he was their son, brother, friend and Savior.

Let's pray: *Thank you, God, for placing strong faithful people around Jesus as he grew. Help us recognize the strong, faithful people you have placed in our lives as we continue to grow into a deeper relationship with you. Amen*

