

LIVING THE WORD—Week 9 (Sun., March 22 – Sat., March 28)

The God of the Mighty Acts: the Great Story of God's Relentless Love

Christmas—God Sends His Son into the World

John 1; Matthew 1; Luke 1-2; Colossians 1:15-23

Key Verse: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

The New Testament opens with the coming of the promised Messiah into the world. This story is not repeatedly emphasized in the New Testament with the frequency of events like the Promise, Exodus, and Exile in the Old Testament. The importance of the Christmas story is seen in its relationship to the prior mighty acts of God as much as in its emphasis New Testament teaching. The Gospel of Matthew opens with a genealogy identifying Jesus as the son of Abraham and David, firmly rooting the Jesus story in the story of God's people, Israel. And Matthew's narrative contains a number of links with the Exodus story (e.g., a baby is rescued from a king who ordered the death of infants). The Gospel of Luke opens with repeated declarations that God is fulfilling the promises and prophecies of old. The Gospel of John opens with a great theological statement directly connecting Jesus to the creation (see also Hebrews 1:1-4).

The Christmas story is another mighty act of God in which God reveals himself. But this event is unique among all the events. For in this event, God does not *do* something for the people he created—he *appears* himself as a human being. At the core of Christian teaching is the doctrine of the Incarnation—the truth that Jesus is "the Word become flesh" (John 1), "God with us" (Matt. 1), "the Son of God" conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1), "the image of the invisible God," in whom "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (Col. 1:15-19).

In the Christmas story, God is acting to bring to completion to the plan he began when he chose Abraham and promised to bless all peoples through his descendants. God is fulfilling his prophecy to send the Messiah, a descendent of David to rule his people. Jesus comes to the poor, for the poor, and as the poor. He comes to bring a new covenant, inviting everyone of every nation into a relationship with the God of gracious, merciful love.

Next Week: The Miracles (Matthew 12:28; Acts 2:22; 10:36-38; John 10:37-38)

Memory Verse (for Weeks 9-12): John 3:16—*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

On the Mountain ("*Love God*")—set aside 30 minutes this week for quiet time with God)

1. Find a time when you can sit alone and uninterrupted. Spend a few moments preparing your heart to meditate on your relationship with God.
2. Read John 1:1-18 a few times. Pick one statement and meditate for a few moments on what it says about Jesus. What does this statement emphasize about Jesus' identity or about his purpose in coming to the world?
3. What do these verses say about human beings? Can you see your own story in them?
4. Use these verses to praise Jesus for who Jesus is and what he has done.
5. Thank God for the grace and truth we have received in Jesus.

In the Gathering (“*Love Each Other*”—discuss with your home church or small group)

1. Does it seem strange to talk about Jesus’ birth at some other time of the year than December? Does all the hoopla around Christmas sometimes make it harder to truly focus on the meaning of Jesus’ birth at that time of the year?
2. Read Matthew 1:1-17. What significant events in the story of Israel are remembered in this genealogy? Why do you think Matthew opened the story of Jesus this way?
3. If someone did not know the story of Israel, what would be difficult to understand in the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke?
4. Pick one account of Jesus coming to the world (Matthew 1-2, Luke 1-2, or John 1). What does it say about the condition of humanity and how Jesus addresses that problem?
5. What does Hebrews 1:1-4 say is unique about Jesus compared to the prophets? What does this suggest about rival claims to truth in other religions and philosophies?
6. Do you have anything to share from your time with God, your family, or in the world?
7. If there is time, discuss the “In the World” section below.
8. Use the songs of Mary and Zechariah (Luke 1:46-79) to praise God for sending Jesus.

Around the Table (“*Love Your Family*”—sit at home and talk together as a family)

1. Do you think Jesus had birthday parties with lots of presents as a child? What about poor children today? What could we do to help poor children?
2. What is different about thinking of Jesus as a baby or as a man who did miracles?
3. What are some reasons why we are glad Jesus came to the world?

Into the World (“*Love the World*”—prayerfully consider God’s mission for us in his world)

1. Read John 3:16-21. What do these verses say about why God sent Jesus into the world? What does that mean for our own purpose in the world as Jesus’ followers?
2. Do you think many Christians give the impression that they want the world to be condemned more than that they want it to be saved?
3. What do you think is the difference between loving the world as God does in John 3:16 and loving the world in the way we are warned not to in 1 John 2:15-17?
4. How could we be more focused on following Jesus into the world to save it?