

Monday, December 19 – Read Jeremiah 31:31. God is just and holy and separated from sinners like us. This is our main problem at Christmas and every other season. How shall we get right with a just and holy God? Nevertheless, God is merciful and has promised in Jeremiah 31 that someday he would do something new. He would replace shadows with the Reality of the Messiah. And he would powerfully move into our lives and write his will on our hearts so that we are not constrained from outside but are willing inside to love, trust and follow him. That would be the greatest salvation imaginable – if God should offer us the greatest Reality in the universe to enjoy and then move in us to see to it with the greatest freedom and joy possible. That would be a Christmas gift worth singing about. He did promise this and made it possible for us all to receive this gift. **Read Hebrews 9:28.** Christ took our judgement and canceled our guilt and that means are sins are gone. Now, we can sing.

Tuesday, December 20 – Read John 17:18. Christmas is a model for missions. Missions is a mirror of Christmas. As I, so you. For example, danger. Christ came to his own and his own rejected him. So you. They plotted against him. So you. He had no permanent home. So you. They whipped and mocked him. So you. He died after three years of ministry. So you. But there is a worse danger than any of these which Jesus escaped. So you! The greatest danger a missionary faces is to distrust the mercy of God. If that danger is avoided, then all other dangers lose their sting. God makes every dagger a scepter in our hand. J.W. Alexander says, “Each instant of present danger is to be graciously repaid with million ages of glory.” Christ escaped the danger of distrust. Therefore God has highly exalted him. Remember this Advent that Christmas is a model for missions. As I, so you. And that mission means danger. The greatest danger is distrusting God’s mercy. Succumb to this and all is lost. Conquer here and nothing can harm you for a millions ages.

Wednesday, December 21 – Matthew 1:18-24. There are so many facets of love to treasure in Matthew’s story. Joseph’s love for Mary— even before his dream, he wants to treat his pregnant bride as gently as possible. God’s love for Joseph and Mary as the angel guides their steps. God’s love for all of us, as Jesus is born to save us from our sins. Have a Christmas filled with light, hope, joy and love! “You are to give him the name Jesus,” the angel in the dream told Joseph, “because he will save his people from their sins.” “Jesus” is the Greek form of “Joshua,” a Hebrew name that means “the LORD saves.” In what ways was Jesus unique among all the boys named Joshua and Jesus before and since his birth? Joseph is an often-unsung hero. Matthew says Mary “was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit,” but it seems that outwardly her unique pregnancy looked like every other pregnancy. What feelings and fears do you imagine Joseph went through? Would a dream have been enough to reassure and sustain you in his shoes?

Thursday, December 22 – Read Luke 2:8-20. We are used to the shepherds in manger scenes, Christmas pageants and paintings. Yet when Jesus was born, no one looked for shepherds. They were obscure (like Mary). Most priests shunned them because, caring for flocks, they couldn’t keep the rituals “holiness” required. But God loved them. When Jesus grew up, he said, “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11). The angel gave the child born in Bethlehem three titles. A “Savior” rescued people from danger. “Messiah” (a Hebrew term) meant “anointed ruler.” “Lord” was a word Greek-speaking Hebrews used to refer to God. How did each of these words capture some of the many facets of who Jesus was and what he did for us? Jerusalem was only a few miles from Bethlehem. Was God biased against the people of power and influence at that time? Why didn’t the “herald angels” sing in the Temple courts, or at the high priest’s luxurious house in Jerusalem? How can you keep your heart and your home open to God’s presence this Christmas?

Friday, December 23 – Read Luke 2:10. In the end, the joy of Christmas call comes down to this – a Savior is born TO YOU. It's not just the fact that after all the centuries his born – but that he is born to the like of you, me and the shepherds. At Christmas God's highest aspiration comes down to earth and everything changes. Reflect on the year that his coming to an end. Remember that Jesus is actually there with you as you look back. In God's presence, remember some of the most important things you did this year. And reflect on what went well, and what didn't go so well. Think through things to give thanks for, and other events to ask forgiveness for and help with.