

Today's Reading: Luke 2:1-7 Bonus: Micah 5:2

*** We are reading in Luke 2 this week to illuminate the PEACE of Advent,
We'll study the conclusion of Luke 1 in Week 3.*

Think back to elementary school when your teacher would make everyone line up so every student could be accounted for; this must be similar to what Caesar had in mind when he put out the decree for a census to be taken. He required all people to return to the city in which they were born. As a result, a man named Joseph, native to Bethlehem, was forced to return to his hometown, accompanied by a pregnant Mary, mother of Jesus, to whom he was betrothed!

The city was busting at the seams, as hundreds were forced to return to Bethlehem to be counted. It was during this time, away from their home, Mary gave birth to our Savior in a stable. It may have appeared to be the perfect storm, but to God, this was His perfect plan. When Mary gave birth in Bethlehem while betrothed to a man from the lineage of David, this fulfilled Biblical prophecy that predated Mary and Joseph by hundreds of years. (Micah 5:2 tells of the One who would come forth from Bethlehem).

In the supernatural, sovereignty of God, Biblical prophecy was fulfilled and the Messiah was born, to bring hope and peace to mankind.

- Did you know the ministry of Jesus saw the fulfillment of more than 300 prophecies found in the Old Testament? How does this point you to worship?

Prayer: God, You are the supreme author of my life. I surrender my plans and seek you, because your way is better!





Today's Reading: Luke 2:8-15
Bonus: 1 Corinthians 1:26

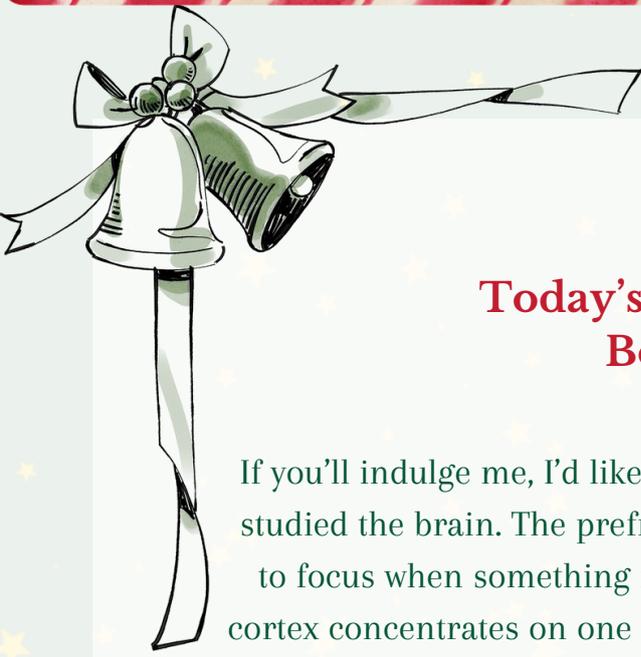
We often champion those who are first to achieve something or the best at a particular activity. You don't often see a Grammy given to someone who is "just OK" at singing or an Olympic medal awarded to someone who is "average" at sports. We champion and celebrate those who are excellent, intelligent, *elite*. Because we are so keenly aware of excellence, we often think God has a penchant for the same. If we can "make ourselves great," we might earn His favor ... but often, this puts us on the path of striving and shame.

The shepherds represented a tier of society who were uneducated and often disregarded. How ironic for this to be the group to whom the Angel of the Lord appeared. There were scholars, priests and kings available - yet God chose to look upon the ones that no one was looking at. In reality the news of the Messiah was good news for *all* people (including the shepherds), and is still good news today! There is nothing we can do to disqualify ourselves from the good news of the Gospel, and we can have peace knowing we don't have to achieve a certain status to earn God's favor or love.

Do you ever feel as though you must strive or be good enough to earn God's favor? Surrender those feelings to Him today.

Prayer: God, thank you for seeing me and my mess and still choosing to love me. Thank you for the Gospel; it is good news for me today!





Today's Reading: Luke 2:16-21 Bonus: Psalm 77:11

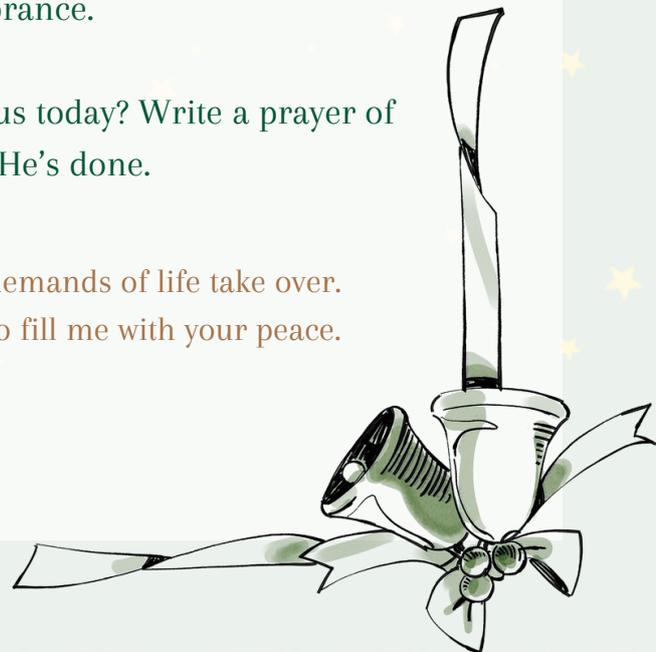
If you'll indulge me, I'd like to revisit health class – specifically, that unit we studied the brain. The prefrontal cortex is a part of the brain that allows us to focus when something is marked as “important.” When the prefrontal cortex concentrates on one thing, we are focused and as a result, more likely to remember what is happening in front of us. For example, many of us can remember significant events, such as a wedding day, a child's birth, or a favorite birthday, because these events were deemed necessary by our brains.

As Mary looked down and held her newborn child, we read that she was “treasuring up these things in her heart” (Luke 2:19). In other words, Mary's prefrontal cortex was engaged and she knew the importance, significance and holiness of the moment. She knew the child she held was no ordinary child – rather, he was the long-awaited Messiah! Mary chose to fully focus on the moment, and in doing so, she showed us the importance of remembering.

In our busy lives, we often fail to remember the good news that Jesus came, lived, and died for us. Schedules and holiday festivities can overshadow the peace God brings that surpasses all understanding. He is worthy of our worship and our remembrance.

In what ways can you stop to acknowledge Jesus today? Write a prayer of thanksgiving to Him for what He's done.

Prayer: Father, I confess I sometimes let the demands of life take over. Today, I submit my mind to you and ask you to fill me with your peace.





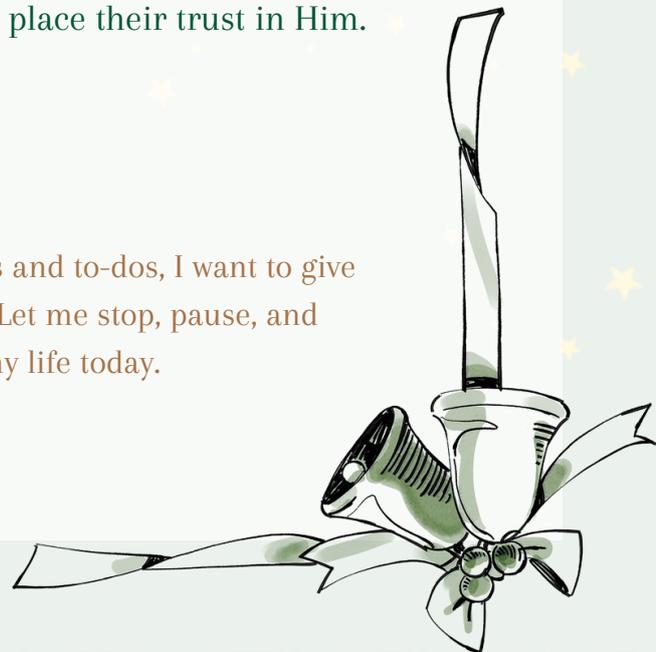
Today's Reading: Luke 2:22-32 Bonus: Isaiah 25:1

Mary and Joseph, in their faithfulness, made certain to observe the customary time of dedication to the Lord on behalf of Jesus. While at the temple, they crossed paths with a man named Simeon, described as “righteous” and “devout.” It’s important to note he was not described as a priest, prophet or scholar; instead, Luke pointed out that Simeon was a faithful servant of God. As a result, we learn that Simeon was filled with the Holy Spirit and had been foretold that he would see the Messiah!

We aren’t told how Simeon knew baby Jesus was the Messiah. In fact, Simeon’s initial encounter with Mary and Jesus is not described. However, Scripture clearly records that Simeon took hold of the child and praised God for fulfilled prophecy – both in his life and in the testimonies of prophets from years before. The faithfulness of Mary, Joseph and Simeon in this account is clearly shown, and there is one result: *praise*. Faithfulness in us should overflow from the faithfulness of God in us every day. May our lives be a constant echo of praise for the peace we have in Christ Jesus.

Amidst the craziness of the season, pause and reflect on our praise-worthy Savior and the peace he affords those who place their trust in Him.

Prayer: God, before I tackle agendas, schedules and to-dos, I want to give you praise for all you have done in my life. Let me stop, pause, and remember Your faithfulness in my life today.





Today's Reading: Luke 2:33-38 Bonus: Zechariah 14:3-9

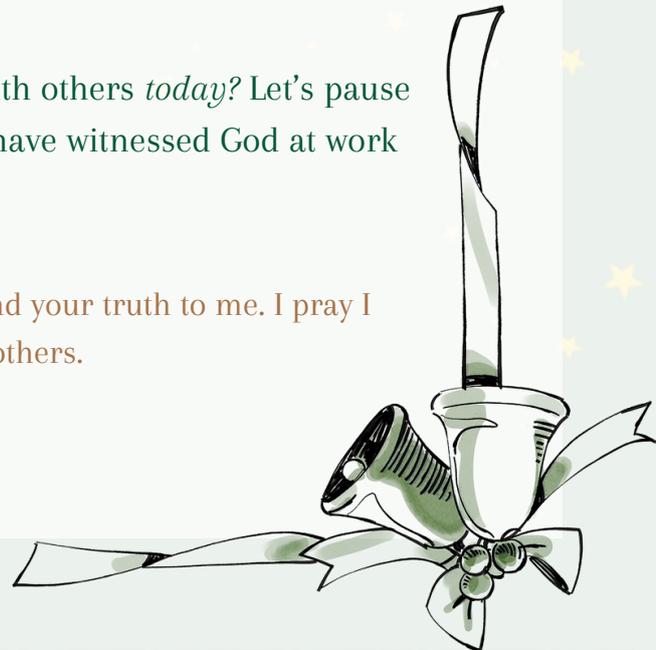
Have you ever walked in on a conversation that you just had to be a part of? This is what it must've been like for Anna, a widow who walked to the temple on the day that Simeon exalted baby Jesus. We read today how Anna was a prophetess who had submitted herself to fasting and praying in the temple. Anna's life was a sacrifice to the One whom she knew was worthy of everything she had.

However, when Anna saw Simeon shouting prophetic praise, she immediately joined him in worship. She saw her Savior and had one response: praise. Then she began "to speak about him to all looking forward to Jerusalem's redemption" (Luke 2:38).

Anna couldn't stay quiet about the baby, born to be our Savior, whom her eyes had just beheld. Her heart's utmost desire was shown in how she immediately worshipped, thanked God, and told others about the Messiah who was now here. Too often, our hearts become distracted from the truth that came to earth so long ago. We allow our schedules to become the idol of our worship rather than the peace afforded us in knowing Christ has come!

How can we share the peace found in Christ with others *today*? Let's pause and remember, in thankfulness, the ways we have witnessed God at work in our own life.

Prayer: God, thank you for revealing yourself and your truth to me. I pray I am able to share this with others.





Week 2

DIGGING DEEPER

LUKE 2:1-38

Webster's Dictionary defines *humility*, derived from the Latin word *humilis*, as meaning "low, a kind of meekness, modesty, or submissiveness as opposed to arrogance, pridefulness, superiority, or haughtiness."

Jesus Christ, Son of God, exercised his own free will, and gave up all he had to take on the nature of a servant. Though fully God, he appeared in human likeness. He was humble and walked the earthly path of obedience to death on the cross. —Philippians 2:7-8, GNB

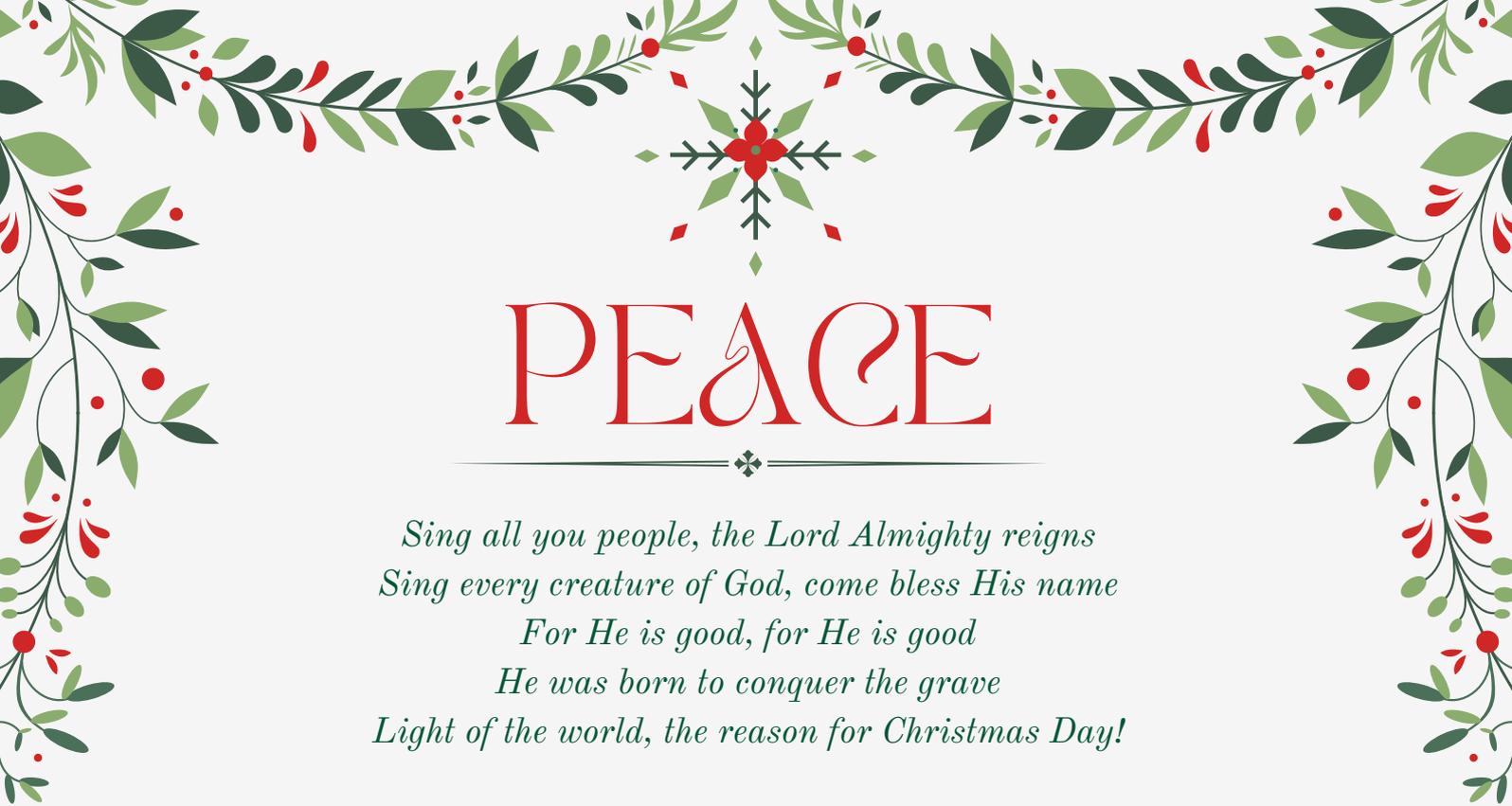
Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the very conditions surrounding Jesus' birth exemplified humility.

In AD 150, early Christian apologist Justin Martyr recorded that the place in which Jesus was born was a cave in Bethlehem. Historian Matthew Henry said, "Jesus was born in Bethlehem to fulfill the prophecy in Micah 5:2. Bethlehem, only six miles from Jerusalem, was that city of David, a small, poor town of Jesus' birth, surrounded by lowly shepherds in the nearby fields who raised the lambs for temple sacrifices. Had there been any decency of humanity among the people, they would not have turned a woman in birthing travail into a stable!"

Consistent with the rocky terrain of the region, a stable was often a limestone cave or grotto common to Bethlehem. Like the shepherds present at the proclamation from the Angel, Jesus was born "poor." He did not inherit a princely estate. He had no rich friends. Instead, he had virtuous, humble parents who honored God. His meager birth reflected characteristic humility embodied later by Christ himself before his Father in heaven (2 Chronicles 7:14). Jesus became a shepherd, not of sheep, but of men (John 10:14-15).

The Angel of the Lord told the shepherds to look for a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger (Luke 2:12). First-century mangers or feeding troughs were usually carved in stone. They would never have believed it if the angel had not told them to look for such a specific sign. They greatly rejoiced at the realization of what they had discovered.

Scottish theologian William Barclay stated, "It is a lovely thought that the shepherds who looked after the temple lambs were the first to witness the lowly birth surroundings of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29-36; Peter 1:19-20). In his humble obedience, Jesus became the final "sacrificial lamb" required by the Father (Hebrews 10:10, 12).



PEACE

*Sing all you people, the Lord Almighty reigns
Sing every creature of God, come bless His name
For He is good, for He is good
He was born to conquer the grave
Light of the world, the reason for Christmas Day!*

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be on his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end —Isaiah 9:6–7

This uplifting song, “Christmas Day,” proclaims that Jesus is Emmanuel, “God with us.” Often, we want to escape our circumstances and choose a road different than the one we are walking. Perhaps we find it easy to enjoy God in times of peace but more difficult when we face darkness and uncertainty.

During this advent season, may we resist allowing people or situations to rob us of Christ’s abiding peace.

The Gospel’s good news is that Jesus was born into this world as a baby and experienced an earthly life and suffered, as we do. No matter our experience, we can rest in His peace, as this song proclaims. He is with us in the darkness. He is the Light of the World! He is good, and we can rejoice knowing our Lord God Almighty reigns!

[“Christmas Day” (Live) – Chris Tomlin with
We The Kingdom arrangement]

