

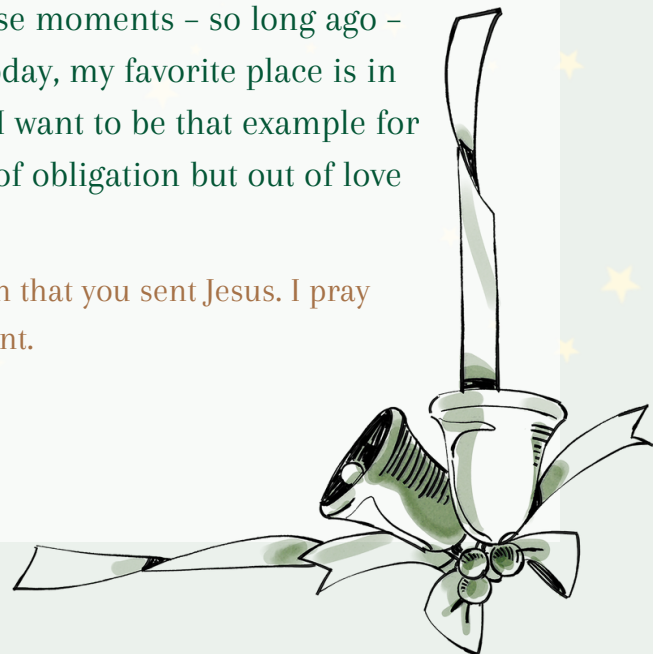


Today's Reading: Luke 2:39-42
Bonus Reading: Luke 1:28, 30, 38; Matthew 1:18-24

In 1974 the Swedish band, Blue Swede, released a catchy toon called “Hooked on a Feeling”. Perhaps it was their one-and-only big hit because it missed the mark on what *love* truly is. Love is more than a feeling; love should always lead to *action*. Mary and Joseph’s love for God, for instance, led to faithfulness. Mary was the first to receive news of the incarnate Gospel message when the angel Gabriel appeared to her, and she replied, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). We have no recorded words for Joseph, however, his actions showed his devotion to God – he did what the Lord told him to do. The faithfulness of Mary and Joseph was seen as they brought Jesus to the temple year after year for the festivals as God commanded.

As a little girl, I grew up attending church with my family. I saw faithfulness not only on the holidays but week after week. I often visited my grandparents’ house next door where I frequently saw their Bibles open on the kitchen table. If my Papa wasn’t done reading when I arrived, he would read to me. This was my first exposure to what a relationship with God looks like, and a picture that inspires me today. Those moments – so long ago – planted seeds in my heart that have grown. Today, my favorite place is in front of an open Bible with a hot cup of coffee. I want to be that example for my own children. A faithful life isn’t lived out of obligation but out of love for our Savior.

Prayer: Father, thank you for loving me so much that you sent Jesus. I pray my love for you is evident.





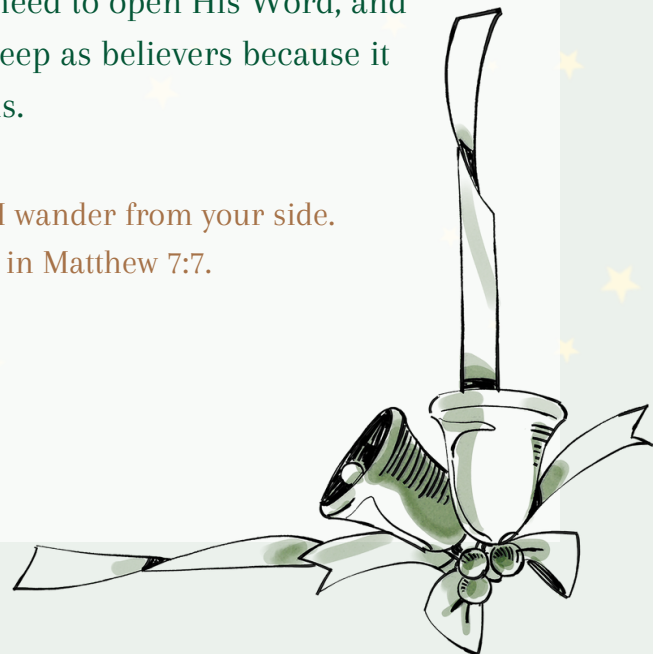
Today's Reading: Luke 2:43-47
Bonus Reading: Jeremiah 29:13-14

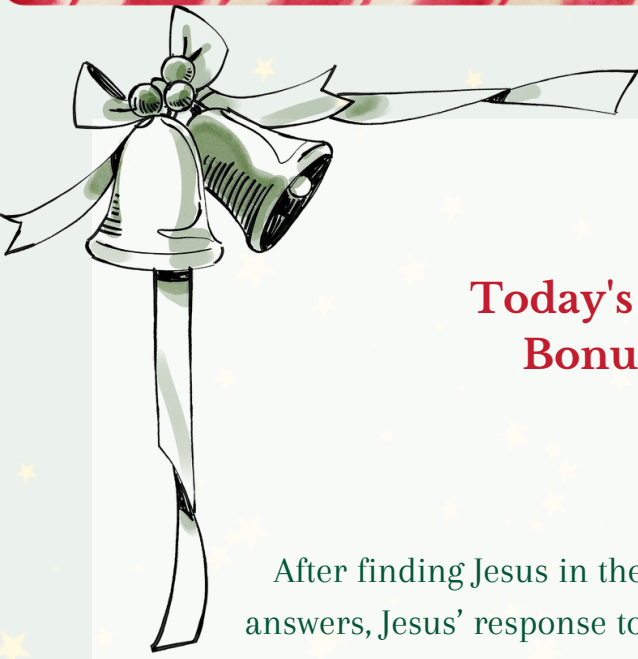
Have you ever temporarily lost or misplaced a child who was in your care? Leaving a child behind is a scenario that invokes dread in every parent or caregiver. Today we read that Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem as his family began the journey home to Nazareth. It was a couple of days before anyone noticed. With a large group of family and friends, it must have been easy to think young Jesus was with someone else. When he wasn't found to be with them, Mary and Joseph went back to Jerusalem on their own and searched three days before finding Him.

Losing track of a wandering child is one thing. But often we are the wandering child! We suddenly look up and find that Jesus isn't near; not because He moved, but because we did. Jesus is the constant. When we lose sight, we can rest assured that we'll find Him right where He's always been. Matthew 7:7 says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you". Jesus is never lost to us.

We don't need a GPS tracker to find Jesus; we need to open His Word, and we will find Him. Bible study is a rhythm we keep as believers because it keeps us close to Jesus.

Prayer: Father, I admit there are times when I wander from your side.
When I do, help me recall your words in Matthew 7:7.





Today's Reading: Luke 2:48-52
Bonus Reading: Luke 2:19

After finding Jesus in the temple, having amazed the teachers with His answers, Jesus' response to Mary and Joseph reminds us that people saw a boy, but Jesus was also *God*. Though they didn't understand Jesus' answer, Mary "treasured up all these things" (Luke 2:19).

We can observe a similar heart posture from Mary a few times in the Gospels. Mary found herself favored by God, yet alongside that favor came situations she didn't quite understand. Still, she chose to take God at His word and trust Him. Because of her faith, she was embraced the arrival of Jesus when the angel came to her.

There are moments in my life when I've treasured a special day: a wedding, the birth of a child, or a special memory. There have also been moments in my life that bore a spiritual, treasured significance. One such moment was when my faith was tested, my life and dreams turned upside down, and I didn't understand. In a moment between only God and me, I declared my complete trust in Him no matter what was to come, even when I didn't understand my circumstances. It is a moment my life and faith have been built upon; a moment I treasure in my heart.

Prayer: Father, thank you for your steadfast love. A love we can trust even when we don't understand.





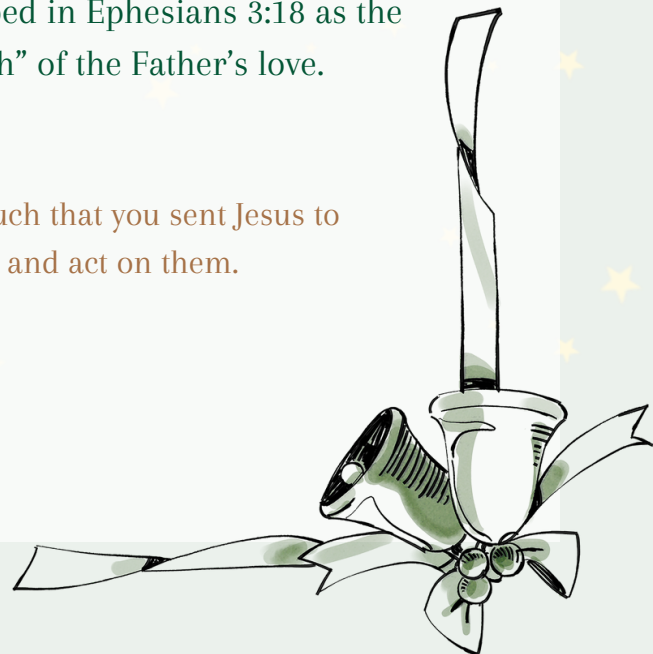
Today's Reading: Matthew 1:18-25
Bonus Reading: John 3:16; 14:23-24; Matthew 7:24; 1
Corinthians 13:1-8; James 1:22

Just as love leads to action, today's Scripture reading reminds us that hearing should lead to doing! (James 1:22) Jesus taught that those who love Him and heard His words should also do them. This is the way of wisdom and faith that will not fail. We are known by our actions just as a tree is known by its fruit.

Joseph's actions tell us so much about him. He is described as an ordinary man, whose love for Mary was evidenced by his intent to divorce her quietly, instead of making a spectacle. His passion for God was seen by his obedience to God's direction. Though Scripture contains no spoken words from Joseph, his actions spoke loudly.

Love is more than a feeling; love is seen in action. Words mean very little if actions do not follow them. In 1 Corinthians 13:1-8, we are given a beautiful example of what it looks like to show love. Jesus told us, "God so loved the world that he sent his son" (John 3:16). Jesus came to be the perfect sacrifice who took away the sins of the world, and offered us salvation! This is how we grasp what is described in Ephesians 3:18 as the "breadth and length and height and depth" of the Father's love.

Prayer: Father, thank you for loving me so much that you sent Jesus to redeem me. Help me hear your words and act on them.





Today's Reading: Matthew 2:1-11
Bonus Reading: Micah 5:2; 2 Samuel 5:2

Often, when important life events occur, we travel to celebrate with those we love. I traveled halfway across the country to attend my best friend's college graduation and later, her wedding. She and I grew up together, and she is much more like a sister than a friend. When it comes to those we love, we are happy to make whatever journey we need to be with them.

The wise men who came to see Jesus traveled a far distance to see the Savior--in a time when travel was not fast or easy! We aren't given much detail, and don't even know who they were or where they came from. What we do know is that God revealed Himself to them, and their response was to seek Him and worship Him. Ironically, those in Jerusalem who knew the Scriptures didn't seek Him out in worship. But, the wise men traveled about two years, treasures in tow, and laid them as gifts before Christ, our King.

- When God reveals Himself or His plans to us, how do we respond?
- Do we seek Jesus more often in worship or need?
- How do we bring our best gifts to Jesus?

Prayer: Father, thank you for the gift of your Son. Help me love you with all my heart, soul, mind and strength.





Week 4

DIGGING DEEPER

LUKE 2:40-52
MATTHEW 1:18-25; 2:1-11

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The English word *submit* comes from a Latin root meaning “to let down or yield.” It paints a picture of kneeling before a superior. The New Testament Greek word is *hupotasso*, a military word meaning “to put under or arrange under.” Submission requires acknowledgment of proper order and authority.

All authority comes from God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and we are commanded to submit to Him. James 4:7 says, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” We are to arrange ourselves under the command of a divine viewpoint rather than live our lives based on a human viewpoint. It is a process of surrendering our will to our Father. Therefore, if our purpose on this earth is to do the will of God, then submitting to someone else becomes an act of trust in God. Obedience requires us to surrender to the authority of another in various circumstances of our life.

This week’s focal passages highlight several examples of submission. Luke 2:41 says Mary and Joseph submitted to God’s Law regarding the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the yearly Passover feast. Young Jesus placed Himself under the instruction of the Jewish religious teachers at the temple. When His parents discovered this, He obediently left to return to Nazareth. Luke 2:51 says, “And he was subject unto them.” In Matthew 1:24, Joseph “did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.” The Magi from the east diligently searched for the newborn king of the Jews and humbly bowed in worship before him, offering precious gifts.

Having a humble and submissive heart is a choice we make before God that allows the Holy Spirit “to conform us to the image of Christ.” (Romans 8:29). In this way, we grow spiritually. How would you gauge your level of submission to the Lord today?

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LOVE

*Love is born, hope is here
Heaven's light has made the darkness disappear
Peace on Earth, goodwill to men
God with us all because of Bethlehem.*

Contemporary Christian artist Matthew West paints a beautiful portrait of the Gospel in musical form. “Because of Bethlehem” tells the story in four verses of Jesus the infant, who became Jesus the student, who became Jesus the teacher, the friend, the healer, the sacrificial lamb and Jesus the Savior.

... God is love. God showed us how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. —1 John 4:9–10, NLT

This is the Gospel we proclaim this Advent season. Over the last four weeks, we have looked at the hope, joy, peace and love we have in Jesus. Love is at the heart of all of it. God is love, so His best gift was the perfect sacrifice to bring us back to Him.

And so, may we consider: Do we only celebrate the birth of the newborn King in this season, or do we daily recognize – and live under – the authority of the King of Kings?

[“Because of Bethlehem” – Matthew West]

