

Weekly Study Guide

November 27, 2016

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God's Power in Humble Beginnings

"He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary."

Things I'd like to remember about today's message...

Daily Readings

Monday

Acts 20:1-6

Thursday

Acts 21:1-16

Tuesday

Acts 20:7-12

Friday

Acts 21:17-26

Wednesday

Acts 20:13-38

Saturday

Acts 21:27-36

Regular habits of private Bible reading strengthen our relationship with God and teach us how to follow Jesus. In addition to the thematic exercise above, you can use this guide each week to lead you through relevant sections of the Bible.

Group Discussion Guide

CONNECT

Have you ever had any Advent traditions as you prepare for the coming of Christmas? Did you ever have a manger scene (sometimes called a crèche) set up in your home? Do you think these things helped you learn the story of Jesus' birth?

LEARN AND APPLY

Read Luke 1:26-38. If an angel came to you and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored, The Lord is with you!" How would you respond?

Sometimes Christians assume Mary must have been quite different from other people. What does Mary's reaction to the angel's words in verse 29 hint to us about Mary's self-assessment of her status? Which vision of Mary is more appealing to you: a Mary holier than all others, like Mary Poppins ("practically perfect in every way") for whom "greetings, you who are highly favored" would not be unexpected, or a Mary who is flawed but faithful, who finds that greeting startling?

In verse 30, the angel gives Mary an instruction and a promise. What are they? How are they tied together?

Re-read verses 30-33, and then Read Isaiah 9:1-2 and 6-7. How do the angel's words connect with this prophecy? Do you think Mary might have known these words from Isaiah? What questions, emotions, hopes and fears might this proclamation have raised in Mary?

While Mary is still wrapping her mind around his enormous promise of who her son will become, a very practical question comes to mind for her. "Um, how? Last time I checked, you need a husband for that. I don't have one yet!" The angel answers the question in Luke 1:35. When Holy God—the Holy Spirit who first breathed life into creation—meets broken, fallen humanity (flawed but faithful) and what is born into the world is Jesus—the Redeemer of Humanity. When God created us, he proclaimed humankind to be good! Jesus, God in the flesh, came to redeem, make right what had become broken in humanity by sin, and instead restore us to all that is good about being human!

Because Jesus is fully God and fully human, he alone is able to restore the connection between us! We are connected through Jesus! Read Isaiah 9:6-7 again. Knowing this about Jesus, do you hear these promises differently; "For to US a child is born," and, "The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this" ?

Read Luke 5:12-14. Usually when a person touches a leper, they 'catch' the status of 'unclean' from that 'unclean' leper. With Jesus, that seemed to work in reverse! How did the incarnation (the in-the-fleshing) of Jesus restore dignity to being human? Why do you think that matters to God? What does that tell you about how God feels about you?

On the cross, Jesus completed his work in redeeming the sin of humanity. As Holy God and wholly human, he took human sin to death in his own sinless life for the sake of all who would ever be human beings wanting to be re-connected to God. In his resurrection to life, in victory for all people, Jesus' kingdom became one that will never end (Luke 1:33, Isaiah 9:7) into eternal life! Does it comfort you to know that your Lord, Savior, Judge, King knows what it's like to be human? If so, what do you find comforting about it?

Mary had a lot of information to take in all at once in this moment. In Luke 1:35-37 the Angel tells her A: She's going to give birth to the Son of God; B: Her relative Elizabeth (who was beyond child bearing years) was 6 months pregnant; and C: No word from God will ever fail! Why do you think the angel gave her those specific pieces of information? What do you think gave Mary the courage to respond "I am the Lord's servant—may your word to me be fulfilled"?

Have you ever experienced a time when you felt that God was calling you to do something, and it felt to you that other things you experienced, or read in Scripture, confirmed that message for you in a way that gave you the confidence to act in faith?

PRAY AND APPLY

Today, may the Lord remind you that in creating human beings he said "It is good." In redeeming human beings, (Romans 5:19) Jesus has restored us to that status! Bring to the Lord the 'not goods' of your day, in confession, and let him lead you and restore you into the joy of being a human redeemed through Jesus' blood.