

Study Guide for the Week of December 11, 2005

The Characters Surrounding Christmas—Joseph the Doubter

This study guide is designed to help you to become more familiar with the Bible. Study these passages on your own, with a friend, or with a group. If you or someone you know needs a Bible, please take one from under a chair in the Worship Center. They are there for you to take home and use! Sermon manuscripts are available at www.saintpauls-umc.com.

Monday – Today we're going to study the story of Joseph. Look over your notes from yesterday's message and then **read Matthew 1:18-25**. Look carefully at this passage. What do you observe about Joseph from this text? After the wise men came to visit the Christ child, the following events take place: **read Matthew 2:13-15**. What must it have been like for Joseph to be a refugee in Egypt, trying to care for his young wife and the infant Jesus? What might he have prayed during this time in Egypt? **Read Matthew 2:19-23**. Note the prophecy, "He shall be called a Nazorean." This exact prophecy is not found in the Old Testament in this form. But remember this prophecy – we'll come back to it and solve a Bible riddle tomorrow. What did you learn about Joseph in Sunday's sermon? How does this relate to your life?

Tuesday – Today we're going to study some of the Old Testament prophetic readings for the season of Advent. **Read Isaiah 11:1-10**. This passage is about the coming of the Messianic King. Written hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, the earliest Christians believed this passage was clearly about Jesus. Remember yesterday's riddle – the Old Testament prophecy about the messiah being a "Nazorean?" The root of the word Nazorean is Natzor – this word means, "branch" and was the word used in Isaiah 11:1-10 to describe the Messiah (the "branch"). The town of Nazareth may have derived its name from this prophecy in Isaiah 11:1-10 – so named because the settlers there were hoping for the coming of the Messiah. And thus, the prophecy, "He shall be called a Nazorean" is a way of pointing to the fact that he would be called a "Branch" while at the same time pointing to the fact that the Messiah's home town would be Nazareth. Note the other prophetic promises of this passage – most have not been fulfilled in Christ's first coming – but will be fulfilled when he returns and ushers in a new heaven and a new earth. Why does Isaiah describe this heavenly vision with these words?

Wednesday – **Read Psalm 72**. This is a royal Psalm invoking God's blessings upon a future king. This future king came to be seen as the Messiah, and thus Christians came to see this Psalm as speaking of Jesus. What does it say about the coming Messiah? How do you see these words fulfilled in Jesus? Note the verses about kings bringing gifts – Matthew speaks of these kings as "wise men" or "magi" who brought gifts to the infant Jesus. Where do you see the theme of peace in this passage? Use this passage as an outline for your own prayer of praise to the Lord for who he is and what he has done and will do in the future.

Thursday – **Read Romans 15:1-13**. Where do you see the theme of peace in this passage? What does this passage call you to strive for? Note Paul's mention of Jesus' work to draw Gentiles into salvation – into peace with God. Notice too the prophetic quote from Isaiah – you'll recognize this as the passage from Tuesday's reading – Isaiah 11. Look over this passage once again to see what God's word to you might be, as you continue to prepare your heart and life for the celebration of Christ's birth and for his Second Coming.

Friday – Remember one of the main ideas of this season of Advent is preparation. As such every year we remember John the Baptist who came to "prepare the way for the Lord." **Read Matthew 3:1-12**. What does John demand of his hearers? What does it mean to produce "fruit appropriate for repentance?" This passage is a warning of judgment, and an offer of God's grace and peace. Do you have sin in your life that you need to confess and leave behind? Or are there ways in which your life has not been pleasing to God? Repent and receive God's grace! Where do we find peace in repentance?