

# Study Guide for the Week of December 18, 2005

## *The Characters Surrounding Christmas—The Shepherds*

*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](http://www.saintpauls-umc.com).*

**Monday** – Look over your sermon notes from yesterday’s message. What did you learn about shepherds? About sheep? **Read Luke 2:8-20.** What do we learn from the angels in this passage? What was the response of the shepherds to the angelic announcement? What did they do after they had seen the child? Many people begin attending Saint Paul’s and ultimately find Christ here as a result of someone inviting them to Candlelight Christmas Eve services. Who do you know that is not actively involved in a church that you might invite to Christmas Eve services? Pray for this individual and then give them a call, or forward the e-mail the church will be sending today or tomorrow inviting persons to Christmas Eve.

**Tuesday** – Today we read a prophecy of Jesus birth. **Read Isaiah 7:10-16.** Let’s take a moment to consider prophecy in the Old Testament. Some prophetic words of the Old Testament concerning the coming of the Messiah are clearly about Jesus. Other prophecies we associate with Jesus were originally pointing to kings or deliverers whom God would raise up in or near the time of the prophet who was writing. These generally had one fulfillment in the prophets’ time, and yet had a subsequent fulfillment in Jesus. If you read Isaiah 7:1-9 you can see the immediate context of this passage. In that context the word “virgin” (which in Hebrew can also be translated as “young woman”) refers to a pregnant woman, perhaps even the prophet Isaiah’s wife, who will have a child. But when early Christians looked back upon this passage, they saw a type of what God had done – a foreshadowing – in Jesus. Some dismiss the Virgin Birth believing that the early Christians misunderstood the words of Isaiah. But Luke doesn’t quote from Isaiah when telling the story of the Virgin Birth – his telling of this story is not based upon Isaiah at all. More likely Matthew and Luke are recording what happened in Jesus’ birth, and Matthew reads Isaiah and believes that God was foreshadowing and hinting at the Virgin Birth. What do you think?

**Wednesday** – The scripture reading for today is a Psalm likely written after the Assyrians had invaded and destroyed Israel in 722 B.C. The Assyrians also threatened to destroy the southern Kingdom of Judah (Israel was divided into two nations – Israel (also known as Ephraim) and Judah, in the 10th century before Christ). This is the context of our Psalm reading for today – Judah is asking for God’s deliverance. **Read Psalm 80:1-7.** Note the longing for restoration. Have you ever felt that the “wheels were coming off” of your life and you needed God’s restoration and deliverance? **Read Psalm 80:17-19.** Notice the language the Psalmist uses to describe the deliverer he hoped God would send. Remember, Jesus uses this same language to describe himself. These verses were a request for immediate deliverance, but they also pointed to what God would do in Jesus. Pray these verses today.

**Thursday** – Today and tomorrow we leave behind the prophecies of Jesus birth and focus on Christmas readings. **Read Luke chapter 1** – you’ll be reading passages we’ve studied over the last few weeks – this will prepare you for Christmas. Enjoy!

**Friday** – Don’t forget to invite a friend to be a part of our Christmas Eve Candlelight Services at 4, 6, 8, and 11 p.m. In the New Year we’ll begin our new sermon series, “The Bible and the Afterlife” which should be of interest to Christians and non-Christians alike. Today, as you prepare for Christmas Eve Candlelight, **read Luke 2:1-20.** How do you see the Christmas story differently as a result of our study this month of the Characters Surrounding Christmas? **On Christmas Day, read Matthew 1:18-25.** MERRY CHRISTMAS!