

thrive

NOV'20-JAN'21

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THIS ISSUE

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LUKE

– the Son of Man

In this edition of *Thrive* we will be reading through Luke's account of the life and ministry of Jesus. Luke's Gospel provides a unique perspective of Jesus' life and contains much profound material that is only found in this Gospel.

His portrait of Jesus is full of grace and compassion. In many ways this Gospel teaches us what it means to be truly human. We see the perfect humanity of Jesus, who appears as the second Adam, the Son of Man, to begin the great reversal of all that the first Adam began when he rebelled against God. You will find this journey deeply rewarding and challenging. So please join me as we read through Luke's Gospel together in this edition of *Thrive*.

MJ

THE RISING TIDE

Luke 1:1-25

MONDAY

2 NOV

God comes to us gradually, like the rising of the tide. When Jesus returns, his coming will be sudden for many people; unexpected like the breaking in of a thief (1 Thessalonians 5:3-4). But not so for those who are ready. When Malachi predicted the coming of Jesus he assured the people that he would be preceded by a messenger who would “prepare the way” so that the people would “stand when he appears” (Malachi 3:1-5). So the book of Luke begins with the birth of the prophet who would prepare the way for the Messiah. What’s the point? The point is that Jesus didn’t come suddenly; out of the blue. There was lots of divine activity preparing the way, including John the Baptist who would call the people to repentance, lest they find themselves resistant to God when he came. Do you want God to come to you? Perhaps you are looking for a great sudden experience in which you find yourself face to face with God. The fact is that you couldn’t handle that. God comes to us gradually like the rising of the tide as we yield more and more of our lives to him. You may not notice the tide rising but you notice the difference between high tide and low tide. The experiences and encounters we might have now and again are like the crashing waves that anticipate the coming tide. The waves crash on you and then they recede, and you wonder why God comes and goes. But this is all part of the tide rising. So wait patiently in the path of the tide and remain faithful. Keep yourself in God’s presence. The tide will rise.

Read Luke 1:1-25

Reflect on what God is saying and doing in your life right now.

The angel comes to Mary and tells her that she is “highly favoured”. Wow, that’s great! So what does this favour look like? Here is the bombshell: “You will conceive and give birth to a son.” A few issues would have occurred to Mary at this ‘annunciation’. First of all, she was a virgin; so there is a physiological impossibility to consider here. But more serious was the fact that Mary wasn’t married, which meant that her pregnancy would bring her disgrace at best and death by stoning at worst. We know now that the angel would visit Joseph too and clear things up with him. Mary, however, didn’t know this would happen. But wait there is more! The angel told her that she would give birth to the Messiah even though she lived in Nazareth. But the Scriptures clearly indicate that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). We know now that just before the birth of Jesus the emperor called for a census which would require people to return to their ancestral land, which in Joseph’s case meant Bethlehem. But Mary didn’t know this would happen. So there are a number of issues with this so called ‘favour’. The favour of God comes in very strange forms. It often looks like confusion at best and sheer doom at worst. Have you experienced the strange providential favour of God? Maybe you are experiencing it now. Are there things going on that seem confusing and worrying? Let your trust be like that of Mary who responded to God saying: “May your word to me be fulfilled.”

Read Luke 1:26-38

What is God saying to you in your present situation? Trust God to fulfil his promises for you through whatever means.

A SIGN FOR EVERYONE

Luke 1:39-80

Elizabeth, a relative of Mary, was barren but was enabled by the miraculous intervention of God to conceive a child. This child was John the Baptist. The miraculous conception would be an important sign, both to Mary (to whom the angel announced this miracle) and to the Jewish people among whom Elizabeth's husband Zechariah was serving as a priest. Certainly both Mary and Zechariah recognised it not just as a miracle but as a sign. Mary's famous exclamation on meeting Elizabeth (the 'magnificat') and particularly Zechariah's prophecy, make this explicit. Throughout the Gospel narratives there are many miracles and it is important to understand that they were not just done for the sake of the individuals themselves. A miracle for someone is a sign of breakthrough for everyone. The fact that one person, in this case Elizabeth, experienced a miracle, meant that God was doing things and this had consequences for everyone. The nature of Elizabeth's miracle is particularly symbolic within the biblical context. The giving of life in the midst of barrenness symbolised the very thing that Israel most needed at the time. They were in a period of great barrenness. There had not been a prophet in Israel for four hundred years. They were wondering where God was and why he wasn't turning up to help them. Well, this miracle for Elizabeth was a sign to Israel that God was at work among them again. If God does a miracle in your life it is a sign for everyone. If God does a miracle in someone else's life it is a sign for you. A miracle for someone is a sign for everyone.

Read Luke 1:39-80

What do you most want to see God do in yours or another's life?

There is a difference between expecting God to act and pre-empting how God will act. The first is faith, the second is folly. The Jews were expecting their Messiah to come but they made the mistake of pre-empting what that coming would look like and they therefore missed it completely. The Jews did not expect their King to be born in a manger. The Jews did not expect that the King's first visitors would be lowly shepherds. He came in a completely different way to what they expected. So many people missed him. But there were some who saw him and it was their expectancy that caused them to be in the right place at the right time to see God's promise fulfilled. Anna and Simeon were looking for the coming of the Messiah and they did not tire of praying and seeking after God, even though it seemed that God was taking his time. In fact, both Anna and Simeon were very old and they had sought God all their lives. So when the infant Jesus was brought into the temple by Joseph and Mary, in the midst of all the crowds of people, they were in tune enough with God to catch the moment and not let it pass them by. The Messiah, the Son of God, was there in the midst of the crowds but only two people recognised him. No one else expected the Messiah to be brought in by a couple so poor that they could only bring a pair of birds as an offering (cf. 2:24 with Leviticus 12:18). God comes to us in unusual ways.

Read Luke 2

Is God trying to speak to you through your circumstances?
Are you missing what he is saying and doing?

PREPARING THE WAY

Luke **3:1-20**

FRIDAY
6 NOV

Our assignment is like that of John the Baptist. We are not to draw attention to ourselves but to Jesus who works in and through us. We are not the ones who change people's lives. Jesus alone does that by his Spirit. Be very clear on this. We prepare the way for Jesus to work in people's lives. John was sent to call people to repentance. That simply means that he called people to come back to God rather than walking away from God. John's message may seem harsh but that was because he was speaking to the Jews who prided themselves in being the exclusive people of God. The irony was that their complacency would cause them to miss the coming of their Messiah, so John was sent to wake them up with some harsh words. To prepare the way for Jesus to come into the lives of non-believers we must, initially, simply turn their attention to the fact that God is calling them to himself. It is now possible, because of Jesus' atoning death on the cross, for anyone to come, and God wants everyone to live in relationship with him. No matter how we have failed, the call of the father sounds to us: just come home! And the call of God wants to be expressed through us. He wants us to exercise the ministry of John, preparing the way for Jesus to take hold of people's lives. Don't try to change people. Just represent God's call of love and grace and let Jesus do the rest.

Read Luke 3:1-20

Pray for people you know and love,
that they might know God and Christ.

True Worship – Psalm 15

Psalm 15 describes the character of the person whose worship is true spiritual worship just as Jesus describes it in John 4:23: “True worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.”

It is easy to fall into thinking that worship is simply the thing we do on Sundays in church. Paul said that our spiritual act of worship is offering ourselves as living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1). Worship is primarily a non-verbal activity. It is expressed in the way we think and act. Whether we have truly surrendered ourselves to God is made evident in our lives.

According to this psalm, the true worshipper is to be a person of integrity who loves others. He speaks the truth and, when he makes an oath, he keeps it. He does not, moreover, make a profit from the misfortunes of others and he does not accept any advantage at the cost of justice. The practice of ‘usury’ (lending money at interest) in those days was not what it is today in normal money-loan situations. A person who needed a loan was generally a poor person in distress and people regularly took advantage of those in this situation for their own profit. In contrast to this, true worship is doing what is right and loving others. The psalm announces a promise to those who are worshippers of God. Such a person, it says, will never be shaken. If you plant yourself firmly in obedience to God, then your destiny is secure no matter what storms life throws at you.

Read **Psalm 15** along with **Matthew 7:24-27**.

Reflect on how you can be more obedient to God.