

Week 39

September 24 - September 30

Matthew 1:1-4:25; 8:1-4, 14-17; 9:1-17; Mark 1:1-2:22; Luke 1:1 – 5:39; John 1:1-4:45

The theme for this week is 'Beholding the Son.' Like Simeon, who rejoiced when he was finally able to see the Messiah, may you rejoice as you encounter the Messiah in the Scriptures this week. From His birth to the temptation in the wilderness to the start of His public ministry, this week will set the table for the remainder of the gospels. -D.C.

September 24th

Matthew 1:1-17; Mark 1:1; Luke 1:1-38; 3:23b-38; John 1:1-18. "Searching out the Truth"

"In today's fast-paced world, it is easy to become overwhelmed and compromise the time that we spend studying the Bible." -Jess Wenick

As we begin reading the New Testament, we jump right into Matthew and what I like to call the "father of" Chapter. Upon first reading, some may say that this chapter could just as easily be left out or that they find it boring or insignificant. Nothing could be further from the truth. I believe Luke 1:3 clears this misconception up rather quickly, "Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning..." Luke thought it wise to investigate events and accounts before he would allow them to even be written. The family tree of Jesus has been considered accurate and true since it was written some two thousand years ago. We need to be like the Bereans, who in Acts 17, were said to have "noble character" because of their passion for searching out the truth in the scriptures. Spending time searching out the truths of the scriptures is quite possibly your greatest asset.

September 25th

Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:39-2:40. "Strength from the Spirit"

As I read through today's readings, a couple of things stand out. How amazingly difficult it must have been for Joseph and Mary to show their faces in public; the humiliation they must have faced on a daily basis, and the strength that they received from the Holy Spirit to endure.

As Mary and Joseph were traveling to Bethlehem from Nazareth to register for the national census, they would have met a large number of people on their journey. Can you imagine how their conversations must have gone?

"Hi there, I'm Joseph and this is my wife Mary. Pregnant? Why, yes she is. Just a few more months and we will have a bouncing baby um... Savior ...uh.. Am I the Father?... well, I am, sort of, or at least I'm going to be.. See, the Holy Spirit is the baby's father! Hey, where you guys going?"

God asks us to do some really tough things in this world and, regardless of the circumstances and by the power of the Holy Spirit, He always gives us the strength to get through it. All we have to do is ask!

September 26th

Matthew 2:1-3:17; Mark 1:2-11; Luke 2:41-Luke 3:22. "Fruits of Repentance"

A voice of one calling in the desert, Prepare the way of the Lord...

We all know who this guy was – John the Baptist, a kind of earthy guy that was living off of locusts and wild honey and ran around in a camel hair robe. This is what most people think of when we read about John the Baptist. But oddly enough, God chose to use him for His kingdom, regardless of his appearance or quirky eating habits. We read in Luke that there were large crowds of people coming out to be baptized by him and to listen to him speak. Even though he is most known for his baptisms, his words had an even greater impact on the lives of those who would listen. Luke 3:11-14 is an excellent example of his point-blank approach to preaching. There were many people asking what the fruits of true repentance are. He answers them with an example for each case. When you take the time to read through them, you will see examples from many walks of life. But all of them have one thing in common, charity. If one were to ask what the fruits of true repentance are? Charity.

September 27th

Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-15; John 1:19-2:25. "For it is written..."

Temptation. What a terrible sounding word. The word sounds as if we have already given in. Sometimes we think the battle is already lost just because we were tempted. But that is not true, is it? We lose the battle only when we give in to temptation. Temptation comes to all people of all ages of all genders and of all colors. Temptation is Satan using the world and all the things in it to entice us, to captivate us, to cause our disobedience and to cause us to take our eyes off the goal, even if only for a moment. Even our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was tempted; in fact, He was tempted many times! I love the way Jesus handled temptation. It's not just that He didn't give in; it's that He fought back. You see, Jesus is a warrior. Jesus knows how to fight and Jesus knows how to win. He used the awesome power of the Scriptures to do His fighting. What a great lesson to show us how we can fight those same temptations. Fight your temptations with scripture and be victorious. Use the power God has given us in His word to fend off temptation.

September 28th

Luke 3:19-20; John 3:1-4:45. "Becoming Less"

"He must become greater; I must become less."

Wow, I love that verse. If I could choose just one scripture verse to summarize the purpose of my own existence here on the earth, that would be it. Upon first examination, it seems rather simple. God deserves greatness; in fact, there is only one person truly entitled to greatness and that person is Almighty God. It's the last half of the verse that's really tough. "I must become less"! How does that work? How do we become less so that God can become greater? I believe John the Baptist is a very good example. John had large numbers of people coming to hear him preach. It would have been quite easy for him to get caught up in his own greatness and shift the focus off of Jesus and on to himself. John was able to stay focused and he continually pointed to the one greater than himself. Exalting Jesus was the purpose of John's ministry. Throughout John's life and his eventual death, he never failed to point people to Jesus. The result? He became less and Jesus became greater.

September 29th

Matthew 4:12-25; 8:14-17; Mark 1:14-39; Luke 3:23a; 4:16-44; John 4:46-54.
"Jesus Heals Many"

The caption at the top of a chapter in Matthew 8 says "Jesus Heals Many;" then again in the book of Mark and also in the book of Luke. All of these books give the same account of Jesus healing the sick. What the books don't say is that they all were saved and lived good Christian lives as a result. There are verses that say that "many" were saved, but not "all" were saved. This causes me to take pause. If I were a man with leprosy and was taken to Jesus and was cured, would it be enough to cause me to commit my life to Him? I would like to think so. But there is a big difference between being grateful for a physical healing, and calling the One that healed you Lord. I wonder how many of the people Christ healed developed the kind of faith that Christ desired. How many people looked at Christ and only saw a "Genie in a bottle?" And then I wonder how many people today come to Christ only for what they can get from Him. When you look at all the great things the Lord has done for you, do you give Him a simple nod, tell Him thanks and wave goodbye, or do you bow at His feet and call Him LORD?

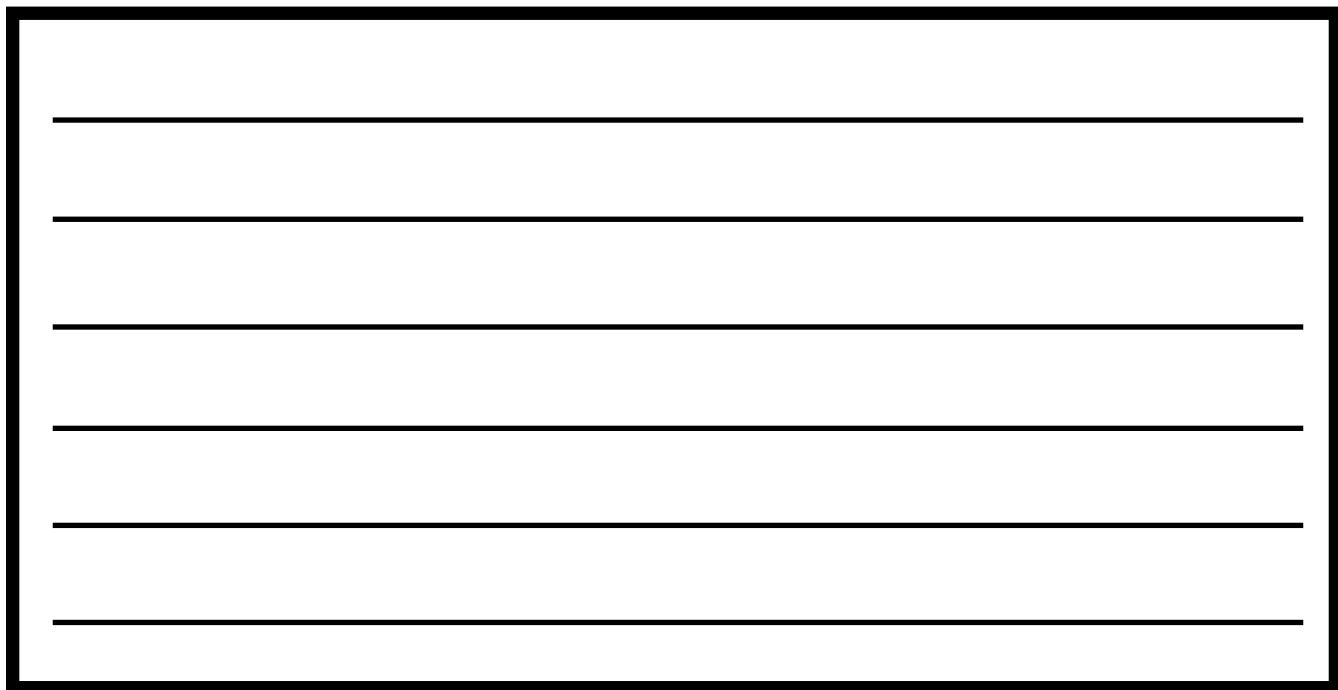
September 30th

Matthew 8:1-4; 9:1-17; Mark 1:40-2:22; Luke 5:1-39. "Learning from Jesus"

Jesus used many different approaches to teaching during His ministry. Jesus related to the people He was ministering to by using stories and symbolism that was meaningful to them during that time. We see parables and short stories, illustrations, scripture references and even miracles. I think it's safe to say that Jesus used all the resources at His disposal to help people understand His teaching.

We see the same idea in our church services. Songs of praise, scripture reading, illustrations and short stories fill our worship services.

So, do you know where I'm going with this? How about the way we approach those we are trying to minister to? Do you have a pocket-full of ideas that you are prepared to use? Maybe you could buy a book or CD and ask the Lord who might be able to use them. Have a short story ready about your personal testimony or a particularly hard time you have gone through, memorize your favorite scripture verse and share it with someone. The next time you're in prayer, ask the Lord to show you ways to minister to those He brings into your life.



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General Questions for each day:

Summarize the day's Bible passage in your own words.

What thoughts, actions, attitudes or beliefs are addressed in the passage?

How is the Holy Spirit leading you to apply this passage to your life today?

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The theme for this week is 'Beholding the Son.' Like Simeon who rejoiced when he was finally able to see the Messiah may you rejoice as you encounter the Messiah in the Scriptures this week. From his birth to the temptation in the wilderness to the start of his public ministry this week will set the table for the remainder of the gospels.

Bible Discussion Guide:

Why do you think Luke and Matthew thought it important to include the details of Jesus ancestry in their gospels?

How does carefully searching out the scriptures like the Bereans enhance your appreciation for Jesus as the Son of God?

How do you imagine the reactions that Mary and Joseph received as a result of her pregnancy?

Can you share an experience when you really sensed a strength from the Holy Spirit to get you through a challenging time?

The devotional from Sept. 26th speaks about the fruits of repentance. Other than charity that is mentioned, what are other fruits of repentance that you can think of?

What methods do you have available to you for dealing with temptation?

In what ways are you tempted to 'become more' instead of allowing God to become more?

What are some practical things you can do for God to become more and you to become less in your life?

How do you think God feels when we don't respond appropriately to his hand working our life?

What are the ways that we can and should respond to God when we recognize his working in our life, our church, our world?

The Sept. 30th devotional speaks about the variety of means that Jesus used to minister to others. What are some of the methods or tools that we have available when we are reaching out to the world around us?

Personal application: What can you do to expand the methods or resources available to you in your attempts to minister to others?