



## **GROW. PRAY. STUDY.**

The Church of the Resurrection – Weekly Guide

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**December 6, 2020 Incarnation – The Deliverer’s Title: Savior**

### **Scripture:**

The Lord appeared to [Joseph] in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, **for he will save his people from their sins.**”

–Matthew 1:20b-21

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a **Savior**, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.

–Luke 2:8-12

**God: “There is no savior besides me”**

**MONDAY 12/7     Isaiah 43:5-11, Isaiah 52:6-10**

In the violent world of the Middle East, Israel’s first concept of God as Savior tended to be military and political. Their tradition said that Moses and the Israelites sang about God as savior after Egypt’s army drowned in the Red Sea (cf. Exodus 15:1-3). Similarly, the Israelites had a powerful sense of God as savior when they were allowed to return to their land after decades in exile in Babylon.

- Egypt was the dominant world “superpower” when Moses led the Israelite exodus to freedom. Persia had overthrown Babylon, and dominated the scene when they let Israel return after the exile. And Rome seemed unassailable when Jesus’ followers spread out to preach the good news. Do you believe God is still more able to save than any world superpower today (cf. Psalm 2)? How does God’s power operate differently than human political and military power?
- Before the exile, Israel had turned to a variety of alliances and kingly maneuvers to try to carve out their own place in the world. Isaiah 43:11 spoke strongly to their efforts to fix things for themselves: “I, I am the Lord, and there is no savior besides me.” What are some of the “saviors” people still tend to look to today? How confident are you that the truth Isaiah declared about God as savior is still true?

**Prayer:** Lord God, I see signs of your saving power in history, even though so many rulers at the time missed seeing you. And I see your saving power at work in my life, too. Again today I claim you as my savior. Amen.

## **God (the savior) “raised up a mighty savior”**

**TUESDAY 12/8      Luke 1:67-75, 2:10-11**

Zechariah, John the Baptist’s father, poetically expressed his joy about God’s salvation when the son God promised to him and his wife in their old age was born. But, like most Israelites at the time, he still saw the gift of a savior as release from “our enemies.” A different vision of the meaning of “savior” began to emerge when the baby the angel told the shepherds about didn’t appear to be much of a threat to the Roman occupiers of Palestine.

- Zechariah said, according to Luke, “[God] has raised up a mighty savior for us in his servant David’s house, just as he said through the mouths of his holy prophets long ago. He has brought salvation from our enemies and from the power of all those who hate us.” Does that sound like an accurate description of a baby born in a stable to a poor young couple? In what ways was it inaccurate? In what ways was it accurate?
- The angel’s announcement to the shepherds included both Jesus’ royal titles, which we studied last week (Christ, the Lord), and the title “savior” made personal (“your savior”). How might those night-shift shepherds have understood the angel declaring such august titles to them? In what ways have you made Jesus, not just savior, but “your savior”?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you came quietly, humbly, softly. But as I look back, I realize that not only the whole world, but MY whole world, began to change when you were born. Thank you for coming to be my savior. Amen.

## **Jesus as Savior from sin (the real enemy)**

**WEDNESDAY 12/9      Matthew 1:20-21, Acts 5:27-32**

Most of us know the story: a carpenter named Joseph, engaged to Mary, struggled to believe her story that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. He planned to break the engagement quietly. In a dream, an angel told him to believe Mary, and to name the child Jesus (Greek form of Hebrew “Joshua,” meaning “Yahweh is salvation”). Salvation ran much deeper than just the Roman army. This child brought salvation from humanity’s greatest enemy: sin. The earliest Christians echoed that, as they defied the leaders trying to silence them.

- Scholar N. T. Wright wrote that “Matthew sees Jesus as the one who will now complete what the law of Moses pointed to but could not of itself produce. He will rescue his people, not from slavery in Egypt, but from the slavery of sin, the ‘exile’ they have suffered not just in Babylon but in their own hearts and lives.” In what ways has missing God’s path led your heart and life into a kind of “exile”? What are the benefits of letting Jesus save you from that exile?
- Wright also observed that in Acts 5 Peter spoke of Jesus as Savior “because he has broken through the power of death itself and is therefore ready to rescue people not only from that ultimate enemy but from such other enemies, whether sickness, oppression, persecution or imprisonment, as they may face from time to time.” What “enemies” of that sort are you facing? How confident are you that Jesus can ultimately save you from all of them?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you came to save us from sin because sin hurts, damages and destroys us. Be my savior today from all that makes me less human, and keep me growing into the person you want me to be. Amen.

## **What our Savior did for us**

**THURSDAY 12/10      2 Timothy 1:8-11; Titus 3:3-6**

God does not save us, the apostles preached, based on any good things we have done. Simply put, they said we couldn't fix the profound problem of humans missing the mark, because we ARE the problem. That's why we needed Jesus, the Savior to do for us what we could never do for ourselves, however good we tried to be. God, they said, saved us through Jesus out of sheer divine grace and mercy.

- It is humbling enough to read that salvation is not based on anything we have done that sometimes we resist that. Is there a point in your past (even your recent past) which you can identify as "foolish, disobedient, deceived," or are you more in the "I've always been a pretty good person" camp? Do people in both groups need God's mercy for rebirth and renewal? When have you most clearly sensed God's mercy toward you?
- We know (though we regularly forget) that Christmas is not really about how much "stuff" we can get, or give. The letter to Titus described salvation as the gift "God poured out upon us generously through Jesus Christ our savior." What helps you, amid all the holiday hoopla, to remember that Jesus the savior is God's ultimate generous "Christmas gift"?

**Prayer:** Lord God, Mary wrapped your ultimate gift to me in cloths and laid him in a manger. Help me to value the gift of Jesus, my savior, as highly as I ought. Amen.

## **Saved by faith, for a divine purpose**

**FRIDAY 12/11      Ephesians 2:3-10**

"God is rich in mercy." "You are saved by God's grace." That was vital, said the letter to the Ephesians, but it was not the end of the story; it was just the beginning. God saved us FROM a broken, self-seeking way of life, for a very specific purpose. God's mission, what Jesus called "the kingdom of God," is to restore not just individuals, but this whole broken world to the divine purpose. And God saves us FOR a new life as God's human instruments, joining in God's work to reclaim our broken world.

- John Wesley applied the idea that we are "created in Christ Jesus to do good things" to everyday life through the Methodist Church's Second General Rule: "By doing good; by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men." What are one or two "sorts" of goodness you didn't used to practice, but do now as a Christ follower? Use the phrase "doing good of every possible sort" to spark your imagination about new sorts of goodness that might be possible in your life.
- Ephesians 2:10 stated, in a general way, the life purpose of every follower of Jesus. Spend time in prayer and thought. Try to write down, and keep handy, the specific ways in which you live out, and intend to live out, the life purpose laid out for you in Ephesians 2:10.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you for all that you have saved me from. Guide me day by day into a way of living that honors and carries out the purpose that you saved me for. Amen.

## **"Now is the day of salvation"**

**SATURDAY 12/12      Isaiah 25:6-9, 2 Corinthians 5:14-6:2**

The Savior's work comes in three "tenses," so to speak. Jesus saved us, past tense, through his life, death and resurrection. Jesus also saves us, present tense, as we yield ourselves to him each day and join in his mission. And the glorious future hope that God's people have always held is that Jesus will save us when God fully establishes the divine reign, and tears and brokenness are no more.

- Review your own spiritual autobiography. In what ways did you find Jesus' gift of salvation in the past? (If by any chance your answer is, "Not yet," remember that "Now is the day of salvation.") In what ways are you living into the gift of salvation more deeply day by day? (If by any chance you say, "Not much," remember that "Now is the day of salvation.") What additional dimensions of salvation do you look forward to experiencing, both in this life and in the next? (If you can't think of any, remember: "Now ...") Jesus came to be your savior. Be sure you've responded to the apostle's plea: "Be reconciled to God!"

**Prayer:** O God, what mystery and what love there is in the message that you were in Christ reconciling the world to yourself. Help me set aside any remaining fear, reservation or rebellion, and trust myself fully to your salvation. Amen.

**Family Activity:** Frederick Buechner wrote, "The worst thing is never the last thing." He can say this (and we can, too) because of the hope we have in Jesus Christ as our Savior. As a family, create a collage of hope. Gather some magazines, markers, glue, scissors and a piece of poster board. Look through the magazines and cut out pictures of images that bring hope to your family. Use the markers or crayons to draw pictures and write words that communicate hope. Also, include images and words representing what brings hope to the whole world. Place your collage of hope in your home where everyone can see it or give the collage to someone who needs hope. Pray and give thanks to God for your family and for hope.