



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The First Week After Epiphany (January 10 – 14, 2022)

Monday

Luke 1:67-68, 76-80

⁶⁷ Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy: ⁶⁸ “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.

⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.

⁷⁸ By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us,

⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the way of peace.” ⁸⁰ The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

The passage immediately preceding the above verses describes the scene at the circumcision of the infant John the Baptizer, who was, at this point, only 8 days old. Can't you just see Zechariah holding up his infant son and announcing to all those assembled that this son of his will be a prophet of God? Last year, my wife and I were reminded of how precious the birth of a little one is when our first grandchild was born. We were there on the day of his baptism, and as the water was poured over him, all of our hopes and dreams for this little guy were also pouring out. We pray that he might be wise and strong, compassionate and loving, and filled with faith and love. We hold him up in prayer every day, thanking God for him, and asking for God's blessing.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, be with our children, we pray. Grant them wisdom and understanding, strength of mind, body, and spirit, and a faith that is strong. Guide them into the ways of peace. Give them light when they are lost in darkness. Give them hope when they near despair. In all times and places, grant them your grace. In the Name of Jesus, your Son, Our Lord. AMEN.

Tuesday

Psalm 29:3-9

³The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over mighty waters. ⁴The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. ⁵The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon. ⁶He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox. ⁷The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.

⁸The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. ⁹The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare; and in his temple all say, "Glory!" In this psalm the psalmist is contemplating God's power, apparently while watching a thunderstorm. The thunder is described as God's voice, sounding forth, while God's actions are compared to the lightning (flashes forth flames of fire), and the wind (causes the oaks to whirl and strips the forest bare). When the psalmist sees all this, all he can say is "Glory!" This psalm reminds us of how awesome God is. God is unimaginably greater than us. God's power is immeasurably greater than ours. God is simply beyond us. We do well to remember this. Sometimes we gravitate towards more intimate images of God (Father, Good Shepherd, Healer of our Every Ill) that assure us of God's love for us and knowledge of us. This is right to do, but it is also good to balance this with a healthy appreciation for God's majesty. We too need to simply say, "Glory!"

Prayer

You are the God of Creation and Lord of All. You are the God of Heavenly Armies, the One who has always been and always will be. You are worthy of all praise. We do praise you, Awesome God. Receive our grateful praises. AMEN.

Wednesday

Ecclesiastes 1:2-9

² Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

³ What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?

⁴ A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.

⁵ The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hurries to the place where it rises.

⁶ The wind blows to the south, and goes around to the north; round and round goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. ⁷ All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they continue to flow. ⁸ All things are wearisome; more than one can express; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, or the ear filled with hearing.

⁹ What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun.

These opening words from the book of Ecclesiastes are seemingly some of the most depressing verses in the Bible. They seem to indicate that life is basically one thing after another until you die. Looking further into this book, we realize that the writer's aim is to have us quit placing our hopes for an abundant life in the accumulation of wealth, power, or prestige. *This*, the writer explains, is what leads to despair. The truly abundant life is found in life with God, life filled with service, worship, works of compassion, and the pursuit of true wisdom. Such a life as this is not just one day after another, but a life where every day is filled with possibility and hope. During this pandemic time, when it does seem like every day is simply a battle with the virus and its effects, we do well to remember that God is still the source of the abundant life. Start the day in prayer, read a bit of God's word, listen to God's voice, and then get up and do the things that bring blessing to others, and fill you with joy.

Prayer

Thank you, Gracious God, for granting us the way to abundant life. Thank you for giving us Jesus whose words and deeds show us the way. Guide us each day into such a life. In your holy name, we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

I Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁸ For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” ²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³ but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

I have always been struck by the opening verse in this passage as St. Paul describes two kinds of people: “those who are perishing” and “us who are being saved.” It strikes me that each group seems to be on the way somewhere, and neither group is really in charge. Those “being saved” are clearly being saved by someone greater than them – a Savior. Those who are “perishing” might be thought of as those who are being swept along by flood waters or perhaps those in a building that is burning down. They also are not in control. I always have wondered if the ongoing nature of these circumstances means that they can change; i.e. can the person who is perishing yet be saved and the person being saved yet be lost? It is unclear. I always pray that finally God’s almighty love and compassion will prevail and *all* will be saved. Let us pray that it is so.

Prayer

Save us, dear Lord, from being swept away from you. Save us from foolishness and wickedness that might lead us to destruction. Grant that always we might be found as those who are safe in your arms, fully embraced by our Savior, in whose name we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

² a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

³ a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

⁴ a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

⁵ a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; ⁶ a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to throw away; ⁷ a time to tear, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; ⁸ a time to love, and a time to hate;

a time for war, and a time for peace.

This well-known passage as, you might remember, is part of a song Pete Seeger wrote in the 1950s, and was made popular by the Byrds in the 1960s. This passage is another example of the style of the writer of Ecclesiastes, whose philosophical bent is obvious. The point of this passage is helpful in that it reminds us that life is normally filled with ups and downs, happy days and sad days, wins and losses, etc. In our ultra-competitive world we are often told that the only life worth living is the one where we are always winning, always getting stronger, always laughing, always enjoying life. In other words, the only life worth living is one that no one has or can have. This makes the pursuit of such a life a fool's errand, or even worse, a cause for despair. How much better to remember what the Teacher says here - that life has seasons: seasons of planting and seasons of harvesting, seasons of growing and seasons of decline, seasons of quiet and seasons of boisterous celebration. Each season has its gifts. Perhaps wisdom is seeking the gift of each of life's seasons.

Prayer

Grant us wisdom, O God. Help us to see the gifts in all the seasons of life. Give us faith to believe that in every season of life, you walk with us. In Christ's name. AMEN.