



GROW. PRAY. STUDY.

The Church of the Resurrection – Weekly Guide

December 20, 2020 *New Year, New Life*

Scripture: Revelation 21:1-6

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

“The Word was God”

MONDAY 12.22.14 John 1:1-5

Opening with “In the beginning,” John deliberately echoed the first words of Genesis. The “life” and “light” images also echoed those “beginning” stories. Coming to earth, Jesus the creator was creating anew. John’s prologue connected Hebrew and Greek thought worlds when he wrote of “the Word.” Many Greek thinkers identified “the Word” as the great Idea behind the world. For Hebrews, meanwhile, Genesis 1 said God created by speaking (cf. Psalm 33:6), by “the Word.”

- John’s prologue, grounded in reality, was splendid philosophical poetry. Which is more “true”: a geologist’s precise technical report on the Grand Canyon’s sediments and rocks, or a poet’s imagery evoking the Canyon’s awe and grandeur? When have you had an experience that took you “out of yourself” or helped you “get “in touch” with depths in yourself, aware of realities that went beyond your ordinary day-to-day life?
- “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn’t extinguish the light” (verse 5). Have there been times when it felt to you as though darkness was trying to put out God’s light in your life? What spiritual practices keep the windows of your soul open, so that God’s light can keep shining in and through you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you were (and are) light in my darkness. Continue to change me from the inside out to be a beacon reflecting your light to those around me. Amen.

“We have seen his glory”

TUESDAY 12.23.14 John 1:6-14

The Bible writers often pictured the tension between good and evil as “light” and “darkness.” The apostle John was able to define what he meant by “light” more specifically. Jesus, he said—the Jesus he had seen, heard and known—was the light who broke into the world’s darkness. As darkness couldn’t put out light, so Jesus could deliver us from the darkness we find within ourselves. (We act out this text’s meaning at each Christmas Eve service. For a schedule, see www.cor.org/christmas, and “come and worship.”)

- Greek thinkers like Plato said “the logos” was too pure to enter the corrupt material world. Hebrews usually saw God as so awesome and distant that they feared to even say the divine name. John drew on both those thought worlds, but he boldly wrote, “The Word became flesh.” How can it help you realize how much God values you to believe that he “became flesh,” like us, rather than just wishing you well from afar?
- Being born is the way each one of us begins our life in the world. John, taking his cue from Jesus (cf. John 3:3-8), said that the life Jesus brought is so qualitatively new that it’s like being born, this time as a child of God. When did your spiritual journey start? In what ways has trusting and following Jesus given you a whole new life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for being born, for becoming flesh, so that you could give me the authority and power to be born anew, as a child of God. Thank you for my new life. Amen.

“She gave birth to ... a son ... and laid him in a manger”

WEDNESDAY 12.24.14 Luke 2:1-7

Christmas is one key story about God’s Great Reversal. Caesar Augustus, a human who thought he was a god, issued a decree that forced Mary and Joseph to make a hard trip with Mary nine months pregnant. Jesus, the true God become human, spent his first night on earth in a humble animal shelter in Bethlehem. On Christmas Eve, we reflect on the birth of the child who showed us God’s kind of power—the power of selfless love.

- Scholar William Barclay wrote, hauntingly, “That there was no room in the inn was symbolic of what was to happen to Jesus ... He sought an entry to the over-crowded hearts of men; he could not find it His search—and his rejection—go on.” What role is Jesus playing in your Christmas celebration this year? How are you making room in your heart, and in your life, for him?
- A contemporary Christmas song has Joseph say, “Why me? I’m just a simple man of trade ... Why here, inside this stable filled with hay? Why her? She’s just an ordinary girl ... This is such a strange way to save the world.” If you were God, would you trust the Messiah to a family as poor and “ordinary” as Mary and Joseph formed? What are some of the key ways God’s values challenge yours?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you were born in a stable, and laid in a feeding trough. Be born in my messy, yearning heart this Christmas Eve, Lord, and dwell in me forever. Amen.

“Wonderful, joyous news for all people”

THURSDAY 12.25.14 Luke 2:8-20

We’re used to seeing dignified, noble shepherds in manger scenes, Christmas pageants and paintings. Yet when Jesus was born, most people looked down on shepherds. Most priests shunned them because, caring for flocks, they couldn’t carefully observe all the rituals it took to be “holy.” But God loved them, and made these shepherds the first to hear the “wonderful joyous news for all people.”

- Was Jesus born on December 25? Probably not. “Flocks in pasture at night show that this was a warmer season, not winter (when they would graze more in the day)” (*The IVP Bible Background Commentary*). How can the story of the shepherds watching their flocks outdoors on a warmer night remind you that the good news of Jesus’ birth applies all year, and not just for a few wintry nights?
- In verses 9-10, the shepherds were terrified, and the angel told them, “Don’t be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you.” Have you ever felt fear when you faced something unexpected or unexplainable? In what parts of your life do you need to hear anew the wonderful, joyous news of Jesus, and to take in the message “Don’t be afraid”?

Prayer: Lord, by my world’s standards, it was odd that you’d declare the good news first to shepherds. But you chose well—the shepherds listened, and worshipped. This Christmas day I join the shepherds in worshipping you. Amen.

“I am the light of the world”

FRIDAY 12.26.14 John 9:1-17

When John wrote that “the life [Jesus] was the light for all people” (John 1:4), he followed Jesus’ lead. Jesus said in the Temple that he was the light of the world (cf. John 8:12), and repeated the claim in verse 5 of today’s reading. His healing of this blind man was like a life-changing, acted-out parable. Jesus’ light gave the beggar back both his physical and spiritual sight.

- At what age or stage of life did Christ’s light first shine into your life? What are some of the first things that you remember seeing more clearly in the light of Jesus’ love and grace? What are one or two ways that Christ’s light has helped to give you clearer vision in the most recent weeks and months of your walk with him?
- Jesus’ disciples reflected a view common in their day (and still today): that God caused everything, even bad things. Jesus taught us to see God differently, as the source of healing and hope even in the face of illness or tragedy. (For deeper study of this keyidea, see Pastor Hamilton’s book *Why?*) What does it mean to you to trust that God is on your side, not working against you, in a volatile, often frightening world?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, when something bad happens, I’m tempted to ask, “Why is God doing this to me?” Help me remember what you told your disciples, and to trust your healing light and love even when I’m hurting. Amen.

How well can you see “the light of the world”?

SATURDAY 12.27.14 John 9:18-41

In his prologue, John said we must choose to see the light Jesus brought (cf. John 1:10-11). John graphically portrayed the terrible results of spiritual blindness—the blind man’s talk with the Pharisees would be comical if it weren’t so tragic. Rather than admit anything good about Jesus, the religious leaders grasped at straws to deny the plain fact that a man born blind could now see! In his beautiful confession of faith in verse 25, the man showed that he could “see” more clearly than the religious leaders.

- In verse 25, you may recognize the words John Newton used when he wrote “Amazing Grace” centuries later. Newton used the words to confess his sorrow at having once sailed a slave ship that carried holds jammed with captive Africans across the ocean to a life of slavery. In what parts of your spiritual life is this your testimony—what do you now see to which you were once blind? How will you apply what you have “seen” about Jesus this Advent to living your life differently in 2015?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, please continue your “eye surgery” in my life, clearing my vision and moving my heart to follow you more completely. Amen.

Family Activity: Gather your family into the darkest space of your home. A closet or a dark bathroom would be good options. Bring a Bible and a very small reading light with you. When you are all together, ask someone to read John 1:1-5. Describe how just as life can be dark at times, so are our hearts, lives and the world without the light of Jesus. Discuss how as followers of Jesus, his light lives within us and he wants us to share it with the world with our words and actions. Open the door of the room and celebrate the light of Jesus together! Give thanks to God for Jesus and for the light he brings to our lives at Christmas and always! Commit to sharing the light of Jesus with all people.