Questions for 12/16-22/24

Dec. 16 – (Luke 2: 6-7) **Lodging in Bethlehem:** Ponder today, what it must have been like for Mary and Joseph to have found a place out of the weather to spend their first night in Bethlehem. Were they grateful that the inn keeper allowed them this little bit of shelter as Mary probably knew her time to deliver was very quickly coming? Many times, we think of the inn keeper as “not a good neighbor”. We really don’t know. What we do know is that just as God foretold that Jesus would lay in a manger, He provided an inn keeper that would allow “room for Jesus” … the perfect place that God had planned. As we look at this hectic time for most of us, let’s make room for whatever God has planned.

“But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” God sets many appointments for us, divinely scheduled meetings with specific people that are often disguised as random encounters. This Christmas season, remind yourself that you might be the neighbor someone desperately needs. Let it not be said of you, there was no “room at the inn”. It might read, “no time for you in my hectic schedule”.

**DID YOU KNOW?** In Micah 5:2, it was prophesied that the Savior would come from Bethlehem Ephrathah. This prophecy is one of the clearest and most direct prophecies of the Messiah in the entire Bible and was made more than 700 years before Jesus was born. Micah says, “His coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.” The Hebrew word for “ancient days” literally means “days of eternity.” In other words, the Messiah was going to come from eternity to a specific place on earth, fully human, with a birthplace just like everyone else. Even in the name, Bethlehem which means “house of bread,” and Ephrathah, which means “fields of fruit” referring to vineyards was to be a reminder of the significance of bread and wine in communion.

**PRAYER**: “Heavenly Father, help me reach out and be the neighbor You called me to be in this Christmas season. Remind me of Your lowly state in which You came into the world yet that had no bearing in how you brought the Kingdom to earth. Amen

Dec. 17 – (Matt. 1:16-25; Luke 2:1-7) **Jesus’ birth/ God with us:** I am drawn to wonder why the OT said Jesus would be named Emmanuel (meaning God with us) while the Angel told both Mary and Joseph, He was to be named Jesus (or Yeshua meaning Salvation of Jehovah). I have realized that history gives us some clues. In Genesis we see that God created us to be in an intimate relationship with Him, but Adam and Eve’s sin caused a separation. After hundreds of years, God provided the tabernacle where only one high priest and Moses could be in His presence. When Jesus came it was God *with* us. When Jesus died for our sin, it became God *in* us by the Holy Spirit. Let me repeat this:

 In the OT, it is – *God For Us*

 In the Four Gospels, it is – *God With Us*

 In the Acts and Epistles, it is – *God In Us*

 “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Of course, He is for us, and with us, but now, by His Spirit, He is always in us. He is our eternal Inhabitant – the Indweller Who will never leave us- the Comforter, abiding with us forever (John 14:16). (Herbert Lockyer)

Now let’s look at the delivery room. There have been so many kinds of “delivery rooms” over the ages. Some deliveries were planned to happen in that room. Some were not. I’m sure Mary did not plan to have her baby 80 miles from her home, possibly with no family to even help her in a room she would not have chosen. But God…His plans for this new family were perfect! Can this situation relate to us today? I think so. Things may not always turn out the way that we hoped or planned, but God…always has that perfect plan He is working for our good and His glory. When we trust Him enough to be okay with our life looking different than we planned, we can enjoy the journey more as we press into Him, knowing His plans for us are perfect!

**PRAYER**: “Father, thank you for being the master artist who arranges our lives the same way you arranged Jesus’ coming to us. You were finally “with us” and we can’t thank you enough! Help us to trust that you are always working to place us exactly where you want us in the masterpiece you are creating.”

Dec. 18 – (Luke 2:8-14; Ps. 51:15) **Angels’ announcement**: Can you imagine this kind of birth announcement? I know it is only fitting that Jesus birth would be announced in this way. In the words they spoke, contained a delivery of Joy (for all people), Hope (for reconciliation back to God through salvation), Peace (with God which brings peace in us). Verse 14 gives us the way to get all these. We need to accept Jesus as Savior. Only then will we have all of this and more. “Joy to the World…!” I get a picture of the angels celebrating in this way (only now in heaven) at another event…every time someone accepts Jesus as Savior! Selah

**PRAYER**: “O Lord, open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare Your praise (Ps. 51:15).” Praise God for the gift of this day. Announce to others how great and loving your God is in sending His Son as a baby. He brought Heaven to earth for you…and for all you choose to tell this wonderful News.

Dec. 19 – (Luke 2:8-18,20) **SHEPHERDS HEAR THE GOOD NEWS**: When I think about this part of the Christmas story, I so appreciate that the angels made a special trip to tell the lowly shepherds. How fitting it was that the Good Shepherd who was coming to give His life for His sheep, announced His birth (the Good Shepherd), first to shepherds watching over their flocks! The angels of heaven didn’t bring their “glad tidings” to the Scribes and Pharisees at Jerusalem but to shepherds who immediately obeyed the heavenly commandment and told others of what had come to pass… **AND TOLD OTHERS OF WHAT HAD COME TO PASS!** How can we not do the same?

**PRAYER:** Lord, first of all, please help us to really hear You in our everyday lives. Help us drown out the world so Your voice is strong and clear. Please then give us courage to speak what You have told us and shown us. Amen.

Dec. 20 – (Luke 2:19) **MARY’S RESPONSE TO A VISIT FROM SHEPHERDS:** This is just one verse showing Mary’s response to God sending the angels to tell the shepherds who responded and came to worship her newborn Son. I get the feeling that her “pondering” went way beyond this event. I’m merely guessing that she thinks back over her whole life and then concentrates on all she has seen and heard since Gabriel first visited her. Let’s ponder with Mary all the events of the Christmas story we have studied so far and celebrate His goodness and love knowing there is a bright future for in what is yet to come.

“But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.” Are you a ponderer? Take a moment and remember good times and happy Christmas memories stored up in your heart. Ponder how God’s goodness has allowed them. Relive joys of past Christmases and look forward to blessings to come.

**PRAYER:** “Father God, thank You for the celebrations and joys of yesterday, today, and tomorrow.”

Dec. 21 – (Luke 2:22-24) **JESUS IS DEDICATED** Mary and Joseph followed the law of the Lord and commands that were given way back in Moses’ time. They had Jesus circumcised and named Him (Jesus) when He was eight days old. They went to Jerusalem at the time for their purification (40 days after His birth) and sacrificed two turtledoves or two young pigeons (this sacrifice was offered by poor parents). (sidebar: Priests were still sacrificing animals for the peoples’ sins. I keep thinking that stopped when we get to NT life, but we have at least another 33 years yet. 😊) Mary and Joseph followed the laws and commands the Lord had given His people hundreds and hundreds of years before. Though we are now thousands of years away from that, we are to follow the NT way of offering our sacrifices. What sacrifices does God require of us today? That would be a good study. Studying His Word is definitely one way to know how to do that! Selah

**PRAYER:** Lord, please help us know your will in all things. Help us recognize when we are just doing things out of tradition only. We want to serve you and love you like you love us!

Dec. 22 – (Matt. 2:1-12; Jn. 1:5; Ps. 8:3-4) **WISEMEN SEE A NEW STAR:** John 1:5 says, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” That was so true for the Wisemen. The star was so bright that astrologers recognized a new light in the universe. They were so curious that they spent lots of time, energy and funds to see why the light appeared. They had many challenges along the way but that didn’t stop them because they knew how important the change was. We follow that light that represents Jesus. We have challenges along the way as well but as we persevere and continue, we will also be able to someday worship Him in “person”! How wonderful!

PRAYER: Jesus, you are the light in our lives that we want to follow. Help us do those things that help us see your light most brightly. We love You!