

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

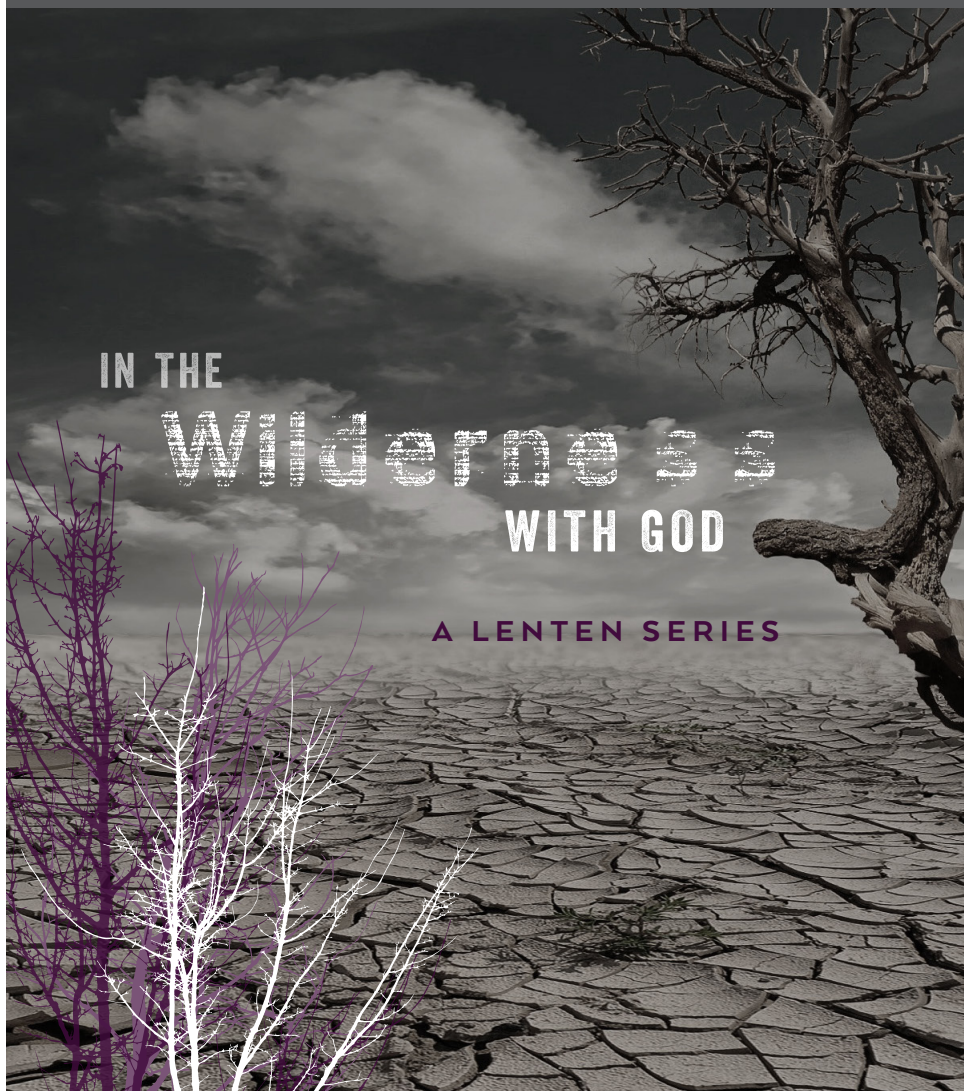
APRIL 8 - 12, 2019

IN THE

WILDERNESS

WITH GOD

A LENTEN SERIES



Fifth Week of Lent

Next week the Gathering Center will be open every day between 7am and 9pm. Plan now to come by at some point during the week to pray through the Stations of the Cross.

In Luke 9:51 we read: *“As the time approached for Him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.”*

Jesus knew what going to Jerusalem meant, and yet He had a “confident resolve” about His decision to go. “During the entire second half of His ministry, Jesus taught His disciples that they would face opposition, resistance, and rejection just as He did. Their spiritual development depended upon how to cope with this reality—a reality our churches today are struggling with as we move into an increasingly post-Christian context,” a reality many of our brothers and sisters face daily around the world.

“As we contemplate Christ during His trial, what do we learn? First, trusting the Father, Jesus did not fight back or reflect fear in the face of rejection. ... Mark 15:5 says that Pilate was amazed [at Jesus’ reaction]. ... Second, Jesus rested in the confidence of His identity.” Jesus knew who He was, where He came from and where He was going. “There was no need to whine about what was happening, nor any need for rebuttal, nor any need to act out of fear.” Such was His confidence in Father God’s ways, purposes, and power.

“Third, we rest in the confidence that vindication and justice will come. When we face opposition, it can seem so risky to let such circumstances go, to not fight back. But Jesus’ confidence was not set in the present; He knew a day of vindication would come. This is clear in Jesus’ answer to a question the Jewish leadership had posed, asking if He was the Messiah. *‘I am,’* said Jesus. *‘And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven’* (Mark 14:62). ... Jesus was saying, essentially, ‘You might do to me whatever you want, but a day is coming when the Father will vindicate me and give me my place at His side where I will be your judge.’ The reality of His coming vindication gave Jesus the confidence to be faithful ... Jesus did not take things into His hands because He knew the Father had His back.”

In the study of Daniel, we have seen that persecution, conflict and evil are realities of following Jesus. We too are called to trust God, to rest in our identity as His children and to let Him vindicate us. As we do, as we heap coals of love on those who persecute us, we point to the reality that this world is not our home. That we too have a confident resolve to live not for that which is passing away, but for that which will last forever. That we too will live as Jesus lived, not as the world lives. To do this takes “confident resolve” and it also takes the power of the Holy Spirit.

Before Jesus faced His final trial, He spent the night praying and He invited those closest to Him to pray too.

“Although Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection flung open the gates of heaven for us all, we still have to face a great inconvenience. We must be willing to pick up our own personal cross and choose the will of our Father over that of our own—several hundred times each day. That’s tough. No, let’s be honest. It’s completely impossible. Our only hope is to have Jesus on our insides, alive, powerful, loving and acting through our mouths and limbs.”

Sources:

- Quoted material in the first three paragraphs is written by Darrell L. Bock. “Confident Resolve,” *Journey to the Cross: Lent/Easter 2019*. A Christianity Today Special Issue.
- Quoted material in the last paragraph is written by Gary W. Moon. *Apprenticeship with Jesus: Learning to Live Like the Master*. Ada, Michigan: Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition, 2009. p. 131.

“What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray.”

– Matthew 26:40-41

This week why not try setting aside an hour each day to be with God. Seems like a long time, right? Recently I came across this in one of my files:

“The Hour That Changes the World”

By dividing an hour into 12 five-minute segments, you can pray daily for one full hour. Use this model to sustain prayer for the nations, the people in your personal sphere, and your own life. Then watch God work! Begin and end with praise:

1. **Praise:** Recognize God’s Nature (Psalm 63:3)
2. **Waiting:** Silent Soul Surrender (Psalm 46:10)
3. **Confession:** Temple Cleansing Time (Psalm 139:23)
4. **Scripture Praying:** Word-Enriched Prayer (Jeremiah 23:29)
5. **Watching:** Develop Holy Alertness (Colossians 4:2)
6. **Intercession:** Remember the World (1 Timothy 2:1-2)
7. **Petition:** Share Personal Needs (Matthew 7:7)
8. **Thanksgiving:** Confess My Blessings (1 Thessalonians 5:18)
9. **Singing:** Worship in Song (Psalm 100:2)
10. **Meditation:** Ponder Spiritual Themes (Joshua 1:8)
11. **Listening:** Receive Spiritual Instruction (Ecclesiastes 5:2)
12. **Praise:** Conclude with Praise (Psalm 52:9)

From Dick Eastman’s book, *The Hour that Changes the World: A Practical Plan for Personal Prayer*. Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2002.

MONDAY

Luke 1:26-55; Luke 2:25-35

Mary, did you know what your life and legacy would entail?

When Mel Gibson's blockbuster "The Passion of the Christ" debuted in 2004, I was among those who saw this stunning movie. During a subsequent Bible study discussion, however, one brother noted, "This was obviously made by a Catholic—Mary is deified as if she's a member of the Godhead." Historical Catholicism has venerated Mary, prominently featuring her image, encouraging prayers to her, and even giving homage to her. In Protestantism, however, Mary's story is muted, shared primarily in the context of Christmas. Which view is more correct?

By the time of Jesus' birth, Rome had ruled Israel for 60+ years, following centuries of Israel's captivity or occupation under various world empires; the Israelites eagerly anticipated God's Messiah. Mary was an impoverished teenager from nondescript Nazareth engaged to the lowly carpenter, Joseph. There was little remarkable about either, except that both were of King David's lineage.

Consider their circumstances. Mary is 13 to 16 years old, a virgin, living in an obscure village where nothing is private. She and Joseph are within the one-year betrothal period, essentially married absent conjugal relations. An angel advises that, despite her virginity, she will birth Israel's Messiah. With this highest honor comes potential shame in many people's eyes—those ascribing her pregnancy to adultery and viewing the "immaculate conception" and "Messianic

birth” as ruses, if she even tried to explain. One wonders exactly what Mary said to her parents. Joseph himself struggled until he likewise was visited by an angel. Did they both have to endure gossip.

The Bible calls Mary one who had “found favor with God” (Luke 1:30) and “blessed” (1:42, 45, 48). Yet 30+ years later, amidst a crowd declaring, “*Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you,*” Jesus replied, “*Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it*” (11:27-28). Years earlier at newborn Jesus’ temple dedication, Simeon warned Mary that because of Jesus “*a sword will pierce your own soul too*” (2:35).

Was Mary blessed and do non-Catholic Christians under-estimate her? Read “The Magnificat” (2:46-55) again. As we’ll explore this week, Mary struggled with much of the circumstances around her. Clearly, her extreme veneration is misguided, essentially idolatry. However, Mary was faithful to an incredibly demanding calling—she heard God’s word and obeyed!

QUESTIONS

Is it wrong to highly esteem the Virgin Mary? What did Simeon mean when prophesying to Mary, “a sword will pierce your own soul, too”?

PRAYERS FOR GIZEM

Pray for Gizem, as she serves in Turkey with AKÜH, affiliated with International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, which is in the same network as InterVarsity. The ministry equips and encourages students to reach out to peers. Her role requires her to connect with students, serve in a local church, and minister to the youth of the broader church community.

TUESDAY

Luke 1:30-33; Luke 2:41-52; John 2:13-17

After the wonder and majesty of Jesus' miraculous birth, we scroll forward twelve years. Mary and Joseph had traveled to Jerusalem from Nazareth to observe Passover as faithful Jews. After departing to return home, they experienced a horror only a parent can appreciate: forgetting Jesus and leaving Him behind in Jerusalem.

Upon their return and finding Jesus at the temple, a strange exchange between Mary and Jesus ensued. Mary said: "*Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.*" Jesus answered: "*Why ... Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?*" (Luke 2:48-49) Was 12-year-old Jesus being cheeky toward His mother and dismissive regarding Joseph? What was He trying to say? How does one parent the "Messiah" anyway? How does one handle such a trust? Luke 2:51 indicates: "*His mother treasured [pondered] these things in her heart.*"

It's highly unlikely that Mary forgot about the miraculous circumstances regarding her pregnancy and the Savior's birth, that He was indeed the Son of God. We should all appreciate Joseph and his decision to stand by Mary despite the gossip they likely endured. Joseph dutifully stepped in as Jesus' stepfather, preparing Him to follow Joseph into a carpentry career, all the time knowing he was not Jesus' biological father.

While the emotional stress of forgetting Jesus in Jerusalem may have thrown Mary off-kilter, it's clear that there is much she didn't grasp regarding her Son's mission. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus all had to grow into what it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah. This must not have been easy for any of them, let alone for Jesus' brothers and sisters. After all, this is not what any of them expected. They had been taught a very different view of what the "Messiah" was to be like. Jesus later said, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*" (John 20:29). What does "believing" look like when the seeing seems so different than our expectations and preconceived notions?

The fact that Mary, while not understanding, still walked faithfully to fulfill God's mission for her makes her even more commendable. She shouldn't be worshiped, but she definitely should be highly esteemed!

QUESTIONS

Why should Joseph be esteemed for the role he played in Jesus' life?

PRAYERS FOR GIZEM

Next month, an experienced Canadian staff will join the Istanbul team—now they will be a team of three! They will be able to do more activities to reach out to non-believers. Gizem asks you to pray that they will serve in unity and with effectiveness, and pray for the new activities and Bible studies.

WEDNESDAY

John 2:1-11; Revelation 19:6-9

Weddings are generally joyous, very public celebrations; this was particularly true in ancient Israel. The wedding in Cana featured our Lord's first recorded miracle (John 2:7-9). Why this event and its circumstances for Jesus' "coming out" as the Messiah?

Note the odd exchange between Mary and her Son in John 2:3-4, given her practical dilemma: Mary was chosen to bear the Messiah while an engaged virgin. In small-town Nazareth, she would be judged by some for 30+ years as "unfaithful." Jesus Himself would be questioned as to the legitimacy of His birth.

By not understanding Jesus' mission, was Mary trying to force His hand, like some believe Judas did three years later? Was she just trying to help the host save face, trying to be "helpful" (how often does our "helpfulness" get us in trouble)? Was she just being a "proud" mom? Note Jesus' mild rebuke. His mission was so vastly different than anyone could imagine.

Jesus was not a magician and certainly no entertainer. He never did miracles for His own gain, though He could have—Satan tempted Him accordingly and unsuccessfully (Luke 4:2-13). His aim was to point others toward God. So, why did Jesus seemingly submit to Mary's request, ensuring ample wine for the wedding reception?

John 2:6 provides a key detail: the water jars He chose were used for the Jews' ceremonial washing, connected to Jewish hygiene laws and related practices. Jesus' first recorded miracle "indicates that the old ritual is passing away to be replaced by the new wine of the Spirit ... The old [water] was to be turned into something better [wine, representing His blood as well as joy in the Lord] ... In the coming of Jesus, the world will be offered new and better 'wine', replacing the old religious ideas." (Peter Pett)

This miracle wasn't about Mary, or the host, or even Jesus' reputation. It was a sign to all regarding God's redemptive plan of salvation, the key theme of the Bible. Perhaps God specifically chose a wedding for the first miracle to symbolize how Jesus, God the Son, entered into humanity's fallenness to save and claim His own, the Bride of Christ. He desires related, joyous intimacy with each of us!

QUESTIONS

Why did Jesus appear reluctant, at first, to step in and help?

What did His resultant miracle symbolize?

PRAYERS FOR GIZEM

Churches in Turkey are small. At a university there may be few Christian students, or none at all. Gizem and her team seek to develop partnerships with churches to create a fellowship of Christian students. It takes time for churches to trust outsiders. Pray that the team will establish relationships of trust with more churches.

THURSDAY

Mark 3:20-21, 31-35; John 7:1-10

Mary wasn't the first mother to worry about her firstborn, nor would she be the last. However, the implications are greater when we consider that her Son was the Messiah, humankind's Savior. John 7:5 says that "*not even His brothers believed in Him.*" After all, Jesus was not acting like they thought a "Messiah" should act.

One of the Lord's hardest sayings was: "*If anyone ... does not hate his own father and mother, brothers and sisters—yes, even life itself—he cannot be my disciple*" (Luke 14:26). It might appear that Jesus was estranged from His own mother and siblings. Yet we also know that He lived a perfect, sinless life (1 Peter 2:22), including keeping the Fifth Commandment. Jesus' caution in Luke 14:26 was intentional hyperbole; he was emphasizing the relative costs and challenges of Christian discipleship.

As God is love (1 John 4:8) and Jesus is God the Son, it's certain that Mary knew of His love for her. However, consider the challenges of raising God's Son, particularly as His radical ministry commenced and Jesus began walking toward crucifixion at Calvary. Children sometimes complain to parents that they admire and coddle a sibling as if he or she is perfect. In Jesus' case, however, such perspective was literally true.

How challenging must this have been for His brothers and sisters, as well as for Mary and Joseph? How hard it is to be obediently

faithful in the midst of questioning, especially when there was no one who would understand, no one other than Joseph who would believe her—and by this time he had probably passed away.

It's reasonable that Mary perceived the intensifying opposition Jesus experienced among the Pharisees and Jewish hierarchy. Very possibly she anticipated that this wouldn't end well for Him. Like any loving mother, she was likely worried about this, wanting only the best for Him. But Mary saw these circumstances through an earthbound, temporal lens. It's doubtful that she could grasp the necessity of Jesus' atoning sacrifice, both for her own redemption and that of all who would believe in Him.

What became of Jesus' skeptical brothers? We know that at least two of them accepted Christ. His brothers James and Jude penned epistles carrying their names; James also led the fledgling Jerusalem church. Why would it have been particularly challenging to be Jesus' sibling?

QUESTIONS

What did Jesus mean when He said that a true disciple must “hate his own father and mother”?

PRAYERS FOR GIZEM

Every week Gizem's team gathers believing students for dinner, fellowship, and Bible study. Pray that these times will touch their lives. May they develop closer relationships and learn from one another. May God's Word transform their hearts, and may they be encouraged to take initiative in their universities to share the gospel effectively.

FRIDAY

John 19:23-27; Luke 2:33-35; John 2:1-5

Mary, did you know that Jesus loves you?

With Good Friday just seven days ahead, we find ourselves today at Calvary and Jesus' crucifixion. Unlike all of the disciples, except for John, Mary was there. As a parent, can you imagine what it must have felt like for her? Her beloved, perfect Son stripped, beaten and ripped open to a bloody pulp, spit upon and mocked, and then executed in the most brutal, painful way possible. And she endured all of it while still not understanding.

During the horror-filled proceedings, did Mary reflect upon Simeon's prophecy regarding 8-day-old Jesus, "*And a sword will pierce your own soul too*"? Did she recall nudging Jesus to do a public miracle at the Cana wedding, or Jesus' mild rebuke when she and Joseph had come to take Him home from Jerusalem? When Mary said "yes" to the angel Gabriel, she probably never imagined the cost. On Good Friday she, like others, probably questioned what went wrong. Did she question if she had failed God? At that moment there is no way that she could begin to understand that Jesus' death was necessary in order to cleanse and purify us all, enabling us to be the "Bride of Christ."

Other onlookers mocked, "*He saved others; He cannot save Himself*" (Matthew 27:42). At some level, this insult was true. He could have called for legions of angels to intervene (v. 53). But had Jesus done

this, humankind would remain irreparably lost and creation with it. He willingly sacrificed so that we, as well as His own mother, could be reconciled with God,

If I were Jesus, I might have lashed out at my wicked accusers and executioners, reminding them that, as God, I could destroy them with a mere word whenever I chose to do so. But I am not the Lord Jesus. Did Jesus want to explain to Mary how all the years of isolation, pain, and questioning were part of what it means to obediently say “yes”? Mary’s call to discipleship is not one of deification or veneration; rather it is our call to obedience despite the questions, lack of understanding, and misunderstanding.

On the cross Jesus looked lovingly upon Mary and John, the “apostle whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20), bonding them as “mother” and “son.” This declaration, heaped upon the selfless love Jesus exhibited upon the cross, is incomprehensible—perhaps it was the only thing providing some measure of comfort to Mary’s pierced soul.

QUESTIONS

What was the cost for Mary’s redemption, as well as yours and mine?

PRAYERS FOR GIZEM

Every June, Canadian students come and partner with Gizem and her team. They have various activities to share the Good News via friendships. This year the program will be two weeks in Istanbul and one week in Izmir. Pray that they build friendships and share with many, and that new students will come to faith.

Sources:

- Peter Pett's quote is from www.studylight.org/commentaries/pet/john-2.html

