

Monday
Luke 1:5–25

Every birth is an important birth. Every child is a gift from God. Shortly before the birth of Jesus, another special baby was born. His birth, like the birth of the Savior himself, was told about hundreds of years before it actually happened. About this child the angel said, “He will go before [the Savior]... to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”

The birth of this special baby happened like this: Zechariah the priest was serving God in the temple when Gabriel, an angel of the Lord, appeared and told him that God had heard his prayers and that he and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son. They were to name him John. Given their advanced age, Zechariah doubted Gabriel's words. Gabriel then told Zechariah he would not be able to speak until the baby was born.

The words of Gabriel came to be true. Soon after the visit of the angel, Elizabeth became pregnant, and in time, she gave birth to a son. The happy couple named their baby John. At the naming of John, Zechariah again became able to speak.

When the child grew up, he became known as John the Baptist. He preached repentance and baptized people in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. God had a plan for John's life.

Somewhat similarly, God has a plan for everyone. At each birthday, we remember God's grace and goodness as we celebrate another year of life. Like John, we ready ourselves for the coming of the Messiah. Unlike John, we await Jesus' second coming, the time when he will take us to live with him in a happy home in heaven.

Dear Father, thank you for the gift of life. Thank you for choosing me to be your child. Help me always remember that you loved me enough to send your perfect Son to cancel my sins. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Tuesday
Luke 2:22–38

God sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world. He was born on the first Christmas. When he was forty days old, Mary and Joseph took him to the temple. They were obeying God. God wanted mothers and fathers to bring their children to him.

An old man named Simeon was in the temple. He believed God's promises of a Savior. God told Simeon he would live long enough to see the Savior. How happy he was when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple! Simeon knew that God had answered his prayer. He knew Jesus was the Savior.

Simeon held baby Jesus. He said, "Now I have peace. I have seen Jesus! He will save all people." Then Simeon blessed Mary and Joseph. He said that Jesus would do many things for all people.

Another person in the temple that day was an old woman named Anna. She prayed night and day in the temple. She wanted to see the Savior too. Anna came up to Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. She thanked God for the Savior. She thanked God for answering her prayer. Then she told people about Jesus. She said, "Jesus will save us." Simeon and Anna thanked and praised God for sending Jesus. They knew God answers prayers.

Dear God, help us to talk to you regularly and often in prayer. Help us to share our joys and sorrows with you, even as we ask you for things we would like to have. We praise you, Lord, for your forgiveness and salvation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Wednesday
Acts 3:1—4:4

Peter and John, two of Jesus' disciples, were walking to the temple one day to pray. As they approached the temple, a man who couldn't walk was sitting by the temple gates. Since he could not work, the man came to the same place every day, where many people would pass by close to him. When Peter and John came near, he asked them if they would give him some money.

Peter told the man, "Silver or gold I have none, but what I have I freely give you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, get up and walk!" Then Peter took the man's hand and helped him stand up. The man began to leap and run and praise God! He was so happy that God had made him well. Right away, he went to the temple to praise God and to give thanks.

The people in the temple recognized him as the crippled man who sat at the temple gates each day. The people were so astonished to see the lame man now able to jump and walk around that they came running to Peter and John.

With the people gathered all around, Peter preached a powerful, important sermon about Jesus. Peter explained to the crowd that he and John did not have any power on their own to make the lame man walk. Peter made it clear that it was only the power of God and faith in the name of Jesus that made this man strong. "The faith that is through Jesus," Peter said, "has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all."

Then Peter reminded the people that the one who had healed the lame man was the same Jesus whom they had killed. But God had raised him from the dead. Peter told the people to repent and turn to God so that he would blot out their sins. Many who heard Peter's message that day believed in Jesus and were baptized.

The man who could now walk praised God for healing him. We too praise God, especially for his gifts of repentance and forgiveness of sins through Jesus our Savior.

- **What did the lame man ask Peter and John to give him?**
- **What did they give him?**
- **Who really healed this man?**
- **Why do we praise God like this man did?**

Close with prayer

Thursday

2 Corinthians 1:3–8; 6:1–5

Paul was a great missionary, perhaps the greatest of all time. He traveled all over the world to tell people the good news of Jesus. But things weren't always easy for Paul. In fact, much of what he experienced could be called suffering or hardship. He was often in prison, was beaten severely, and even had enemies who once tried to kill him by throwing stones at him.

Three times, he was shipwrecked, and he spent many hours on the open sea. Often, he went without sleep or food or clothing. Paul could have focused on the things he didn't have but wanted in order to feel comfortable. Instead, though, he found contentment in Jesus and in the work he was doing.

Paul wanted to bring the good news of Jesus' love and forgiveness to those who had not yet heard about it. Paul wanted to share it with others because of the change Jesus had made in his life.

- **What good things has God put into your life?**

Thank you, Lord, for all the beauties and pleasures of life. You are so good to me. Amen.

Friday
Acts 10

Cornelius was an important Roman soldier who believed in the one true God of the Jews, but he did not know about Jesus. One day, an angel came to Cornelius. The angel told him, “Send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter.” Cornelius obeyed the angel and sent messengers to Joppa to find Peter.

Before the messengers found Peter in Joppa where he was staying, God gave Peter a strange dream while he was praying. In his dream, Peter saw a large sheet with many animals in it. A voice from heaven told Peter he could eat the animals, even though the Jewish people were forbidden to eat some of those animals, like pigs. While Peter was still wondering about what his strange dream might mean, the Holy Spirit told him messengers were at the door and that he should go with them to Cornelius' house.

Peter went downstairs and found the messengers waiting for him. And Peter went back to Cornelius' house with them, even though they were Gentiles (non-Jews, usually unbelievers), and Jews were forbidden to go into Gentile homes. Peter understood from his dream that God did not love just the Jews – even though they had been specially chosen by God – but that God loves people from every nation.

When they arrived at Cornelius' home, he was happy and excited to see Peter. Peter went into his home and met many of Cornelius' family and friends who were there too, ready to hear whatever the Lord had commanded Peter to say.

Peter now understood that God cares for people of every nation. He gladly told Cornelius and his family that God had sent Jesus. “Everyone,” Peter said, “who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard. Cornelius and all his friends believed in Jesus and were baptized. Now they were part of God's family too.

God showed Peter that he does not prefer any one group of people over another. God loves people of every nation – no matter what language they speak or what color they are. God sent Jesus to die on the cross and rise again for the sins of all people. All who believe in Jesus will be saved and someday will live with him.

- **What was Peter's dream, and how did it show that God loves people from every nation?**
- **What happens to everyone who believes in Jesus?**
- **Are there people in your life, disliked by you or others, who need to hear about Jesus?**

Close with prayer