

Countdown to Christmas 2024



9th – 13th

(The readings this year are based on material from RBC Ministries)

Monday 9

BARREN BUT NOT BITTER

Read:

Luke 1:5-17

They were both righteous before God But they had no child. —Luke 1:6-7

Barrenness, whether physical or spiritual, can lead to bitterness in some of God's people. It can develop in the heart of a disappointed couple who cannot have a child. It can also occur when people serve God and see no results.

A missionary couple who served diligently for many years with no visible fruit asked in frustration, "Have we wasted our lives?" A young pastor and his wife laboured 5 years for a thankless, unresponsive congregation, pouring out their lives for their people. "Do they even care?" the woman asked.

Zacharias and Elizabeth, mentioned in Luke 1, are a model for anyone who is facing physical or spiritual barrenness. The aged couple had an impeccable reputation, having faithfully and obediently served the Lord for many years (v.6). They had prayed for children, but none came. Yet instead of becoming bitter, they kept serving and obeying the Lord. In His time, God honoured Zacharias and Elizabeth with a son named John, the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah (vv.13-17).

To avoid developing a bitter spirit in your life, faithfully serve and obey the Lord in the place where He has called you. Trust God to bless you in His time, in His way, and according to His plan.

*Lord, keep me from being bitter
When things don't go my way,
And grant me Your grace and wisdom
To do Your will today.*

Be faithful—and leave the results with God.

Tuesday 10

**THE MAIN
EVENT**

Read:

Luke 1:26-38

You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. —Luke 1:31

During the Great Depression that hit the United States in the 1930s, a family in the Midwest struggled to put food on their table. They had no money for luxuries.

One day posters all over town announced that a circus was coming. Admission would be \$1. A boy in the family wanted to see the show, but his father told him that he would have to earn the money on his own. The youngster had never seen a circus before, so he worked feverishly and was able to buy a ticket.

On the day the circus arrived, he went to see the performers and the animals parade through town. As he watched, a clown came dancing over to him, and the boy put his ticket in the clown's hand. Then he stood on the curb and cheered as the rest of the parade moved by.

The youngster rushed home to tell his parents what he had seen and how exciting the circus was. His father listened, then took his son in his arms and said, "Son, you didn't see the circus. All you saw was the parade."

That story is a parable of Christmas. Many people get excited about the festivities but miss the main event. During this season, let's remember what happened in a humble stable and what Jesus' birth means to us.

*The world drowns the carol with its sleighbells
Giftwraps the manger—shoves it out of sight;
Yet though the darkness deepens and the din swells,
The Star of Bethlehem still shines as bright. —Gustafson*

Jesus is the reason for the season.

Wednesday 11

**THE BLESSING
TREE**

Read:

Luke 1:39-45

Blessed are you among
women, and blessed is
the fruit of your womb. —
Luke 1:42

A young couple whose business had failed, and they had little money to spend at Christmas. They were going to have to move out of their house after the New Year. But they didn't want their holiday season to be spoiled because of it. So they decided to throw a party. When the guests arrived, they saw a cedar tree decorated with one string of lights and small rolled-up pieces of paper tied to the limbs with ribbon.

"Welcome to our 'blessing tree' !" they said, beaming. "In spite of hard times, God has blessed us in so many ways that we decided to

dedicate our tree to Him. Each piece of paper describes a blessing He has given us this year."

This couple has faced more trials since then, but they have chosen to stay focused on the Lord. They often remark that the Christmas with the "blessing tree" was one of their most beautiful, because they could testify as Elizabeth did of Mary: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Luke 1:42).

Whatever your difficulties, they needn't spoil Christmas, for nothing can spoil Christ! Like this couple, stay focused on Jesus and seek ways to share His blessings with others—perhaps through your own "blessing tree."

*Jesus came—and came for me!
Simple words, and yet expressing
Depths of holy mystery,
Depths of wondrous love and blessing. —Havergal.*

The crux of Christmas is Christ.

Thursday 12

**THE SONG OF
MARY**

Read:

Luke 1:46-55

Mary said: "My soul
magnifies the Lord." —
Luke 1:46

Mary was, troubled. She had just heard the words, "Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28). Comforting words, it would seem, but startling because they were spoken by an angel.

Mary was about to be presented with the most magnificent news ever, yet she was fearful. And when the angel told her she would have a baby, she exclaimed, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" (v.34).

Those two facts about Mary—that she was troubled and that she questioned the angel—tell us she was a person like us, with normal concerns.

Yet, after listening to the angel, Mary called herself "the maidservant of the Lord," and she said, "Let it be to me according to your word" (v.38). She was a humble, godly servant, with a willingness to do God's will.

We see more of Mary's heart in her eloquent prayer, known as the Magnificat, the Song of Mary (vv.46-55). Here she rejoiced in God's holiness (v.49), His mercy (v.50), His strength (vv.51-52), His care for the hungry (v.53), and His goodness to His people (vv.54-55).

We can learn from Mary to trust God despite our concerns and fears, and to praise Him for His greatness. That's what the song of Mary is all about.

*We magnify our Father God
With songs of thoughtful praise;
As grateful children we confess
How perfect are His ways. —Ball*

God's unsearchable ways deserve our unbounded praise.

Friday 13

**SING A NEW
SONG**

Read:

Luke 1:67-80

[Jesus will] give light to
those who sit in darkness,
to guide our feet into the
way of peace.

—Luke 1:79

Two passages in Luke related to the birth of Jesus are often called "songs" because of their similarity to Hebrew psalms of the Old Testament. The early church set them to music and used them in worship. One of them, the Magnificat of Mary (1:46-55), is well known. But the second "song" is a less familiar poem of praise, which was spoken by Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist (vv.67-79).

After 9 months of divinely imposed silence, Zacharias was finally able to speak. He announced that the miracle baby born to him and

Elizabeth would be named John. Then, filled with the Holy Spirit, Zacharias spoke of God's faithfulness and the salvation He would bring through Messiah.

Zacharias said that Jesus, "through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us," would come "to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (vv.78-79).

For a fresh look at the birth of Jesus this Christmas, consider Zacharias' words of prophecy and exultation. Read them aloud. Ponder their meaning. Let God use them to write a new song of praise deep in your heart.

*This Christmas sing a new song
That comes from deep within,
A song that honours Christ the Lord,
Who saves us from our sin. —Hess*

Seeing God's work in our life puts a new song in our heart.