



The prayer that Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane is one of the most vivid pictures of Jesus' devotion to the will of his heavenly father. Only a few hours prior to his arrest by the Jewish authorities, Jesus asks that "this cup be taken from me." Knowing full well the suffering that he was about to endure, Jesus again offers himself to the path that he alone had been called to follow to redeem the world.

Our readings for this week began with Joseph's decision to "divorce Mary quietly" when "she was found to be with child." Joseph's mind was changed when an angel of the Lord appeared to him and let him know that God had a different plan. Joseph chose God's plan over his own. In Matthew 26 we find Jesus doing exactly what his earthly father had done before.

Following God's will for our lives is never easy. It often requires our sacrifice. It demands that we consistently surrender our hopes and dreams. It challenges us to see God's perspective of our lives and how our lives might be used to further God's kingdom. The difficulty reveals our true devotion. Today, as you prepare to celebrate again the gift of Christmas, ask for God to give you the strength to present your whole life as your gift to the newborn King.

## GPS for Families

*GrowPrayStudy.org/family*

This time of year is often planned, scheduled and hectic. Make this Christmas a special one by taking a planned time-out. You may have to schedule this time or wait for a spontaneous opportunity, but make it happen. You will create a memory more important than the food, the clothes and the gifts. Here are some suggested time-out ideas:

- Turn on some upbeat music and dance with your family. There are some fun Christmas tunes that will make you want to dance, or pick some old favorite tunes that make you want to move. Let it all go while you dance your socks off!
- Sit in front of the tree with your family and just stare at the lights. Talk about how pretty the tree is, how it reminds you of God's beauty. Relive past Christmas stories and tell the kids about their first Christmases.
- Snuggle on the couch while listening to soft Christmas music. Drink hot cocoa, talk about the true meaning of Christmas. Remind your kids of the gift we received when Jesus was born.
- Read a good Christmas story with your children. There are many Christmas books for children that explain the meaning of Christmas. Or read straight out of the Bible from Luke 2. You can use a Children's Bible if you have younger children.
- Light a candle and sing *Happy Birthday* to Jesus. Talk about how you can give the gift of yourself to Jesus this year.

MESSAGE

"Christmas Is for Worship!"

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 2:1-2, 9-14

*Rev. Mike Ramsdell, Senior Pastor*  
*miker@firstmethodistmansfield.org*  
*facebook.com/mike.ramsdell1*  
*www.mikeramsdell.com*

**"For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow . . . and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."** (*Philippians 2:9-11*)

- In a world of chaos, worship restores us to God's created order.
- Worship shapes who we are and reminds us who God is.
- Worship helps spiritual roots go deeper as its practice develops a living relationship with Jesus Christ.
- God did not design us to worship Him, nor does he need us to worship, but we need to worship God.
- Christmas invites us to a welcoming God, a loving God, a saving God, an understanding God, an active God, a present God.

### PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

*Holy and loving God, I give you thanks for the gift of Christmas. As I celebrate the coming of our newborn King, I pray that you would forgive me of my sin, bind up my wounds and cast out all my worries and fear. May the life I live this day and every day testify to my belief that Jesus has come to save my life and redeem the entire world. Amen.*

This miraculous story of Jesus' birth, which we mark during the season of Christmas, comes to us through the Gospel written by Matthew and Luke. Luke's narration of Jesus' birth centers on Jesus' mother, Mary, while Matthew's account revolves around Mary's husband, Joseph. In our first GPS reading for this season we said that "the words of the angel Gabriel who came to Mary . . . turned her life completely upside down." Today, we read about Joseph's response to this shocking news.

*In verse 19 it says that Joseph planned to divorce Mary. What changed his mind? If God wanted to "change your mind" as he did for Joseph, how might God do that?*

*The hopes and dreams that Joseph and Mary had for their lives completely changed when Jesus came into their lives. Has your vision for your life changed because of Jesus? In what way?*

.....  
.....  
.....

The second chapter of Matthew's Gospel opens with the magi, more commonly known as the wise men, coming to Herod and asking, "Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?" Their question disturbed Herod given that he was the current "king of the Jews." By conspiring with the Romans who controlled the territory of Israel, Herod had solidified his kingship. The coming of Jesus was a direct threat to his continued reign.

*In looking at Mary and Joseph's response to Mary's pregnancy, we noted their willingness to allow God to "turn their lives upside down." Herod had a different reaction. He decide to further assert his own will. Can you think of a time in your life when you reacted like Herod?*

*Worship always involves sacrificing our desires for God's dreams. What dreams does God have for you that will require your sacrifice?*

.....  
.....  
.....

In his book *The Journey*, Rev. Adam Hamilton describes the inhabitants of Nazareth in this way. "These were not affluent people by any means. In fact, evidence shows that, far from living in luxury villas, some of them may actually have built their homes within and around the area's soft limestone caves — the least expensive form of housing in the first century and a sign of relative poverty." Matthew indicates that Joseph's decision to make a home in Nazareth was intended to fulfill prophecy and to protect his special son.

*The man who served as Jesus' earthly father is not mentioned again in Matthew's Gospel. What is clear from the first two chapters of Matthew is that Joseph went to great lengths to ensure Jesus' safety and security.*

*Given what you have read about Joseph this week, what might Jesus have learned from his father?*

.....  
.....  
.....

The scriptures share little information regarding Jesus' childhood. In fact, this episode recorded in Luke 2 is the only event reported in the four Gospels. We can only imagine the panic that must have overwhelmed Joseph and Mary once they discovered that Jesus was missing. For three days they searched for the son they knew to be the "Son of the Most High." They found him in "his Father's house."

*We would expect any mom to respond as Mary did. In verse 48 she says, "Why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." What does this reveal about Mary and Joseph's feeling about their special son?*

*It seems that serving as the earthly parents for Jesus was a special burden born by Joseph and Mary. What special "burdens" do you carry because of your obedience to Christ?*

.....  
.....  
.....