

Reading 1 – Genesis 2:4–9;15-17 (NLT)

4 This is the account of the creation of the heavens and the earth.

When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, **5** neither wild plants nor grains were growing on the earth. For the LORD God had not yet sent rain to water the earth, and there were no people to cultivate the soil.

6 Instead, springs came up from the ground and watered all the land.

7 Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man’s nostrils, and the man became a living person.

8 Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the man he had made. **9** The LORD God made all sorts of trees grow up from the ground—trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

15 The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. **16** But the LORD God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—**17** except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.”

Reading 2 – Genesis 2:18–24 (NLT)

18 Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.” **19** So the LORD God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. **20** He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him.

21 So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the LORD God took out one of the man’s ribs and closed up the opening. **22** Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man.

23 “At last!” the man exclaimed.

“This one is bone from my bone,
and flesh from my flesh!
She will be called ‘woman,’
because she was taken from ‘man.’ ”

24 This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

Reading 3 – Genesis 3:1–9 (NLT)

1 The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the LORD God had made. One day he asked the woman, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?”

2 “Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,” the woman replied. **3** “It’s only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, ‘You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.’ ”

4 “You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman. **5** “God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”

6 The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too.

7 At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

8 When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees. **9** Then the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

Reading 4 – Isaiah 2:1–5 (NLT)

1 This is a vision that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

2 In the last days, the mountain of the LORD’s house
will be the highest of all—
the most important place on earth.

It will be raised above the other hills,
and people from all over the world will stream there to worship.

3 People from many nations will come and say,
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of Jacob’s God.

There he will teach us his ways,
and we will walk in his paths.”

For the LORD’s teaching will go out from Zion;
his word will go out from Jerusalem.

4 The LORD will mediate between nations
and will settle international disputes.

They will hammer their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will no longer fight against nation,
nor train for war anymore.

5 Come, descendants of Jacob,
let us walk in the light of the LORD!

Reading 5 – Psalm 122 (NLT)

A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem. A psalm of David.

1 I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD.”

2 And now here we are,
standing inside your gates, O Jerusalem.

3 Jerusalem is a well-built city;
its seamless walls cannot be breached.

4 All the tribes of Israel—the LORD’s people—
make their pilgrimage here.

They come to give thanks to the name of the LORD,
as the law requires of Israel.

5 Here stand the thrones where judgment is given,
the thrones of the dynasty of David.

6 Pray for peace in Jerusalem.
May all who love this city prosper.

7 O Jerusalem, may there be peace within your walls
and prosperity in your palaces.

8 For the sake of my family and friends, I will say,
“May you have peace.”

9 For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
I will seek what is best for you, O Jerusalem.

Reading 6 – Isaiah 11:1–10 (NLT)

1 Out of the stump of David’s family will grow a shoot—
yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root.

2 And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

3 He will delight in obeying the LORD.
He will not judge by appearance
nor make a decision based on hearsay.

4 He will give justice to the poor
and make fair decisions for the exploited.
The earth will shake at the force of his word,

and one breath from his mouth will destroy the wicked.

5 He will wear righteousness like a belt
and truth like an undergarment.

6 In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together;
the leopard will lie down with the baby goat.

The calf and the yearling will be safe with the lion,
and a little child will lead them all.

7 The cow will graze near the bear.

The cub and the calf will lie down together.

The lion will eat hay like a cow.

8 The baby will play safely near the hole of a cobra.

Yes, a little child will put its hand in a nest of deadly snakes without
harm.

9 Nothing will hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,
for as the waters fill the sea,

so the earth will be filled with people who know the LORD.

10 In that day the heir to David's throne

will be a banner of salvation to all the world.

The nations will rally to him,

and the land where he lives will be a glorious place.

Reading 7 – Luke 21:25–36 (NLT)

Jesus was speaking and said, **25** “And there will be strange signs in the sun, moon, and stars. And here on earth the nations will be in turmoil, perplexed by the roaring seas and strange tides. **26** People will be terrified at what they see coming upon the earth, for the powers in the heavens will be shaken. **27** Then everyone will see the Son of Man coming on a cloud with power and great glory. **28** So when all these things begin to happen, stand and look up, for your salvation is near!”

29 Then he gave them this illustration: “Notice the fig tree, or any other tree. **30** When the leaves come out, you know without being told that

summer is near. **31** In the same way, when you see all these things taking place, you can know that the Kingdom of God is near. **32** I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass from the scene until all these things have taken place. **33** Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear.

34 “Watch out! Don't let your hearts be dulled by carousing and drunkenness, and by the worries of this life. Don't let that day catch you unaware, **35** like a trap. For that day will come upon everyone living on the earth. **36** Keep alert at all times. And pray that you might be strong enough to escape these coming horrors and stand before the Son of Man.”

Reading 8 – Revelation 21:1–14 (NLT)

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. **2** And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

3 I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. **4** He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.”

5 And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!” And then he said to me, “Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true.” **6** And he also said, “It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. **7** All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children.

8 “But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

9 Then one of the seven angels who held the seven bowls containing the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come with me! I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

10 So he took me in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and he showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. **11** It shone with the glory of God and sparkled like a precious stone—like jasper as clear as crystal. **12** The city wall was broad and high, with twelve gates guarded by twelve angels. And the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were written on the gates. **13** There were three gates on each side—east, north, south, and west. **14** The wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Reading 9 – Revelation 21:22 – 22:5 (NLT)

22 I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. **23** And the city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light. **24** The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the world will enter the city in all their glory. **25** Its gates will never be closed at the end of day because there is no night there. **26** And all the nations will bring their glory and honor into the city.

27 Nothing evil will be allowed to enter, nor anyone who practices shameful idolatry and dishonesty—but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

1 Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. **2** It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations.

3 No longer will there be a curse upon anything. For the throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and his servants will worship him. **4** And they will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. **5** And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever.

Reading 10 – Revelation 22:6–13 (NLT)

6 Then the angel said to me, “Everything you have heard and seen is trustworthy and true. The Lord God, who inspires his prophets, has sent his angel to tell his servants what will happen soon.”

7 “Look, I am coming soon! Blessed are those who obey the words of prophecy written in this book.”

8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw all these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me. **9** But he said, “No, don’t worship me. I am a servant of God, just like you and your brothers the prophets, as well as all who obey what is written in this book. Worship only God!”

10 Then he instructed me, “Do not seal up the prophetic words in this book, for the time is near. **11** Let the one who is doing harm continue to do harm; let the one who is vile continue to be vile; let the one who is righteous continue to live righteously; let the one who is holy continue to be holy.”

12 “Look, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me to repay all people according to their deeds. **13** I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”

Reading 11 – Revelation 22:14–21 (NLT)

14 Blessed are those who wash their robes. They will be permitted to enter through the gates of the city and eat the fruit from the tree of life. **15** Outside the city are the dogs—the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idol worshipers, and all who love to live a lie. **16** “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this message for the churches. I am both the source of David and the heir to his throne. I am the bright morning star.” **17** The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” Let anyone who hears this say, “Come.” Let anyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who desires drink freely from the water of life. **18** And I solemnly declare to everyone who hears the words of prophecy written in this book: If anyone adds anything to what is written here, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book. **19** And if anyone removes any of the words from this book of prophecy, God will remove that person’s share in the tree of life and in the holy city that are described in this book. **20** He who is the faithful witness to all these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon!” Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! **21** May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s holy people. Amen.

Reading 1—Psalm 22:1–11 (NLT)

- 1** My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
Why are you so far away when I groan for help?
- 2** Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer.
Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief.
- 3** Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
- 4** Our ancestors trusted in you,
and you rescued them.
- 5** They cried out to you and were saved.
They trusted in you and were never disgraced.
- 6** But I am a worm and not a man.
I am scorned and despised by all!
- 7** Everyone who sees me mocks me.
They sneer and shake their heads, saying,
- 8** “Is this the one who relies on the LORD?
Then let the LORD save him!
If the LORD loves him so much,
let the LORD rescue him!”
- 9** Yet you brought me safely from my mother’s womb
and led me to trust you at my mother’s breast.
- 10** I was thrust into your arms at my birth.
You have been my God from the moment I was born.
- 11** Do not stay so far from me,
for trouble is near,
and no one else can help me.

Reading 2—Isaiah 49:8–15 (NLT)

8 This is what the LORD says:

- “At just the right time, I will respond to you.
On the day of salvation I will help you.
I will protect you and give you to the people
as my covenant with them.
Through you I will reestablish the land of Israel
and assign it to its own people again.
- 9** I will say to the prisoners, ‘Come out in freedom,’
and to those in darkness, ‘Come into the light.’
They will be my sheep, grazing in green pastures
and on hills that were previously bare.
- 10** They will neither hunger nor thirst.
The searing sun will not reach them anymore.
For the LORD in his mercy will lead them;
he will lead them beside cool waters.
- 11** And I will make my mountains into level paths for them.
The highways will be raised above the valleys.
- 12** See, my people will return from far away,
from lands to the north and west,
and from as far south as Egypt.”
- 13** Sing for joy, O heavens!
Rejoice, O earth!
Burst into song, O mountains!
For the LORD has comforted his people
and will have compassion on them in their suffering.
- 14** Yet Jerusalem says, “The LORD has deserted us;
the Lord has forgotten us.”
- 15** “Never! Can a mother forget her nursing child?
Can she feel no love for the child she has borne?
But even if that were possible,
I would not forget you!

Reading 3—Habakkuk 1:2–4 (NLT)

- 2** How long, O LORD, must I call for help?
But you do not listen!
“Violence is everywhere!” I cry,
but you do not come to save.
- 3** Must I forever see these evil deeds?
Why must I watch all this misery?
Wherever I look,
I see destruction and violence.
I am surrounded by people
who love to argue and fight.
- 4** The law has become paralyzed,
and there is no justice in the courts.
The wicked far outnumber the righteous,
so that justice has become perverted.

Reading 4—Isaiah 40:1–11 (NLT)

- 1** “Comfort, comfort my people,”
says your God.
- 2** “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem.
Tell her that her sad days are gone
and her sins are pardoned.
Yes, the LORD has punished her twice over
for all her sins.”
- 3** Listen! It’s the voice of someone shouting,
“Clear the way through the wilderness
for the LORD!
Make a straight highway through the wasteland
for our God!
- 4** Fill in the valleys,
and level the mountains and hills.
Straighten the curves,
and smooth out the rough places.

5 Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.
The LORD has spoken!”

6 A voice said, “Shout!”
I asked, “What should I shout?”
“Shout that people are like the grass.
Their beauty fades as quickly
as the flowers in a field.

7 The grass withers and the flowers fade
beneath the breath of the LORD.
And so it is with people.

8 The grass withers and the flowers fade,
but the word of our God stands forever.”

9 O Zion, messenger of good news,
shout from the mountaintops!
Shout it louder, O Jerusalem.
Shout, and do not be afraid.

Tell the towns of Judah,
“Your God is coming!”

10 Yes, the Sovereign LORD is coming in power.
He will rule with a powerful arm.
See, he brings his reward with him as he comes.

11 He will feed his flock like a shepherd.
He will carry the lambs in his arms,
holding them close to his heart.
He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young.

Reading 5—Job 21:1–9;13-15 (NLT)

1 Then Job spoke again:

2 “Listen closely to what I am saying.
That’s one consolation you can give me.

3 Bear with me, and let me speak.
After I have spoken, you may resume mocking me.

4 “My complaint is with God, not with people.

I have good reason to be so impatient.

5 Look at me and be stunned.

Put your hand over your mouth in shock.

6 When I think about what I am saying, I shudder.

My body trembles.

7 “Why do the wicked prosper,
growing old and powerful?

8 They live to see their children grow up and settle down,
and they enjoy their grandchildren.

9 Their homes are safe from every fear,
and God does not punish them.

13 They spend their days in prosperity,
then go down to the grave in peace.

14 And yet they say to God, ‘Go away.
We want no part of you and your ways.

15 Who is the Almighty, and why should we obey him?
What good will it do us to pray?’

Reading 6—Malachi 3:1-7a (NLT)

1 “Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.

2 “But who will be able to endure it when he comes? Who will be able to stand and face him when he appears? For he will be like a blazing fire that refines metal, or like a strong soap that bleaches clothes. **3** He will sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He will purify the Levites, refining them like gold and silver, so that they may once again offer acceptable sacrifices to the LORD. **4** Then once more the LORD will accept the offerings brought to him by the people of Judah and Jerusalem, as he did in the past.

5 “At that time I will put you on trial. I am eager to witness against all sorcerers and adulterers and liars. I will speak against those who cheat employees of their wages, who oppress widows and orphans, or who deprive the foreigners living among you of justice, for these people do not fear me,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.

6 “I am the LORD, and I do not change. That is why you descendants of Jacob are not already destroyed. **7** Ever since the days of your ancestors, you have scorned my decrees and failed to obey them. Now return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.

Reading 7—Malachi 3:7b-13a (NLT)

“But you ask, ‘How can we return when we have never gone away?’

8 “Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me!

“But you ask, ‘What do you mean? When did we ever cheat you?’

“You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me. **9** You are under a curse, for your whole nation has been cheating me. **10** Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, “I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test! **11** Your crops will be abundant, for I will guard them from insects and disease. Your grapes will not fall from the vine before they are ripe,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. **12** “Then all nations will call you blessed, for your land will be such a delight,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.

13 “You have said terrible things about me,” says the LORD.

Reading 8—Malachi 3:13b-4:6 (NLT)

“But you say, ‘What do you mean? What have we said against you?’

14 “You have said, ‘What’s the use of serving God? What have we gained by obeying his commands or by trying to show the LORD of Heaven’s Armies that we are sorry for our sins? **15** From now on we will call the arrogant blessed. For those who do evil get rich, and those who dare God to punish them suffer no harm.’ ”

16 Then those who feared the LORD spoke with each other, and the LORD listened to what they said. In his presence, a scroll of remembrance was written to record the names of those who feared him and always thought about the honor of his name.

17 “They will be my people,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. “On the day when I act in judgment, they will be my own special treasure. I will spare them as a father spares an obedient child. **18** Then you will again see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.”

1 The LORD of Heaven’s Armies says, “The day of judgment is coming, burning like a furnace. On that day the arrogant and the wicked will be burned up like straw. They will be consumed—roots, branches, and all.

2 “But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. And you will go free, leaping with joy like calves let out to pasture. **3** On the day when I act, you will tread upon the wicked as if they were dust under your feet,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.

4 “Remember to obey the Law of Moses, my servant—all the decrees and regulations that I gave him on Mount Sinai for all Israel.

5 “Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the LORD arrives. **6** His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

Reading 9—Luke 3:1–9 (NLT)

1 It was now the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius [ti-BIHR-ee-uhs], the Roman emperor. Pontius Pilate [PON-chuhs PI-luht] was governor over Judea; Herod Antipas was ruler over Galilee; his brother Philip was ruler over Iturea [ih-too-REE-uh] and Tracónitis [trak'oh-NI-tis]; Lysanias [li-SAY-nee-uhs] was ruler over Abilene [ab'uh-LEE-nee]. **2** Annas [AN-uhs] and Caiaphas [KAY-uh-fuhs] were the high priests. At this time a message from God came to John son of Zechariah, who was living in the wilderness. **3** Then John went from place to place on both sides of the Jordan River, preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. **4** Isaiah had spoken of John when he said,

“He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,

‘Prepare the way for the LORD’s coming!

Clear the road for him!

5 The valleys will be filled,

and the mountains and hills made level.

The curves will be straightened,

and the rough places made smooth.

6 And then all people will see

the salvation sent from God.’ ”

7 When the crowds came to John for baptism, he said, “You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? **8** Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. **9** Even now the ax of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.”

Reading 10—Luke 3:10–18 (NLT)

10 The crowds asked, “What should we do?”

11 John replied, “If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry.”

12 Even corrupt tax collectors came to be baptized and asked, “Teacher, what should we do?”

13 He replied, “Collect no more taxes than the government requires.”

14 “What should we do?” asked some soldiers.

John replied, “Don’t extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay.”

15 Everyone was expecting the Messiah to come soon, and they were eager to know whether John might be the Messiah. **16** John answered their questions by saying, “I baptize you with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. **17** He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.” **18** John used many such warnings as he announced the Good News to the people.

Reading 11—Romans 8:18–25 (NLT)

18 Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. **19** For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. **20** Against its will, all creation was subjected to God’s curse. But with eager hope, **21** the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God’s children in glorious freedom from death and decay.

22 For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. **23** And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. **24** We were given this hope when we were saved.

If we already have something, we don’t need to hope for it. **25** But if we look forward to something we don’t yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.

Luke 1:5–25; 57–80 (NLT)

⁵ When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. ⁶ Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations. ⁷ They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old. ⁸ One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. ⁹ As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying. ¹¹ While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. ¹² Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. ¹³ But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. ¹⁴ You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. ¹⁶ And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly." ¹⁸ Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure this will happen? I'm an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years." ¹⁹ Then the angel said, "I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! ²⁰ But now, since you didn't believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time." ²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary, wondering why he was taking so long. ²² When he finally did come out, he couldn't speak to them. Then they realized from his gestures and his silence that he must have seen a vision in the sanctuary. ²³ When Zechariah's week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home. ²⁴ Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. ²⁵ "How kind the Lord is!" she exclaimed. "He has taken away my disgrace of having no children."

⁵⁷ When it was time for Elizabeth's baby to be born, she gave birth to a son. ⁵⁸ And when her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her, everyone rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹ When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. ⁶⁰ But Elizabeth said, "No! His name is John!" ⁶¹ "What?" they exclaimed. "There is no one in all your family by that name." ⁶² So they used gestures to ask the baby's father what he wanted to name him. ⁶³ He motioned for a writing tablet, and to everyone's surprise he wrote, "His name is John." ⁶⁴ Instantly Zechariah could speak again, and he began praising God. ⁶⁵ Awe fell upon the whole neighborhood, and the news of what had happened spread throughout the Judean hills. ⁶⁶ Everyone who heard about it reflected on these events and asked, "What will this child turn out to be?" For the hand of the Lord was surely upon him in a special way. ⁶⁷ Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy: ⁶⁸ "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people. ⁶⁹ He has sent us a mighty Savior from the royal line of his servant David, ⁷⁰ just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago. ⁷¹ Now we will be saved from our enemies and from all who hate us. ⁷² He has been merciful to our ancestors by remembering his sacred covenant— ⁷³ the covenant he swore with an oath to our ancestor Abraham. ⁷⁴ We have been rescued from our enemies so we can serve God without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness for as long as we live. ⁷⁶ "And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord. ⁷⁷ You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins. ⁷⁸ Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, ⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace." ⁸⁰ John grew up and became strong in spirit. And he lived in the wilderness until he began his public ministry to Israel.

Reading 1—2 Samuel 7:1–7 (NLT)

1 When King David was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all the surrounding enemies, **2** the king summoned Nathan the prophet. “Look,” David said, “I am living in a beautiful cedar palace, but the Ark of God is out there in a tent!”

3 Nathan replied to the king, “Go ahead and do whatever you have in mind, for the LORD is with you.”

4 But that same night the LORD said to Nathan,

5 “Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD has declared: Are you the one to build a house for me to live in? **6** I have never lived in a house, from the day I brought the Israelites out of Egypt until this very day. I have always moved from one place to another with a tent and a Tabernacle as my dwelling. **7** Yet no matter where I have gone with the Israelites, I have never once complained to Israel’s tribal leaders, the shepherds of my people Israel. I have never asked them, “Why haven’t you built me a beautiful cedar house?”’

Reading 2—2 Samuel 7:8–17 (NLT)

8 “Now go and say to my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies has declared: I took you from tending sheep in the pasture and selected you to be the leader of my people Israel. **9** I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have destroyed all your enemies before your eyes. Now I will make your name as famous as anyone who has ever lived on the earth! **10** And I will provide a homeland for my people Israel, planting them in a secure place where they will never be disturbed. Evil nations won’t oppress them as they’ve done in the past, **11** starting from the time I appointed judges to rule my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies.

“Furthermore, the LORD declares that he will make a house for you—a dynasty of kings! **12** For when you die and are buried with your ancestors, I will raise up one of your descendants, your own offspring,

and I will make his kingdom strong. **13** He is the one who will build a house—a temple—for my name. And I will secure his royal throne forever. **14** I will be his father, and he will be my son. If he sins, I will correct and discipline him with the rod, like any father would do. **15** But my favor will not be taken from him as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from your sight. **16** Your house and your kingdom will continue before me for all time, and your throne will be secure forever.’ ”

17 So Nathan went back to David and told him everything the LORD had said in this vision.

Reading 3—Micah 5:2–5 (NLT)

2 But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
are only a small village among all the people of Judah.

Yet a ruler of Israel

whose origins are in the distant past,
will come from you on my behalf.

3 The people of Israel will be abandoned to their enemies
until the woman in labor gives birth.

Then at last his fellow countrymen
will return from exile to their own land.

4 And he will stand to lead his flock with the LORD’s strength,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.

Then his people will live there undisturbed,
for he will be highly honored around the world.

5 And he will be the source of peace.

Reading 4—Zephaniah 3:14–20 (NLT)

14 Sing, O daughter of Zion;
shout aloud, O Israel!

Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!

15 For the LORD will remove his hand of judgment
and will disperse the armies of your enemy.

And the LORD himself, the King of Israel,
will live among you!

At last your troubles will be over,
and you will never again fear disaster.

16 On that day the announcement to Jerusalem will be,
“Cheer up, Zion! Don’t be afraid!

17 For the LORD your God is living among you.
He is a mighty savior.

He will take delight in you with gladness.
With his love, he will calm all your fears.
He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.”

18 “I will gather you who mourn for the appointed festivals;
you will be disgraced no more.

19 And I will deal severely with all who have oppressed you.
I will save the weak and helpless ones;

I will bring together
those who were chased away.

I will give glory and fame to my former exiles,
wherever they have been mocked and shamed.

20 On that day I will gather you together
and bring you home again.

I will give you a good name, a name of distinction,
among all the nations of the earth,
as I restore your fortunes before their very eyes.
I, the LORD, have spoken!”

Reading 5—Psalm 126 (NLT)

A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.

1 When the LORD brought back his exiles to Jerusalem,
it was like a dream!

2 We were filled with laughter,
and we sang for joy.

And the other nations said,
“What amazing things the LORD has done for them.”

3 Yes, the LORD has done amazing things for us!
What joy!

4 Restore our fortunes, LORD,
as streams renew the desert.

5 Those who plant in tears
will harvest with shouts of joy.

6 They weep as they go to plant their seed,
but they sing as they return with the harvest.

Reading 6—Luke 1:26–56 (NLT)

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, **27** to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. **28** Gabriel appeared to her and said, “Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!”

29 Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. **30** “Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! **31** You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. **32** He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. **33** And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!”

34 Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.”

35 The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. **36** What’s more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. **37** For the word of God will never fail.”

38 Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” And then the angel left her.

39 A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town **40** where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. **41** At the sound of Mary’s greeting, Elizabeth’s child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

42 Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, “God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. **43** Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? **44** When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. **45** You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said.”

Reading 7—Luke 1:26–56 (NLT)

46 Mary responded,

“Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.

47 How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!

48 For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,
and from now on all generations will call me blessed.

49 For the Mighty One is holy,
and he has done great things for me.

50 He shows mercy from generation to generation
to all who fear him.

51 His mighty arm has done tremendous things!
He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.

52 He has brought down princes from their thrones
and exalted the humble.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away with empty hands.

54 He has helped his servant Israel
and remembered to be merciful.

55 For he made this promise to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his children forever.”

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back to her own home.

Reading 8—Matthew 1:18–24 (NLT)

18 This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. **19** Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

20 As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. **21** And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

22 All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet:

23 “Look! The virgin will conceive a child!
She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,
which means ‘God is with us.’ ”

24 When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife.

Reading 9—Galatians 3:23–29 (NLT)

23 Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until the way of faith was revealed.

24 Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith.

25 And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.

26 For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. **27** And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. **28** There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. **29** And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.

Reading 10—Galatians 4:1–7 (NLT)

1 Think of it this way. If a father dies and leaves an inheritance for his young children, those children are not much better off than slaves until they grow up, even though they actually own everything their father had. **2** They have to obey their guardians until they reach whatever age their father set. **3** And that's the way it was with us before Christ came. We were like children; we were slaves to the basic spiritual principles of this world.

4 But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. **5** God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. **6** And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." **7** Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.

Reading 11—Isaiah 52:7–10 (NLT)

7 How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who brings good news,
the good news of peace and salvation,
the news that the God of Israel reigns!
8 The watchmen shout and sing with joy,
for before their very eyes
they see the LORD returning to Jerusalem.

9 Let the ruins of Jerusalem break into joyful song,
for the LORD has comforted his people.
He has redeemed Jerusalem.
10 The LORD has demonstrated his holy power
before the eyes of all the nations.
All the ends of the earth will see
the victory of our God.