

THE GOSPEL OF ST. LUKE – WEEK ONE – GOOD NEWS ABOUT PRAYER

One of the great themes of the Gospel of St. Luke is the power and priority of prayer.

Luke describes several prayers that are unique to the gospel of Luke.

Luke is the only gospel writer who tells us Jesus was praying when the heavens opened and God spoke at his baptism (Lk 3:21).

Luke tells us Jesus spent the full night in prayer before calling his twelve apostles (Lk 6:12).

Luke tells us Jesus was praying when he asked, “Who do people say that I am?” Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ and Son of God and Jesus declared, “Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overpower it” (9:18).

Luke tells us Jesus was praying when he was transfigured (Lk 9:28-29).

Luke tells us Jesus was praying when his disciples asked: “Lord, teach us to pray” (and Jesus gave them the model prayer) (Lk 11:1).

Luke tells us that Jesus had prayed for Simon Peter before the betrayal, that his faith would not fail and he would become a true rock for the other apostles (Lk 22:31).

Discuss: What do we learn about the purpose and power of prayer from each of these stories?

The Gospel of St. Luke also opens with a unique story about the power of prayer – an old and abandoned prayer.

Read Luke 1:5-25 and 36-45.

Who were Zechariah and Elizabeth?

What are some qualities of godly character you see described in the lives of Zechariah and Elizabeth?

This story is unique to the Gospel of Luke. Why do you suppose Luke decided to open his account of life of Jesus with this story about the parents of John the Baptist?

Read Luke 1:6-7. What conflict is presented by this brief account of Zechariah and Elizabeth?

Why would the gospel begin with a story of a godly but “barren” couple?

How does the coming of Jesus into our lives fill up and satisfy our “barren” places?

John tells us that when Zechariah was an old man he was selected to offer “incense” in the Temple of the Lord. Why is this important?

What does the offering of incense represent in the Old Testament? Think of the smoke ascending to heaven...

Historians tell us that a Priest was “lucky” if he was selected even one time to go into the Temple for these offerings. Was it really simple luck (the casting of lots (compare the casting of dice) Luke 1:9) that put Zechariah in the Temple at this time in his life?

As Zechariah was offering incense in the Temple what was happening outside the Temple? See Luke 1:10. Understand the imagery – Zechariah is in the Holy Place of the Temple, offering fragrant incense that represents prayer, and all the people were outside praying with uplifted hands. Luke is describing a “symphony of prayer.”

Have you ever had a really intense prayer experience? What was it? Were you alone or praying with others?

At that moment an angel appeared to Zechariah. What was Zechariah’s response to the angel? Why was he frightened?

What was the message the angel brought to Zechariah? See Luke 1:13. “Your prayer has been heard!” (Luke 1:13).

What do you suppose was the first prayer that popped into Zechariah’s head?

If an angel spoke to you today and said: “Your prayer has been heard” what would be the first prayer that pops into your head?

For how long had Zechariah and Elizabeth prayed for a child?

Is there any particular prayer that you have prayed for years on end?

How does it feel when you have prayed for something for years and not received an answer?

What was Zechariah’s response to the Angel’s announcement? (See Luke 1:19).

Why this skeptical response? Had Zechariah given up on this prayer?

The point: Although Zechariah had apparently abandoned his prayer for a child, God remembered! God used the “moldy old prayers” of Zechariah to work a great miracle. God gave an answer that could only come from an almighty God.

Look at Luke 1:37 – “Nothing is impossible with God!”

What “impossible” prayers are you praying?

What “impossible” prayers should you be praying?