Week 02 is scheduled for study January 2-8, 2023. God's will can be a tough nut to crack. How much can we question before we are guilty of unbelief?

I would like you to consider something for a moment. I assume that I am not the only one on this planet to sometimes put God into my mental framework of what a human is. By that I mean that sometimes I make the assumption that if a mere human can't do something then neither can God. If you have read this week's chapters you might recall that Zacharias had difficulty believing the angel's promise that his elderly wife would have a child. Why did Zacharias not believe? I think it was because he too was assuming that if he couldn't make it happen then neither could God. We limit God's abilities because we think of Him as almost being as human as we are. We don't actually see God as being omnipotent (all powerful).

To be all powerful means that God, who created all physical things in the universe, can also destroy, alter, modify, suspend, or anything else He wants to do with His own creations. We have absolutely no ability to do any of that by just stating that it is to be done, and it is so. So we put God in this nice little box that allows us to better accept that He is a "special" mortal who can often do more things than we can. In fact, we have no idea what He is capable of, since we have seen only the tiniest fraction of His actual power and abilities.

Small wonder that Christ broke all the laws of physics we know of by walking on water (during a violent storm no less), speaking to a storm and immediately subduing it, or

turning water into wine (without a lab I might add), or giving life to those who were very much dead. My point is this - as we read the New Testament this year, keep in mind that God is so far beyond what we are now that we should always stand in awe at His amazing power and ability. Everything that leaves His lips comes to pass. The scriptures talk about the power of His arm, which is the mortal way of indicating one's personal strength. Yet God never "flexes" in a physical way. His power is in his mouth. He has but to utter the command and the universe obeys. God issues a law and all things become subject to that law and its attendant blessings and punishments. He is, in very fact, all powerful or omnipotent. We'll refer back to this subject in future materials we study.

Day 1

As you read and ponder Matthew 1 and Luke 1, record the spiritual impressions you receive. What doctrinal truths do you find? What messages will be of most value to you and your family?

Who were Matthew and Luke?

As the manual mentions, Matthew was a "Jewish publican." That means he was viewed by his fellow Jews as a traitor to the state. He collected the hated taxes for Rome. The Jews viewed that as stealing from one's neighbors to give their hard earned money to the enemy of their people. Publicans were very low on the social acceptability scale, somewhere around beggars and thieves. Can you imagine how his fellow Jews may have treated him in Synagogue? What about how they may have wanted to treat him during the week if they ran into him? Men such as Matthew were hated by the Jews. They were frequently lumped as part of a package deal called, sinners and publicans.

Did Luke fare any better than Matthew? Luke was a physician, which was a respected profession. But Luke was a gentile, an outsider. Jews looked down on anyone who wasn't of their Abrahamic faith and wasn't part of the "family." It took a while for gentiles to be accepted among the members of Christ's church. The vast majority of the original membership was Jewish by heritage and training. They considered the gospel of Christ just like all the Jews considered the law of Moses, to be meant only for Jews. It wasn't until Peter had his vision, after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, that the church began to look out beyond the Jewish population and to preach actively to

the gentile nations. Up to that point when the missionaries went to a gentile nation they only preached to the Jews of that nation.

Luke was a companion of Paul in the mission field. We don't know from anything historical that he actually was the author of the books of Luke or Acts. The fact that he was a gentile is a pretty good clue that he may not have been among the earliest members of the Church. Matthew was one of the original apostles. Luke is known only as an evangelist. I believe Jesus called 72 to go out and preach. Luke was supposed to be in that group.

Day 2

As you read and ponder Matthew 1 and Luke 1, record the spiritual impressions you receive. What doctrinal truths do you find? What messages will be of most value to you and your family?

Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-35 - Jesus Christ was born of a mortal mother and an immortal Father.

The very idea that to be the Christ, Jesus had to have both human as well as Godly physical traits, can boggle the mind. How does one have a baby that is born as part God. Yet this is what had to happen. The suffering, and the payment required for Christ's atoning sacrifice to take place couldn't be done by a mere mortal. If it could have then there would be no need for a Christ or Redeemer.

What being part God entails is outside of our ability to fully discuss. We know from the New Testament that Jesus was able to perceive things we can't. He would look at someone and know if their faith was great enough or too small for something to happen. Jesus could measure one's righteousness with the same simplicity that we might measure flour. He could look at someone, like the woman at the well, and know her whole life story. He knew how many husbands she had had, and what her current life situation was. Jesus knew that the man born blind had only been born that way so the glory of God could be manifest by Christ. None of these abilities are available to us mere mortals.

It was the divine half of Jesus that allowed him to make his atoning sacrifice, and to know all things, so that is was not possible for anyone to teach him anything. It was his mortal half that permitted this God made flesh to actually die. Fortunately for all of us his divine half also gave him power over life and death. This is why he was able to resurrect himself. (And as a disclaimer to that last statement, if you look in the New Testament you will see that each member of the Godhead is credited with Christ's resurrection in one reference or another, so we don't have a definite declaration as to who actually resurrected him. All we know is that Christ had power over life and death, so it is not unreasonable to assume he could and did resurrect himself.)

Was there anything "normal" about Jesus? Well, he looked like the rest of us. He lived among us like one of us. But if we are talking about character, ability, intellect, or spiritual connection and power, no, Jesus was nothing like us. But since we always look on the outward appearance, Jesus was able to walk among men undetected, unnoticed. Only those who had spiritual insight and faith were able to catch the slightest glimmer of what and who Jesus really was. It was the mortal side of Jesus that allowed him to see and feel as one of us. This gave him the compassion he desired to learn so he could be a merciful judge for us.

Day 3

As you read and ponder Matthew 1 and Luke 1, record the spiritual impressions you receive. What doctrinal truths do you find? What messages will be of most value to you and your family?

Luke 1:5-25, 57-80 - God's blessings come in His own time.

One of the common miracles in the ancient scriptures is that of women who can't have children who are suddenly able to bear a child after God declares they will, despite their previous circumstances. Some women were barren for many years, but still of child bearing age. Others were well beyond the ability to have children, yet God made them fertile once again. This demonstrates two main ideas about God - He has power over life and death, in all its permutations and possibilities, and when God does something there is a reason behind it. This reason is what most often escapes us, because it appears to be merely a matter of timing.

Why did the Lord make Hannah wait to have Samuel? Why did Elizabeth have to wait so long to have John the Baptist? Was the lord waiting until they exercised enough personal growth and faith that they now deserved this reward for their sincerity or faith? What about the timing of John the Baptist's birth, just six months before the ministry of Christ began?

Before the world was even created, God knew when and where each of us would be born. He had already set boundaries on our influence and where we would go in life. Every generation from Adam's day to the end of the Millennium was already known to Him. The whole plan of salvation had already been mapped out, guaranteeing its success. When we look at what appears to be odd timing on the Lord's part, we need to remember that this was all planned by an all powerful, all knowing, and loving God before this world was ever created. Everything happens in God's own time and in His own way for a reason. And it is important to remember that everything He does is for our personal benefit and blessing. We are, after all the reason for all that He does. We are His work and His glory. God is doing all of this for our own exaltation. Let's not be guilty of being ungrateful or insubordinate to someone who is doing all of this for our benefit.

That being said, does it make it any easier to live without the blessings we have so earnestly hoped for? Probably not. We still may need to do some repenting for being resentful for not getting our way about something. The trials that require our patience in the Lord's timing in our lives will be unique to each of us. We can't judge another by the trials we have not personally faced in the same way and under the same conditions. This requires patience and forbearance on our part not to be judgmental of other's situations.

We may have to wait a long time in this life for a particular blessing to come our way. Like anyone who wants marriage or children, but the opportunity just isn't forthcoming, we may have to wait until the next life to receive that particular blessing. That doesn't say anything negative about us. Remember that to God, the whole plan of salvation is taking place in about the span of what to Him is a week. That means that none of us will have to wait very long for our desired blessing. Everyone waits on God. While Adam got to come to mortality first, he had to wait thousands of years to be resurrected after Christ's resurrection. And while Adam was on earth, and when he was waiting for his resurrection, we were still waiting in heaven for our own chance to come

to earth. No one waits more than anyone else. Some get privileges soon, but wait for other things longer, while some wait longer up front and then get their privileges. It all boils down to God's own timing for what is best for each of us and for the welfare of the family as a whole.

Day 4

As you read and ponder Matthew 1 and Luke 1, record the spiritual impressions you receive. What doctrinal truths do you find? What messages will be of most value to you and your family?

Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38 - The faithful willingly submit to God's will.

Sometimes I see the phrase "curse God and die" as the opposite of "Thy will be done." When we see ourselves as God's equal in intellect or ability, God's timing can look trivial, His judgments faulty. Those who fight against life and don't accept God's actions towards His children really are fighting a losing battle. Who can countermand God? Who can declare His works to be inadequate?

It is those who accept God's abilities and His timing who are able, with peace in their heart, to say, "Thy will be done." Those who are able to say that, and mean it, recognize our mortal status before the power that is God. One who is able to concede to God's will at all times is someone who recognizes His power, authority, and His rule over all that happens in this universe. That is also a person who recognizes that we as humans have no power over anything greater than our next decision about how we behave or what we choose to believe. All of our greatest powers in this life stem from our moral agency. The powers to control the elements comes much later.

Being able to admit that God is really in charge of all things isn't something that just happens to prophets. In fact, even prophets have been chided by the Lord for assuming they knew more than Him. The Lord chided Jonah for his attitude by giving him a three day time out in the belly of a fish. Joseph Smith was corrected by the Lord when Joseph was in Liberty Jail. If some of the prophets had to be corrected by the Lord, we shouldn't be too hard on ourselves when we become impatient with the Lord. The important lesson we all need to learn from the prophets who were corrected by God is

that the prophets repented and submitted to God's will. We should do the same - the repenting and submitting part.

Jesus taught a parable about two sons. One son promised to do what the father asked of him, but then didn't do it. The other son declined to do his father's will, but then later repented of his attitude and did his father's will. The one approved of God was the second son, for it was he who, in the end, did his father's will. The Lord recognizes that we will often need to repent in order to move forward in our spiritual progression. And He is perfectly okay with that.

Day 5

As you read and ponder Matthew 1 and Luke 1, record the spiritual impressions you receive. What doctrinal truths do you find? What messages will be of most value to you and your family?

Luke 1:46-55 - Mary testified of Jesus Christ's mission.

Here are some verses and some of the questions that came to my mind as I sat and thought about what I had just read.

> 46 And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,
>
> 47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

The child she had in her was her's and God's. She was little more than a child in age, mid teens at the eldest I'm guessing. She was innocent of the ways of the world and was now pregnant in a society that could have stoned her or cast her out for "such behavior." Yet here she is magnifying the Lord and rejoicing in her Savior, her own child. So she knew what her baby was destined to become. This is what caused my questions:

How much was Mary shown by God before she got pregnant?

Doesn't it seem in the character of God to enlighten and teach a person before asking them to do something hard? Think of all the times the Lord showed things to the prophets in vision. He almost always first asks, 'will you believe what I am about to show you?' If the prophet answers yes then God shows them mighty things.

Mary often witnesses things then ponders them in her heart. Do you think she might have been reflecting back on what God showed her the night she helped create the Savior of the world?

Following are the next three verses in Luke 1.

> 48 For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
>
> 49 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.
>
> 50 And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

As a young teen she has had her first encounter that resulted in a pregnancy. The man was not her husband, yet she submitted to the situation because God asked it of her.

These verses are sweet, tender, reverent, lovingly worded, and filled with glory to God. What does this experience tell us of the nature of God, our Father?

How do these verses hint at the level of the spiritual experience Mary must have had? The experience appears to have all the hallmarks of a tremendous vision of the future.

FHE/Personal Study

Luke 1:46-55 - Great things

Okay, admittedly we probably haven't had anything happen in our life that was as monumental as what happened in Mary's life. But that doesn't mean that God doesn't do great things in our own lives for us. His love is no less for you or me than it was for Mary, Joseph, or Jesus. Remember that part and parcel with being a follower of Jesus is being able to accurately assume the very best of our God and His Son. When God says He loves everyone equally, that is as sure a guaranty as anything you can imagine in this universe.

Let's play the game of Count Your Blessings. See how many times you can give credit to God for anything that helped you, saved you, supported you, led you, strengthened you, etc. Especially look long and hard at all the hardest times in your life. Try to imagine what those times would be like if God was not part of your life. How would you make sense of what you were going through? What beliefs, doctrines, stories, or feelings helped you through that trial? Who helped you through that trial? Was God there in any of those interchanges with whomever it was that helped you?

I think part of our difficulty in making the Lord and Christ personal in our own life is that we don't always see their influence in what happens around us. Learning to see the Lord's influence and presence in our life, will help us be more grateful, more aware of His mercies, and more appreciative of His company in our journey through life.

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NT02-2023 - Be it Unto Me According to Thy Word

Week 02