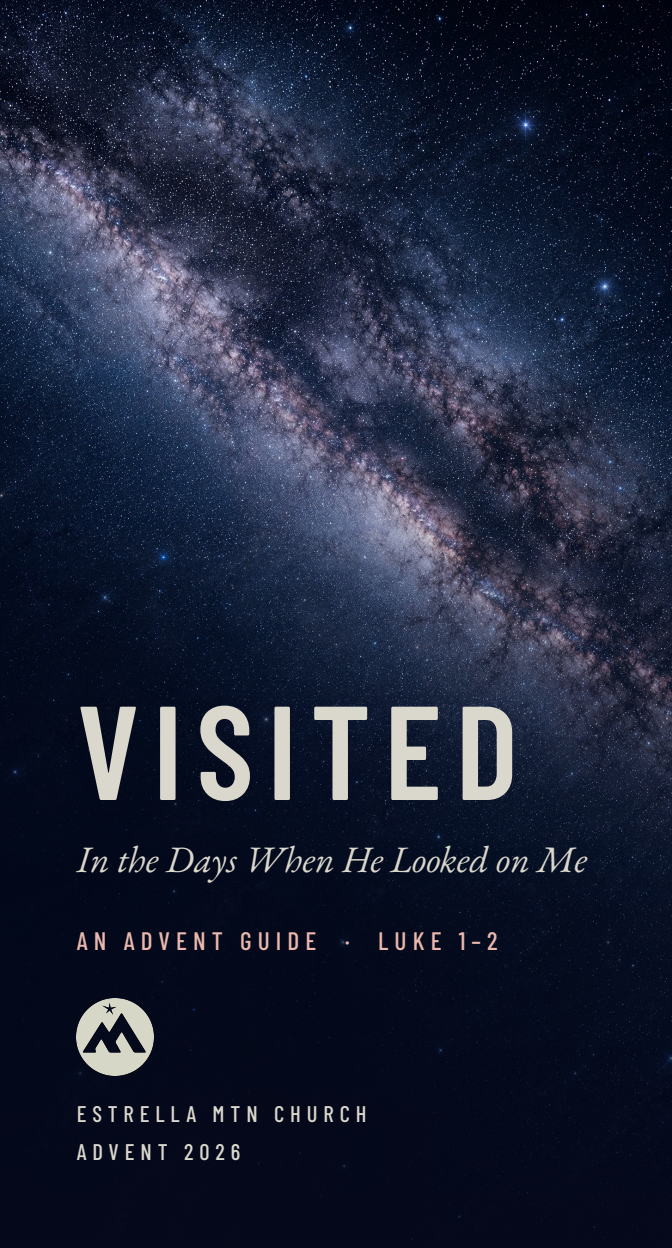

VISITED

In the Days When He Looked on Me

AN ADVENT GUIDE · LUKE 1–2

ESTRELLA MTN CHURCH

ADVENT 2026

CONTENTS

Before the First Candle

Two Comings

In the Days of Herod

Visited

Week One · Hope

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Week Two · Love

8 9 10 11 12 13 14

Week Three · Joy

15 16 17 18 19 20 21

Week Four · Peace

22 23 24 25 26

Christmas · The Christ Candle

27

Four Candles and a Fifth

The Songs of Luke

Further Along

For the Curious

About This Guide

BEFORE THE FIRST CANDLE

This guide runs for twenty-seven days, from the first Sunday of Advent to Christmas morning. It walks slowly through the first two chapters of Luke, alongside the VISITED sermons at Estrella Mountain Church. You don't need to have heard a sermon to use it.

Each day is short: a page or so, and five or ten minutes. There are four parts.

Read. A few verses of Luke, printed on the page. Read them slowly. Out loud, if you can.

Look closer. A short reflection that stays with something in those verses. It's there to keep your eyes on the text, so that what you carry into the day comes from the Word and not from somewhere else.

Carry. The questions. This is where the day does its work, so give it the most room. Some days there's one question, and some days there are several that come at the same thing from different sides. They aren't an assignment, and

they don't have to be answered immediately. Take them with you.

Pray. A short prayer. Pray it as written, or let it start your own.

The days follow the Sundays. Each Sunday page names the passage being preached that morning, the candle being lit, and a place for sermon notes. The days after it go back through the same passage a few verses at a time. If you missed Sunday, the week still works.

One thing about the order. In Luke, the shepherds come first, and Simeon and Anna meet the child in the temple afterward, about forty days after he was born. We've turned those two around. Simeon and Anna get the fourth week, and the shepherds wait for Christmas Eve, so that we hear about the birth on the night we gather to celebrate it. Luke's order is the true one. We're reading it out of turn for the sake of that night.

A candle is lit in worship each week: Hope, Love, Joy, Peace, and then the Christ candle. There's more about the wreath at the back, in *Four Candles and a Fifth*.

This is the phone edition. Tap a day number on the contents page, or on a week's opening page, to jump straight to it. Keep your notes and your answers wherever suits you: a notes app, a journal, or the margin of the print edition.

If you miss a day, or a week, pick it up wherever you are. You don't have to finish to follow along.


TWO COMINGS

TWO COMINGS

Advent means coming.

For most of us the word has shrunk. It means the weeks before Christmas, a countdown with a calendar on the wall. This Advent, we want the whole word back.

There are two comings. The first is behind us: the Son of God, born of Mary, wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger. The second is ahead of us. The same Jesus is coming again, and he said so.

> 27 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. *Luke 21:27*

Advent is the season that holds both. We remember an Advent in the past, and it points us to the one yet to come.

That's why this season has never been only cheerful. The church's year begins here, as

the days get short, and it begins with waiting. The waiting is full of hope. It's also sober. One of the old prayers of the season asks for grace to cast away the works of darkness, because the One who is coming will come to judge the living and the dead. When he comes, nothing stays hidden, and no wrong is left standing. If you're comfortable, that's a hard word. If you've waited a long time for something to be put right, there isn't a better one.

For these four weeks we'll be in the first coming, among the people Luke names. We won't say much about the second: a line here and there, and more when we come to a man in the temple who had been told he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. But keep it in the corner of your eye the whole way. Everyone in Luke 1 and 2 is waiting for God to come. So are we.

One thing sits under all of this. Advent isn't mainly about us getting ready for God. It's about God arriving. Luke's people are

waiting, some of them for most of a lifetime, and the first one God comes to still can't believe it when it happens.

He comes anyway.

> *Creator of the stars of night,*
> *Thy people's everlasting light,*
> *Jesu, Redeemer, save us all,*
> *And hear Thy servants when they call.*
>
> *Creator of the Stars of Night* (Latin, *Conditor alme siderum*; tr. John Mason Neale, 1852), stanza 1

IN THE DAYS OF HEROD



IN THE DAYS OF HEROD

Luke starts with a date. *In the days of Herod, king of Judea.* A chapter later he gives another: *In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus.* A king and an emperor, and neither one gets more than a sentence. Luke uses them the way you'd use a calendar, to say when. Then he turns to the people he wants you to meet.

A priest named Zechariah, on duty with his division. His wife Elizabeth, who had no child. A young woman in Nazareth, a town in Galilee, betrothed to a man named Joseph. Shepherds out in a field, keeping watch over their flock by night. A man in Jerusalem named Simeon. A prophetess named Anna, a widow, worshiping in the temple night and day.

Luke is careful with them. He tells you whose family they came from and where they lived, how old some of them had gotten, what work

they did. Three of them are old, and he says so plainly. In a story about a birth, he keeps putting the old near the center. In these chapters, age is a place where God speaks.

It was a world that knew how to wait. Luke says Simeon was *waiting for the consolation of Israel*, and that Anna spoke about the child *to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem*. There were people like that, who kept praying and kept waiting.

And it all starts in the regular worship of the temple. Zechariah's division is on duty. He's chosen by lot to go into the temple and burn incense, which Luke calls *the custom of the priesthood*. Outside, *the whole multitude of the people were praying*. Picture it. A crowd in the courts, praying. One man inside, out of their sight, with the incense.

That's where God comes: into the regular worship of his people, to a man doing his appointed work, with the crowd waiting outside.

You've probably heard these chapters so many times that they've gone soft at the edges, like a card you've kept for years. Try to read them the way Luke wrote them: as things that happened to people, on days that had dates. Before anything else, he wants you to know that it happened.


VISITED

VISITED

Before the priest and the angel, Luke writes one long sentence about what he's doing.

> [1] Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, [2] just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, [3] it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, [4] that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. *Luke 1:1–4*

He has followed everything closely. He got it from people who were there. He's writing it in order, and he says why: *that you may have certainty.* So the names and the dates are part of the certainty. This faith rests on things that

happened, to people with names and hometowns.

The word this guide is named for comes late in chapter 1, when a man who hasn't spoken for months opens his mouth and sings.

> 68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people."
>
> *Luke 1:68*

Visited. In English that can sound like a social call. The word Zechariah uses is stronger.

VISITED

ἐπισκέπτομαι *episkeptomai*

"to exercise oversight in behalf of, look after, make an appearance to help" (BDAG)

It's what you do when you go to see about someone, and you go to help. The Old Testament, in the Greek that Luke knew, uses it of God. *The LORD visited Sarah as he had said* (Genesis 21:1), and she bore a son. So when Zechariah says God *has visited*, he

means God has come to see about his people himself.

The subtitle comes from somewhere else, from a woman newly with child. Elizabeth says, *Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me* (1:25). Some months later Mary sings, *he has looked on the humble estate of his servant* (1:48). Then Zechariah: *he has visited* (1:68).

Those are three different verbs in Luke's Greek, and I won't pretend they're one word. But three different verbs describe one act: God looking toward his people. And for Elizabeth the look and the help aren't two moments. He *looked on me, to take away my reproach.* When God looks, something happens to the one he looks at.

Notice who gets named each time. Elizabeth says *me*. Mary says *his servant*, and before her song is over she's saying *his servant Israel* (1:54). Zechariah says *his people*. One woman's shame is lifted in a house in the hill

country, and it turns out to be the beginning of what God is doing for all of them. So the *me* in the title doesn't make Advent small and private. It's where the visit lands first. It comes to you by name, and it's never only for you.

One more thing has to be said, and Luke says it early. A visit like this is mercy, and nobody in the story takes it in stride. The first man God comes to is silenced because he did not believe (1:20). Mary sings about the proud scattered and the rich sent away empty (1:51–53). Simeon takes the child in his arms and tells Mary that he is *appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel*, and that a sword will pierce her own soul (2:34–35). Much later in Luke's Gospel, well outside these two chapters, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem and says it will fall *because you did not know the time of your visitation* (19:44). Even there the related noun means a gracious visit. The grief is that grace came and wasn't recognized.

So everyone in these chapters has to answer. One asks how he can know. One asks how it will be, and then says yes. Some go with haste to see. What they do, they do because of what they've heard and seen (2:20). That's all I'm hoping for you in these twenty-seven days.

Look at what God did. And let him look at you.

WEEK ONE

HOPE

Zechariah and Elizabeth · Luke 1:5–25



WEEK ONE

HOPE

Zechariah and Elizabeth · Luke 1:5–25

THE CANDLE

Hope

VERSE TO KEEP

"Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard." (Luke 1:13)

THIS WEEK'S QUESTION

"How shall I know this?" (Luke 1:18)

HYMN

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

DAY 1 · SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29

HOPE

READ Luke 1:5–25, straight through, in your own Bible. This week's pages will take it a few verses at a time.

> 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. *Luke 1:13*

The first candle. The first candle is lit today, and its name is Hope.

In this week's passage, hope arrives as a sentence. An old priest is in the temple, afraid, and he's told: *your prayer has been heard.* Luke doesn't say which prayer, or how long ago he prayed it.

Today, read the whole passage from start to finish and listen for that sentence. Then listen to what Zechariah asks back. It's this week's

question, and we'll carry it just as Luke wrote it: *How shall I know this?*

Verse to keep: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard." (Luke 1:13)

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
and with fear and trembling stand;
ponder nothing earthly minded,
for, with blessing in His hand,
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
our full homage to demand.

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence (Liturgy of St. James; paraphrased by Gerard Moultrie), stanza 1

PRAY

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; so that on the last day, when he comes again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

The collect for the First Sunday in Advent, Book of Common Prayer, in modern English.

SERMON NOTES

Jot them in your phone's Notes app, or on paper.

DAY 2 · MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30

RIGHTEOUS, AND CHILDLESS

READ Luke 1:5–7

> 5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea,
> there was a priest named Zechariah, of
> the division of Abijah. And he had a wife
> from the daughters of Aaron, and her
> name was Elizabeth. 6 And they were
> both righteous before God, walking
> blamelessly in all the commandments
> and statutes of the Lord. 7 But they had
> no child, because Elizabeth was barren,
> and both were advanced in years.
>
> *Luke 1:5–7*

LOOK CLOSER

Luke sets two sentences side by side and doesn't explain them. *They were both righteous before God.* Then: *But they had no child.*

Sit where Elizabeth sits. She has walked in the commandments for years, and Luke says it was *before God*. He saw it. And the thing she wanted didn't come. Where she lived, a woman without a child got talked about. By the end of this week she'll have a word for it: *reproach*.

Luke wants both sentences in front of you at once. Her childlessness is not a verdict on her. She was blameless, and she was barren, and both were true on the same day for a long time.

Maybe that's your house too. You've walked with God for decades, and there's a room that stayed empty, or a prayer that has gotten old along with you. I can't tell you why. Luke never says why. He only refuses to let anyone read her life as a punishment.

CARRY

Luke's sentence has a *but* in it: *but they had no child.* What's the *but* in yours? Say it as plainly as he does. How long has it been true? Who knows about it, and what do you imagine they make of it? Somewhere in those years, did you start to read it as a verdict, as though you'd been weighed and this is what came back? Luke puts *righteous before God* in the sentence just before. Can you let both sentences be true of you on the same day?

> *Where have you decided that what you don't have is God's opinion of you?*

PRAY

Father, you saw Elizabeth on every one of those days, and you see me on mine. Where I've read my emptiness as your verdict, tell me the truth. I don't need the reason today. I need to know you haven't looked away. Amen.

DAY 3 · TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1

THE HOUR OF INCENSE

READ Luke 1:8–12

> 8 Now while he was serving as priest
> before God when his division was on
> duty, 9 according to the custom of the
> priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter
> the temple of the Lord and burn incense.
> 10 And the whole multitude of the people
> were praying outside at the hour of
> incense. 11 And there appeared to him an
> angel of the Lord standing on the right
> side of the altar of incense. 12 And
> Zechariah was troubled when he saw
> him, and fear fell upon him. *Luke 1:8–12*

LOOK CLOSER

He was chosen by lot.

Luke calls it *the custom of the priesthood*. Nobody picked Zechariah, and Zechariah didn't pick the day. The lot fell on him, and

he went in. Israel had a proverb about that: *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD* (Proverbs 16:33).

To everyone in the temple that morning, it was Zechariah's turn and nothing more. Luke lets us see further. An old prayer is about to be answered, and the man it belongs to has just been sent to the altar. I don't think Luke wants us to read that as luck.

Outside, *the whole multitude of the people were praying*. Inside, one priest. Luke doesn't tell us what Zechariah was praying in there, or whether after all these years he was still asking for anything for himself.

So let me wonder for a minute, and I'll say plainly that this part is wondering. Imagine a man who has prayed the people's prayers faithfully for a lifetime and has learned to keep his own longing somewhere quieter. It's still there. He's just put it away. A man can serve God well for years with a desire folded

up inside him that he no longer says out loud.

Is that Zechariah? Luke doesn't say. Is it you?

Luke does say this much. When the angel appeared, Zechariah *was troubled*, and *fear fell upon him*. He had been serving as priest before God, and when an angel of the Lord stood beside the altar, it was more than he was ready for.

CARRY

Start with the lot. Think of a day that looked like nothing more than your turn: the ordinary shift, the appointment, the errand you almost skipped. Have you ever looked back on a day like that and seen that God had put you there? Then go where Zechariah may have been. What did you once ask God for, plainly and often? When did you stop? Did you stop because you had your answer, or because asking had started to hurt?

> *What have you stopped saying out loud to God?*

PRAY

Lord, you know what I've folded up and put away. I'm not sure I want it opened. Come near anyway. And when I'm afraid, say to me what you said to him. Amen.

DAY 4 · WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2

YOUR PRAYER HAS BEEN HEARD

READ Luke 1:13–17

13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be
afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has
been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will
bear you a son, and you shall call his
name John. 14 And you will have joy and
gladness, and many will rejoice at his
birth, 15 for he will be great before the
Lord. And he must not drink wine or
strong drink, and he will be filled with
the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s
womb. 16 And he will turn many of the
children of Israel to the Lord their God,
17 and he will go before him in the spirit
and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of
the fathers to the children, and the
disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to

> make ready for the Lord a people prepared." *Luke 1:13–17*

LOOK CLOSER

Your prayer has been heard.

Which prayer? Luke doesn't say. It could be the prayer for a child. It could be the prayer for Israel that a priest would bring to that altar. Careful readers land in different places, and the angel's answer reaches both: a son for this house, and through him many of the children of Israel turned *to the Lord their God*.

Whichever it was, it wasn't a new prayer. Elizabeth's barrenness was years old. Israel's waiting was older. For a long time, in that house and in that nation, there had been praying and nothing to show for it. Now an angel says it was heard.

I want to be careful here. Some of you have prayed for a child, or a healing, or a son to come home, and no angel has come. This

passage doesn't promise you Elizabeth's ending. What it tells you is that a prayer can be heard for years before anything in the house changes.

And look at what the angel says first, before any of the news. *Do not be afraid.*

CARRY

Which prayer is it for you? You probably didn't have to think long. How many years has it been? Are you still asking, or has it gone quiet? Be honest about what the waiting has taught you to believe: that God didn't hear, or that he heard and said no, or that he heard and it didn't matter much to him. Which of those have you been living by?

> *What would be different today if you believed your prayer was heard on the day you prayed it?*

PRAY

Father, I don't know what you're doing with what I asked you for. Some of it I've stopped asking. Let it be enough today to know you heard me. And if I'm afraid of your answer, say the first thing first. Amen.

DAY 5 · THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3

HOW SHALL I KNOW?

READ Luke 1:18–20

> 18 And Zechariah said to the angel, "How
> shall I know this? For I am an old man,
> and my wife is advanced in years." 19 And
> the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I
> stand in the presence of God, and I was
> sent to speak to you and to bring you this
> good news. 20 And behold, you will be
> silent and unable to speak until the day
> that these things take place, because you
> did not believe my words, which will be
> fulfilled in their time." *Luke 1:18–20*

LOOK CLOSER

How shall I know this?

It's a reasonable question. It's what you ask when you've lived long enough to check before you hope. *For I am an old man, and*

my wife is advanced in years. He has the facts on his side.

It's an old question, too. Abraham asked it, nearly word for word in the Greek Old Testament, when God promised him a land (Genesis 15:8). Abraham was answered with a covenant. Zechariah is answered with silence.

Gabriel gives the reason himself: *because you did not believe my words.* I'm not going to soften that. It's a judgment, and it falls on a righteous man, in the temple, on the day the lot chose him. A blameless life didn't make his question safe.

And still, look at how the sentence is built. *You will be silent ... until the day that these things take place.* The silence has an end. The promise isn't taken back. The child is still coming, to the man who didn't believe it.

Why Abraham's question was met one way and Zechariah's another, I'm going to leave alone for now. Stay in it with him. He asked

for something to know by. He was given a closed mouth and a long wait.

CARRY

Zechariah gave his reasons: *I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.* What are yours?

> *When you ask God, "How shall I know?", what are you really asking for?*

PRAY

Lord, I like to be sure before I trust. You know that about me. I've called it wisdom, and I'm not certain it always is. I don't know what to say after that. Amen.

DAY 6 · FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4

THE PEOPLE WERE WAITING

READ Luke 1:21–23

> 21 And the people were waiting for
> Zechariah, and they were wondering at
> his delay in the temple. 22 And when he
> came out, he was unable to speak to
> them, and they realized that he had seen a
> vision in the temple. And he kept making
> signs to them and remained mute. 23 And
> when his time of service was ended, he
> went to his home. *Luke 1:21–23*

LOOK CLOSER

Turn around and stand with the crowd.

They were praying out here when he went in. Now they're *waiting for Zechariah*, and *wondering at his delay*. He's taking too long, and nobody knows why.

Then he comes out, and he can't speak to them. *He kept making signs to them and*

remained mute. They work out that he has seen a vision in there. That's all they get: a priest who can't talk, and no one to say what it means.

A lot of faith gets lived right there, in the court outside. God has done something close by, and you weren't in the room for it. You can tell it was real. You can't get anyone to explain it. Then the service is over.

What they couldn't know is that God had already begun, on the other side of a wall. The first they saw of it was a man who couldn't speak.

Zechariah finishes his service like that. *And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.*

CARRY

When did you last sense that God was doing something real close by, in someone else's life, or in your church, or in your own house, and you weren't in the room for it? The crowd got a sign and no explanation. When that happens to you, what do you do with it? Do you press someone for answers, or shrug and go home? Is there anything you've filed away as nothing because no one ever came out and told you what it meant?

> *What would it take to go home without the explanation and still believe God had been at work?*

PRAY

God, I'm out here with the others. I can tell something has happened, and I can't see what. Keep me from deciding it was nothing. Amen.

DAY 7 · SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5

IN THE DAYS WHEN HE LOOKED ON ME

READ Luke 1:24–25

> 24 After these days his wife Elizabeth
> conceived, and for five months she kept
> herself hidden, saying, 25 "Thus the Lord
> has done for me in the days when he
> looked on me, to take away my reproach
> among people." *Luke 1:24–25*

LOOK CLOSER

For five months she kept herself hidden. Luke doesn't say why, and I'd rather not guess. What he gives us is what she said in there. It's the first time anyone in this Gospel says what God has done for them.

Read it slowly. *The Lord has done. For me. He looked on me.*

For years the eyes she felt on her were other people's. That's what *reproach among people*

means: what gets said about you, and how you get looked at. Now she says someone else has looked. And when he looked, he wasn't measuring her. He took the weight off.

LOOKED ON

ἐφοράω *ephoraō*

"to fix one's glance upon, look at, concern oneself with" (BDAG)

This guide gets its name here, from a woman in hiding, with something God has done that hardly anyone knows yet, saying *me*.

If you're still waiting, I haven't forgotten Monday. Elizabeth had been living in God's sight the whole time. Luke said so in verse 6. These were the days she knew it.

CARRY

> *Whose eyes have you been living under?*

Give them names: a parent, a spouse, a congregation, the people you worked beside for thirty years, your own. What do those eyes see when they look at you? How much of what you do in a week is done for them? Elizabeth says the Lord looked on her and took something away. When he looks on you, what do you most want lifted?

PRAY

Lord, look on me. I've lived a long time under other people's eyes, and under my own. I want to be able to say what she said: you have done this for me. Until I can, let me live as someone you see. Amen.



WEEK TWO

LOVE

Mary · Luke 1:26–56

WEEK TWO

LOVE

Mary · Luke 1:26–56

THE CANDLE

Love

VERSE TO KEEP

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." (Luke 1:30)

THIS WEEK'S QUESTION

"How will this be?" (Luke 1:34)

HYMN

The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came

8	9	10	11	12	13	14

DAY 8 · SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6

LOVE

READ Luke 1:26–56, straight through, in your own Bible.

> 30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. *Luke 1:30*

The second candle. The second candle is lit today, and its name is Love.

You won't find the word *love* in this week's passage. What you'll find is *favor*. An angel comes to a young woman in Nazareth and calls her *favored one*, and then says it again: *you have found favor with God.* Luke gives no reason for it. He told us Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous. About Mary he tells us her town, that she was a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, and her name.

So this is how the passage shows us love: favor that comes looking for someone. That's my way of naming the candle, and I think the passage bears it out.

Today, read all of it, from the angel's greeting to the end of Mary's song. Listen for her question. It's this week's, and again we'll carry it as Luke wrote it: *How will this be?*

Verse to keep: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." (Luke 1:30)

> *The angel Gabriel from heaven came,*
> *His wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;*
> *"All hail," said he, "thou lowly maiden Mary,*
> *Most highly favoured lady," Gloria!*
>
> *The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came* (Basque carol; English by Sabine Baring-Gould), stanza 1

PRAY

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; so that on the last day, when he comes again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

The collect for the First Sunday in Advent, prayed each Sunday of the season.

SERMON NOTES

Jot them in your phone's Notes app, or on paper.

DAY 9 · MONDAY, DECEMBER 7

GREATLY TROUBLED

READ Luke 1:26–29

> 26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel
> was sent from God to a city of Galilee
> named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed
> to a man whose name was Joseph, of the
> house of David. And the virgin's name
> was Mary. 28 And he came to her and
> said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord
> is with you!" 29 But she was greatly
> troubled at the saying, and tried to
> discern what sort of greeting this might
> be. *Luke 1:26–29*

LOOK CLOSER

Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!

That's the whole greeting, and it troubled her. Notice where Luke puts the trouble. It's *at the saying*. It's being called favored.

FAVORED

χαριτόω *charitoō*

"to cause to be the recipient of a benefit, bestow favor on, favor highly, bless" (BDAG)

The word is something done to her. God does the favoring, and she's the one it lands on. She hasn't asked for it, and Luke hasn't told us anything she did to draw it.

I wonder if that's what unsettles her, and here I'm wondering, not reporting. Most of us know what to do with being measured. We know how to earn, and how to fall short. Being favored before you've done anything is harder to receive. You can't manage it. You can only stand there while it's given.

She doesn't run, and she doesn't take it in quickly. She *tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.* Luke leaves her there for a verse, thinking.

CARRY

Think of the last time someone gave you something you hadn't earned: a gift that was too large, praise you didn't think you deserved, help you never asked for. What did you do with it? Did you thank them and start working out how to pay it back? Did you explain why they shouldn't have? Most of us know how to be measured. How do you take being favored? Now put God where that person stood.

> *If he called you favored today, before you'd done anything, what would trouble you about it?*

PRAY

Lord, I know how to be measured. I don't know how to be favored. If you come to me today with something to give, let me stay in the room long enough to hear it. Amen.

DAY 10 · TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8

DO NOT BE AFRAID, MARY

READ Luke 1:30–33

> 30 And the angel said to her, “Do not be
> afraid, Mary, for you have found favor
> with God. 31 And behold, you will
> conceive in your womb and bear a son,
> and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He
> will be great and will be called the Son of
> the Most High. And the Lord God will
> give to him the throne of his father
> David, 33 and he will reign over the house
> of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom
> there will be no end.” *Luke 1:30–33*

LOOK CLOSER

Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

Favor, twice in three verses (1:28, 30). Maybe she couldn't take it in the first time.

Then come the largest words in the chapter. A son who will be great. *The Son of the Most High. The throne of his father David.* A kingdom with no end. I'm not going to unpack the throne today. Look at the order. Favor comes first, and then the news. She's told where she stands with God before she's told what God is going to do. Even the throne is a gift: *the Lord God will give to him.*

Some of us have spent a long time trying to make the order run the other way. Do well, and then be favored. Gabriel doesn't offer Mary that arrangement, and it isn't offered to you.

It's also the second time in this chapter that an angel has said *Do not be afraid.* Zechariah heard it in the temple. Mary hears it in Nazareth. Some shepherds are going to hear it in a field.

CARRY

Look at how your day starts. What's the first thing you reach for to find out where you stand: the list, the inbox, what you did or didn't get done yesterday? When a day goes badly, what do you assume God thinks of you by evening? And when it goes well? Gabriel told Mary where she stood before he told her anything else.

> *Which do you live as if comes first: what you do for God, or his favor toward you?*

PRAY

Father, say it to me again, because I didn't believe it the first time. Your favor came before anything I did this year. Let that be the first thing I know today, before the first thing I have to do. Amen.

DAY 11 · WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9

HOW WILL THIS BE?

READ Luke 1:34–38

> 34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. 36 And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. *Luke 1:34–38*

LOOK CLOSER

How will this be?

Last week an old priest asked a question in the temple and came out unable to speak. Now a young woman asks one, and look at what she gets back. There's no rebuke. There's an explanation: *The Holy Spirit will come upon you.* And there's a sign she didn't ask for: *your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son.*

It's tempting to make a rule of this: ask like Mary. Luke doesn't make it that simple. The two questions sound a good deal alike, and he doesn't stop here to say what the difference was. He shows us two answers and lets us wonder. The priest's story isn't over, either.

What I can see is where each question points. Zechariah's is about his own knowing: *How shall I know?* Mary's is about the thing itself: *How will this be?* I'm not sure that's the whole of it.

Then she says the sentence the scene has been waiting for. *Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.*

The word for *servant* is a slave's word. She's handing herself over, and she doesn't know yet what it will cost.

CARRY

What question are you asking God right now? Put it in the words you'd actually use. Now look at it. Is it asking him to prove something to you, or asking him what he's going to do? You may find it's some of both.

> *When you question God, are you asking "How can I be sure?" or "How will you do it?"*

Then go to Mary's last sentence: *let it be to me.* Where can you say that today and mean it? Where can't you yet?

PRAY

Lord, I have my questions, and you know which kind they are. I'd like to get to her sentence, and I'm not there about everything. Take me as far as I can go today: let it be to me according to your word. Amen.

DAY 12 · THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10

THE LEAP

READ Luke 1:39–45

> 39 In those days Mary arose and went
> with haste into the hill country, to a
> town in Judah, 40 and she entered the
> house of Zechariah and greeted
> Elizabeth. 41 And when Elizabeth heard
> the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in
> her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with
> the Holy Spirit, 42 and she exclaimed
> with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among
> women, and blessed is the fruit of your
> womb! 43 And why is this granted to me
> that the mother of my Lord should come
> to me? 44 For behold, when the sound of
> your greeting came to my ears, the baby
> in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And
> blessed is she who believed that there
> would be a fulfillment of what was
> spoken to her from the Lord." *Luke 1:39–45*

LOOK CLOSER

Mary goes *with haste* into the hill country and enters the house of Zechariah.

Think about that house. A man who can't speak. His wife, in her sixth month, not long out of hiding. And now a young relative coming in with news of her own.

Before Mary can explain anything, the baby leaps, Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit, and she cries out. Everything she says is about someone else. *Blessed are you among women. Why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* She has waited years for her own child, and when a younger woman walks in carrying someone greater, I can't find any rivalry in her. She's glad to be near it.

Then she says one more thing. *Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.*

Elizabeth is married to a man who was silenced *because you did not believe*. Luke

doesn't say he was in the room, and he doesn't say she meant anything by it. But he lets both sentences stand in the same house.

I don't hear Elizabeth scoring a point. I hear Luke telling us what he most wants us to see in Mary. She believed what God said.

CARRY

Who has walked into your house carrying something greater than what you were given? A younger colleague, a friend's child, another church. What rose in you first? Elizabeth is glad to be near it. Can you be? Then take her last sentence. She calls Mary blessed for believing that what God said would happen. Be specific here, and keep to what he has actually said in Scripture.

> *Which of his promises do you find hard to believe will really happen?*

PRAY

Lord, make me like Elizabeth, glad for what you're doing in someone else. And where I've stopped believing what you said, I'd like to believe it again. Help me. Amen.

DAY 13 · FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11

HE HAS LOOKED ON THE HUMBLE ESTATE

READ Luke 1:46–50

> 46 And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the
> Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my
> Savior, 48 for he has looked on the
> humble estate of his servant. For behold,
> from now on all generations will call me
> blessed; 49 for he who is mighty has done
> great things for me, and holy is his name.
> 50 And his mercy is for those who fear
> him from generation to generation.
>
> *Luke 1:46–50*

LOOK CLOSER

Read the song for its verbs, and see who is doing them. *He has looked. He who is mighty has done great things. His mercy is for those who fear him.* Mary is in the song mostly as the place where it happened.

He has looked on the humble estate of his servant. It's Elizabeth's sentence again, in another woman's mouth. And *humble estate* isn't Mary praising her own modesty. It's where she stood: low, and unnoticed. God looked there.

HUMBLE ESTATE

ταπείνωσις *tapeinōsis*

"an unpretentious state or condition, lowliness, humility, humble station" (BDAG)

Then she says something that makes some of us uneasy. *From now on all generations will call me blessed.*

Some of you grew up in churches that said a great deal about Mary. Some of you grew up where she was hardly mentioned outside December. I think the song itself shows us how to honor her. Call her blessed. She said we would, and Elizabeth already has. Then read on to the next word, which is *for*. *For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.* Her blessedness is

something God did, and she calls him *my Savior*. We honor Mary the way she asks when we say what she says: look what he has done.

CARRY

Go back to a low place in your own life: a year you'd rather not talk about, a failure, a stretch when nobody was looking for you. What did God do there? Say it the way Mary does, with him as the subject of the verbs. *He looked. He did.* Now think about how you usually tell that story. Who's in the middle of it?

> *Where has God looked on you in a low place, and have you ever said so out loud?*

PRAY

My soul magnifies you, Lord. You've looked on low places in my life that I'd rather no one saw. You've done great things for me, and I've often told the story with myself in the middle. Holy is your name. Amen.

DAY 14 · SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12

THE RICH HE HAS SENT AWAY EMPTY

READ Luke 1:51–56

> 51 He has shown strength with his arm;
> he has scattered the proud in the
> thoughts of their hearts; 52 he has
> brought down the mighty from their
> thrones and exalted those of humble
> estate; 53 he has filled the hungry with
> good things, and the rich he has sent
> away empty. 54 He has helped his servant
> Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55 as
> he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and
> to his offspring forever." 56 And Mary
> remained with her about three months
> and returned to her home. *Luke 1:51–56*

LOOK CLOSER

The song turns here. It has been about one woman, and now it's about everyone.

He has scattered the proud. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones. The rich he has sent away empty.

I'd like to find us somewhere else in these lines. We could call ourselves the hungry, in a spiritual sense. But I have to be honest about who is likely reading this page. By the measure of Mary's world, and of most of the world now, most of us are the rich in this sentence. We're well fed, and we're used to things going the way we arrange them.

And Mary, carrying the Son of the Most High, is glad about a God who sends the rich away empty.

I'm not going to explain that away. She doesn't say what the rich did. She doesn't tell anyone what to do with their money; the song gives no instructions, and every verb in these lines is God's. It ends on mercy, too: *in remembrance of his mercy*. But it says what it says. When God comes, the hungry are filled,

and people who were already full leave with nothing.

Then Mary stays about three months and goes home, and Luke lets the song hang there.

CARRY

What would you have to lose before you'd call yourself hungry?

> *What are you full of?*

PRAY

Lord, I don't know how to pray this one. Most days I'm not hungry. I'm afraid of what it would take to make me hungry, and I'm more afraid of being sent away. Amen.

WEEK THREE

JOY

The Silence Ends · Luke 1:57–80



WEEK THREE

JOY

The Silence Ends · Luke 1:57–80

THE CANDLE

Joy (the rose candle)

VERSE TO KEEP

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people." (Luke 1:68)

THIS WEEK'S QUESTION

"What then will this child be?" (Luke 1:66)

HYMN

Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding

FROM DECEMBER 17

the O Antiphons close each day's prayer.

15	16	17	18	19	20	21

JOY

READ Luke 1:57–80, straight through, in your own Bible.

> 64 And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. *Luke 1:64*

The third candle. The third candle is lit today. It's the rose one, and its name is Joy.

For a long time the church has called this Sunday *Gaudete*, the Latin for *rejoice*, after the verse that opened its worship on this day: *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice* (Philippians 4:4). In a season of waiting, one Sunday is given to joy.

In this week's passage, joy comes out of a silence. A child is born, a name is written on a tablet, and a man who hasn't spoken since the temple opens his mouth. Luke tells us what came out first: *he spoke, blessing God.*

Read all of it today, the birth and the song. This week's question belongs to the neighbors, and we'll carry it as they asked it: *What then will this child be?*

Verse to keep: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people." (Luke 1:68)

> *Hark! a thrilling voice is sounding:*
> *"Christ is nigh!" it seems to say,*
> *"Cast away the dreams of darkness,*
> *O ye children of the day!"*
>
> *Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding* (Latin, *Vox clara ecce intonat*; tr. Edward Caswall), stanza 1

PRAY

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; so that on the last day, when he comes again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

The collect for the First Sunday in Advent, prayed each Sunday of the season.

SERMON NOTES

Jot them in your phone's Notes app, or on paper.

DAY 16 · MONDAY, DECEMBER 14

THE NEIGHBORS REJOICED

READ Luke 1:57–58

> 57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to
> give birth, and she bore a son. 58 And her
> neighbors and relatives heard that the
> Lord had shown great mercy to her, and
> they rejoiced with her. *Luke 1:57–58*

LOOK CLOSER

She bore a son. Four words, after all of it.

Luke turns straight to the people around her. *Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.*

In Week One Elizabeth spoke of her *reproach among people*. I think of these neighbors when I read that. Whatever was said about her over the years, some of it may have been said by these same people. Now they hear

what the Lord has done, and they're glad with her.

In Luke's Greek, the Lord "made his mercy great" toward her. It's the verb Mary used when she sang *My soul magnifies the Lord.* Mary makes much of God. God makes much of his mercy.

Sit with the neighbors today, because it isn't always an easy seat. Some of you have stood at a wedding or a baby shower, glad for her and aching for yourself. Luke shows a whole village doing the first half. *They rejoiced with her.* Joy in this chapter is something people do together, and you may be doing it this year with empty hands.

CARRY

> *Whose good news is hard for you to be glad about?*

Someone probably came to mind while you read. Stay with that person for a minute. What did they receive that you asked for? What did you say to them, and what did you say later, at home? Have you been keeping count? Luke says the neighbors *rejoiced with her*. What would it look like to be glad with that person this week, with your own hands still empty?

PRAY

Lord, you've shown great mercy to people near me, and I haven't always been glad. Sometimes I've kept count. Make my joy large enough to hold someone else's good news while I wait for mine. Amen.

DAY 17 · TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15

HIS NAME IS JOHN

READ Luke 1:59–63

> 59 And on the eighth day they came to
> circumcise the child. And they would
> have called him Zechariah after his
> father, 60 but his mother answered, “No;
> he shall be called John.” 61 And they said
> to her, “None of your relatives is called
> by this name.” 62 And they made signs to
> his father, inquiring what he wanted him
> to be called. 63 And he asked for a writing
> tablet and wrote, “His name is John.”
> And they all wondered. *Luke 1:59–63*

LOOK CLOSER

On the eighth day they come to circumcise the child, and the name is already picked. *They would have called him Zechariah after his father.* It's the sensible name. It keeps the family going.

Elizabeth says no. *He shall be called John.* The relatives object, and then they turn to the father. They have to make signs to ask him.

He asks for a writing tablet. Months ago an angel gave him a name for this child, and he couldn't believe there would be a child. He has had a long quiet since then. Luke doesn't tell us what it did in him. He tells us what Zechariah wrote. *His name is John.*

Look at how he puts it. He doesn't write "Call him John." He writes it as something already settled, somewhere else. The boy has a name, and it didn't come from this family.

There's a desire under this that I think is worth naming. A son called after you carries you forward. Zechariah lets that go. This boy will not be his father's namesake. He belongs to what God said.

CARRY

What carries your name? Start with the obvious: children, a business, a ministry, a reputation you spent forty years on. Which of those would be hardest to watch go a way you didn't choose? When one of them has turned out differently than you planned, have you only counted it as loss, or have you asked what God was calling it? Zechariah wrote down a name he'd been given and hadn't chosen.

> *What have you named after yourself that God may be calling something else?*

PRAY

Lord, there are things I've wanted to carry my name: my work, my children, what I've built. You gave them, and you call them what you call them. Hand me the tablet. Let me write what you said. Amen.

DAY 18 · WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 16

WHAT THEN WILL THIS CHILD BE?

READ Luke 1:64–66

> 64 And immediately his mouth was
> opened and his tongue loosed, and he
> spoke, blessing God. 65 And fear came on
> all their neighbors. And all these things
> were talked about through all the hill
> country of Judea, 66 and all who heard
> them laid them up in their hearts, saying,
> "What then will this child be?" For the
> hand of the Lord was with him.
>
> *Luke 1:64–66*

LOOK CLOSER

And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God.

Months of silence, and the first thing out of him is blessing. He doesn't explain himself.

He doesn't take up his argument with the angel again.

I'd have expected the neighbors to cheer. They don't. *Fear came on all their neighbors.* On Monday they were rejoicing. I don't think they've changed their minds about the baby. They've seen how near God has come. He has been at work in a house down the road: a barren woman with a son, a mute man speaking, a name nobody in the family chose. It's one thing to be glad for a neighbor. It's another to find out God has come this close.

So the story travels *through all the hill country of Judea*, and the people who hear it *laid them up in their hearts*. They ask the question we've carried all week. *What then will this child be?*

Nobody answers them. Luke adds only, *For the hand of the Lord was with him.* They'll wait years to find out.

CARRY

The neighbors were glad, and then they were afraid. When God comes this close, which are you?

> *What has God done near you that you've laid up and don't yet understand?*

PRAY

Lord, your hand is on things I can't read yet. I'm glad, and I'm a little afraid, and I don't know what this will be. Amen.

DAY 19 · THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17

HE HAS VISITED AND REDEEMED

READ Luke 1:67–71

> 67 And his father Zechariah was filled
> with the Holy Spirit and prophesied,
> saying, 68 “Blessed be the Lord God of
> Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his
> people 69 and has raised up a horn of
> salvation for us in the house of his
> servant David, 70 as he spoke by the
> mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
> 71 that we should be saved from our
> enemies and from the hand of all who
> hate us; *Luke 1:67–71*

LOOK CLOSER

Now we hear what the silence was holding. *Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied.*

He has visited and redeemed his people. There's the word this guide is named for. And look at the tense. *Has visited.* Zechariah sings it as done, and it has only begun: a son in his arms, another child still unborn, and nothing in Judea looks any different.

This is the man who asked, *How shall I know this?* He still can't see the rescue. He sings it anyway, because God has begun it.

He sings about enemies, too. *That we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.* He means it. Israel had real ones. Let that stand for today, because the song isn't over.

And notice whose house the rescue comes through: *the house of his servant David.* Zechariah's son is a priest's son. With his own newborn son in the house, he's singing mostly about someone else's child.

CARRY

Listen to how you talk about the thing you're waiting on. What tense do you use? "If God ever." "Someday." "When things turn around." Zechariah sang *has visited* before Mary's child was born. Is there anything in your situation that God has already begun: a first step, a changed heart, a door that wasn't open a year ago? What keeps you from calling it his?

> *What has God begun that you still talk about as if it hasn't started?*

PRAY

Lord God of Israel, you have visited. Teach me to say it in the past tense while I'm still waiting to see it.

O Wisdom, who came forth from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from end to end and ordering all things with strength and gentleness: come and teach us the way of prudence. Amen.

O SAPIENTIA · DECEMBER 17 From today until December 23, each day's prayer ends with one of the O Antiphons: seven short prayers the church has sung in the last week before Christmas for well over a thousand years. Each one calls on Christ by one of his old names and asks him to come. If you've sung *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, you already know them; the hymn is made from them.

DAY 20 · FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18

TO SERVE HIM WITHOUT FEAR

READ Luke 1:72–75

> 72 to show the mercy promised to our
> fathers and to remember his holy
> covenant, 73 the oath that he swore to our
> father Abraham, to grant us 74 that we,
> being delivered from the hand of our
> enemies, might serve him without fear, 75
> in holiness and righteousness before him
> all our days. *Luke 1:72–75*

LOOK CLOSER

The song reaches further back now, behind David, to *the oath that he swore to our father Abraham*. God is doing this because he said he would.

And what is the rescue for? *That we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear.*

I'd have guessed the sentence would end another way. Delivered from our enemies, so that we might be left alone. Zechariah says: so that we might *serve*.

> **SERVE**
> λατρεύω *latreuō*
> "serve, in our lit. only of the carrying out of religious duties, esp. of a cultic nature" (BDAG)

It's a worship word. It's what a priest does. He's singing about a whole people free to do what he was doing at the altar on the day this began.

In the song, the fear is fear of the enemy's hand. But I can't help hearing the singer in it. The last time this man served before God, *fear fell upon him*, and he went home unable to speak. Now he sings about serving *without fear*.

The serving stays: *in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.* The fear

is what goes.

Some of us have served God for a long time, and a good deal of it has been fear: of getting it wrong, of not having done enough. I wonder what your serving would be like without it.

CARRY

Think about what you do for God in an ordinary week: the serving, the giving, the showing up. Now ask what would happen inside you if you stopped. Would you feel guilty? Would you wonder whether he was still pleased with you? What are you afraid he'll think if you get it wrong, or don't do enough? When did you last serve him and enjoy it?

> *How much of your serving God is fear?*

PRAY

Father, I've served you afraid. Deliver me into the other kind.

O Adonai, ruler of the house of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the flame of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai: come and redeem us with an outstretched arm. Amen.

O ADONAI · DECEMBER 18

DAY 21 · SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19

THE SUNRISE FROM ON HIGH

READ Luke 1:76–80

> 76 And you, child, will be called the
> prophet of the Most High; for you will
> go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77
> to give knowledge of salvation to his
> people in the forgiveness of their sins, 78
> because of the tender mercy of our God,
> whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on
> high 79 to give light to those who sit in
> darkness and in the shadow of death, to
> guide our feet into the way of peace." 80
> And the child grew and became strong in
> spirit, and he was in the wilderness until
> the day of his public appearance to Israel.
>
> *Luke 1:76–80*

LOOK CLOSER

And you, child.

Now Zechariah turns and speaks to the baby, and the neighbors' question gets its answer. This child will be *the prophet of the Most High*. His work will be *to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins*.

This is the turn I asked you to wait for. All week the rescue has been from enemies. Now it's from sins, and they're the people's own. The ones who need saving from those who hate them need forgiving too. For capable, decent people that's harder to hear than anything about enemies.

And here is why any of it happens: *because of the tender mercy of our God.*

TENDER MERCY

σπλάγχνον *splanchnon*

the inward parts as "the seat and source of love, sympathy, and mercy" (BDAG)

Then the word once more. *The sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who*

sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. Luke doesn't say who they are. The line is wide enough for anyone sitting there.

A sunrise isn't yet the whole day. The light has come, and people still sit in that shadow, and we're still waiting for full day.

If that's where you are this December, notice the verb. You aren't told to get up and find the light. It visits.

CARRY

Who do you want to be rescued from? Most of us can name them quickly. It's slower work to name what we need forgiven. What have you been calling by a gentler name? Being direct. Being careful. Being busy. What would you call it if you were telling the truth to someone who already knew? Zechariah says forgiveness comes *because of the tender mercy of our God*. Does that make it easier to say?

> *What do you need forgiven that you've been calling something else?*

And if you're the one sitting in the dark this December: what would it mean to you that the light does the coming?

PRAY

God of tender mercy, I've wanted rescue from other people more than forgiveness for myself. Give me both, and visit the ones sitting in the dark tonight.

O Root of Jesse, standing as a sign for the peoples, before whom kings will shut their mouths and to whom the nations will pray: come and set us free; do not delay any longer. Amen.

O RADIX JESSE · DECEMBER 19



WEEK FOUR

PEACE

Simeon and Anna · Luke 2:22–38

WEEK FOUR

PEACE

Simeon and Anna · Luke 2:22–38

THE CANDLE

Peace

VERSE TO KEEP

"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation." (Luke 2:29–30)

THIS WEEK'S QUESTION

What are you still waiting to see?

HYMN

Hail to the Lord Who Comes

A NOTE ON THE ORDER

Luke tells of the shepherds before Simeon and Anna. We're holding the shepherds for Christmas Eve.

22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26

PEACE

READ Luke 2:22–38, straight through, in your own Bible.

> 29 "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation... *Luke 2:29–30*

The fourth candle. The fourth candle is lit today, and its name is Peace.

We've stepped out of Luke's order this week. The shepherds are waiting for Christmas Eve. Today we're in the temple, about forty days after the birth, where a man and a woman have been waiting.

The peace in this passage isn't quiet. It belongs to a man who says he can be let go now, because he has seen what he was promised. A few lines later the same man is

talking about a sword. Both are in the passage, and we'll take them in turn.

Read all of it today. There's no question in the text this week, so here is one to carry beside Simeon's song: What are you still waiting to see?

Verse to keep: "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation." (Luke 2:29–30)

Hail to the Lord who comes,
comes to his temple gate,
not with his angel host,
not in his kingly state:
no shouts proclaim him nigh,
no crowds his coming wait.

Hail to the Lord Who Comes (John Ellerton), stanza 1

PRAY

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; so that on the last day, when he comes again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

O Key of David and scepter of the house of Israel, who open and no one shuts, who shut and no one opens: come and lead the prisoner out of the prison house, the one who sits in darkness and the shadow of death. Amen.

O CLAVIS DAVID · DECEMBER 20

SERMON NOTES

Jot them in your phone's Notes app, or on paper.

DAY 23 · MONDAY, DECEMBER 21

TWO TURTLEDOVES

READ Luke 2:22–28

22 And when the time came for their
purification according to the Law of
Moses, they brought him up to
Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23
(as it is written in the Law of the Lord,
"Every male who first opens the womb
shall be called holy to the Lord") 24 and
to offer a sacrifice according to what is
said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of
turtledoves, or two young pigeons." 25
Now there was a man in Jerusalem,
whose name was Simeon, and this man
was righteous and devout, waiting for the
consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit
was upon him. 26 And it had been
revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he
would not see death before he had seen
the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the
Spirit into the temple, and when the

> parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, [28] he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, *Luke 2:22–28*

LOOK CLOSER

Mary and Joseph bring the child to Jerusalem *to present him to the Lord*, and to offer what the Law asks: *a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.*

Luke doesn't comment on the birds. Leviticus does. The offering was a lamb, and then: *if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons* (Leviticus 12:8). Set the two passages side by side, and see what Mary and Joseph brought.

Into that scene comes a man Luke introduces with care. *Righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.* Luke doesn't give his age, or his work, or how long he had waited. He tells us what Simeon was waiting for, and that

he'd been promised he would see it before he died.

WAITING

προσδέχομαι *prosdechomai*
"to look forward to, wait for" (BDAG)

Look at how he gets there. *He came in the Spirit into the temple.* Nothing about this couple would have marked them out. They had two birds. He was led.

That's what waiting looks like here: a man the Spirit can move, on the right day, to the right place. And when the child comes, *he took him up in his arms*.

CARRY

> *What are you still waiting to see?*

Say it in a sentence. How long have you waited? Simeon had a promise to wait on. What is your waiting resting on: something God has said, or something you've hoped? Then look at how he found what he was waiting for. He was led to a couple with two birds. Where have you been expecting God to show up, and what might you walk past because it looked too ordinary? If the Spirit moved you toward someone today, would you go?

PRAY

Lord, I've waited a long time for some things, and I don't always know where to look. Lead me, as you led him, to where you are.

O Dawn, brightness of eternal light and sun of justice: come and give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. Amen.

O ORIENS · DECEMBER 21

DAY 24 · TUESDAY, DECEMBER 22

DEPART IN PEACE

READ Luke 2:29–32

> 29 “Lord, now you are letting your
> servant depart in peace, according to
> your word; 30 for my eyes have seen your
> salvation 31 that you have prepared in the
> presence of all peoples, 32 a light for
> revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory
> to your people Israel.” *Luke 2:29–32*

LOOK CLOSER

He's holding the child, and he blesses God.

Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace. Depart can mean to die, and Simeon had been told he would not see death before this day. It's also a word for a servant released from his post. The watch is over, and he can stand down. I hear both. A man who has kept watch is saying: I can go now.

Notice what he has seen. *My eyes have seen your salvation.* He has seen a baby a few weeks old. He hasn't heard him teach, and nothing in Luke suggests he lived to see the cross or the empty tomb. He saw the beginning, called it salvation, and said it was enough to go on.

Some of you won't see how it turns out: the grandchild grown, the son come home, what becomes of the church you gave your years to. I'm not telling you to be content with that. Simeon wasn't content. He was waiting. But what he was given to see, he recognized, and he held it.

Then the song opens wider than the room. *A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.* Most of us reading this are the Gentiles in that line. A man in Jerusalem, holding a Jewish child, sang about us.

CARRY

What are you hoping to see before you die? Say it plainly. Simeon's song is plain about death. And what if you don't see it? Stay there a moment before you go on. Now look at what you have been given: a beginning, a small thing, a child a few weeks old. What has God put in your arms that you haven't called salvation because it wasn't finished yet?

> *What has God already let you see?*

PRAY

Lord, I want to see how things end, and you've shown me beginnings. Give me eyes to know your salvation when it's in my arms.

O King of the nations and their desire, the cornerstone who make the two one: come and save humankind, whom you formed from clay. Amen.

A SWORD

READ Luke 2:33–35

> 33 And his father and his mother
> marveled at what was said about him. 34
> And Simeon blessed them and said to
> Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is
> appointed for the fall and rising of many
> in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed 35
> (and a sword will pierce through your
> own soul also), so that thoughts from
> many hearts may be revealed." *Luke 2:33–35*

LOOK CLOSER

His father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. They're still marveling when Simeon blesses them and turns to Mary.

Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed.

There's no softening this. The child in his arms will not be good news to everyone. People will fall over him. He'll be spoken against. And Simeon says what it's for: *so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.* Where this child goes, what is in people comes out.

Then, in the middle of the sentence, to his mother: *a sword will pierce through your own soul also.*

> **SWORD**
>
> ῥομφαία *rhomphaia*
>
> "a large and broad sword"; in Luke 2:35, "in imagery for pain or anguish" (BDAG)

She's a new mother, and a stranger tells her that loving this child will run her through. Luke doesn't say what she felt, and Simeon doesn't say when. If I look ahead, past these chapters, I can see where the opposition ends: at *the place that is called The Skull* (Luke 23:33). Mary can't look ahead. She's given the sword and no date.

This is the day to say plainly what we're waiting for. The revealing Simeon speaks of isn't finished. The same Jesus is coming again, and on that day the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed, mine among them, and there will be falling and rising. Later in this Gospel Jesus uses the word Luke chose for Simeon's waiting, about servants *waiting for their master to come home* (12:36). That's us. Advent remembers a child, and it waits for a Judge who was once small enough to be held.

I don't know how to make that comfortable. I don't think Simeon was trying to.

CARRY

Where this child goes, what is in people comes out. Is there a part of you that you'd keep him out of, if you could?

> *What would be revealed in you?*

PRAY

Lord Jesus, you're the sign I'd rather admire than be searched by. Search me anyway. I don't know what you'll find.

O Emmanuel, our king and lawgiver, the hope of the nations and their Savior: come and save us, O Lord our God. Amen.

O EMMANUEL · DECEMBER 23

DAY 26 · THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24

TO ALL WHO WERE WAITING

READ Luke 2:36–38

> 36 And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, 37 and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. 38 And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. *Luke 2:36–38*

LOOK CLOSER

Luke slows down for Anna. He gives her father's name and her tribe. Seven years of marriage. And then the long line: *and then as a widow until she was eighty-four.*

He doesn't tell us about the day her husband died, or the first year after. He tells us where she went with it. *Worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.* Year after year of that.

Some of you are reading this alone tonight. There's a chair that's empty this year, or has been for many years, and Christmas Eve is when you feel it most. I won't tell you Anna's life is the pattern for yours, or that being widowed is a calling. Luke doesn't say that. He shows a woman who lost the life she expected, and God did not set her aside. She was there *at that very hour*. She saw him. And she became the one who told the others.

Look at who she tells. *All who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.* It's the same word Luke used for Simeon. There were more of them. There always are: people who have kept waiting when there was little to see. She found them, and she began *to speak of him*.

If you gather with the church tonight, you'll be standing among people like that. Some of them have waited a long time. Look around you. Tomorrow we read what the shepherds found.

CARRY

If there's an empty chair tonight, whose is it? You can say the name. What did you expect your life to look like by now, and where did you go with it when it didn't turn out that way? Anna went to the temple and stayed. Where have you gone? Then look around the way she did. Who else do you know that has been waiting a long time: in your row at church, on your street, in your own family? Do they know you're waiting too?

> *Who is waiting alongside you, and what could you tell them about him?*

PRAY

Lord, you saw Anna through every one of those years. See the ones who are alone tonight, and see me. Put us where you are going to be, and give us someone to tell. Amen.

CHRISTMAS

THE CHRIST CANDLE

The Shepherds · Luke 2:1–20



CHRISTMAS

THE CHRIST CANDLE

The Shepherds · Luke 2:1–20

THE CANDLE

the Christ candle

VERSE TO KEEP

"Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10–11)

THE QUESTION

What will you treasure up and ponder?

HYMN

While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks

27

DAY 27 · FRIDAY, DECEMBER 25

GLORIFYING AND PRAISING GOD

READ Luke 2:1–20

> 1 In those days a decree went out from
> Caesar Augustus that all the world
> should be registered. 2 This was the first
> registration when Quirinius was
> governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be
> registered, each to his own town. 4 And
> Joseph also went up from Galilee, from
> the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the
> city of David, which is called Bethlehem,
> because he was of the house and lineage
> of David, 5 to be registered with Mary,
> his betrothed, who was with child. 6 And
> while they were there, the time came for
> her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to
> her firstborn son and wrapped him in
> swaddling cloths and laid him in a
> manger, because there was no place for
> them in the inn. 8 And in the same

region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10 And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” 15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16 And they went with

> haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. *Luke 2:1–20*

LOOK CLOSER

You've heard this more times than you can count. Hear it this morning as something that happened.

It begins with the most powerful man in the world. Caesar speaks, and *all the world* has to move. Inside that sentence, almost lost in it, a man from Nazareth takes his betrothed to Bethlehem, and *the time came for her to give birth*. Luke has done this all the way through.

He names the great in a line, and then he turns to the small.

Then a field at night, and men at work. An angel comes and they're *filled with great fear*, like Zechariah, like Mary. They're told what those two were told: *Fear not.* And the sign they're given hardly looks like one. *A baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.* God has come to see about his people, and he has come as someone who has to be wrapped up and laid down.

Heaven sings what it means. *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.*

Think of the people we've walked with. A priest who couldn't believe it, and was given months of silence and then a song. His wife, who said *he looked on me*. A young woman who asked how, and then said *let it be to me*. Neighbors who rejoiced, and then were afraid. A man who held the child and said he could go in peace. A widow who told the

others. And now shepherds, who *went with haste* and found it *as it had been told them*.

Four candles and a fifth: hope, love, joy, peace, and the One they were lit for. Four songs: Mary's, Zechariah's, the angels', Simeon's. Every one of them is about what God has done.

He has visited his people. He is coming again. This morning sits between the two.

Each of these people answered what they heard and saw. Some asked. Some sang. Mary does something quieter. *Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.* You can do that today. You don't have to say anything yet.

And the shepherds went back. Their work hadn't changed. They had.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

CARRY

Look back over these twenty-seven days. Which of these people have you been? The one who wanted proof. The one who said *let it be to me*. The neighbor who was glad and then afraid. The one still waiting in the temple. What did you hear this Advent that you hadn't heard before? What did you see? Tomorrow the ordinary days start again, the way they did for the shepherds. What do you want to take back into them?

> *What will you treasure up and ponder?*

PRAY

Father, you looked on us, and you came. Glory to you in the highest. I have heard, and I have seen. Send me back to my ordinary days the way you sent them back to theirs. Amen.

While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around.

While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks (Nahum Tate, 1700), stanza 1

FOUR CANDLES AND A FIFTH

If you worship with us this Advent, you'll see a wreath at the front of the room: a ring of evergreen with four candles around it and one in the middle. Each Sunday one more is lit. Here's what you're looking at.

The wreath isn't in the Bible, and it isn't ancient. It's traced to a man named Johann Hinrich Wichern. In 1839 he was running the Rauhes Haus, a home for poor children in Hamburg, and to help them through the wait for Christmas he set candles around a wagon wheel: small ones for the weekdays and a large one for each Sunday. One more was lit every day, so the light grew as Christmas came closer. Over the years the wheel became the smaller wreath with four candles, and many churches added a fifth.

So it's a custom, and a fairly young one. We keep it because it does one thing well. It lets a

room full of people see what waiting looks like.

Christians have read the circle as the love of God, which has no end, and the evergreen as the life he gives, which stays green through the winter.

Three of the candles are purple. Purple is the church's old color for seasons of repentance, and it's there to remind us that Advent is sober as well as glad. The third candle is rose. It's lit on the Sunday called *Gaudete*, when the season stops for joy. The candle in the center is white, the color of the church's feasts, and it's lit on Christmas Eve.

The candles have gone by different names in different churches, and in different orders. Ours are Hope, Love, Joy and Peace, and then the Christ candle. In this guide each one belongs to a household God came to in Luke 1 and 2.

Hope · Zechariah and Elizabeth. An old couple, a prayer of many years, and the

sentence *your prayer has been heard* (1:13).

Love · Mary. Favor that came looking for a young woman in Nazareth: *you have found favor with God* (1:30).

Joy · the house in the hill country. A son is born, a name is written on a tablet, and a man who had been silent *spoke, blessing God* (1:64).

Peace · Simeon and Anna. A man holds the child in the temple and says, *now you are letting your servant depart in peace* (2:29).

The Christ candle · the shepherds, and the child they found. *Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord* (2:11).

Watch what happens to the room over these weeks. On the first Sunday there's one small flame, and most of the wreath is dark. Nothing we do in Advent makes the light come faster. We light what's given that week, and we wait for the rest. By Christmas Eve

the whole ring is burning, with the white candle in the middle of it.

These chapters go the same way. The light arrives one household at a time, and then the One the others were lit for.

THE SONGS OF LUKE

Four times in these two chapters, someone answers what God has done with words the church has been singing ever since. Luke only says that they *said* them. They've been heard as songs from very early on.

You've read all four in pieces on the daily pages. Here they are whole, because the church has prayed them far more than it has studied them. For many centuries Christians have said Zechariah's song at morning prayer, Mary's at evening prayer, and Simeon's last thing at night. The angels' line opens one of the oldest hymns of Sunday worship. Each song is known by its first words in the Latin Bible.

Pray them slowly. Every one of them is about what God has done.

Mary's song · the *Magnificat* · prayed in the evening

46 And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the
Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my
Savior, 48 for he has looked on the humble
estate of his servant. For behold, from
now on all generations will call me
blessed; 49 for he who is mighty has done
great things for me, and holy is his name.
50 And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation. 51 He has
shown strength with his arm; he has
scattered the proud in the thoughts of
their hearts; 52 he has brought down the
mighty from their thrones and exalted
those of humble estate; 53 he has filled the
hungry with good things, and the rich he
has sent away empty. 54 He has helped his
servant Israel, in remembrance of his
mercy, 55 as he spoke to our fathers, to
Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

Luke 1:46–55

Zechariah's song · the *Benedictus* · prayed in the morning

68 “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for
he has visited and redeemed his people 69
and has raised up a horn of salvation for
us in the house of his servant David, 70 as
he spoke by the mouth of his holy
prophets from of old, 71 that we should be
saved from our enemies and from the
hand of all who hate us; 72 to show the
mercy promised to our fathers and to
remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath
that he swore to our father Abraham, to
grant us 74 that we, being delivered from
the hand of our enemies, might serve him
without fear, 75 in holiness and
righteousness before him all our days. 76
And you, child, will be called the prophet
of the Most High; for you will go before
the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give
knowledge of salvation to his people in
the forgiveness of their sins, 78 because of
the tender mercy of our God, whereby
the sunrise shall visit us from on high 79 to
give light to those who sit in darkness and

> in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." *Luke 1:68–79*

The angels' song · the *Gloria*

> 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" *Luke 2:14*

Simeon's song · the *Nunc Dimittis* · prayed at night

> 29 "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word;
> 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation
> 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
> 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." *Luke 2:29–32*

FURTHER ALONG

Two books, if you want company past these pages.

Alistair Begg, ***Christmas Playlist: Four Songs That Bring You to the Heart of Christmas*** (The Good Book Company, 2016). A short book on the same four songs printed in this guide: Mary's, Zechariah's, the angels' and Simeon's.

Malcolm Guite, ***Waiting on the Word: A Poem a Day for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany*** (Canterbury Press, 2015). A poem for each day of the season, with Guite's reflection on it. It includes his own sonnets on the seven O Antiphons you prayed in the last week of Advent.

FOR THE CURIOUS

One block for the whole guide. These entries cover the front matter, all twenty-seven days and the back matter.

This is the work underneath the pages. You don't need any of it to use the guide. It's here for anyone who wants to see it.

Scripture quotations are from the ESV. Greek definitions follow BDAG (Bauer, Danker, Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed.). Hebrew definitions follow BDB (Brown, Driver and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*). The one Latin definition follows Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*.

Before the First Candle. The forty days: Leviticus 12:2–4 sets seven days and then thirty-three before a mother comes to the sanctuary after the birth of a son, and Luke 2:22 says Mary and Joseph came *when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses*.

Two Comings. Advent — *adventus* — "a coming" (Lewis and Short). The prayer about the works of darkness is the collect for the First Sunday

in Advent from the Book of Common Prayer, written by Thomas Cranmer for the 1549 Prayer Book; its language comes from Romans 13:12. It's printed, in modern English, on Day 1. *Creator of the Stars of Night* is an anonymous Latin hymn, *Conditor alme siderum*, usually dated somewhere between the seventh and ninth centuries. The English is John Mason Neale's, from the *Hymnal Noted* (1852).

In the Days of Herod. Luke says Zechariah and Elizabeth were *advanced in years* (1:7, 18) and Anna was *advanced in years* (2:36). He doesn't give Simeon's age, or Mary's. That Simeon was old is a fair guess from 2:26 and 2:29, and it's only a guess.

Visited. Visited — ἐπισκέπτομαι — *episkeptomai* — "to exercise oversight in behalf of, look after, make an appearance to help," of divine oversight (BDAG); *epeskepsato*, Luke 1:68. At 1:78 the ESV has "shall visit"; some early manuscripts read "has visited." The Greek Old Testament uses this verb at Genesis 21:1. Behind it there is **visit — פָּקַד — *pāqad* — "attend to, visit, muster, appoint" (BDB)**, a Hebrew verb BDB shows being used both for God's gracious visiting (Genesis 21:1; Ruth 1:6) and for his visiting to punish (Exodus 32:34; Amos 3:2). BDAG lists no sense of judgment for the Greek verb itself, so I haven't claimed one. The edge

in Luke 1–2 comes from what happens in the story (1:20; 1:51–53; 2:34–35), not from the word.
Looked on (1:25) — ἐφοράω — *ephoraō* — "to fix one's glance upon, look at, concern oneself with" (BDAG, under the aorist ἐπεῖδον); *epeiden*, Luke 1:25.
Looked on (1:48) — ἐπιβλέπω — *epiblepō* — "to look attentively at, with implication of personal concern for someone, look upon" (BDAG); *epeblepsen*, Luke 1:48.
These are three different verbs. Some commentators treat Elizabeth's verb as another way of saying "visit"; others point out that it isn't Luke's usual word for it. I've said only that the three describe one act.
Visitation (19:44) — ἐπισκοπή — *episkopē* — a divine visitation "of a salutary kind": "the time of your gracious visitation" (BDAG). Luke 19:44 lies outside Luke 1–2. Bringing it in here is my reading across the whole Gospel.

Day 1. *Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence* is Gerard Moultrie's paraphrase of a prayer from the Liturgy of St. James, first published in 1864 in the second edition of *Lyra Eucharistica*, edited by Orby Shipley. The prayer is the Advent collect named above, put into modern English for this guide. The 1662 wording behind it reads "came to visit us in

great humility," "to judge both the quick and the dead," and "we may rise to the life immortal"; the 1662 book appoints the collect to be said every day of Advent.

Day 2. Reproach — ὄνειδος — *oneidos* — "loss of standing connected with disparaging speech, disgrace, reproach, insult" (BDAG); Luke 1:25. That Luke calls the couple righteous in order to keep their childlessness from being read as a judgment is a point several commentators make on 1:6–7 (Bock, Marshall, Fitzmyer).

Day 3. Luke says only that Zechariah was chosen by lot, *according to the custom of the priesthood* (1:9). Commentators add that there were so many priests that a man might offer the incense only once in his life (Bock and Stein on 1:8–10). Their estimates of the number of priests differ, so I haven't given one, and since Luke doesn't mention it, the once-in-a-lifetime point isn't on the page. Reading the lot as God's choosing follows Proverbs 16:33 and Stein's comment on 1:9. In Acts, Luke shows the apostles choosing Matthias the same way (Acts 1:26). The man with the folded-up longing is my imagining, and the page says so. Luke gives Zechariah's fear (1:12) and nothing else about what was in him.

Day 4. Prayer — δέησις — *deēsis* — "urgent request to meet a need, exclusively addressed to God, prayer" (BDAG); Luke 1:13. Commentators divide over which prayer the angel means: an old prayer for a child, the prayer for Israel offered with the incense, or both at once (Bock, Marshall, Green and Fitzmyer on 1:13). I've left it open on purpose.

Day 5. Be silent — σιωπάω — *siōpaō* — "be silent in the sense lose the ability to speak" (BDAG); Luke 1:20. Zechariah's question follows the wording of Genesis 15:8 in the Greek Old Testament (Nolland on 1:18). Genesis 15:9–21 answers Abraham with a covenant ceremony, and Genesis records no rebuke. Commentators read Zechariah's silence as a judgment that is also a sign and a way of keeping the news until its time (Bock, Marshall, Green and Nolland on 1:20). Why the two men are answered differently is something I've left unresolved here.

Day 6. Luke doesn't mention a blessing. Commentators report, from the Mishnah (*Tamid* 7:2), that the priests came out after the incense and blessed the people with the words of Numbers 6:24–26, which would mean the crowd went home that day without it (Marshall, Nolland and Fitzmyer on 1:21–22). I know that custom only through them, so it isn't on the page.

Day 7. Why Elizabeth hid: the commentators list several possibilities and settle on none (Bock and Green on 1:24). *Reproach*: Rachel says nearly the same thing when her first son is born, *God has taken away my reproach* (Genesis 30:23). *Before God* (1:6) and *he looked on me* (1:25) are different expressions. Reading verse 6 as God's sight on her through the earlier years is my pastoral connection.

Day 8. Naming the Love candle by *favor* is my choice; the word "love" doesn't appear in Luke 1:26–56. **Favor (1:30) — χάρις — *charis* — "a beneficent disposition toward someone, favor, grace, gracious care/help, goodwill" (BDAG).** That Luke introduces Mary without anything to recommend her for God's favor is Green's observation on 1:26–27. *The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came* is Sabine Baring-Gould's English version of the Basque carol *Birjina gaztetto bat zegoen*, which Charles Bordes collected and published in Paris in 1897. The English is usually dated to 1922. The stanza's wording matches the text in a current hymnal (*Complete Anglican Hymns Old and New*, on Hymnary.org); punctuation differs from book to book. The prayer is the Advent collect from Day 1, repeated each Sunday.

Day 9. Favored — χαριτόω — *charitoō* — "to cause to be the recipient of a benefit, bestow

favor on, favor highly, bless" (BDAG); *kecharitōmenē*, Luke 1:28, "one who has been favored (by God)." The older English "full of grace" follows the Latin; BDAG's sense has God as the one who favors. Why Mary was troubled is my wondering, and the page says so. One commentator (Brown) reads her disturbance as part of the pattern of angelic announcements, not as a report of her feelings.

Day 10. The same verb for "favored" is used once more in the New Testament, of all who are in Christ: *his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved* (Ephesians 1:6). That is my ground for letting the reader pray Mary's favor as their own. The throne language of 1:32–33 takes up God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 (Strauss on 1:32–33); I've left it alone here on purpose. The three announcements: 1:13, 1:30, and 2:10, where the ESV has "Fear not."

Day 11. Servant — δούλη — *doulē* — female slave; used "by one of humble station in addressing one of a higher rank or a deity" (BDAG); Luke 1:38, 48. Mary's "since I am a virgin" is literally "since I do not know a man," the biblical idiom for sexual relations (BDAG, γινώσκω). "Nothing will be impossible with God" echoes what the LORD said to Abraham about Sarah (Genesis

18:14). How the two questions differ is disputed. The commentators note how alike they are and locate the difference in the angel's answers and in the narrator's later words (1:20, "you did not believe"; 1:45, "she who believed") (Green and Nolland on 1:34). Reading one question as about knowing and the other as about the thing itself is my way of seeing it, and I've said I'm not sure it is the whole of it.

Day 12. The ESV's "blessed" translates two different Greek words in this speech. **Blessed (1:42) — εὐλογέω — *eulogeō* — "to bestow a favor, provide with benefits" (BDAG)**; *eulogēmenē* and *eulogēmenos*, both in Luke 1:42. **Blessed (1:45) — μακάριος — *makarios* — "pert. to being esp. favored, blessed, fortunate, happy, privileged" (BDAG)**; *makaria*, Luke 1:45. The page doesn't build on the difference. Luke 1:62 suggests Zechariah could not hear as well as not speak, which is one more reason not to say he heard Elizabeth. Setting 1:45 beside 1:20 follows Green and Nolland; "what Luke most wants us to see in Mary" is my reading.

Day 13. Humble estate — ταπείνωσις — *tapeinōsis* — "an unpretentious state or condition, lowliness, humility, humble station" (BDAG); Luke 1:48, where BDAG renders the

phrase "show concern for someone in humble circumstances." "Looked on" is ἐπιβλέπω (see *Visited*, above), a different verb from Elizabeth's in 1:25. The paragraph on honoring Mary is my pastoral counsel drawn from 1:42, 1:45 and 1:47–49.

Day 14. That the song celebrates what God does and is not a call to human action is Green's point on 1:46–55. Brown, on the same verses, reads God's strength as both saving the lowly and punishing his enemies. Commentators differ on what time the past-tense verbs of 1:51–53 refer to (Bock on 1:51). That most of this guide's readers are "the rich" of 1:53 is my judgment about us, not something the commentators say. Mary's stay: *about three months* (1:56).

Day 15. *Gaudete* is the first word of the old Latin opening chant for the third Sunday of Advent, which is taken from Philippians 4:4; rose is the day's color in churches that keep it. **Rejoice — *gaudeo* — *gaudēre* — "to rejoice, be glad or joyful respecting any thing" (Lewis and Short).** *Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding* is Edward Caswall's translation of the Latin hymn *Vox clara ecce intonat*; the stanza is printed as it stands on Hymnary.org (from *Hymns and Devotions for Daily Worship*), and hymnals differ in a few words. Caswall made

the translation in 1849 for his *Lyra Catholica*, where it began "Hark, an awful voice is sounding"; the first line we sing dates from a hymnal of 1852.

Day 16. Shown great (1:58) — μεγαλύνω — *megalynō* — "to cause to be large ... make large/long, make great" (BDAG), where BDAG renders the phrase in Luke 1:58 "show someone great mercy." Its second sense is "exalt, glorify, magnify." That 1:58 repeats the verb of 1:46 is Brown's observation on 1:57–58; the forms are *megalynei* (1:46) and *emegalynen* (1:58). Linking these neighbors to the "people" of 1:25 is my inference; Luke doesn't make it.

Day 17. Luke doesn't say how Elizabeth knew the name. The signs made to Zechariah (1:62) are why commentators think he could not hear. Naming at circumcision on the eighth day: Genesis 17:12; 21:4 (Brown on 1:59). What Zechariah gave up in the name is my reading of him.

Day 18. Luke doesn't say what Zechariah's first words were, and I haven't treated the blessing of 1:64 as the song of 1:68–79. Why the neighbors were afraid is my reading; Luke gives the fear and not the reason. "Laid them up in their hearts" comes back with Mary in 2:19.

Day 19. *Visited*: see the entry under *Visited*, above. The past tense of 1:68 is not in doubt (it is 1:78 where the manuscripts differ). That the visit is already under way in the two conceptions is Green's point on 1:68. That the song celebrates the Davidic savior more than Zechariah's own son is noted by Nolland in his introduction to Luke 1:5–25. The enemies: Strauss, on 1:71 and 1:74, hears national deliverance in these lines, and I've let them mean that until the song itself moves on.

Day 20. Serve — λατρεύω — *latreuō* — "serve, in our lit. only of the carrying out of religious duties, esp. of a cultic nature, by human beings" (BDAG); Luke 1:74. **Without fear — ἀφόβως — *aphobōs* — "pert. to being without fear of what might happen, fearlessly" (BDAG)**; Luke 1:74. In the song, the fear is of the enemies. Hearing Zechariah's own fear at the altar (1:12) in the line, and applying it to fearful serving, is mine.

Day 21. Tender mercy — σπλάγχνον — *splanchnon* — the inward parts as "the seat and source of love, sympathy, and mercy" (BDAG); Luke 1:78. "Sunrise" translates a word (ἀνατολή) that BDAG glosses as "the dawn, fig., of the coming of the Messiah"; other scholars hear "branch" or "star" in it. "Shall visit": some early manuscripts read "has visited," so I've rested nothing on the tense.

The line about waiting for full day rests on the picture, not the verb. Commentators hear the prophet Isaiah behind 1:79 (Isaiah 9:2; 42:7). That the horizon widens here beyond Israel is Green's reading of 1:79, and he calls it only a beginning.

The O Antiphons (Days 19–25). The Latin texts are the Liturgy of the Hours texts of the Magnificat antiphons, read for this guide on the Catholic Resources lectionary site; the English is my own translation, made for this guide. They are sung at evening prayer with the Magnificat from December 17 to 23 and are thought to go back to about the sixth century. *O Sapientia* draws its language from Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon, books Protestants do not count as Scripture; it is printed here as a prayer of the church. Scriptural sources: O Sapientia, Sirach 24:3 and Wisdom 8:1; O Adonai, Exodus 3:2 and 6:6; O Radix Jesse, Isaiah 11:10 and 52:15 (as listed in the table of the antiphons on the Catholic Resources lectionary site).

Day 22. *Hail to the Lord Who Comes* is John Ellerton's hymn for the Presentation; the stanza is printed as it stands on Hymnary.org (from *Ancient and Modern*), which dates the hymn to 1880. The forty days: see *Before the First Candle*, above.

Day 23. Waiting — προσδέχομαι — *prosdechomai* — "to look forward to, wait for" (BDAG); BDAG lists both Luke 2:25 and 2:38 under this sense. **Consolation — παράκλησις — *paraklēsis* — "comfort, consolation"; in Luke 2:25, "the consolation of Israel (i.e. Messianic salvation)" (BDAG)**. The two birds are the offering Leviticus 12:8 provides for a mother who cannot afford a lamb. Commentators think this probably signals poverty but say it can't be certain (Stein on 2:24), so the page sets the two texts side by side and stops there. Luke gives neither Simeon's age nor says that he was old (Bock on 2:25).

Day 24. Depart — ἀπολύω — *apolyō* — a "euphemism for let die"; "perh. discharge from Simeon's long vigil" (BDAG); Luke 2:29. Brown reads it of death and Nolland of a servant released from his watch; I've kept both. "All peoples" and the Gentiles: Brown and Green on 2:30–32, who also hear the prophet Isaiah behind these lines (Isaiah 49:6; 52:10).

Day 25. Sword — ῥομφαία — *rhomphaia* — "a large and broad sword"; in Luke 2:35 "in imagery for pain or anguish" (BDAG). Sign — σημεῖον — *sēmeion* — "a sign or distinguishing mark whereby something is known" (BDAG), which groups 2:34 with signs of warning. Whether

the "thoughts" of 2:35 are only hostile ones is disputed (Brown says yes; others say both kinds), and I haven't ruled on it. Green calls 2:34–35 the first clear sign that Luke's story will be one of conflict. Naming the cross here (Luke 23:33) is my look ahead; Luke does not place Mary at the cross. The paragraph on the second coming is a move across the whole of Scripture, not something 2:34–35 says by itself. The same verb for waiting is used at Luke 12:36 and at Titus 2:13, *waiting for our blessed hope* (BDAG).

Day 26. The Greek of 2:37 can mean that Anna was eighty-four years old or that she had been a widow for eighty-four years; the ESV takes the first, and I've followed it (Bock, Marshall and Brown discuss both). "She did not depart from the temple" should not be pressed to mean she lived there (Bock, Marshall and Brown on 2:37). **Redemption — λύτρωσις — *lytrōsis* — "experience of being liberated from an oppressive situation ... ransoming, releasing, redemption" (BDAG)**; Luke 2:38, and 1:68. What the page says to the widowed is my pastoral word; Luke draws no lesson from Anna's widowhood.

Day 27. "Inn" (2:7): BDAG says the word is "best understood here as lodging ... or guest-room," so there is no innkeeper in the story. "All the people"

(2:10) is Israel in the first place (Fitzmyer, Bock and Brown); the wider reach is in "all the world" (2:1, on Green's reading) and in the angels' song. **Pleased (2:14) — εὐδοκία — *eudokia* — "state or condition of being favored, favor, good pleasure" (BDAG)**: the peace is for those on whom God's favor rests, a different word from the "favor" spoken to Mary. **Pondering — συμβάλλω — *symballō* — "to give careful thought to, consider, ponder" (BDAG)**; Luke 2:19. *While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks* is Nahum Tate's paraphrase of Luke 2:8–14, first printed in the 1700 supplement to Tate and Brady's *New Version of the Psalms of David*. The stanza was checked against the text at the Choral Public Domain Library.

The O Antiphons, December 20–23. Scriptural sources: O Clavis David, Isaiah 22:22 and 42:7; O Oriens, Malachi 4:2 and Luke 1:78–79; O Rex Gentium, Haggai 2:7 and Ephesians 2:14; O Emmanuel, Isaiah 7:14 (from the same table). Hearing Genesis 2:7 behind "formed from clay" in O Rex Gentium is my own identification.

Four Candles and a Fifth. Wichern's wheel is described by the Diakonie, the organization that grew out of his work: 1839, the Rauhes Haus in Hamburg, a wagon wheel with small candles and four large ones, one lit each day for children from

very poor homes. Its own page gives two different counts for the candles, so the guide gives none. The Church of England's guidance on the Advent wreath describes three purple candles with a pink one for the third Sunday and a white or gold one in the center, and says plainly that "there are several traditions about the meaning or theme of each candle." It has the center candle lit on Christmas Day; ours is lit on Christmas Eve. The readings of the circle and the evergreen are the traditional ones, offered as devotional meaning, not as history. Matching the candles to the households of Luke 1–2 is this guide's arrangement, not a tradition.

The Songs of Luke. Luke introduces each of the four with a verb of speaking, not singing (1:46; 1:67; 2:13; 2:28). The Latin titles are the opening words of each in the Latin Bible. In the daily prayer of the Western church the *Benedictus* belongs to morning prayer, the *Magnificat* to evening prayer and the *Nunc Dimittis* to night prayer, and Luke 2:14 opens the hymn *Gloria in excelsis Deo*. The three assignments are the traditional ones (Lauds, Vespers and Compline in the Roman rite; Morning and Evening Prayer in the Book of Common Prayer).

Further Along. Begg's details were read on the publisher's page (The Good Book Company; first

published October 2016). Guite's publisher is Canterbury Press; booksellers' listings give 2015 for the first edition.

Works named above.

Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Baker, 1994), on Luke 1:5–25, 1:51 and 2:25–38.

Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Doubleday, 1977; updated ed. 1993), on Luke 1:26–66 and 2:22–38.

Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX*, Anchor Bible 28 (Doubleday, 1981), on Luke 1:5–25 and 2:10.

Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Eerdmans, 1997), on Luke 1:8–79 and 2:1–35.

I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1978), on Luke 1:5–25 and 2:36–38.

John Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary 35A (Word, 1989), on Luke 1:5–38 and 2:29.

Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, New American Commentary 24 (Broadman, 1992), on Luke 1:8–10 and 2:24.

Mark L. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts: The Promise and Its Fulfillment in Lukan Christology*, JSNTSup 110 (Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), on Luke 1:32–33 and 1:68–79.

whereby the sunrise shall visit us
from on high

LUKE 1:78

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. ESV Text Edition: 2025. The ESV text may not be quoted in any publication made available to the public by a Creative Commons license. The ESV may not be translated in whole or in part into any other language. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ESTRELLA MOUNTAIN CHURCH · GOODYEAR, ARIZONA · ADVENT 2026