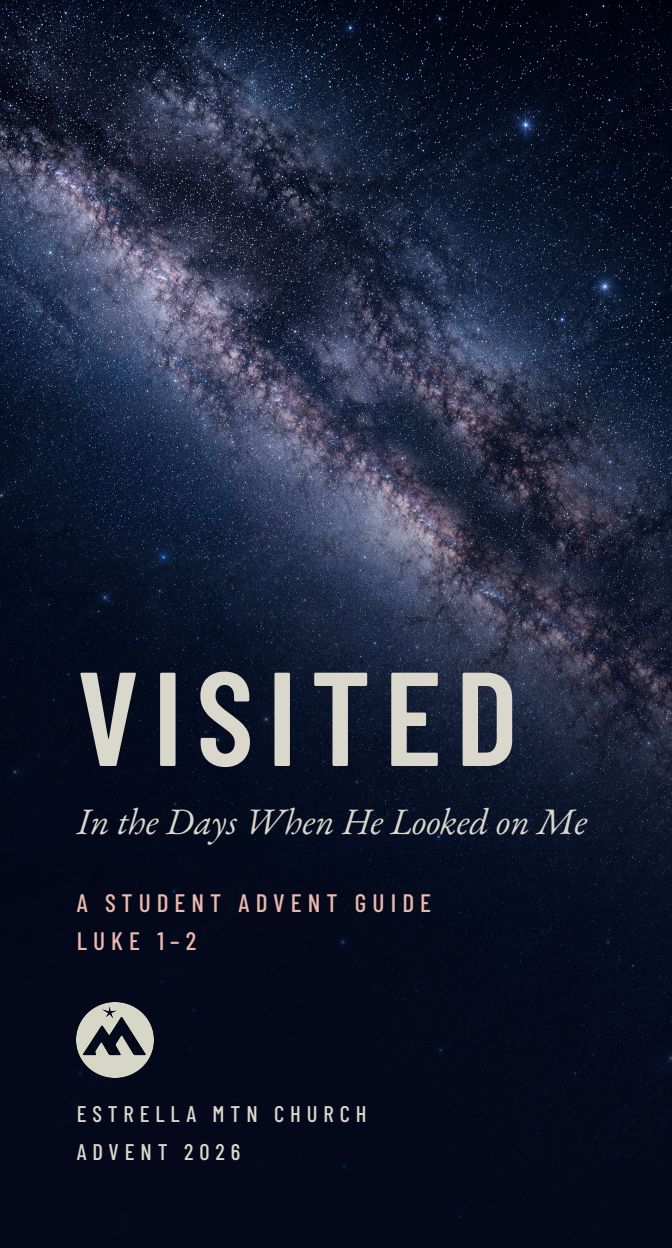

VISITED

In the Days When He Looked on Me

A STUDENT ADVENT GUIDE
LUKE 1-2

ESTRELLA MTN CHURCH
ADVENT 2026

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IF THIS IS HEAVY

HOW THIS WORKS

This is a guide to the first two chapters of Luke, from November 29 to Christmas. It takes about five minutes a day. It's built to be read on your phone, on your own or with a group.

Luke tells a story about God showing up, in person, to particular people: an old priest, a woman who couldn't have kids, a teenage girl, an old man waiting in the temple, some shepherds on a night shift. The word for it is *visited*. This guide is about what those people did with it, and what you do.

What a day looks like.
Read. A few verses, printed word for word.
Notice. A short look at what's actually on the page.
Wrestle. A question that doesn't get answered here. On purpose.
Pray. A few lines you can say, change, or skip.

Two labels.

JUST YOU This one is between you and God, or you and a notebook. Nobody should ever ask you to share it.

BRING TO THE GROUP Good for talking about with other people, if you're in a group.

What this guide won't do. It won't tell you how you're supposed to feel. It won't wrap up a hard question with a neat answer. Sometimes it says "Luke doesn't tell us." When it does, it means that. If a day lands flat, skip it and come back.

The Do Not Be Afraid / Fear Not hunt. Three times in these chapters, God's messenger says those words: to Zechariah, to Mary, and to some shepherds. Keep a count.

☐ Zechariah ☐ Mary ☐ the shepherds

If it gets heavy. Some of this is about waiting for something that hasn't come, being talked about, and being afraid. If that touches something real, turn to ***If this is heavy***.

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 CARRY

"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)

What is hope? Hope isn't optimism. It's waiting on something God has promised, when nothing around you has changed yet. Luke opens with a couple who had been doing that for a long time.

JUMP TO A DAY

1 2 3 4 5
6 7 Group Help

DAY 1 · SUN, NOV 29

HOPE

READ

Read all of Luke 1:5–25 in your own Bible or app first. It takes about three minutes. Then come back.

Here's why Luke says he wrote his Gospel:

> 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, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. *Luke 1:3–4*

NOTICE

Luke doesn't start with a feeling. He starts with a king (Herod), a priestly division (Abijah), and a temple. He says he has *followed all things closely* and wants you to have *certainty*.

That doesn't prove anything. But it tells you how he wants to be read: as someone claiming that these things happened, not someone offering you a mood. You can believe him or not. Either way, it helps to know what he's claiming.

This week's verse is the first thing an angel says in Luke's Gospel. We'll get to it.

WRESTLE

BRING TO THE GROUP Which part of this story is hardest for you to take seriously: the angel, the old couple, the silence? Why that part?

PRAY

God, I'm starting this honestly. Some of it I believe and some of it I'm not sure about. Meet me where I am. Amen.

DAY 2 · MON, NOV 30

RIGHTEOUS, AND CHILDLESS

READ

> 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. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. *Luke 1:5–7*

NOTICE

Two sentences, side by side. *They were both righteous before God.* And then: *But they had no child.*

Luke puts them next to each other and doesn't explain. In Elizabeth's world, a woman without children was talked about. (She'll have her own word for it by Day 7.)

Luke says she was righteous *before God*, which means God saw it. Both sentences were true on the same day, for years.

You may have heard the idea that if something is going badly, it's because of something you did. Luke won't let that idea touch Elizabeth. He doesn't say why she waited. He just refuses to let her life be read as a punishment.

WRESTLE

JUST YOU Where have you decided that what you don't have is God's opinion of you?

If the answer is heavy, you don't have to write it here. Telling one real person is better than telling a page.

PRAY

God, you saw Elizabeth on every one of those days. You see me on mine. Where I've read my

emptiness as your verdict, tell me the truth.
Amen.

DAY 3 · TUE, DEC 1

THE HOUR OF INCENSE

READ

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

NOTICE

He was chosen by lot. Nobody picked Zechariah. It was his turn, and the lot fell to him, so he went in to burn the incense. Outside, a crowd was praying. Inside, one old priest, alone.

Then an angel is standing next to the altar. And Luke doesn't make Zechariah cool about it. He was *troubled*, and *fear fell upon him*. A priest, in the temple, doing exactly what he was supposed to be doing, and he was terrified.

WRESTLE

BRING TO THE GROUP Be honest. When you read "an angel appeared," what did you think? Luke doesn't scold you for it. He just tells you that Zechariah, who of all people should have been ready, was afraid. Does that make the story easier to believe, or harder?

PRAY

Lord, when you show up, I'm not sure I'm ready. I'm not even sure what I want you to do. Come near anyway. Amen.

DAY 4 · WED, DEC 2

YOUR PRAYER HAS BEEN HEARD

READ

> 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. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 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. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 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*

NOTICE

Your prayer has been heard. Which prayer? Luke doesn't say. It could be a prayer for a child. It could be the prayer for Israel that a priest would pray at that altar. Whichever it was, it wasn't new. Elizabeth's waiting was years old. Israel's was older.

And look at what comes first, before any of the news: **Do not be afraid.** That's one on the hunt. Check the first box in *How This Works*.

Be careful with this page. It doesn't promise you Elizabeth's ending. Some prayers, for a person or a diagnosis or a family, never get that kind of answer. What the angel says is that this one was heard, and that it had been heard for a long time before anything in that house changed.

WRESTLE

JUST YOU What have you prayed for the longest? Do you still pray it? When nothing changes, what does "heard" mean to you?

PRAY

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

DAY 5 · THU, DEC 3

HOW SHALL I KNOW?

READ

> And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." 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. 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*

NOTICE

How shall I know this? It's a reasonable question. He's old, his wife is old, he has the

facts. It's also an old question. Abraham asked God almost the same thing:

> "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" *Genesis 15:8*

Abraham got a covenant. Zechariah got silence. And Gabriel says why: *because you did not believe my words.*

Don't skip past that. It's a judgment, and it falls on a righteous man in the temple on the day the lot chose him. People have offered reasons why Abraham and Zechariah were treated differently. None of them is in the text.

Look at how the sentence ends, though. *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.

WRESTLE

BRING TO THE GROUP Make the case that this is unfair. Then make the case that it isn't. Which was harder?

JUST YOU When you ask God "How shall I know?", what are you actually asking for?

PRAY

Lord, I like to be sure before I trust. I've called that wisdom. I'm not certain it always is. I'm not sure what else to say. Amen.

DAY 6 · FRI, DEC 4

THE PEOPLE WERE WAITING

READ

> And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. 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. And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home. *Luke 1:21–23*

NOTICE

Stand with the crowd for a minute. They were praying outside when he went in. Now they're waiting, and wondering what's taking so long. Then he comes out and can't speak. They figure out he's seen something. That's all they get. A man making signs, and no explanation.

A lot of faith gets lived out there, in the court. Something has happened nearby. You weren't in the room. Nobody can tell you what it meant.

WRESTLE

BRING TO THE GROUP What does it take to believe something you weren't there to see? Is that a fair thing to ask of anyone? Luke says the people *realized* Zechariah had seen a vision. What do you think they based that on?

JUST YOU When did you last sense that God was doing something real, close by, and no one could tell you what it was? What did you do with it?

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 · SAT, DEC 5

IN THE DAYS WHEN HE LOOKED ON ME

READ

> After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, "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*

NOTICE

For five months she kept herself hidden. Luke doesn't say why, so I won't guess. What he gives us is what she says in there, and 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 … when he looked on me.*

For years the eyes she felt on her were other people's. *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.

WORD STUDY

LOOKED ON

ἐφοράω *ephoraō*

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

This guide gets its name from that line.

One honest caution. Elizabeth's reproach was lifted in this story. That isn't a promise that yours will be, on schedule. What Luke gives you is a claim about who is looking.

WRESTLE

JUST YOU Whose eyes have you been living under this year? What do they see when they look at you? What would you want lifted?

PRAY

Lord, look on me. I've lived a long time under other people's eyes, and under my own. Let me live as someone you see. Amen.

GROUP NIGHT

About 30 to 40 minutes. For a student ministry group, a friend group, or anyone meeting once this week.

1. Read it aloud. Read Luke 1:5–25 out loud, with different voices if you can. One person reads the narration, one reads Gabriel, one reads Zechariah.

2. One line. Go around. Each person says one word or phrase that stuck with them. No explaining yet.

3. Pick two. Choose two of these to talk about: the angel (Day 3), is it fair? (Day 5), believing what you weren't there for (Day 6).

4. Close. Read Luke 1:13 together, out loud, once. Stop there.

For the leader.

- Don't resolve the questions. If the group goes quiet, let it. A pause is usually

someone thinking, not a problem.

- Don't make anyone share a "Just you" question. Ever.
- If someone says something heavy, don't fix it in the room. Thank them, check in privately after, and follow EMC's policy for anything involving safety or harm.
- End on time.

WEEK ONE

THE WEEK IN ONE LINE

> *God heard a prayer for years before anything in the house changed. You're allowed to wait, and you're allowed to ask honestly. Both are in the text.*



WEEK TWO

LOVE

Mary · Luke 1:26–56

WEEK TWO

LOVE

Mary · Luke 1:26–56

THE CANDLE

Love

VERSE TO CARRY

"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)

What is love here? The word *love* doesn't appear in Mary's story. What does is *favor*: someone being on your side before you've done a thing to earn it. That's how this passage shows love, and it's harder to receive than it sounds.

JUMP TO A DAY

8 9 10 11 12
13 14 Group Help

DAY 8 · SUN, DEC 6

LOVE

READ

Read all of Luke 1:26–56 in your own Bible or app first, from the angel's greeting to the end of Mary's song. It takes about five minutes. Then come back.

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

NOTICE

An angel comes to a young woman in Nazareth and calls her *favored one*, then says it again: *you have found favor with God.* Luke gives no reason for it. About Zechariah and Elizabeth he told us they were righteous. About Mary he gives us her town, that she was a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, and her name.

So this week the second candle is lit and its name is Love, and the text answers with a

different word. Favor: love that goes looking for someone.

Listen for Mary's question. It's this week's, and it sounds a lot like last week's.

WRESTLE

BRING TO THE GROUP Is it easier for you to believe you're loved when you've earned it, or when you haven't? Why?

PRAY

God, I know how to earn things. I'm less sure how to be given them. Teach me this week. Amen.

DAY 9 · MON, DEC 7

GREATLY TROUBLED

READ

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

NOTICE

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*. She isn't afraid of the angel's wings. She's thrown by being called favored.

I'll wonder out loud here, and I'll say that's what it is: 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. 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 right away. Luke says she *tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.* She stays in the room and thinks.

WRESTLE

JUST YOU When someone gives you more than you earned, a compliment too big, help you didn't ask for, what do you actually do with it? Explain it away? Start working out how to pay it back?

PRAY

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

DAY 10 · TUE, DEC 8

DO NOT BE AFRAID, MARY

READ

> And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 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, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."
>
> *Luke 1:30–33*

NOTICE

Favored one in 1:28, *found favor* in 1:30. That's twice in three verses. Maybe she couldn't take it in the first time.

Then come the biggest words in the chapter: a son who will be great, the Son of the Most High, a throne, a kingdom with no end.

Look at the order. The favor comes first, and then the news. She's told where she stands with God before she's told what God will do. Even the throne is a gift: *the Lord God will give to him.*

A lot of us have spent a long time trying to run that order backwards: do well, then be favored. Gabriel doesn't offer Mary that arrangement.

That's the second time in this story that an angel has said *Do not be afraid.* Check the second box on the hunt in *How This Works*.

WRESTLE

JUST YOU What do you check first to find out where you stand: grades, messages, how the day went, what you got right? When a day goes badly, what do you assume God thinks of you by night?

PRAY

God, say it to me again, because I didn't believe it the first time. Let me know your favor before I know my to-do list. Amen.

DAY 11 · WED, DEC 9

HOW WILL THIS BE?

READ

> And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" 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. 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. For nothing will be impossible with God." 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*

NOTICE

How will this be, since I am a virgin? Notice what Luke does. The objection is already in

the story, in Mary's mouth. Luke knows this is hard to believe, and he puts the problem on the page.

Then Gabriel gives her three things: an explanation (*The Holy Spirit will come upon you*), a sign she didn't ask for (Elizabeth, in her old age), and a sentence: *For nothing will be impossible with God.*

You may have heard this claim all your life. You may be taking it seriously for the first time. You may think it's a story people made up. This guide isn't going to argue you out of any of those places. What I'll say is that Matthew and Luke both tell it, the church has confessed it ever since, and nobody who tells it has pretended it's ordinary.

Now look at last week. An old priest asked *How shall I know this?* and got silence. A young woman asks *How will this be?* and gets an answer. The questions sound alike. Luke doesn't explain the difference, and I'm not going to either.

Then Mary says it: *let it be to me according to your word.* She puts herself at God's disposal before she knows what it will cost.

WRESTLE

BRING TO THE GROUP Why do you think Zechariah got silence and Mary got an explanation? Make a guess, then say what in the text would count against it.

JUST YOU When you question God, are you asking "How can I be sure?" or "How will you do it?" It may be a little of both.

PRAY

God, you know which kind of question I'm asking. I'd like to get to her sentence, and I'm not there about everything. Take me as far as I can go today. Amen.

DAY 12 · THU, DEC 10

THE LEAP

READ

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 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*

NOTICE

Mary goes *with haste* into the hill country, to the house of Zechariah. Think about that house. A man who can't speak. His wife, six months pregnant and not long out of hiding. And now a younger relative at the door with news of her own.

Before Mary explains 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?* Elizabeth 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 he did not believe. Luke

doesn't say she meant anything by it. He just lets both sentences stand in the same house.

WRESTLE

BRING TO THE GROUP Which of God's promises in Scripture do you find hardest to believe will really happen? Keep it to what he has actually said, not what you wish he'd said.

JUST YOU Who has walked into your life lately carrying something better than what you have? What rose in you first?

PRAY

God, make me like Elizabeth, glad for what you're doing in someone else. Where I've stopped believing what you said, help me. Amen.

DAY 13 · FRI, DEC 11

HE HAS LOOKED ON THE HUMBLE ESTATE

READ

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

NOTICE

Read Mary's 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 from last week in another woman's mouth. And *humble estate* isn't Mary being modest. It's where she stood: low, and unnoticed. God looked there.

WORD STUDY

HUMBLE ESTATE

ταπείνωσις *tapeinōsis*

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

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

Some of you grew up in churches that said a lot about Mary. Some of you grew up where she's hardly mentioned outside December. I think the song itself shows how to honor her. Call her blessed; she said we would. Then read the next word: *for. For he who is mighty*

has done great things for me. Her blessing 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.

WRESTLE

JUST YOU Think of a low place in your own life, a year you'd rather not talk about, a time nobody was looking for you. Say what God did there the way Mary would, with him as the subject of the verbs. How do you usually tell that story? Who's in the middle of it?

PRAY

My soul magnifies you, Lord. You've looked on low places in my life that I'd rather no one saw. Holy is your name. Amen.

DAY 14 · SAT, DEC 12

THE RICH HE HAS SENT AWAY EMPTY

READ

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

NOTICE

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 probably 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, and every verb in these lines is God's. The song ends on mercy, too. 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.

WRESTLE

BRING TO THE GROUP Mary is glad about this. Is that okay with you? What do you do with a song you wish said something else?

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

PRAY

God, 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 2

GROUP NIGHT

About 30 to 40 minutes.

1. Read it aloud. Read Luke 1:26–38 together. One person reads the narration, one Gabriel, one Mary. Then read 1:46–55 slowly, all together.

2. One line. Go around. Each person says one word or phrase that stuck with them. No explaining yet.

3. Pick two. Choose two to talk about: the "How will this be?" question and Zechariah's silence (Day 11), glad for someone else (Day 12), or Mary singing about the rich sent away (Day 14).

4. Close. Read Luke 1:30 together, out loud, once. Stop there.

For the leader.

- Day 11 will bring up what people think about the virgin birth. Let them say it,

including doubt. Don't answer it for them.

- Day 14 may feel like a guilt trip. It isn't meant as one. Keep the question on what Mary says, not on anyone's family.
- Don't make anyone share a "Just you" question.
- End on time.

WEEK TWO

THE WEEK IN ONE LINE

> *Favor comes before anything you do. Mary asked "how," and then said "let it be to me." Both are in the text.*



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 CARRY

"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)

What is joy? Joy isn't a mood you can produce. In this week's story, joy comes out of a long silence, and it's something people do together. This Sunday is traditionally the one day of Advent set aside for it.

JUMP TO A DAY

15 16 17 18 19
20 21 Group Help

DAY 15 · SUN, DEC 13

JOY

READ

Read all of Luke 1:57–80 in your own Bible or app first: the birth, the name, and the song. Then come back.

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

NOTICE

The third candle is the rose one, and its name is Joy. For a very long time the church has called this Sunday *Gaudete*, Latin for *rejoice*, after a line that opened its worship that day. 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.*

This week's question belongs to the neighbors. We'll carry it as they asked it: *What then will this child be?*

WRESTLE

BRING TO THE GROUP When have you felt joy that you didn't make happen? What was it like compared to the happy you can produce on purpose?

PRAY

God, I know how to be happy when things go well. Show me the other kind. Amen.

DAY 16 · MON, DEC 14

THE NEIGHBORS REJOICED

READ

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

NOTICE

She bore a son. Four words, after everything. Then 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 come from these same people. Now they hear what the Lord has done, and they're glad with her.

Sit with the neighbors today, because it isn't always an easy seat. You've probably stood in the middle of someone else's good news, glad for them and aching for yourself. Luke shows a whole village doing the first half. Joy in this chapter is something people do together, and you may be doing it this year with empty hands.

WRESTLE

JUST YOU Whose good news is hard for you to be glad about? Stay with that person for a minute. What did they get that you asked for? Have you been keeping count?

PRAY

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

DAY 17 · TUE, DEC 15

HIS NAME IS JOHN

READ

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

NOTICE

On the eighth day they come to name the child, and everyone already knows what the name should be. *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. *None of your relatives is called by this name.* So they turn to the father, who can't speak, and he asks for a writing tablet. Months ago an angel gave him this name, and he couldn't believe there would be a child to give it to. Luke doesn't tell us what the quiet did in him. He tells us what he wrote: *His name is John.*

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

Everyone in the room had a plan for this child's life, built from what was expected. God's plan doesn't match it, and Luke doesn't treat that as a tragedy.

WRESTLE

JUST YOU Whose plan for your life are you living by: a parent's, a coach's, your friends', your own? What happens inside you when you picture it going a different way?

PRAY

God, there are plans for me that I've never questioned. Hand me the tablet. Let me write what you said, even if it doesn't match what anyone expected. Amen.

DAY 18 · WED, DEC 16

WHAT THEN WILL THIS CHILD BE?

READ

> And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, 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*

NOTICE

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 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, and now they're afraid. I don't think they changed their minds about the baby. They've seen how close God has come. He's 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 that close.

So the story travels through all the hill country, 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.

WRESTLE

BRING TO THE GROUP The neighbors went from glad to afraid. When God gets this close, which are you, and what does that tell you?

JUST YOU What has happened near you that you've put away and don't understand yet?

PRAY

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

DAY 19 · THU, DEC 17

HE HAS VISITED AND REDEEMED

READ

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

NOTICE

Now we hear what the silence was holding. *Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied.* And there it is, the word this guide is named for: *he has visited and redeemed his people.*

WORD STUDY

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. So when Zechariah says God *has visited*, he means God has come to look after his people himself.

Look at the tense. *Has visited.* The child Gabriel promised to Mary isn't born yet. Nothing in Judea looks different. Zechariah sings it as done, and it has only begun. 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.

WRESTLE

BRING TO THE GROUP Zechariah says God *has visited and redeemed* while the baby isn't born and nothing visible has changed. Is that faith, or wishful thinking? How would you tell the difference?

JUST YOU What has God begun in your life that you still talk about as if it hasn't started?

PRAY

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

DAY 20 · FRI, DEC 18

TO SERVE HIM WITHOUT FEAR

READ

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

NOTICE

The song reaches further back now, behind David, to the oath God swore to 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 so

that we might be left alone. Zechariah says: so that we might *serve.*

WORD STUDY

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.

WRESTLE

JUST YOU Think about what you do for God in an ordinary week: showing up, serving, trying to be good. How much of it is fear: of getting it wrong, of not being enough, of what people would think? What would your serving be like without that?

PRAY

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

DAY 21 · SAT, DEC 19

THE SUNRISE FROM ON HIGH

READ

> And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." 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*

NOTICE

And you, child. Zechariah turns and speaks to the baby, and the neighbors' question finally gets its answer. This child will be *the prophet of the Most High*, and 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. 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.* 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 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.

WRESTLE

JUST YOU What do you need forgiven that you've been calling something else? Being direct. Being busy. Being careful. What would you call it if you were telling the truth to someone who already knew?

BRING TO THE GROUP If you're 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 to be rescued from other people more than forgiven myself. Give me both, and visit the ones sitting in the dark tonight. Amen.

WEEK 3

GROUP NIGHT

About 30 to 40 minutes.

1. Read it aloud. Read Luke 1:57–66 together, then Zechariah's song (1:67–79) slowly, one person reading and everyone else listening.

2. One line. Go around. Each person says one word or phrase that stuck with them. No explaining yet.

3. Pick two. Choose two: glad or not glad for someone else's good news (Day 16), living by someone else's plan (Day 17), faith or wishful thinking (Day 19), or fear in serving (Day 20).

4. Close. Read Luke 1:68 together, out loud, once. Stop there.

For the leader.

- Day 19 asks a real question about whether faith is honest. Let the group stay in it.

Don't rescue them from it.

- Day 17 may touch family pressure. Keep it to the question, not anyone's family.
- Don't make anyone share a "Just you" question.
- End on time.

WEEK THREE

THE WEEK IN ONE LINE

> *God has visited, and Zechariah sang it before he could see it. Joy came out of a long silence.*



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 CARRY

"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? (This one isn't in Luke's words. It's ours, to carry beside Simeon's song.)

A NOTE ON THE ORDER

In Luke, the shepherds come before Simeon and Anna. We're holding the shepherds for Christmas.

What is peace? Peace isn't quiet. In this story, peace is what a man feels when he has finally seen what God promised. And a few lines later, the same man says something very hard. Both are in the passage, and we're going to read both.

JUMP TO A DAY

22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26

Group Help

DAY 22 · SUN, DEC 20

PEACE

READ

Read all of Luke 2:22–38 in your own Bible or app first. Then come back.

> "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*

NOTICE

The fourth candle is lit today, and its name is Peace. We've stepped out of Luke's order. The shepherds can wait for Christmas. 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.

There's no question in the text this week, so here's one to carry beside Simeon's song: *What are you still waiting to see?*

WRESTLE

BRING TO THE GROUP What does peace mean to you when it isn't "calm"? Where have you felt it?

PRAY

God, I've had calm without peace and peace without calm. Show me which this is. Amen.

DAY 23 · MON, DEC 21

TWO TURTLEDOVES

READ

> 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 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” 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. 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. 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, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,
>
> *Luke 2:22–28*

NOTICE

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:

> And if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean.
>
> *Leviticus 12:8*

So the offering was a lamb, unless the family couldn't afford a lamb. Set the two passages side by side and see what kind of household God chose.

Into that scene comes a man Luke introduces carefully: *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'd waited. He tells us what Simeon was waiting for, and that he'd been promised he'd see it.

WORD STUDY

WAITING

προσδέχομαι *prosdechomai*

to look forward to, wait for (BDAG)

Look how he gets there. *He came in the Spirit into the temple.* Nothing about this couple 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.*

WRESTLE

JUST YOU What are you still waiting to see? Say it in a sentence. Is your waiting resting on something God has said, or on something you've hoped?

BRING TO THE GROUP Simeon found what he'd been waiting for in a couple with two birds. What might you walk past because it looks too ordinary?

PRAY

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

DAY 24 · TUE, DEC 22

DEPART IN PEACE

READ

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

NOTICE

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 wouldn't see death before this day. It's also what you'd say to someone released from his post. The watch is over, and he can stand down. I hear both.

Notice what he has seen. *My eyes have seen your salvation.* He's 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 family member who isn't well, what happens with a friend, what your own life becomes. 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.

If someone you love has died, this page may weigh more than the others. That's not a sign anything is wrong with you. See *If this is heavy* if you need it.

WRESTLE

JUST YOU 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.

BRING TO THE GROUP What has God already let you see, even if it's only a beginning?

PRAY

God, 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. Amen.

DAY 25 · WED, DEC 23

A SWORD

READ

> And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 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 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." *Luke 2:33–35*

NOTICE

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 that. The child in his arms will not be good news to everyone. And Simeon says what it's for: *so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.* Where this child goes, what's inside people comes out.

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

WORD STUDY

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.

Here is where it was heading. Later in Luke, when Jesus is grown, people turn against him and he's put to death:

> And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. *Luke 23:33*

This is what Christians have always said that death was: not an accident, but why he came.

> God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
>
> *Romans 5:8*

And they say it wasn't the end. Some women go to his tomb and are told:

> "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."
>
> *Luke 24:5–6*

I'm saying this plainly because the whole Gospel is walking toward it, and I'd be hiding something if I skipped it. I'm not going to claim I've explained how a death can do what Christians say it does. People have tried for two thousand years, and none of the explanations is the whole thing. What the passage gives you is Simeon's warning that this child divides people, and the claim of the

rest of the Gospel that the dividing line runs through a cross.

If this is new to you, or you're not sure what you think, that's an honest place to be. Talk to your youth leader. You don't have to settle it tonight.

Advent also waits for something else: that same Jesus coming back, and every heart being revealed. Later in this Gospel, Jesus describes servants waiting for their master to come home (Luke 12:35–36). That's us. The child in Simeon's arms is the one we're waiting on.

WRESTLE

BRING TO THE GROUP Simeon says people will react to this child, some falling and some rising. Where do you see people reacting to Jesus today? What's your own reaction, if you're honest?

JUST YOU 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. Amen.

DAY 26 · THU, DEC 24

TO ALL WHO WERE WAITING

READ

> 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, 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. 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*

NOTICE

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 with an empty chair in your life tonight. Someone has died, or left, or isn't speaking to your family. 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.* There were more of them than just Simeon. There always are, people who've 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. Look

around.

WRESTLE

JUST YOU If there's an empty chair tonight, whose is it? 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?

BRING TO THE GROUP Who do you know that's been waiting a long time for something? Do they know you're waiting too?

PRAY

God, 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.

WEEK 4

GROUP NIGHT

About 30 to 40 minutes.

1. Read it aloud. Read Luke 2:22–38 together. One person reads the narration, one Simeon's song (2:29–32), one Simeon's words to Mary (2:34–35).

2. One line. Go around. Each person says one word or phrase that stuck with them. No explaining yet.

3. Pick two. Choose two: waiting and the ordinary (Day 23), seeing only a beginning (Day 24), where people react to Jesus (Day 25), or the empty chair (Day 26).

4. Close. Read Luke 2:29–30 together, out loud, once. Stop there.

For the leader.

- Day 25 names the cross and the resurrection plainly. Don't turn the group into a persuasion session. Let students say

what they think, including "I don't know."

- Day 24 and Day 26 may touch loss. Let the quiet be quiet. Don't ask anyone to explain their empty chair.
- Don't make anyone share a "Just you" question.
- End on time.

WEEK FOUR

THE WEEK IN ONE LINE

> *Simeon saw a beginning and called it salvation. Peace here costs something: a sword, and a cross.*

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 CARRY

"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? (Luke 2:19)

A note on the order. Luke tells of the shepherds before Simeon and Anna. We held them for Christmas, so you're reading the birth last. The Christ candle is lit on Christmas Eve.

JUMP TO A DAY

27 | Group | Help

DAY 27 · FRI, DEC 25

GLORIFYING AND PRAISING GOD

READ

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 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, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 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.

Luke 2:1–7

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 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. 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. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" *Luke 2:8–14*

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." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. *Luke 2:15–20*

NOTICE

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 fiancée 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, then turns to the small.

Luke names Caesar and Quirinius, and that's a risk. Historians have long argued about how Luke's mention of a registration under Quirinius fits with the rest of what we know, and with Luke's own note that this began in the days of Herod. People have offered ways to fit them together. None of them is settled, and I'm not going to pretend it is. Luke put real names in his story anyway. That's what someone does who thinks it happened.

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.* That's the third time, so check the third box on the hunt. 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's come as someone who has to be wrapped up and laid down.

WORD STUDY

SIGN

σημεῖον *sēmeion*

a sign or distinguishing mark whereby someth. is known, sign, token, indication (BDAG)

Luke uses this same word for what Simeon said about the child: *a sign that is opposed.* The baby in the manger and the child who divides people are one sign. You don't have to pick the soft one.

Think of the people we've walked with. A priest who couldn't believe it, 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, 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.*

Each of them 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.

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

WRESTLE

BRING TO THE GROUP Which of these people have you been this Advent: 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?

JUST YOU What will you treasure up and ponder? Tomorrow the ordinary days start again, the way they did for the shepherds. What do you want to take back into them?

PRAY

God, 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.

GROUP NIGHT

About 30 minutes. For the first gathering after Christmas, or whenever it fits.

1. Read it aloud. Read Luke 2:1–20 together, slowly.

2. Look back. Go around: of everyone we met in these twenty-seven days, who did you recognize yourself in?

3. One line. What's the one thing you want to keep?

4. Close. Read Luke 2:19 together, out loud, once. Stop there.

For the leader. Don't summarize the guide. Let them say what stayed. Thank them for being honest. End on time.

THE WEEK IN ONE LINE

> *He has visited, and he is coming again. In between, we're the ones who treasure it up, and go back to the ordinary days different.*

IF THIS IS HEAVY

Some of what's in these chapters is about waiting for something that hasn't happened, being talked about, and being afraid. If reading it stirs up something real, you haven't done anything wrong, and nobody is going to think you're weird for it.

You don't have to carry it alone.

Tell one person this week. A parent, a youth leader, a teacher you trust. You don't have to explain it well. "Something's been heavy lately" is enough to start.

Your youth leader: Dave Simms · ignite@emcaz.org

If you're thinking about hurting yourself or ending your life, or you're worried that someone else is, call or text **988** (the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in the US, free, any hour).

If you or someone else is in danger right now, call **911**.

A guide on a phone can't sit with you. People can.

whereby the sunrise shall visit us
from on high

LUKE 1:78

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