



Look... Learn... Lead Study Guide

Looking for the Holy Spirit's direction

Learning through God's Word

Leading others in a personal relationship with Christ

Sermon Series

"Simple Joy"

WEEK 2

Sunday, December 9, 2018 — Simple Joy for Simple People (Luke 1:39-44, 46-49 and 52-53)

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy." ... And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name ... He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty."

Monday, December 10, 2018 — Good News: A Son Who Will Be a Joy and a Delight (Luke 1:5-20)

"Because there were [an estimated 18,000] priests, special duties had to be assigned by lot.... This occasion was likely Zechariah's only opportunity to perform this service during his lifetime." ¹ It seems likely that when Zechariah awoke on this morning, he already thought this would be a day he'd remember for the rest of his life. Yet little did he know how true that would be!

- We might think Zechariah and Elizabeth had given up their hope for a child. The angel's words in verse 13 ("Your prayers have been heard") implied otherwise. As in Abraham and Sarah's story (Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7), God's messenger said Elizabeth would bear the child they'd prayed for all those years. Was that "good news" (verse 19) "too good

to be true"? Zechariah struggled to believe it. Are you ever tempted to see faith and hope as naive and foolish? Have you known any people of faith who were anything but naive and foolish?

- We find this reaction several times in the Advent story: "When Zechariah saw the angel, he was startled and overcome with fear" (verse 12). Zechariah's fear obscured the joy in the angel's "good news" (verse 19). Yet the angel's first words were, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah" (verse 13). "Don't be afraid" is the most common command God and God's messengers give in the Bible. This Advent, in what part(s) of life do you most need to take in the message, "Do not be afraid"?

Prayer: Lord God, you know how often doubt and fear tug at my heart.

Send your message of promise and joy across my path, reminding me to trust and not to fear. Amen.

Tuesday, December 11, 2018 — The Lord's Doing: "He Has Shown Me His Favor" (Luke 1:21-25)

In Zechariah and Elizabeth's day, "Childless parents lacked support in their old age, and many people assumed that such a condition reflected divine punishment for sin." ² That's probably why Luke stressed in Luke 1:6 that "they were righteous before God." And it was what Elizabeth meant when she said God had showed favor by "removing my disgrace among other people."

- Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, "Luke is careful not to dress up the story by making Zechariah a great hero of faith ... God regularly works through ordinary people, doing what they normally do, who with a mixture of half-faith and devotion are holding themselves ready for whatever

God has in mind." ³ What helps you to hold yourself ready for whatever God has in mind? Has God ever surprised you and brought you joy by doing something through you bigger than you thought you were capable of?

- Luke's story was no "once upon a time" tale. It was about real people and places, which he said he'd verified with eyewitnesses (cf. Luke 1:1-4). He began, as we read yesterday, "During the rule of King Herod of Judea." Does it help you to trust Luke's story that he gave many names and dates that people in his day could easily have verified? Why or why not?

Prayer: Lord God, you worked out your plan through ordinary people like Zechariah and Elizabeth.

That gives me hope. I hold myself ready for whatever you have in mind for me. Amen.

Wednesday, December 12, 2018 — "Rejoice, Favored One!" (Luke 1:26-38)

As he did to Zechariah and Elizabeth, God's messenger promised that Mary would have a baby. Different biological facts (Elizabeth was too old, Mary was a virgin) ruled pregnancy out in both cases. Like Zechariah, Mary struggled to believe the angel's words—but she did. Young as she was (probably early to mid-teens), Mary knew she served a God who is free to do very unusual things.

- The angel's greeting ("Rejoice, favored one!") confused Mary, who lived in Nazareth, a village so minor it did not even appear on any map of Palestine we've found from that time. Does your life experience of love and trust in close relationships help or hinder you from taking in

the good news about God's incredible love for you? What helps you trust that God is with you and for you through all the ups and downs of life?

- People in Mary's day understood the basics of human reproduction as well as we do — a virgin could NOT be pregnant. Yet that was what Gabriel promised (verse 31). Mary didn't try to hide her puzzled questions (verse 34), but she was open to the angel's answer. Her final response was an awe-inspiring model for us: "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said." What does it take for you to respond to God's call as Mary did?

Prayer: Lord God, from darkness to light, from illness (physical or spiritual) to health, from death to life — you are always the God for whom nothing is impossible. I praise you for the joy and hope you offer me. Amen.

Thursday, December 13, 2018 — “Happy is She Who Believed” (Luke 1:39-45)

Mary’s journey to Elizabeth’s home could have taken her eight to ten days.³ Mary desperately needed the faith, affirmation and joy that Elizabeth, herself living with an unexpected pregnancy, gave her. Elizabeth summed it up by saying, “Happy is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises he made to her” (verse 45).

- Even before Jesus’ birth, Elizabeth was the first person to call him “Lord”: “Why do I have this honor, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (verse 43) (The gospels also recorded that women were the first witnesses and proclaimers of Jesus’ resurrection.) In what ways does calling Jesus “Lord” involve giving up the right to live your

Prayer: O God, keep reminding me that you kept your promises to Elizabeth and Mary — and that you still do that today. Give me opportunities to give to others as Elizabeth and Mary gave to one another. Amen.

Friday, December 14, 2018 — “In the depths of Who I am I Rejoice” (Luke 1:46-55)

We often call Luke 1:46-56 “The Magnificat” because magnificat is the first word of Mary’s song in the Latin Bible. The first part of Mary’s song was full of hope, excitement, anticipation and joy. It was Mary’s praise-filled response to the realization that she would bear the Redeemer Israel had long waited for. But she also rejoiced that her child would fulfill God’s promise to bring justice to an unjust world, and to care for the lowly, hungry and oppressed.

- In verse 46 Mary said, “With all my heart I glorify the Lord!” Mary began her song with a glowing expression of gratitude. In this season when

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, I choose you to be king in my life. I gladly take up the freedom and challenge of wrestling with the implications of living by your values, which are so different from ours. Amen.

Saturday, December 15, 2018 — Celebration, Praise and Awe (Luke 1:57-75)

Zechariah doubted the angel’s word that he and Elizabeth would have a son (Luke 1:5-17). But they did. When Zechariah wrote that they would name the baby John, as the angel instructed, he was able to speak again. Zechariah said, according to Luke, “[God] has raised up a mighty savior for us in his servant David’s house, just as he said through the mouths of his holy prophets long ago. He has brought salvation from our enemies and from the power of all those who hate us.” Luke said “everyone throughout the Judean highlands talked about what had happened”— today we’d say there was “a lot of buzz” about John’s birth. The unusual birth and naming had people asking, “What then will this child be?”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you came quietly, humbly, softly. You lived with joy and freedom. You baffled most of the powerful who heard you. Not only the whole world, but MY world, began to change when you were born. Thank you for offering me your better, more joyous life. Amen.

Family Activity

God surprises us with unexpected joy every day! Gather your family and share times you have each experienced God’s unexpected joy. Maybe you have received a special gift, seen a beautiful sight or heard a favorite song. Pause for a moment, remember the feeling of that unexpected joy and thank God for those joyful experiences. Next, create a list of individuals or groups whom you would like to surprise with unexpected joy this season.

life any way you please? In what ways has Jesus’ lordship changed your life, and brought a different kind of joy into it?

- “We all need an Elizabeth we can turn to for advice, wisdom, and encouragement. And we’re all called to be an Elizabeth for someone else — to invest in that person and pass on what we’ve learned.”⁵ As you reflect on this lovely story of support and sharing, remember (and remember to thank) those who have blessed you with love and understanding when you really needed it. And ask, “Who could my caring support help this Advent?”

we remember and celebrate the birth of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, who or what in your life are you thankful for? What aspect(s) of your life cause you to glorify the Lord with “all your heart”?

- Mary’s song went on to recognize that the eternal king God was sending would turn upside-down many human values that had always tended to rule the world. How willing are you to use your God-given ability to lift the burdens borne by people who have fewer of life’s good things than you have? When have you found joy in lifting up “the lowly,” in filling “the hungry with good things”?

- When Zechariah and Elizabeth’s son grew up, people called him John the Baptizer (or Baptist). His life ended when Herod had him beheaded, as a result of Herod’s inner weakness and his wife’s malicious plotting (see Matthew 14:1-12). Did John live up to God’s purposes for him — was he “great in the Lord’s eyes,” as the angel said in Luke 1:15? For that matter, did Jesus bring Israel “salvation from our enemies and from the power of all those who hate us” in the way Zechariah seemed to expect? How closely do your personal definitions of “power” and “greatness” match God’s?

Then share ideas on ways you can bring unexpected joy to these people. Include ways to bring joy to your immediate family members as well! Decide together how you will spread unexpected joy to others, then pray and ask God to help you! Also, in your prayers, remember to thank God and others when you are recipients of surprising, unexpected joy!

¹ HarperCollins Christian Publishing. NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, eBook: *Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Kindle Locations 232061-232065). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

¹ * HarperCollins Christian Publishing. NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, eBook: *Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Kindle Locations 232054-232055). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

³ N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, pp. 7-8.)

⁴ Adam Hamilton, *The Journey: A Season of Reflections*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011, p. 78.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 97.