



# ADVENT 2020 DEVOTIONAL

“THE COMING OF OUR SAVIOR”

# DAY 1

NOVEMBER 29

LUKE 1:1-4

**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.

**F**or decades my father has recorded daily in a journal the most important or impactful thing that happens each day. It is a small yet significant narrative of his life. It displays and gives insight into his heart and character as he records meaningful events that transpire. His journal is a valuable treasure to me. After he has gone to be with the Lord, hopefully many years from now, I will be able to look back and not only see the days of his life that I was a part of but get a glimpse of the ones I wasn't around to witness. Like when he was dating my mother, the early years of their marriage, what he valued the years he was an early father, and what he appreciated each day my mother battled with cancer. I'm grateful that I have the ability to look back and remember him in such a meaningful way.

Luke tells us in his introduction that he has followed things closely for some time and chosen to compile an orderly account concerning the things that Theophilus has been taught. He says it's been an undertaking, and no doubt it was. There's no Google or database that contains the answers or accounts. Luke had to go

to speak to the eyewitnesses and ministers, and remember travel wasn't quick during those days... this was an endeavor, a meticulous collection of accounts, geographic locations, and historical context, it's an anointed true labor of love, so that Theophilus, so that WE may be certain of the person and work of Jesus our savior.

Our Father in heaven has given us more than a journal of His important and impactful memories. He has given us the word Himself (John 1:1-5), that we may know His character and His heart, and that we may be certain He is who He says He is, and that He loves us. As we enter into this Advent season, I pray that Luke's account of Jesus would increase your faith and certainty in our true King, and that a love for the word would grow deep within your soul. Many of us have heard these stories many times, but let's make a point this Advent season, to slow down, to cherish and treasure the gift that God has given us. The Word Himself has been made flesh and dwells among us.



# DAY 2

NOVEMBER 30

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.

**L**uke's account of Jesus's life begins with a familiar story in scripture: a righteous man and woman who are advanced in years and cannot have children. He summarizes what must have been years of sorrow, prayer, confusion and solidarity with the simple phrase, "but they had no children." Our passage today ends without relieving that tension.

We find Zechariah and Elizabeth living in the midst of the 400 years of silence from God, a time when no prophets were sent and no word from God was heard. Much like the patriarchs of the Old Testament – Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Samuel's mother Hannah – Zechariah and Elizabeth have been poised to see God move their whole marriage, but He is still silent.

And in that, let's focus today; trusting the faithfulness of a moving, silent God.

During this Advent season, we will practice celebrating the coming of the Messiah. We will also practice longing, slowly walking through Luke's account of the first Advent of Jesus. For those of us who have spent our childhoods hearing about the birth of Jesus, setting up nativity scenes and singing Christmas hymns on repeat, this will need intentionality. I argue that it also needs silence.

As we experience our own season of longing – longing to gather with friends, listen to live music, re-

gain balance, worship with our church family – let us make time to meditate on the ceaseless movement of God. When God seems silent, we can trust that He is still moving. When we are silent before Him, we can acknowledge that movement more deeply.

***"IF WE DON'T SEEK OUT SILENCE, WE WILL PROBABLY NOT FEEL THE STUPENDOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF GOD'S WORK IN HISTORY ON OUR LIVES. IT WOULD BE A RARE THING TO BE GRIPPED AND MOVED DEEPLY IN A NOISY ROOM. THERE IS A CLOSE CORRELATION BETWEEN STILLNESS AND A SENSE OF THE STUPENDOUS."** - JOHN PIPER*

In just a few verses, God is going to break His long silence with miraculous news for Zechariah and Elizabeth, but we are not rushing to read it. We are not rushing past the tension of their faithfulness and unfulfilled desires. We are not rushing past their current reality like we may be tempted to rush past ours. We are not rushing to Christmas or 2021 or the end of COVID-19. We are practicing longing by sitting in this moment. We are handing our concerns and our thoughts to a God who sees us exactly where we are. We are learning to breath in His peace in the midst of discord.

We are learning to trust that God does not rush, He moves.



# DAY 3

DECEMBER 1

LUKE 1:8-17

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. 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."

Imagine you are Zechariah, a priest serving the Lord in the temple. Today is a different day. You walked down the usual road that takes you to the temple and you witnessed the same people traveling to their work just like you. You arrive at the gates of the temple and you are immediately welcomed with the familiar smell of burnt incense and the tired smell of other weary travelers. You are about to receive an amazing message that you are the one who was chosen to offer the sacrifice of incense in the temple. This is an honor and a divine moment that you would potentially be overwhelmed by. You enter in, and you are offering prayer on behalf of your people, but instead you have your own personal prayer answered! The angel Gabriel promises a son to you and your barren wife, Elizabeth!

Zechariah would grow in anticipation of the arrival of his son, John, the one who would "make straight in the desert a highway for our God!" As it was written, "A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall be-

come level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'" (Isaiah 40:3-5)

The "voice in the wilderness" that Isaiah prophesied about is now being entrusted to Zechariah and Elizabeth. I'm certain that much fear, joy, and expectation filled Zechariah's heart and mind as the Angel spoke to him about his expected son, John's birth. John was set apart for God to serve Him, as John was filled from the Holy Spirit before and through his birth. John's voice would prepare the way of the Lord as the earth swelled with anticipation of the arrival of the Messiah.

Zechariah and Elizabeth's prayer was answered in a way that they did not expect. They had even given up on praying for a child. What prayer do you need to pray in expectation for God to move?

God, in His divinity, intervened for Zechariah and Elizabeth and provided them with a son. God, in His divinity, intervened for you and I and sends His Son to redeem the earth.



# DAY 4

DECEMBER 2

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.”

I find it curious that Zechariah, described as a devout and righteous priest, is surprised and fearful when encountering the angel Gabriel at the altar in the temple. What’s noteworthy is the priests of the day were sent into the Holy of Holies to meet with God to pass along to their colleagues outside the veil what they had heard. So, given he was there, why was he scared when Gabriel appears and why was his initial reaction to doubt what the messenger told him? Interesting questions.

Maybe, just maybe, we too are a little like Zechariah, we have been following the rules, we have been made righteous as disciples of Jesus and yet when we encounter God through His Word and Spirit we too respond in doubt and disbelief. Human nature wants absolute proof before we believe.

Faith says, trust and obey. Zechariah will have to wait out his skepticism in silence contemplating the news of the prophesied son who set the stage for the coming Messiah. I wonder what was going through his mind over those long quiet months.

How about you, are you going into this Advent season waiting in anticipation of the coming Messiah? Waiting is hard in our instant gratification society. We want answers now, we want cures now, we want our way now. And in the midst of this little piece of the story we are reminded to be silent and to wait as God’s plan will come to pass on His terms not our own. Christmas is coming, are you preparing your heart for the coming King?



**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.

**Z**echariah is a priest, and his job is to perform the incense offering at the temple.

The incense altar is directly outside the Holy of Holies, where God dwells. Priests go in often, and overall, the process is down to a timed science: Walk in, perform the offering, pray, then come out of the temple to bless the people with Numbers 6: 24-26, “The LORD bless you and keep you, the LORD make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace”. Zechariah walked in, but he was staying much longer than usual. I can imagine people were starting to talk. Some feared he was struck down by God’s presence. Rumors may have started. Regardless, the people were getting worried.

Inside, as we learned over the last few days, Zechariah was having a spiritual experience. An angel was answering his lifelong prayer, his prayer for a child. He was getting an answer for something that has broken both his and Elizabeth’s heart for years, and what did he do?

He did what all of us do so often. He doubted and asked for proof.

“How do I know this is really you, God? How do I know that you will really do this?”

And as a result, Zechariah is made mute. He exits the temple, and as he does so, the people fill with hope. They start the choirs singing. The priest hits the cymbals, the trumpets blow. They build to a beautiful crescendo, building up to the blessing Zechariah is about to give. The people look expectantly to their leader, and:

Nothing. He can’t speak.

Zechariah has received an answered prayer. He has experienced God in a way that most will never, and instead of trusting, he asks for proof.

And now he can do nothing but play charades with the crowd for a bit, but they don’t understand him, so he goes home.

I see myself in Zechariah a great deal, and not only because my name comes from the same Hebrew word of “God has not forgotten”: I see him in myself because so often I doubt the promises of God. I so often fail to take what I read in scripture and see it in my life and acknowledge God in it.

This Advent season, we celebrate one of the most important promises of God, his Son, Jesus. May our eyes be open to the promises of God, and may we cast aside doubt for the childlike joy of accepting the promises our Lord has for us.



**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.”

**H**ope. That’s what we are all holding onto in this season. Whether it be the hope of a particular gift on our wishlist, the hope to see family again, or the hope for a fresh start in the new year.

As we saw at the very beginning of this chapter, Elizabeth had hoped for a child. For so long she held onto that hope despite years of not seeing that hope come to pass. But finally, we hear the first words of Elizabeth in our story and she brings us the fulfilment of her long awaited hope. God has done what others thought was impossible! To not have a child in Elizabeth’s time was something looked down upon regardless of

her circumstances. That is why we see her praising God for taking away her reproach among people.

For us, Jesus is that hope. Our long-awaited Messiah has come and has taken away our reproach (our sin; our separation from God). He has looked down on us and we get to look back at Him without shame but instead with awe, thankfulness, and with great hope of His return and an eternity forever with Him.

What have you found yourself hoping for in this season? Do you find your true hope in Christ our King? Let’s praise Him for being the fulfilment of our hope!



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

**A**lthough Gabriel greeted Mary with an assurance, "o favored one," she was still "greatly troubled." In fact, he had to tell her twice. Verse 30 states again, "... you have found favor with God." Do you know what it means to be a "favored one?" Was it something Mary earned as a faithful Jew? Is it something we can work towards? Nope. None are righteous, no not one (Romans 3:10). The favor described here can be translated as to be pursued with grace, honor with blessings. The Lord in His graciousness pursued Mary and gave her blessing. Mary is chosen to carry the Messiah because of God's grace.

Now, not only did God bestow His grace and blessing to Mary, but He did so by sending an angel from heaven to speak with her. I'm pretty sure I'd respond like Mary and have some genuine concern. Angels are a big deal. And yet, Gabriel gives her more than the title, "o favored one," he tells her that God is with her. What comes to mind when you think about being in the presence of the Lord? Do you feel joy, love, fulfillment, mercy, etc. or are you greatly troubled like Mary? So easily we forget that the Lord's presence was terrifying before it was comforting. In the presence of the Lord there is judgement, but "the hinge on which

God's presence is turned from judgement to comfort is atonement for sin." Praise be to Jesus our Lord, our perfect sacrifice. In him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:7-10).

The Lord *chooses* to be with us. The Lord *chooses* to lavishly give the riches of His grace so that all things in heaven and on earth will be united. Don't forget, that one of the many names for Jesus is Emmanuel, meaning God with us. This is a beautiful and costly gift that He gives to those who call upon His name. Hear the good news, oh favored one, Emmanuel has come, and He will come again, for the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God Himself will be with them as their God (Revelation 21:3).

*Quote from "The Worship Pastor, A call to ministry for Worship Leaders and Teams" by Zac Hicks*





**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.”

**“FOR TO US A CHILD IS BORN, TO US A SON IS GIVEN, AND THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE ON HIS SHOULDERS. AND HE WILL BE CALLED WONDERFUL COUNSELOR, MIGHTY GOD, EVERLASTING FATHER, PRINCE OF PEACE.” ISAIAH 9:6**

In today’s verses, Luke continues to invite us into the intimate conversation between a heavenly messenger and a young recipient, Gabriel and Mary. We have read about the same messenger’s conversation with Zechariah and the miraculous conception that Elizabeth experienced. Now we are reading a similar account with Mary, the mother-to-be of Jesus.

The angel proclaims truths about this God-child Jesus, fulfillments of prophecies from centuries back. And he proclaims for the first time the simple, powerful name: Jesus.

It is incredible to think that this one name, Jesus, is THE name. In Scripture, we see the Messiah referred to as many names, but this name, His human name, is the name above all names. His human name is the name at which every knee will bow (Philippians 2:10-11). His human name is the one given to mankind by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). His human name points us continually to His purpose and plan: to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).

How beautiful is the name of Jesus.

Luke’s stated goal in writing this gospel is to leave Theophilus with certainty about the identity of Jesus Christ as the Messiah. In slowly walking through this encounter with Gabriel, Luke exposes multiple prophecies fulfilled by His birth, identity, and life. Read the verses below and praise God that He has the patience, the care and the ability to orchestrate history to fulfill these prophecies.

**Isaiah 7:14** | “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”

**Isaiah 9:6-7** | “For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon His shoulders; and He is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and His kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”

**2 Samuel 7:12-13** | “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish His kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever.”

And ever and ever and ever.



**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.

**T**o be born of a virgin... what an unthinkable entrance for the King of the universe! But His entrance was prophesied in this way, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14), which means God with us.

Since the beginning of the story of scripture God has been pursuing His people. This is the moment, the announcement that God is on the way! God announces to a young girl that He is returning to redeem His people through her, her own son. This reveals God’s character. He uses the least of these to display His wonders of redemption to the world.

Mary of Nazareth would have been shocked to her core to hear the news that she would give birth to the Messiah, the Savior of the world. It was prophesied that the Savior would be born of a virgin, but imagine all of the thoughts she would have had! A woman of little esteem is chosen to carry the Savior of the universe! No one would have had any regard for her pregnancy. In fact,

she would likely be misunderstood and mocked her whole life. But upon hearing the Angel Gabriel, she accepted her calling with unrelenting faith. Mary, a young virgin, and Elizabeth, an older, barren woman, had deep faith that the Lord was with them as they both magnified the Lord in their callings. The Lord was with Mary every step of the way and He also provided Elizabeth, a relative, to walk through life with - imagine their relationship and friendship as they both relied so deeply on the Lord!

As Mary and Elizabeth anticipated the birth of their sons, who would change the world, how can you help others anticipate the coming of Christ? How do you think their faith would have encouraged those around them?

**“FAITH IS A LIVING, DARING CONFIDENCE IN GOD’S GRACE, SO SURE AND CERTAIN THAT A MAN COULD STAKE HIS LIFE ON IT A THOUSAND TIMES. I KNOW NOT THE WAY GOD LEADS ME, BUT WELL DO I KNOW MY GUIDE.” – MARTIN LUTHER**



**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.”

**T**he spotlight of our Advent story has now turned to Elizabeth and her unborn child. As Mary enters their home carrying the promised Messiah, we see the pre-born John the Baptist already realizing His calling in life. The angel Gabriel told Zechariah his son would “make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” John lets his mother know she is in the presence of someone very special. Elizabeth’s response is one of worship and praise.

How encouraging for Mary to hear these words from Elizabeth. She is about to carry out the biggest assignment in the history of the world and in the midst of it, Elizabeth affirms her calling. If there were ever a possibility to waiver in the mission, it was

put to rest with Elizabeth’s words, “blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear!” We all need an Elizabeth in our lives, someone who sees us and acknowledges what God has called us to do.

How about you, what is your response to the proximity of our Lord Jesus? Does His presence make you leap for joy? Like Elizabeth do you recognize His nearness and consider yourself blessed? And are you affirming in others what their unique value is to the Kingdom of God and encouraging them in it? Christmas is coming, are you excited about the coming King?



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." 56 And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

Mary's song in Luke 1:46-56 (known as the Magnificat) is one of my favorite sections of verse in the Bible. Her gratitude and amazement at God's majesty and power is on full display, and, like many things in the New Testament, we see parallels to the Old Testament.

Mary's song has beautiful similarity with the song of Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 2:1-10). Both women were told they were pregnant, and the first response was worship.

We can glean a few key things from Mary's song:

## MARY KNEW HER SCRIPTURE

Mary makes several references to the Old Testament, showing that she was well-versed in Scripture. She makes references to Psalm 113, a Psalm deeply ingrained with the tradition of Passover. In the same way that Israel was delivered from Egypt, Mary's womb was preparing the way for the deliverer of humanity from the sin that so deeply entangles us.

## SHE RECOGNIZES HER PART IN THE STORY

Look at verses 48-49, "From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is His name."

Mary has been chosen to be the human by which the *Savior of the world* is to be delivered. Let's be honest,

wouldn't it be easy to be feeling pretty good about yourself? Wouldn't you, in your heart of hearts, feel like you've at least done *something* personally to raise yourself up to this point?

But that isn't how God works in Scripture. God often uses the ordinary to bring forth the extraordinary, and Mary immediately recognizes that. She says that people will call her blessed for years to come, because He has done great things for her. She pushes that praise right back on God.

## MARY REJOICES IN A STILL YET UNFULFILLED PROMISE

Mary switches to worship immediately. It's her first response! She believes God is calling her to something, and she gladly accepts the will of the Father. How often do we do that? How often do we fully lean into God's blessings and promises? Charles Spurgeon says of Mary's song, "Brothers, there are some of you who cannot even sing over a mercy when it is born, but here is a woman who sings of an unborn mercy". Mary wastes no time in bringing the glory to God, magnifying Him in all of His worthiness.

May this advent season be a time where we rejoice in the mercies of our lives, both those born and unborn. This year has been a year of testing, a year of growth, and a year of hardship. May we grow closer together, and closer to the same God who Mary sang to.



# DAY 12

DECEMBER 10

LUKE 1:57-66

**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. **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. **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.

**T**he depth of God’s mercy is something we can never fully get a grasp on. Lamentations 3:22-23 tell us that, “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning.” But how often do we find ourselves rejoicing in praise over these mercies? If I’m honest, I don’t do it enough. But we have so much reason to rejoice!

In the start of this passage we see a community coming around Elizabeth because they have heard of the great mercy God has shown to her by blessing her with a child. They are rejoicing!

And that isn’t where God stops. We see God open the mouth of Zechariah after being silent for the duration of his wife’s pregnancy. What is Zechariah’s response? To bless God with his words. Zechariah could choose bitterness of his silence, but instead he immediately jumps to praising God.

Family, let us take time today to rejoice in God’s mercies. No matter how big or how small those mercies may seem. Let’s take time today to bless Him with our words!



# DAY 13

DECEMBER 11

LUKE 1:67-80

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; 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.” 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.

I don't know about you, but my first words after having been silent and unable to speak for the last say, 10 months (Luke 1:20), would not likely be, “blessed be the Lord God of Israel.” It's humbling, isn't it? God was true to His word and it filled Zechariah with joy and praise. The God of Israel has brought about the promised time of salvation. God has visited and redeemed His people as He promised through the prophets of old. Now we are saved from not just physical enemies, but our spiritual ones. THE light has come to push back darkness and bring us out of death once and for all through the forgiveness of sins. Revelation tells us that we will not need a sun in heaven because the Son will be our light. In these verses we see not only did He rescue us from the darkness, but He leads us in the way of peace. Now we can worship the Lord without fear for we are clothed in Christ's holiness and righteousness. Wow! This is the good news. This is the gospel. Will you say, AMEN?!

Besides the blessing and praising of God, this is a prophecy, and it's fascinating to me that as he prophe-

sied over his son, only 2 out of the 12 verses are actually about John. Zechariah defines his son in relationship to Jesus' life and mission. How do you define yourself? What things come to mind... your job? Race or ethnicity? Political affiliations? By your family? Hobbies? Your character? Do you think about yourself in relation to Jesus? And if you do, is it about what He has done for you, or what you have done for Him?

Dear friend and follower of our beloved Jesus, meaning is found when we choose to define ourselves in our Savior. I pray that you would see yourself through that lens today. We are God's beloved children, co-heirs with Christ because of His life and mission to save and redeem through the cross. It is by grace through faith that we are saved. And it is not of our own doing, it is a gift from God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). Take time today to pray and write it out, actually define yourself in Jesus. Let it stir your heart's affections and lead you to praise Him.



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.

He is here.

Imagine the micro-focus of the heavens on this one baby in this one manger in this one little town. He is the seed of Eve that God promised back in Genesis 3:15. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29); the only One who is worthy to open the scroll (Revelation 5).

But tonight, He is a baby wrapped up snugly, laying on hay. His mother is exhausted. His father is amazed. The heavens are poised to celebrate. This is the breath between the centuries of waiting, the hours of labor pains and the noise of life: the God of everything born as a helpless child to redeem the world.

Below are the lyrics from Silent Night by the 116 Clique. Put the song on repeat and rest today in the unearnable gift of Jesus, God with us.

### SILENT NIGHT 116 CLIQUE FEAT. CHRYSTAL NICOLE

*How do you mend a broken world?  
Give it a gift it could never earn  
Pour out a love that it don't deserve  
Send it a Son and a Savior*

*It was a silent night  
A holy night  
All was calm  
And all was bright  
Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child  
Holy infant so tender and mild*

*Hush, hush  
I hear the clouds speak-sing of His glory, singin'  
Hush, hush  
I see the sky part, showin' the Father's heart, singin'  
Hush, hush  
I see the stars bow, Heaven is smiling down, singin'  
Hush, hush  
Making my wrongs right, bringing me life on a  
silent night*

*How do you repay the gift of life?  
What's the return on a sacrifice?  
'Cause silver and gold won't suffice  
So I'm giving my heart as my reply*

*It was a silent night  
A holy night  
All was calm  
And all was bright  
Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child  
Holy infant so tender and mild*

*Hush, hush  
I hear the clouds speak-sing of His glory, singin'  
Hush, hush  
I see the sky part, showin' the Father's heart, singin'  
Hush, hush  
I see the stars bow, Heaven is smiling down, singin'  
Hush, hush  
Making my wrongs right, bringing me life on a  
silent night*

*Oh, onto them a child is born  
A Son is given on a silent night  
All the glory, all the honor  
On a silent night*

<https://youtu.be/RljVCY0mquk>



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!"

**T**he first announcement of Jesus's birth was announced to shepherds who were tending their flocks in a nearby field. Jesus himself is referred to as the Good Shepherd! Jesus was born in "the town of David." This is where David would have been born who later would become the king of Israel. Jesus is the greater David, the greater King!

The death of the "perfect" lamb that the shepherd could find, provided a picture of sacrifice, foreshadowing what God Himself would ultimately do through Jesus Christ, the "Lamb of God," to rescue sinners from the eternal consequences of their sin. Throughout Scripture, other sacrifices for sin were offered to God by righteous men like Abel ([Genesis 4:4](#)), Noah ([Genesis 8:20](#)), Abraham ([Genesis 22:13](#)), and Job ([Job 1:5](#)). In the days of Moses, God

gave more detailed instructions regarding sacrifices, and over the centuries the Levitical priests sacrificed millions of animals to the Lord.

It is possible that the shepherds in the field close to the birth of Jesus were raising sheep that the people would have offered as Passover sacrifices in the upcoming months. These shepherds would have understood what it takes to raise and care for a perfect sacrificial lamb and they are the ones who were entrusted to announce to the world that "the Lamb of God has come!"

Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice, born of a virgin, untainted by sin. Perfect in His being and perfect among men.





**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.

**T**he scene now moves to the first known human visitors to meet the Son of God, the Shepherds from the fields. These ordinary servants who take care of sheep are told the news of the prophesied Messiah’s birth by an Angel of the Lord and they set out on a journey to find the baby. I’m sure they were amazed to find the setting just as the Angel told them about. A manger, a baby, and a mom and dad who needed to hear their remarkable story of encountering angels who tell them of the promised Messiah. Just in case Mary was fighting uncertainty, the shepherds were there to remind her of who she carried. The very Messiah foretold to the people of Israel so many centuries ago. I’m sure it was a little overwhelming to say the least.

The shepherds were sent to offer an enlightened word to the new mother. As Mary pondered these things in her heart it was just

another reminder of her task at hand, raise the Son of God to fulfill His mission. How much she remembered from Isaiah’s prophecy we do not know, but what we do know is the story doesn’t end with a birth in the manger but with a resurrected Savior 30+ years later. What happens between the two events will be significant to Mary, to the Shepherds, and to us today.

How about you, have you pondered the meaning behind the birth of this child Jesus? What does the birth narrative and subsequent life of Jesus mean to you? Have you been proclaiming His arrival as the Shepherds did so long ago? Christmas is coming, are you telling others of the coming King?



**21** And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. **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.”

**M**ary and Joseph, upon giving birth to Jesus, had a job to do. The Levitical law (Leviticus 12, in this case) demanded some form of action for most areas of life, and birth was no exception.

After Mary gave birth to Jesus, she followed the Levitical law that stated that you must wait eight days for circumcision. This shows that Mary and Joseph were devout followers of God. It also, however, made certain that Jesus Himself, the greater Law, would fulfill all aspects of the Levitical Law.

The purification and circumcision ceremonies were present as reminders that we are all born into sin. If you're like me, you may be thinking “But Jesus never sinned, why is this going on?” but we see throughout the Bible, even from infancy, Jesus identifying with sinners.

Jesus, even from infancy, was already beginning to bear the sins of the world.

Alexander Whyte, a Scottish theologian says:

**“FOR HE WHO KNEW NO SIN, AND WHO NEVER WAS TO KNOW SIN, WAS ALREADY IN HIS CIRCUMCISION MADE SIN FOR US. HE WAS NOT SO MUCH AS EIGHT DAYS IN THIS WORLD TILL HE BEGAN TO BE**

**NUMBERED WITH THE TRANSGRESSORS. MARY'S FIRSTBORN SON WAS A LAMB WITHOUT BLEMISH AND WITHOUT SPOT, BUT BEFORE HE WAS A WEEK OLD, HE BEGAN TO BEAR THE SINS OF MANY...”**

We also see in verse 24 that Mary offers up what is known as *the offering of the poor*. In the law, a lamb was ordered to be sacrificed, but if the couple could not afford a lamb, then two turtledoves or two young pigeons could be sacrificed. This shows us that Jesus was born into an ordinary home. He was born into a home that could not afford luxury, or even a home that could afford the lamb required for the cleansing of sins.

But God delivered a different lamb for a greater purpose through their son. Jesus was the ultimate lamb. The lamb whose blood was shed for our transgressions, who entered this world fulfilling the law, living without sin, yet was still taken to fulfill the sacrifice to save us from what we deserve.

He gave grace upon grace upon grace upon grace.

Jesus was the lamb for all of us, when all we could afford is two turtledoves.



# DAY 18

DECEMBER 16

LUKE 2:25-32

**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, **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."

One of the great things about Advent is that it is a season of waiting. We wait

for four Sundays in a row before we finally get to celebrate that our Savior was born. Each day we creep closer and closer to this celebration, time of remembrance, and hope toward the future. This season of Advent reflects what we are always doing, waiting for Christ to come again as He promised.

In today's reading, we see Simeon who was also faithfully waiting for Christ. God had promised that Simeon would not die until he saw the Christ, the Savior. This was what Simeon had hoped for and waited for. We find him in the temple waiting as he probably did every day. God had not told him when this Christ would come, just that he would not die before he saw Him. How wonderful it is that we get to see this promise fulfilled in Scripture! Simeon

knows upon seeing Jesus that this was the promise fulfilled to him.

Let's take a moment to rest in the goodness of the words that Simeon offers up as a praise to God after finally seeing the Savior, "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." We have seen the salvation that God prepared in the presence of all peoples. We have seen the light of revelation. We have seen the glory for God's people.

Take some time today to praise God for the precious gift of Jesus, our long-awaited Savior.



**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.”

**T**here are many who would marvel at Jesus like His mother and father; those who heard Him preach, those who were healed, those who witnessed a miracle, and those who merely heard stories about Him. And yet there were many who heard and saw the same things and yet opposed Him; the people in His hometown, Scribes, Pharisees, elders and chief priests, etc. Verse 34 references Isaiah 8:14 that says, “And He will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” Yesterday you read that Jesus will be “salvation that you (God) prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation... (v.30-32),” but Jesus is also a light that exposes. He was appointed for the fall and rising of many. Not all will marvel at Jesus, accept Him, and rise alongside Him. Many will oppose Him and ultimately fall. Our God has always been after our hearts, and we are reminded in this text that the thoughts of our hearts will be revealed to this end. The heart is deceitful above all else and because we are a sinful people, there are areas of our life where we are in opposition to Christ. Today let us seek to let the light of our Savior expose the areas of our life where we fail to accept His lordship and deity, where we fail to be

obedient to His word. Let’s take a time to seek forgiveness and pray to walk in repentance.

#### **In what ways do you marvel at Jesus?**

*Think, write, or speak aloud these things and take a minute to praise God and thank Him for a clear vision and acceptance of His Son.*

#### **In what ways do you find Jesus offensive? In what areas of your life are you reluctant to follow His word?**

*Think, write, or speak aloud these things and pray for forgiveness and the strength to walk in repentance.*

To close out today, hear these words of assurance...

**“THEREFORE BROTHERS, SINCE WE HAVE CONFIDENCE TO ENTER THE HOLY PLACES BY THE BLOOD OF JESUS, BY THE NEW AND LIVING WAY THAT HE OPENED FOR US THROUGH THE CURTAIN, THAT IS THROUGH HIS FLESH, AND SINCE WE HAVE A GREAT PRIEST OVER THE HOUSE OF GOD, LET US DRAW NEAR WITH A TRUE HEART IN FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH, WITH OUR HEARTS SPRINKLED CLEAN FROM AN EVIL CONSCIENCE AND OUR BODIES WASHED WITH PURE WATER.” — HEBREWS 10:19-22**



**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.

“**TELL YOU, SOMETHING GREATER THAN THE  
TEMPLE IS HERE.”- MATTHEW 12:6**

She gets it. Anna, a prophetess, sees the baby Jesus and immediately begins spreading the news of Him – the Messiah they have been waiting for, the redemption of Israel.

We hear so often of the Israelites who missed it. They met Jesus, saw Him work, heard Him preach, saw Him die, and they didn't believe He was the One they had been waiting for. Leaders who had memorized Scripture about Jesus and adhered to every iota of the Law missed the Messiah walking around in the flesh.

Anna's life on the other hand has been marked by intimacy with God, and she sees clearly who this child is. The temple that she attends continually will be the setting for many stories about Jesus – He will drive out money-changers here (John 2, Matthew 21), He will walk past it and prophesy His resurrection (John 2), He will teach here and heal here (Matthew 21, Luke 21, John 8), He will resist the devil's temptation from the very pinnacle of

this temple (Luke 4) – but today He is a baby. The long-awaited Savior held in His mother's arms.

This is the only time Anna is mentioned in Scripture, but I can imagine that after years of praying at the temple, she would understand the power of Jesus's later words, “I tell you, something greater than the temple is here,” (Matthew 12:6).

Let us not miss celebrating our Redeemer this season. Advent is almost over. The hustle of Christmas may have looked different this year than last, but there have doubtless been opportunities to brush quickly past the joy of a Savior. Do not let the season come and go, sitting at the temple gates but not seeing the Savior passing before your eyes. Speak about Him to the people you are living with so that we can remind each other of the gift of our Redeemer.

*“Shout it  
Go on and scream it from the mountains  
Go on and tell it to the masses  
That He is God”*

*— All the Poor and Powerless by All Sons and Daughters*



**39** And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. **40** And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

**M**ary and Joseph are obedient in following the Law of Moses by bringing their firstborn, Jesus, to the temple in Jerusalem, and presenting Him to the Lord. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law!

When Jesus is older, He delivers the Sermon on the Mount and says, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your right-

eousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:17-20).

Because Jesus fulfills the Law and is our ultimate sacrifice, our sin no longer separates us from God! We no longer have to sacrifice animals to cover our sins. Through His sacrifice we are able to receive His grace and the mercy of the Father freely. Often we say that the Savior has died for us, but we still believe that we have to work for His love. How are you still trying to work for what Jesus has already accomplished?

**“GOD’S WORK IS NOT MAN WORKING  
FOR GOD; IT IS GOD’S OWN WORK, THOUGH  
OFTEN WROUGHT THROUGH MAN’S HANDS.”**  
— HUDSON TAYLOR



# DAY 22

DECEMBER 20

LUKE 2:41-52

41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. 43 And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, 44 but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, 45 and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48 And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." 49 And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" 50 And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. 51 And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

We now meet the young Jesus traveling with His parents to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem. We learn during this encounter that He is laser focused on doing His Father's work mixing with the teachers and the people in temple courts. Do you wonder where He went at night or what He did for meals during the three days He was there? The text doesn't say but it does tell us of the amazement of the people He talked with as they heard His questions and listened to His answers.

Jesus was where He wanted to be. We also see the other side of this story, the frantic parents on a three-day quest to find their son. I'm sure their emotions were running high as they anxiously searched the countryside, the city, and finally found Him

in the temple. Mary's mission to save Jesus was not Jesus' mission to save mankind. He knew what His heavenly Father wanted Him to do and He was compelled to carry it out even if it meant disappointing His earthly parents.

How about you, what assignment have you been sent on that required laser like focus to accomplish? How did you handle distractions that could have caused you to lose concentration? How did you handle detractors who didn't understand what you were trying to do? How do you persevere even when no one else goes with you? Christmas is coming, are you about the Father's mission?



**1** In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, **2** during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. **3** And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **4** As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. **5** Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, **6** and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

**J**ohn the Baptist was a servant to the core. His entire life's purpose was to serve as a beacon pointing others towards Jesus. We see in this passage that John is fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah, coming before Jesus to prepare the way for the Lord (verses 4-6).

John did so not for the sake of personal gain. He did so because he was called to fulfill a purpose that God called him to. In fact, his rise to prominence would only lead to his demise later, which we see referenced in Luke 9.

How often are we willing to fulfill our calling for God's glory, no matter the cost? How often are we willing to live a life only of service, and only for the gain of the Father? If I'm honest with myself, not that often. I get distracted by my own interests, my own desires, and my own comfort.

In this Advent season, it's easy for us to get caught up in the celebrations, especially today, as we gear up for our holiday gatherings. We may find ourselves being especially caught up in ourselves this year, as our holidays likely look a little different than they have in past years. I hope you can find time to reflect on things you can do this year not only to spread the joy of the

Advent season, but to spread the message of John the Baptist and Isaiah:

*"Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.  
Every valley shall be filled,  
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,  
and the crooked shall become straight,  
and the rough places shall become level ways,  
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."*

We are called to the same message! In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus calls us the light of the world. Much in the same way that John the Baptist was a beacon to others about the news of the coming Christ, we are similarly called to spread the message of the Gospel to those who have not heard.

May our reflections this year cause us to be a beacon to those who have not heard. May we engage in the Good News of the Gospel in ways we have not before, and may we extend the same new mercies God grants us to those in our world around us. His Gospel is beautiful, His Son was perfect, and Church, we are deeply, deeply loved by the Creator of the universe.

May we cast ourselves into growth and sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel.





**7** He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? **8** Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. **9** Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” **10** And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?” **11** And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” **12** Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” **13** And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.” **14** Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”

**D**o you ever have those moments in your community group that just stick with you for a long time? I do. I remember the night that someone first brought up the concept that even the good things we do that are done with impure motives can be sinful. Woah. That changed my whole way of thinking about sin and my heart towards God.

I have to imagine that is how the crowd who is coming to John to be baptized must feel. They have come to be baptized but their hearts are not in the right place. John points out that they are trying to flee from the wrath to come. When they then ask what to do, John tells each group what they should do. To the crowd he says to share their clothing with those who have none, and to do the same with

their food. To the tax collectors, he says to only collect what they are authorized to collect (and not more). To the soldiers, he tells them to not extort money from anyone and to be content with their wages.

In short, John was telling them to love their neighbor in counter-cultural ways. In a way in which Christ loves us. We cannot come to God wanting to love Him while not wanting to love His people too. That’s one of the beautiful things about Christmas. We get to show our love for our neighbors through an outpouring of giving (time, talents, treasures). Let’s not let that stop just at Christmas. Let us continue to love others just as Christ has loved us no matter the season.



**15** As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, **16** John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. **17** His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." **18** So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. **19** But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, **20** added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.

**A**s image bearers of the Lord we are a glory hungry people. When we do well, we want to hear about it. So many of us are terrified of being insignificant. Now, there's nothing wrong with praise for a job well done, but who is giving us that praise is what really matters. We shouldn't settle for man's empty praise when we can hear spoken over us, "well done my good and faithful servant." Isn't that the praise our hearts truly long for? There's a difficult balance we walk as Christians and as we work hard to accomplish all things for our King with excellence. Often-times the world notices... but, we know that every good and gracious thing is from the Lord and in and of ourselves we are incapable of doing anything good. So, how do we do this? How do we walk this line? I think John gives a beautiful picture of this in these verses. The people are wondering if he is the promised Messiah. John was killing it, if you know what I mean. He's literally preparing people's hearts to receive the Savior that was promised and doing such a good job, they think it's him! And yet, he chose to set the record straight to ensure that Jesus would receive the glory, and not only that, but that they would actually know who he was. The one "who is mightier...whose sandals I am not worthy to untie... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." John has only got "normal" water. Jesus' water will be a well that never runs dry! John continues to tell the people who Jesus truly is, not just the Savior, but also the judge, "to clear His threshing floor to gather the wheat... the chaff He will burn." John hopes that when Jesus arrives on the scene that He will not be missed. He is so committed to preparing the way and making Him known, that he faithfully preaches even when it challenges folks. Even when it causes him to be locked up in prison. To him, Jesus is worthy.

All of us have an opportunity to prepare the way for the Lord just like John. Jesus has redeemed us and as sons and daughters of the King, we are invited to work on His behalf. Remember that Advent holds two things to be true. Firstly, we remember the people of Israel's long expectation for the promised Messiah, and we celebrate His arrival into the world to conquer sin and death. But secondly, we also wait expectantly for His promise to come again. The people are still in expectation, the harvest is ripe, but the laborers are few. Are you using your life to give God the glory, set the record straight, and make sure people know our beloved Savior who is to come? Let's deem Him worthy and prepare the way.



**21** Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, **22** and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." **23** Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, **24** the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, **25** the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, **26** the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, **27** the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, **28** the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, **29** the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, **30** the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, **31** the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, **32** the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Sala, the son of Nahshon, **33** the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, **34** the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, **35** the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, **36** the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, **37** the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, **38** the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

**"B**eing...the son of God." Luke 3:23 & 38

Maybe we are too familiar with the idea of being sons and daughters of God to be amazed by this passage. Reread the account of Jesus's baptism and notice what God says: You are my beloved Son.

Repeatedly in Luke, we have been confronted with the duality of Jesus's humanity and deity.

Though He was born as a helpless baby in a dirty stable, a star appeared at His birth.

As a young baby, He was presented to the Lord at the temple as was required by the Mosaic Law, but while He was there, multiple people identified Him as the long-awaited Savior.

When He is a twelve-year-old kid, His parents lose Him in Jerusalem like a child at the mall. When they find Him in the temple, He is unworried, amazing grown men with His questions and understanding.

If this gospel is written to give Theophilus (and us) certainty about the identity of Jesus Christ as Luke stated in his introduction, this too is a pivotal passage in the book. Here again, we see the duality of Jesus: He comes to get baptized by John even though He has no sin to be cleansed of. And when He comes out of the water, God speaks to Him, calling Jesus His beloved Son.



Luke immediately drives this point home with the genealogy of Jesus. Beginning with the very pointed phrase, “being the son of Joseph (as was supposed),” Luke follows Jesus’s ancestors all the way to Adam and ultimately to God.

Much like Luke highlights the fulfilled prophecy of the virgin birth by recording Gabriel’s interaction with Mary, he again highlights another fulfilled prophecy by tracing Jesus’s lineage all the way back to Adam.

In Genesis 3:15, God pronounces what is called the protoevangelium, or the first mention of the good news of salvation in the Bible. He speaks to the serpent after Adam and Eve eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and proclaims,

*“I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel.”*

Wrapped in these words is a promise that Satan will be ultimately defeated by a descendant of Eve, Adam’s wife. So, not only is it crucial that the Messiah be a descendant of King David (Luke 1:32), He must also be the one who will bruise Satan’s head – a descendant of Adam and Eve.

By noting God’s declaration that Jesus is His Son, and by tracing Jesus’s earthly lineage back to God, Luke shows us how Jesus is fully God, fully man and therefore fully qualified to redeem us back to the Father. He is the prophesied One, the King of kings, the Son of Man, and the Son of God Most High. Nothing is beyond His abilities. No one is beyond His reach. No sin is too great for Him to forgive. No pain is too small for Him to care for. No miracle is too difficult for Him to achieve.

Tomorrow is Christmas Day, the day we celebrate His first coming. Jesus was fully God and fully man, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger as a helpless babe. He came, God with us, to reconcile us to Himself so we can live with Him in indescribable glory forever and ever and ever.

#### **O HOLY NIGHT BY ADOLPHE ADAM AND JOHN SULLIVAN DWIGHT**

*O holy night, the stars are brightly shining  
It is the night of our dear Savior’s birth  
Long lay the world, in sin and error pining  
’Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth  
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices  
For yonder breaks, a new and glorious morn*

*Fall on your knees  
O hear the angels’ voices  
O night divine  
O night when Christ was born  
O night divine  
O night  
O night divine*

