

Study Through the Bible

Advent: A Savior for All People

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Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide

Study Through the Bible

Advent: A Savior for All People - Study 1

Be Prepared

Are you ready to receive what God is offering this Christmas?

Some of us may have written off Christmas. Maybe it brings up too many old issues for us. Maybe we're sick of the commercialization of it all. Maybe we feel every day ought to be a celebration of the birth of Christ, so why make such a big deal out of December 25? But as creatures bound in time and space, we need real time and space markers that remind us of the great events that define our faith. But if our Christmas is to be spiritually successful, we're going to have to fight for it. And the way to do that is through preparation.

Scripture:
Luke 1:1-25

Based on:
The sermon series "A Savior for All People," by Mark Mitchell, PreachingToday.com



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide, included at the end of this study.

Advent is all about preparation. Sometimes we forget that before God sent his Son into the world, he prepared the way. Jesus arrived on the scene after 400 years of silence from God—preparation. He arrived after an angel named Gabriel visited numerous people—preparation. God even saw fit to prepare the way for his Son by sending a man named John to call people to repentance. God is into preparation.

The Gospel writer who focused most on preparation was Luke. Maybe it was because he was a physician. We all know the amount of preparation it takes to become a doctor. Or maybe it had something to do with the purpose of his writing. Luke was a prolific writer. He wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else, including Paul.

Luke tells us of his purpose in the opening of his Gospel (Luke 1:1–4). He wrote so that a man named Theophilus would know the exact truth about Jesus Christ. Theophilus was probably a Gentile who had become a Christian, and Luke wanted him to get the straight scoop. Luke himself was a Gentile who had never seen Jesus, but he wrote down the accounts of those who were eyewitnesses of Christ. He investigated everything carefully, and laid it all out in logical order. It was a two-volume work: Volume 1 is his Gospel; Volume 2 is the Book of Acts.

In a day and age of best-selling books on lost gospels, it's good to know that someone—a very well-educated, thorough researcher—did his homework. And so, in keeping with his purpose, Luke carefully chronicled what happened before Christ was born. It was all about preparation for the coming of Christ.

Discussion Questions:

- [Q] What, if anything, do you do to prepare your heart for Christmas?
- Is there anything you need to change about the way you celebrate Christmas to better do this? What would it take for that to happen?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Elizabeth and Zechariah were in need of a blessing.

Are you prepared for Christmas? Not do you have your tree up, or have you done your shopping, but are you really prepared? Are you prepared for the arrival of God's Son? You might wonder how you do that. Luke helps us by telling the story of an old Jewish priest and his wife. Read Luke 1:5–7.

We see here that Zechariah was a priest, and Elizabeth was a descendant of priests. That's not unusual. The priesthood was divided into 24 divisions, which amounted to about 18,000 priests. Most of them were poor and worked small farms. Nevertheless, this was an unusual couple. Luke says they were righteous in God's sight; they kept his commandments. This



doesn't mean they were without sin, but unlike many priests of that day, they were examples of genuine faith.

This is significant because of the other thing Luke tells us about them: they had no children. Elizabeth was barren, and the days of hoping for a child were long over. In those days, to be barren was a sign of a spiritual defect in the wife. They didn't have fertility specialists back then; they simply believed God closed a woman's womb because he held some grudge against her. So a barren woman was a disgraced woman. It wasn't uncommon for a husband to divorce his wife because of her supposed flaw. In essence, Elizabeth was forced to walk through life with a sign hung around her neck that read "sinner." You think you don't want to go to church sometimes? Consider how she felt!

And though Zechariah didn't have quite the same stigma to deal with, he still lived with the deep disappointment of having no child to carry on the family name—a tragedy for a man in that culture. Many of us have something like this that rightly or wrongly brings disgrace. It could be something we've done in the past. It could be an addiction we battle every day. Maybe we've been in prison. Maybe we've been divorced. Maybe we've been fired. Maybe we've been abandoned. Any one of those things can hang like a sign around your neck for all to see.

Or maybe you're like Zechariah and Elizabeth. You've been ambushed by some tragedy or disappointment that you never could have expected. You wonder if you will ever be able to really enjoy life again.

- [Q] How would you define a blessing? Is it getting what you want, gaining perspective, becoming wiser? Explain.
- [Q] Have you ever felt that you were in need of a blessing? What made you feel that way?
 - Do you feel that you received the blessing you needed? Why or why not?
- [Q] How can we deal with other people's judgments, as Zechariah and Elizabeth had to do? How can we keep from feeling despair?
- [Q] What do you think kept Zechariah and Elizabeth faithful to God in spite of the disappointment and shame of not having a child?

Teaching point two: God chose to bless Elizabeth and Zechariah in his timing.

At least for Zechariah there was his work. Read Luke 1:8–10.

Zechariah was chosen by lot to enter the Holy Place in the temple and burn incense, which was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. While he was inside the temple, the people were outside offering prayers, waiting for him to come out. He would cast incense on the altar, prostrate himself, and then leave.

But on this day, Zechariah didn't come out for a long time. Read verses 11–14.

Our tendency is to read this like he had a visit from an old friend. But this was an angel, and it scared him to death! Nevertheless, this angel came with good news: Elizabeth would give birth to a son, whom they were to name John, and he would bring joy not only to them, but to many others as well.



The angel said, "Your prayer has been heard." What prayer? This passage doesn't mention a prayer. The angel must be talking about Zechariah's prayer for a son, which he had probably stopped praying a long time ago. Zechariah may have even forgotten that prayer, but God hadn't.

- [Q] Does our society's common view of angels correspond with how they are portrayed in Scripture? Explain.
- [Q] Have you ever had a prayer that was answered long after you prayed it? If so, tell us about it.
- [Q] Why does God so often say, "Wait," when we ask for something?
 - Why do you think he allowed Zechariah and Elizabeth to wait so long?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us see how often the Bible gives us examples of those who must wait.

Activity: Ask the group to name at least ten Bible characters. Using a whiteboard or poster board, write the names down in a column on the left side. Considering them one by one, ask them to recall a time that each of these people had to wait to see God act. (This may not be true for all of them, but most of them probably had to wait for God.) When you're finished, ask what this might tell us about waiting for God to answer our own prayers.

Teaching point three: Zechariah and Elizabeth had prepared differently for the blessing.

Maybe Zechariah also had in mind another prayer. As a righteous man, he would have prayed for the Messiah to come. Read verses 15–17.

The angel told Zechariah that his son's mission and purpose would be to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Have you ever been promised something that was beyond your wildest dreams—something so out-of-the-box that you could hardly believe it? That's what this was for Zechariah.

Look at verse 18: "Zechariah asked the angel, 'How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.'" That's a tactful way of putting it. In essence, Zechariah is saying: Because my wife and I are so old, I'm going to need some proof—a sign that this is really going to happen.

The angel didn't like that. If an angel is scary, think about what an angry angel would be like. Read verses 19–22.

Gabriel was a famous angel who would have been well known to Zechariah. So not only do you have an angel, you have an angry angel; and not only do you have an angry angel, you have a famous angry angel. He says: Don't you know who you're talking to? Don't you know where I've been hanging out? What kind of sign did you want?

So Zechariah is left in the temple with nothing to say. He's been muted. Meanwhile, the people outside are wondering if he's had a heart attack in there. When he finally does come out, he's unable to speak, so he starts signing. Imagine trying to describe what had just happened to him using sign language!



Read verses 23–25.

Elizabeth became pregnant and stayed in seclusion for five months. We don't know why she did this. Some say she was afraid of losing the baby. Luke doesn't tell us, but he does tell us she spent that time thanking and praising God. During this time, she was thinking and talking about how God had worked in her life to bless her and to take away her disgrace among people.

Think about these two. Zechariah is righteous. He's old. He's a priest. He knows God. He knows what it means to serve God. If there ever was a real saint, it's this guy. But he still had some growing to do. God sent the angel Gabriel to him to give him a marvelous promise. But what does he do? He doubts God. He underestimates God. The angel says it flat out: "You did not believe my words."

We don't always think of that as sin, but it is. Underestimating God is just as serious as rebelling against God. Look at the Gospels—the thing that frustrated Jesus the most was the people's lack of faith. Faith isn't just something we exercise to get into God's family.

Zechariah is an example of a person who has known the Lord for a long time. He goes to church. He gives his tithes. He leads a small group. He goes on mission trips. He prays before meals. He reads the Bible every day. He does all the right things in all the right places in all the right ways. But when God comes along and challenges him to a new level of faith, he's not ready.

Many of us like to use cruise control. But cruise control doesn't work in traffic. Zechariah was on spiritual cruise control, going about his religious duties—he could do it all with his eyes closed—but God chose to throw him into traffic, and he was not ready; he didn't want to turn off his cruise control.

This couple reminds us that it really doesn't matter how long you've known God, or how well you've obeyed God, or how faithfully you've served God; there is always room for growth. God is committed to stretching and growing the faith of people like Zechariah and Elizabeth.

- [Q] Why is underestimating God sin? Give an example.
- [Q] How might you be on "spiritual cruise control" in your Christian life? What can you do to turn off the "cruise control"?
- [Q] Share a time when God "threw you into traffic." What happened to your spiritual life, and why?
 - How should we respond when God "throws us into traffic"?
- [Q] Which of the following keep you sharp spiritually?
 - Regular Bible reading
 - Continuous prayer
 - Faithful church attendance
 - Solitude
 - Fasting
 - Accountability partner
 - Outreach



➤ Other

Why did you choose the one(s) you did? How does that thing keep you spiritually sharp?
How might any of those things fail you at times?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Zechariah wasn't prepared for Christmas because he didn't believe that God could step into his life and answer long-forgotten prayers in out-of-the-box ways. Most of us are secretly disappointed with God, but afraid to admit it. So, like old Zechariah, we just do what we're supposed to do, never really believing that God is at work to bless us in ways that will blow our minds.

That's what the coming of Christ really means for each one of us. What Elizabeth says in verse 25 is true of each of us, because God sent his Son—he's looked with favor on us, to take away our disgrace among people.

We may believe that God could do that for someone else, but not for us. We think: You don't know what I've done. You don't know what I've gone through. You don't know how hopeless my situation is. Some of us have become so cynical and jaded by life that we no longer believe God is at work in us. If we're stuck in our unbelief, we're not ready for God's gift. But God has some interesting ways of getting through to us.

James Dobson relates a story of an elderly woman named Stella Thornhope, who was struggling with her first Christmas alone. Her husband had died of cancer just a few months earlier. Now, several days before Christmas, she was almost snowed in by brutal weather. She felt terribly alone, so much so that she decided she was not going to decorate for Christmas. Late that afternoon, the doorbell rang, and there was a delivery boy with a box.

He said, "Mrs. Thornhope?" She nodded. He said, "Would you sign here?" She invited him to step inside and closed the door to get away from the cold. She signed the paper and said, "What's in the box?" The young man laughed and opened up the flap, and inside was a little puppy, a golden Labrador retriever. The delivery boy picked up the squirming pup and explained, "This is for you, ma'am. He's 6-weeks-old and completely housebroken." The young puppy began to wiggle in happiness at being released from captivity.

"Who sent this?" Mrs. Thornhope asked.

The young man set the animal down, handed her an envelope, and said: "It's all explained here in this envelope, ma'am. The dog was bought last July while its mother was still pregnant. It was meant to be a Christmas gift for you." The young man then handed her a book, *How to Care for Your Labrador Retriever*.

In desperation, she again asked, "Who sent me this puppy?"

As the young man turned to leave, he said, "Your husband, ma'am. Merry Christmas."

She opened up the letter from her husband. He had written it three weeks before he died, and left it with the kennel owners to be delivered with the puppy as his last Christmas gift to her. The letter was full of love, encouragement, and admonishments to be strong. He vowed that he was waiting for the day when she would join him. He had sent her this young animal to keep



her company until then. She wiped away the tears, put the letter down, and then, remembering the puppy at her feet, she picked up that golden, furry ball and held it to her neck. Then she looked out the window at the lights that outlined the neighbor's house, and she heard from the radio in the kitchen the strains of "Joy to the world, the Lord has come."

Suddenly, Stella felt the most amazing sensation of peace washing over her. Her heart felt a joy and wonder greater than the grief and loneliness. "Little fella," she said to the dog, "it's just you and me. But you know what? There's a box down in the basement I'll bet you'll like. It's got a little Christmas tree in it and some decorations and some lights that are going to impress you. And there's a manger scene down there. Let's go get it."

God has a way of sending signals of hope to remind us that life is stronger than death. Light is more powerful than darkness. God is more powerful than Satan. Good will overcome evil. Joy is stronger than disappointment. That's the message of Christmas. The question is: Are we prepared for it? Are we able to believe that God is acting for us, in ways we never could have imagined, to take away our disgrace and disappointment?

Action Point: How about you? Do you believe God is able to bring you joy and blessing where there has been disgrace and disappointment? Share with the group a prayer request about how you need renewed hope.

—Study by Mark Mitchell, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Advent: A Savior for All People - Study 2

The True Spirit of Christmas

Are you where God wants you to be this holiday season?

More than anyone else in the Christmas story, Mary demonstrates the true spirit of Christmas. The true spirit of Christmas is not the spirit of family bonding, or the spirit of giving, or even the spirit of rejoicing. All of those things are well and good, but Mary teaches us that the true spirit of Christmas is a spirit of humility.

Scripture:
Luke 1:26-56

Based on:
The sermon series "A Savior for All People," by Mark Mitchell, PreachingToday.com



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide, included at the end of this study.

In one *Peanuts* comic strip, Lucy says that Christmas is a time for kindness and to forgive one another. Charlie Brown says, "Why do that just at Christmas? Why can't we have the Christmas spirit the rest of the year?" Lucy looks at Charlie and says, "What are you—some kind of religious fanatic?"

In our last study, we looked at the beginning of Luke's Gospel. The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah in the temple and promised that his wife would bear a child who would prepare the way for the coming of Christ. Zechariah had a hard time believing that, because he and his wife were well beyond the years of childbearing. He asked for a sign, and the angel gave him more than he bargained for—he was unable to speak until the promise was fulfilled.

At this point in Luke's Gospel, Zechariah exits the stage. He'll be back, but now we have a change of scene. Luke leads us from the great and holy temple in Jerusalem to an obscure village in a remote region not known for its piety. He leads us away from this well-known priest to an unknown peasant, from an old man to a young woman. He leads us from Zechariah to Mary.

More than anyone else in the Christmas story, Mary demonstrates the true spirit of Christmas—a spirit of humility.

Discussion Questions:

- [Q] How would you define *humility*?
- [Q] What about Mary sticks out most to you in the Christmas story?
- [Q] Who else in the Christmas story demonstrates humility?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Humility is demonstrated by submission to the Lord's plan.

Read Mary's story in Luke 1:26–38.

There are some striking similarities between what happened to Zechariah and to Mary. Both are visited by the angel Gabriel. Both are given what seemed like an impossible promise involving a child. One of them would be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb. The other would be conceived by the Spirit. Both are given a sign.

But the similarities end there. Mary is a young teenager from a podunk town called Nazareth, in the region of Galilee. She was betrothed to a carpenter named Joseph. That meant more than



engagement does today. It was a binding contract; any breach of it was considered adultery. To get out of it, you had to initiate divorce proceedings. Betrothed couples had many of the responsibilities of marriage, without the privileges.

We don't know what Mary was doing. Perhaps she was in the midst of her morning chores, daydreaming about her future with Joseph. What kind of husband would he be? When would their first child come along? And then the unthinkable happened: the angel Gabriel appeared, front and center. If that weren't strange enough, he gave Mary an even stranger greeting. He called her "favored," and said, "The Lord is with you." She's baffled! Gabriel senses her confusion and explains more: she would conceive and give birth to a child—the long awaited Messiah.

Like every Jewish kid, she had grown up hearing all about the coming Son of David. It might have even crossed her mind that Joseph was from the line of David. *But me, the mother of the Messiah?* And then it hit her: *Wait a minute, that's not how my mother told me it worked. How can I have a child? I've never been with a man!*

It wasn't an expression of doubt, as with Zechariah, but of confusion. And then came the shocker: *Who did he say the father would be? Something about the Holy Spirit making me pregnant?* Imagine the swirl of emotions. On the one hand, she was stunned by the honor. On the other hand, she dreaded how this might play out. Jewish law said that a man or woman who committed adultery was to be stoned.

And how would Joseph react? Could he possibly believe her story? She would be disgraced. All her dreams were dying. A part of Mary wanted to fall down in grateful praise; another part wanted to protest at such an unfair intrusion into her life. But somehow, in that battlefield of her own heart, she chose to surrender: "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." In simple faith, Mary said yes to God.

That's the spirit of Christmas—humility. Mary said yes to God's intrusion because she saw herself as the Lord's servant. Humility is one of those Christian buzz words we love to talk about, but when it comes right down to it, everything within us protests against it. Humility expresses itself in surrender. Some translations have used the word *bond slave* instead of *servant*. A bond slave is one who has basically given up his right to call the shots. He realizes he doesn't own himself. He's not autonomous. He belongs to someone else. Think of how different your life would be if you saw yourself as a bond slave of the Lord. What would you stop worrying about? What would you stop wrestling with God over? What would you stop doing to secure your own place?

Maybe a friend, a coworker, or a family member has mistreated you. You've been cheated and you're angry about it. You're not getting a fair shake. What do you do? How do you handle that? Do you try to secure your own position, demand your own rights? Humility means you start with surrendering your rights and plans and desires and questions to the Lord: "Behold the bond slave of the Lord"

Corrie Ten Boom tells the story of when she was speaking in a church and recognized a man who was a guard at the concentration camp she and her sister were in during World War II. Memories of the concentration camp came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor, the shame of walking naked past the man. Now this former guard was in front of her with his hand thrust out: "A fine message, fraulein. How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!"



It was the first time since her release that she had been face to face with one of her captors. She froze. "You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk," he said. "I was a guard there. But since that time, I've become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I'd like to hear it from your lips as well." Again the hand came out—"Will you forgive me?" She stood there—and couldn't do it. Her sister had died in that place. Hours seemed to pass as the man stood there with his hand held out, and Corrie wrestled with the most difficult thing she ever had to do.

She knew she didn't really have a choice. Jesus commanded it. So she prayed: "Jesus, help me! I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling." And so, mechanically, she thrust her hand into his. As she did, she said a current started in her shoulder, raced down her arm, and sprang into their joined hands. And then a healing warmth seemed to flood her whole being, bringing tears to her eyes. "I forgive you, brother!" she cried. "With all my heart!"

For a long moment, they grasped each other's hands—the former guard and the former prisoner. Corrie made the same choice Mary did. Those are hard choices to make, but could it be that, as with Mary, our greatest gifts come disguised as intrusions demanding our surrender? Philip Yancey writes, "Every work of God comes with two edges—great joy and great pain."

That doesn't mean we won't wrestle over this. There will be a battle within. Self never gives up easily, and right when you think you've got it where you want it, it rises up somewhere else. Jesus called us to take up our cross daily. It's the daily part that's so hard. Every day, we have to make that choice. But, as with Mary, there is blessing on the other side of surrender.

- [Q] Have you ever had to surrender something to God and found it difficult? If so, tell us about it: What was the hardest thing about it? What was the outcome?
- [Q] Have you ever refused to surrender something to God? If so, what was the outcome of that?
- [Q] What do you think it means to "take up our cross daily"? What does that look like in everyday life?
- [Q] Why does God bless us when we surrender? What does he want most from us?

Teaching point two: Humility is expressed in knowing and accepting your place in God's plan.

This brings us to the second scene. The angel said that Mary's cousin Elizabeth was also experiencing a miracle: she was pregnant in her old age. Mary might have thought that Elizabeth would understand. So she packed her bags and headed south for the hill country of Judea, where Zechariah and Elizabeth lived. It would have been about a four-day trek to Elizabeth's house. She had plenty of time to think about how she would present this to her older cousin. She may have even prepared a little speech. But she didn't need it.

Look at what happened when she arrived. Read Luke 1:39–45.

This must have been one of those moments when Mary felt a massive load lift off her. This was confirmation: *No, I'm not crazy. Yes, I did hear the angel right. God is in control.* Mary didn't



even have to say a word. Before she could speak, Elizabeth broke out in a Holy Spirit–inspired blessing on Mary and her child.

In this blessing, we see another example of the spirit of Christmas. Elizabeth’s humility is seen in the fact that she recognizes Mary as the most blessed among women. She’s humbled by the fact that Mary would come visit her; she doesn’t feel deserving. She says Mary believed that the Lord would deliver on his word. Not only that, but she recognized that the child in Mary’s womb is greater than the child in her own womb. She called Mary, “the mother of my Lord.” John, who did a prenatal somersault, pointed to Jesus even from the womb. Years later, John would confess, “He must increase; I must decrease.”

Perhaps in the back of Luke’s mind was another story from Scripture. When the twins, Jacob and Esau, were still in their mother’s womb, they struggled for preeminence. When their mother prayed about it, the Lord said, “The older will serve the younger.” That’s not the way it was supposed to work. In that culture, the younger was supposed to serve the older. Now, years later, we have the same message: the older (John) is going to serve the younger (Jesus). The difference is that no one is struggling. Both Elizabeth and John are filled with joy.

Knowing and accepting your place in God’s plan expresses humility. We all have a place, but your place is different than mine. When we finally get that and stop comparing ourselves with others, and when we start doing what we were called to do, the result is just what we see here—joy. You can’t have joy if you’re always chafing under the fact that God’s plan for you doesn’t seem as important as God’s plan for someone else.

In the 1998–99 NBA season, David Robinson, a frequent all-star and veteran center for the San Antonio Spurs, learned to share the limelight with the new dominant player of the league: his teammate, Tim Duncan. San Antonio won the NBA playoffs in 1999, and Duncan was the star.

In *Sports Illustrated*, Robinson reflected on what this was like for him:

I can’t overstate how important my faith has been to me as an athlete and as a person. It’s helped me deal with so many things, including matters of ego and pride. For instance, I can’t deny that it felt weird to see Tim standing on the podium with the finals MVP trophy. I was thinking, *Man, never have I come to the end of a tournament and not been the one holding up that trophy.* It was hard.

But I thought about the Bible story of David and Goliath. David helped King Saul win a battle, but the king wasn’t happy because he had killed thousands of men while David had killed tens of thousands. So King Saul couldn’t enjoy the victory because he was thinking about David’s getting more credit than he was.

I’m blessed that God has given me the ability to just enjoy the victory. So Tim killed the tens of thousands. That’s great. I’m for him.

That’s the spirit of Christmas—knowing you’re accepting your role in God’s plan. Thomas Merton once said, “Give me humility, in which alone is rest, and deliver me from pride, which is the heaviest of burdens.”

- [Q] In what areas are you most tempted to compare yourself to others? What kind of things are you most jealous of in others?
- [Q] Name practical ways we can know and accept our place in God’s plans.



[Q] Why is it often so hard to rejoice with those who rejoice? What does that say about us?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us learn to identify ways we compare ourselves to others.

Activity: Ask the group to break into smaller groups of three or four. Provide each person with a magazine that has a lot of ads and photos. Ask them to thumb through and find a picture of someone who represents what they would like to be. Discuss these in the smaller groups and talk about why focusing on that image may be good or bad.

Teaching point three: Humility is seen in grateful worship for God's salvation.

As you might imagine, all of this was pretty overwhelming for Mary—so much so that she broke out in praise.

This song has at least 15 quotations from the Old Testament. Mary knew her Bible. The spirit of the song is one of praise and thanksgiving. If this song had a name, it might be "The Great Reversal." Its theme is God's great reversal of fortune for the poor in spirit. It has two parts to it. The first part focuses on what God did for her. Read verses 46–49.

[Q] Do you see the reversal? Name as many reversals as you see in this section.

Mary sees the same principle at work in others. Read verses 50–55.

[Q] Once again, do you see the reversals? Name as many as you see in this section.

Some have taken this as a political manifesto of liberation for the poor and oppressed of the Earth. It was never meant to be that. The liberation she describes is not political or economic, but spiritual. Mary will be called blessed not because she'll get a new Mercedes, but because her Son will save her and others from sin. The liberation is not for the poor, period—but for the poor who fear God, trust God, and look to God for salvation.

[Q] The reality is that it's easier for the poor and oppressed to do this than for the rich and powerful. Why is that so?

The spirit of Christmas is the spirit of humility. Like Mary, each one of us is born into a humble state. Spiritually, we're bent toward sin, separated from God. But God sent his Son so that our fortune might be reversed.

[Q] Name one thing God has reversed in your life since you have come to know him.

The angel told Mary, "You shall name him Jesus." That name means *salvation*. Mary sings of "God, my Savior." What was Mary being saved from? Her sin, of course. Later, Zechariah will praise God for raising up a "horn of salvation" for us. And it's as we begin to claim that salvation that joy and gratitude come into our lives. But salvation only comes to the poor in spirit—the humble of heart.

The Masai tribe in West Africa has an unusual way of saying thank you. They bow, put their foreheads on the ground, and say, "My head is in the dirt." Why do they do that? Because at its core, thanksgiving is an act of humility. Humility isn't just, "Woe is me." It begins with "Woe is



me,” and ends with “Look what God has done for me.” Every one of us has a choice: will we humble ourselves before God and live gratefully, or will we continue to lick our wounds and wallow in self-pity?

The Christmas season can bring that question to the fore. It’s a hard time for many people. But no matter how hard it is, the message of Mary’s song is that God has done something to change your situation—he has sent his Son to be your Savior, to reverse your fortune. And if you let it, that will bring you real joy.

[Q] Explain why thanksgiving is an act of humility.

- How does it annihilate self-pity?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

The spirit of Christmas is the spirit of humility. It’s a humility that is expressed in being willing to say, “I’m a bond slave. Be it done to me according to your word.” It’s a humility that’s expressed in being willing to accept your place in God’s plan. It’s a humility that’s expressed in grateful worship for a salvation you did not merit.

A well-known Christian writer and speaker was asked if it was difficult for her to remain humble. She replied, “When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on the back of a donkey, and everyone was waving palm branches and throwing garments on the road and singing praises, do you think for one moment it ever entered the head of that donkey that any of that was for him? If I can be a donkey on which Jesus Christ rides in his glory, I give him all the praise and all the honor.”

That’s the spirit of Christmas—the spirit of humility.

Action Point: Earlier we named one reversal Christ has made in our lives. Now name another one you would like him to make. Ask the group to pray for you in this regard.

—Study by Mark Mitchell, with JoHannah Reardon



Advent: A Savior for All People - Study 3

A Christmas To-Do List

What's at the top of your list this season?

Most of us have heard the Christmas story so many times that we think we know what it's all about. But the fact is, we might have passed over some important pieces. If we look a little harder, we might find a whole new piece of the Nativity scene that's been in the closet for years—never unwrapped.

Scripture:

Luke 1:57–2:21

Based on:

The sermon series "A Christmas To-Do List," by Mark Mitchell, PreachingToday.com



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide, included at the end of this study.

In Luke's Gospel, the Christmas story is not just about one birth—it's about two. Before we read about the birth of Jesus, we read about the birth of John. In fact, John's birth gets more coverage than Jesus' birth. If we just read about Jesus' birth apart from John's birth, we don't really get the whole story. It's like reading *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy without reading *The Hobbit*, or teaching a kid how to throw a football without teaching him how to play the game.

If we're going to do Christmas right, we have to look at both of these births. Read Luke 1:57–66 and Luke 2:1–21.

Discussion Questions:

- Why is so much attention given to John's birth in this account? What does his birth tell us about Jesus' coming?
- How might John's birth have prepared the people of that day for Jesus' birth?
- How might hearing the account of his birth have given John courage when things got tough later in his life, when he was imprisoned?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Luke's Christmas story includes not one but two births.

Notice the locations of these two births. The first one took place at home, while the other took place far from home. Zechariah and Elizabeth were from the hill country of Judea, and that's where their son was born. That's how it was supposed to happen in those days.

Not so for Joseph and Mary. They lived in the region of Galilee, in the little town of Nazareth, but late in Mary's pregnancy, they had to go south to Bethlehem.

It was a long journey, at least a three-day trip, and the timing couldn't have been worse. Perhaps in the back of their mind was the ancient prophecy about Bethlehem, that it would be the birthplace of the coming Messiah. It might have all made sense at that point, seeing God's hand in the decree, but it couldn't have been easy. To make matters worse, Bethlehem was filled with visitors who were there for the census. Mary and Joseph found shelter in what was most likely a cave or a stable for farm animals.

Don't be fooled by your adorable Nativity scenes. This wasn't a pretty sight. As they entered the cave, the manure smells might have knocked them off their feet. But the location was not the only difference between these two births.



One of the best things about bringing a new child into the world is getting to share it with your friends and family. In the case of John, all the friends and relatives were in attendance. That's the kind of thing you want. Everybody is there; everybody is happy for you.

It wasn't that way for Mary and Joseph. Jesus was born without any doting relatives around, without any fanfare. This is like the Super Bowl being played in an empty and silent stadium.

The one encouragement was the shepherds. There is some debate among scholars as to how shepherds were viewed in those days. Some have said they were despised; others believe that attitude didn't really develop until later. Either way, we know for sure that shepherds were just ordinary, unlettered folk.

That's not to say there wasn't a lot of joy in this event. It all started with the angel, who said, "I bring you good news of great joy." It was customary in the Roman Empire for poets and orators to declare peace and joy at the birth of one who was to become the emperor. Now, in that same pattern, came the good news of joy occasioned by the birth of a Savior.

At the end of chapter one, Zechariah, filled with the Holy Spirit, blurts out what has historically been called the Benedictus. It's a prophecy, more about Jesus than about John. Zechariah praises God for bringing redemption and salvation to his people. He sings about God's tender mercy, which will result in the forgiveness of sins. And he likens the coming of Jesus to the sunrise that will give light to those who sit in darkness and guide them in the way of peace. Read Luke 1:67–79.

So we have not one birth but two. One took place at home, with doting friends and relatives in attendance; the other took place far away from home, in a stable, with no one there but animals and a few shepherds. Both of them were occasions of great joy and singing. Both of them took place in accord with Jewish law—naming and circumcising the boy.

You might be thinking, *That's all fine and good, but what does it mean for me?* In the cast of characters of these two births, we see representative responses to the Christmas event that teach us something about our response. In fact, all of this is capsulated in the response of the shepherds to the angel's words (Luke 2:15–20).

- [Q] John 1:67 says that the Holy Spirit prophesied through Zechariah. How would you sum up the prophecy?
- [Q] How did John prepare the way for Christ when they were both adults?
- [Q] How did Christ's coming fulfill each of the following:
- Forgiveness of sins (v. 77)
 - Reveal God's tender mercy (v. 78)
 - Shine on those living in darkness (v. 79)
 - Guide our feet into the path of peace (v. 79)
- [Q] What purpose did the shepherds play in these events (Luke 2:15–20)?



Teaching point two: The two births teach us what to do at Christmas.

There are four things we can learn about what to do at Christmas through this account.

1. **Believe.** Zechariah failed to believe that God would do what the angel promised him. That's why he was silent until his son was born. Mary, in contrast to that, believed that what the angel said really would take place. As soon as the angels left, the shepherds looked at each other and said: *What are we waiting for? Let's go straight to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened.*

There is no debate. There is no procrastination. They don't decide to sleep on it. They don't go to the local library for research. They just believe it. That's faith. Scripture says that without faith, it's impossible to please God. The angel said, "On earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." Who is that? It's those who respond to God's gift through faith. Scripture says, "For by grace you have been saved, through faith"

Faith means you say yes to all that God did through Christ. Yes, he is the Savior of the world. Yes, he came to die for my sins. Yes, through him I find forgiveness and new life. Yes, I want to follow Christ as Lord. Faith isn't a spectator sport; it's an active embracing of all that God has promised in Christ.

[Q] In what way are you having trouble believing God? How might you be debating, procrastinating, or making excuses for your unbelief?

- Is there any way this group can help you move past that unbelief?

2. **Obey.** We see obedience in the naming and circumcision of both John and Jesus. Zechariah named his first and only son John. It couldn't have been easy. He faced some pretty serious family pressure: *John? There's no one in our family named John! What kind of name is that?*

There is a time to break with family tradition in obedience to God. Maybe the hardest time to do that is at Christmas. Zechariah learned that neither he nor his family calls the shots; God does.

We see the same obedience in Joseph and Mary. We sometimes think of Christmas as a rather tame holiday. We think of sweet little baby Jesus asleep on a bed of hay—tiny little hands that could do no harm, a bright halo above his head. Everyone loves that because it's so innocuous and safe. But Christmas isn't safe! That baby is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He has come to usher in a kingdom that rivals the kingdom of self. That's threatening. He bids those who would follow him to take up their cross daily—to lay aside our own right to rule ourselves, to surrender to his rule.

The world loves to celebrate the birth of Christ, but they hate to obey him as the Lord of their lives. Everyone wants to keep Christ in the manger. But the manger is meaningless apart from the Cross. As one writer put it many years ago: "This little babe, so few days old, is come to rifle Satan's fold; all hell doth at his presence quake, though he himself for cold does shake." Christmas is a time for obedience.

[Q] Is a misplaced loyalty to tradition holding you back from obeying God? If so, how can you break free from that?



[Q] How might you be keeping Christ in the manger instead of letting him be Lord of your life?

3. **Tell others about him.** That's the next thing to put on your to-do list—tell others. We see that at John's birth. It says that when Zechariah's friends heard him praise God, they began to talk about it all throughout the hill country of Judea. It was hot, but holy, gossip that spread like wildfire.

It's in the shepherds that we see it best. When they arrived in Bethlehem and saw the child lying in the feed trough, "they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child." Observe the progression: they heard the angels; they went to Bethlehem; they saw the child; and then they made known the news.

You cannot speak of what you have not seen and experienced in your own life. But when you embrace Christ—or, more accurately, he embraces you—something happens to you. You know it. Paul says, "God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Romans 5:5). If you, like the shepherds, have experienced that, you have to tell others about it.

They weren't preachers, they weren't missionaries, but that didn't matter. They had heard and seen something that meant salvation for the whole world. If you saw a fire and heard a small child screaming in the window, you wouldn't wait for the professionals—you'd run in there and get that child out.

Christmas trees, eggnog, and exchanging of gifts are fine. But if we do all that stuff but don't talk about Jesus—if we fail to speak of the real meaning of it all; if we neglect to tell someone that this child was born as Savior and Lord, that he was sent by God to die on the Cross to purchase with royal blood our own deliverance from sin, death, and the devil; if we neglect to publish that abroad—we've failed to do Christmas right.

The angel said that this is good news of great joy which shall be for all the people. Not just religious people, not just Western people, not just poor people or rich people or smart people or not-so-smart people—for all people. So don't let Christmas go by without telling someone about Jesus.

[Q] Name at least one person you could talk with about how much Christ means to you this Christmas. It could be a child, a relative, a neighbor, or a coworker.

4. **Experience holy wonder.** We see it in the people who heard the news about John's birth. Luke 1:66 says, "Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, 'What then is this child going to be?'" We see a similar reaction when people heard what the shepherds were saying.

You get the feeling that Mary took it even a step further: "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." When you write your to-do list, put that on there, too. Amidst all the activity, stop and treasure all these things. Ponder them in your heart. Engage in some holy wonder.

[Q] How can you engage in holy wonder? Read the following and check any you would like to implement this Christmas season. When you're finished, share what you checked with the



group. In the coming weeks ask each other how you are doing on engaging in holy wonder.

- ___ In the middle of my shopping, I'd like to stop, pull out my Bible, and read the Christmas story.
- ___ I would like to gather my children around a Nativity scene each night to unwrap a different piece, and talk about the role it plays in the Christmas story.
- ___ I would like to wake up early one morning and find a place to watch the sun rise and meditate on Zechariah's words: "The rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."
- ___ I would like to write the words of the angel on a 3x5 card and pull it out every time I eat: "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."
- ___ Your own idea for engaging in holy wonder.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Corrie Ten Boom tells a story about working with mentally disabled young people after World War 2:

Henk was a boy who was a member of my Bible class for the mentally disabled. He came from a family with 11 children, and it was difficult for his poor, tired mother to give him much attention. Once I visited Henk at home, and his mother received me with such a thankful manner. "Henk talks so much about the stories you tell in his Bible class. He never remembers anything about any other class, but when he comes from your class, he talks to his brothers and sisters about it."

"Is Henk at home?"

"He's in his room upstairs, in the corner of the attic. He's there most of the time—he's really my easiest boy. We know he'll never become a professor or anything important, but he does work for a salary—he's in a government workshop where he makes clothespins the whole day. Dear Henk, he's so satisfied, but when he's at home the house is so full of noise that he goes to his attic room."

I went upstairs and found Henk on his knees in front of a chair. Before him was an old, dirty picture of Jesus on the cross. I stopped at the door to listen, for Henk was singing. His voice was soft and hoarse. He sang: "Out of my bondage, sorrow, and night, Jesus, I come, Jesus, I come. Into thy freedom, gladness, and light, Jesus, I come to thee. Out of the depths of ruin untold, into the peace of thy sheltering fold; ever thy glorious face to behold, Jesus, I come to Thee."

I've heard Bach played by Schweitzer, and anthems sung by gigantic choirs, but at that moment I felt as if I were in a cathedral with angels surrounding me. I tiptoed back downstairs without disturbing him, praising God again for the love he brings into the lives of "even the least of them."



Sometime later, I heard that Henk's mother had gone into his attic room and found him before the chair, with the picture of Jesus in his hand. Henk was home with the Lord. When I heard about his death, I wondered if he had been singing, "Jesus, I come to Thee" at that last moment.

This Christmas, kneel before the Lord Jesus and praise him. This includes believing, obeying, telling others, and taking time for holy wonder. Don't leave out any one of those things.

Action Point: Which of the four things (believe, obey, tell others, experience holy wonder) do you struggle most with, and why? How can this group pray for you in that area?

—Study by Mark Mitchell, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Advent: A Savior for All People - Study 4

The Bad (or Good) News About Jesus

Jesus' birth was the best thing that could happen to you—or the worst.

The day after Christmas can be disappointing. Maybe some part of the holiday didn't meet our expectations. Maybe we just don't want it to be over. Maybe the new year frightens us. Perhaps Mary and Joseph felt similarly after Jesus' birth. In the days to come they had to face the bad news with the good.

Scripture:
Luke 2:22-38

Based on:
The sermon series "The Bad News About Jesus ...," by Mark Mitchell, PreachingToday.com

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide, included at the end of this study.

We don't always think a lot about what happened during the days after that wondrous night in the stable. The Gospel writer, Luke, tells us that Mary and Joseph presented Jesus in the temple, where they were met by the prophets Simeon and Anna.

In the 14th century, an Italian artist named Ambrogio Lorenzetti painted this scene. Simeon and Anna are at the altar. Mary and Joseph look on in amazed silence. The prophetess Anna has her eyes fixed on the child. The bearded Simeon, with a solemn look on his face, stares down at the baby in his arms. Yet the baby Jesus at the center of the picture surprises everyone. They all gaze awestruck at him because he's sucking his thumb! The family may marvel, the aged Simeon and Anna may prophesy, but this little child—this thumb-sucking baby Jesus—is not exactly what was expected.

Luke doesn't really tell us that Jesus was sucking his thumb. But there are some surprising things about this scene. This study will look at some of these surprises.

Discussion Questions:

- [Q] What are some misconceptions you might have (or have had) about the Christmas story?
- [Q] How have artwork and media affected the way you look at Christ's birth? How have they helped you? How have they given you false impressions?
- [Q] Is there anything about Jesus' birth that surprises you?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Simeon revealed that Jesus would fulfill the prophets' dreams.

Read Luke 2:25–32.

Luke took pains to describe Simeon. He was an ideal Jew. He embodied everything God intended for his people. He was righteous and devout. He operated with integrity toward God and others. He had also been waiting for the consolation of Israel, which is another way of saying he was waiting for the Messiah. This Messiah would bring consolation—comfort to people who were anxious and oppressed. The Holy Spirit, who is also called “the Comforter,” was upon Simeon, and had revealed to him that he would actually see the Messiah before he died.

Have you ever waited anxiously for a letter that would bring some kind of important news? You knew it would come, but until you held it in your hand, you could not rest. You checked your mailbox daily. We can imagine Simeon entering the temple each day, wondering if this would



be the day—in a sense, waiting for the letter God had promised. And one day he sensed the Spirit leading him into the temple, when Mary and Joseph entered with their baby. He took the child in his arms, thanked God, and began to pray. He could now die a contented man—the letter had come; the comfort had arrived; his dreams were fulfilled.¹

- [Q] Mary and Joseph discover who Jesus is in bits and pieces. What must have been their understanding at this point?
- [Q] What new thing did Simeon reveal to them (v. 32)? Why would this be significant?

Leader's Note: *Even though the angel Gabriel had told the shepherds, "I bring you good news of great joy, which shall be for all the people," it was assumed he meant the people of Israel. But here it is clear: Israel's glory is that the Messiah comes through them, but his coming is not just for them—it's for Gentiles as well. In these days of equal opportunity, that may not mean a whole lot to us, but you can be sure it was a shock to Mary and Joseph. Even though they might not understand it all, they could understand enough to see that their son would be more than just a national hero. His impact would be worldwide.*

- [Q] In what way was Jesus the fulfillment of everything the Old Testament prophets had hoped for?

Teaching point two: Simeon revealed that the good news will be bad news for some, but Anna revealed that the bad news is good news after all.

Imagine the pride Mary and Joseph felt at Simeon's prophecy. But then Simeon spoke again, and they must have wondered if they heard him right. Read Luke 2:34–35.

For the first time in Luke's Gospel, a dark thread is woven into a bright tapestry. Mary and Joseph's faces must have fallen upon hearing these words. Their first thoughts might have been: *But wait a minute, we're doing everything right. We're doing everything by the book. How can this be? Where have we gone wrong?*

Who wants to have their son described like this? He'll cause "the falling and rising of many in Israel." No one will stay the same. Those who stand up and reject him will fall; those who humbly receive him will rise up. By their reaction to him, Jesus will split the nation in two. Some will see him as "a sign [to] be spoken against." He won't be winning "Most Popular" at the middle school in Nazareth.

But why would he garner such opposition? Simeon said that the thoughts of many hearts will be exposed. People don't like to be exposed. People who prefer to stay in hiding resent exposure. No wonder they would oppose him.

There will even be a cost to Mary. A sword will pierce her soul. Maybe that means that she will endure what every parent fears most—she'll bury her son. Or maybe it means that Mary herself

¹ Ron DiCianni captures the joy Simeon must have felt upon holding the baby Jesus in his painting [Simeon's Moment](#). Superimposed on the background is an artistic map of the world, showing that Jesus would impact the whole world.



would have to make up her own mind about him, that her own heart would be exposed and divided.

Simeon's words are mysterious. But you don't have to have a Ph.D. in literature to figure out that there is something ominous going on here. But we shouldn't be surprised. When you turn on a light, it creates shadows. To be a savior assumes that people need saving. Some people embrace that; others resent it. Some people rise; others fall.

But the story doesn't end there. There are some people for whom the bad news is good news after all. Read verses 36–38.

Like Miriam and Deborah in the Old Testament, Anna is a prophet. She is from the tribe of Asher—one of the lost ten tribes. She's 84 years old, and most of that time she's been a widow. When it says she never left the temple, it may mean that she lived in one of the rooms of the many buildings on the temple hill. Anna is the kind of woman who is devoted to the church, serving the Lord with fasting and prayers.

We don't know how much of what Simeon had to say she had been able to hear, but at any rate she gives thanks to God and starts spreading the news to those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. Perhaps Anna had lived long enough to know that what is bad news for some is good news for others.

- [Q] Why is Jesus Christ good news for some but bad news for others? How do our decisions determine whether he is good or bad news to us?
- [Q] How does Jesus expose your heart?
 - What makes that either good or bad?
- [Q] Give an example of a time when you've observed Jesus be a dividing line for someone.
- [Q] Why would Simeon and Anna have been happy, in spite of knowing that Jesus would be such a controversial person?
- [Q] How does knowing this about Jesus give us perspective on others' reactions to him?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us let Jesus expose our hearts.

Activity: Ask the group to quietly listen to a recording of a hymn, chorus, or worship song that expresses why Jesus came to Earth. This could be a Christmas song or another song that makes this clear. Ask them to think about the words, and to ask Jesus to expose what is really going on in their hearts.

Teaching point three: The coming of Jesus can be good or bad news for us.

What makes the difference? Why is the coming of Jesus good news for some and bad news for others? The answer lies in Simeon and Anna. We've seen how Luke takes pains to paint a vivid picture of these two. And the thought that jumps off the page in verses 25 and 38 is that both were looking and hoping for God to do something. Verse 25 says Simeon was "waiting for the



consolation of Israel.” Verse 38 says Anna spoke of the child “to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem,” which no doubt she was doing also.

Simeon and Anna saw the coming of Christ as good news rather than bad because they were looking, longing, and waiting for God to break into history again and bring consolation and redemption. In the back of Luke’s mind might have been an ancient prophecy from the prophet Isaiah. Read Isaiah 52:9.

In the coming of Christ, this prophecy was fulfilled. The Lord has consoled his people—that’s what Simeon was looking for; and the Lord has redeemed Jerusalem—that’s what Anna was looking for. Consolation speaks to our longings for healing and restoration from all of the past losses and miseries of life. Redemption delivers us from powers that hold us in bondage. It could be the power of sin. It could be the power of death. It could be the power of Satan.

A pastor met a young boy in front of his church; he was carrying a rusty cage in which several birds fluttered nervously. The pastor asked, “Son, where did you get those birds?” The boy said, “I trapped them out in the fields.” The pastor asked, “What are you going to do with them?” The boy said, “I’m going to play with them, and then I guess I’ll just feed them to an old cat we have at home.”

Then the pastor offered to buy them, and the boy tried to talk him out of it because they were good for nothing. The pastor said, “I’ll give you ten dollars for the cage and the birds.” The boy felt bad for the pastor, but agreed. He walked off with his cash, and the pastor walked to the back of the church, opened the cage, and let the birds go. What a good illustration of how Christ redeemed those destined for destruction, not with a few dollars, but with his own life.

- [Q] Simeon and Anna looked, longed for, and waited for God. How can we do that?
- [Q] How has Christ brought consolation and redemption to you? Give practical examples.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

If you are satisfied with life as it is, if you have no longing in your heart for consolation or redemption, this good news of Christ will ultimately be bad news. He’ll be a stumbling block over which you will fall; he’ll be a sign you will oppose; he’ll expose your heart, and you will refuse to stay in the light.

But perhaps God has been graciously and tenderly frustrating you with a life that is not centered on Christ. Maybe he’s been filling you with longings and desires that cannot find their fulfillment in cars or houses or careers or relationships or anything else this world has to offer. Maybe he’s been exposing your own heart, and you see there a need for someone beyond yourself to comfort and redeem you.

To give new plants the best chance to survive, we have to be a little ruthless with them. When we take them out of their plastic container, we inspect the soil ball. If the plant has been growing in its pot so long that the roots are circling the bottom, we must untangle the roots. If the whole pot is filled with circling roots, we have to be merciless. It’s better to break the roots than to allow the roots to become bound and worthless.



Maybe you feel like you have been roughed up a bit. That could be God's severe mercy, because through that you may come to long for comfort and redemption. If this is true of you, then the coming of Christ is good news. The good news is that Christ has come and will come again, and only he can bring you consolation and redemption.

Action Point: Provide a time of silent meditation. Each person should ask themselves how he or she should respond to Jesus Christ: Do you need to trust him? Let him draw his light into your darkness? Let him "untangle your roots"? Be honest before God and ask him to begin to do a new work in you.

—Study by Mark Mitchell, with JoHannah Reardon



