Advent Sermon Series

Good Tidings

A Study Companion for Small Groups and Personal Reflection



November 29: 1st Sunday of Advent

Good Tidings: Hope Is Heard **| Luke 1:5-25** (CEB)

Opening Reflection

Some prayers we pray with confidence. Others we keep praying out of habit, long after we've stopped expecting an answer. And some prayers we quietly set aside, not because we no longer care, but because hoping again feels too painful. Zechariah and Elizabeth knew that ache. They had served God faithfully for years, and the prayer for a child had gone unanswered for so long that it seemed the door had closed.

Then, in the most ordinary moment of priestly duty, an angel speaks: your prayer has been heard. Before God changes the world, God reminds one aging priest that no prayer is forgotten. The story moves from silence to waiting, from promise to joy. On this first Sunday of Advent, as we light the candle of hope, we are invited to bring our long-held prayers back into the light and trust that God hears.

Discussion Questions

1. Is there a prayer you've prayed for so long that you've almost stopped expecting an answer?
2. Luke describes Zechariah and Elizabeth as faithful and righteous, yet still waiting. What does that tell us about the relationship between faithfulness and unanswered prayer?
3. Why do you think God's message came to Zechariah in the middle of his ordinary work?
4. Zechariah responds with doubt. Why might good news sometimes be harder to believe than bad news?
5. What do you think Zechariah learned during his season of silence?
6. How does knowing that God hears us change the way we wait?
7. How can our church be a community that holds hope for those who feel their prayers have been forgotten?

Formation Invitation

This week, write down one prayer you have stopped praying or have grown weary of praying. Place it somewhere you'll see it each day, perhaps near your Advent wreath, nativity, or bathroom mirror. Each morning, offer it to God again in a single sentence, then add: "Thank you for hearing me." Notice what changes in you as you wait.

Contemplative Practice: Holy Silence

Zechariah's season of silence became a season of preparation. Set aside ten minutes this week to sit in silence with God.

- Find a quiet place and sit comfortably. Set a gentle timer.
- Choose a simple word to hold your attention, such as heard, hope, or wait.
- Close your eyes and rest in God's presence. When your mind wanders, gently return to your word without judgment.
- When the timer ends, sit for a moment longer and pray: "You hear me, even in the silence."

You don't need to fill the silence with words. Simply trust that God is present and listening.

For Further Reflection

Read 1 Samuel 1:1–20 and Psalm 130. Notice how Hannah and the psalmist hold honest longing and patient hope together.

Closing Prayer

God who hears, we bring you the prayers we have spoken and the ones we have stopped speaking. In our silence and our waiting, remind us that nothing we lay before you is forgotten. Rekindle our hope this Advent, and prepare our hearts to receive your good news with joy. Amen.



December 6: 2nd Sunday of Advent
Good Tidings: Nothing Is Impossible | Luke 1:26-38 (CEB)

Opening Reflection

Many of us carry a quiet question beneath the surface: Am I enough? Smart enough, faithful enough, good enough, important enough for God to notice or use? Mary would have had every reason to ask that question. She was young, unmarried, and from an unremarkable village. Nothing about her circumstances suggested she would play a central role in God's story.

Yet the angel's first words to her are words of grace: you have found favor with God. Mary's worth was not something she had to earn; it was something God declared. The good news begins when ordinary people say yes to extraordinary grace. Christmas begins when God's impossible becomes Mary's "Let it be." As we light the candle of love, we remember that God's love chooses us before we ever feel ready.

Discussion Questions

1. When have you wondered whether you were "enough" for God or for others?
2. What does it mean to "find favor" with God? How is that different from earning approval?
3. Mary asks, "How can this be?" How is her question different from Zechariah's doubt last week?
4. Why do you think God chose someone so ordinary for such an extraordinary calling?
5. What might Mary have risked by saying yes?
6. What is the difference between surrender and resignation?
7. Where might God be inviting you to say "Let it be" right now?

Formation Invitation

Each day this week, begin with a simple breath prayer. As you breathe in, pray: "I have found favor with God." As you breathe out, pray: "Let it be with me." When feelings of inadequacy surface, return to these words. At week's end, reflect on one area of your life where you sense God asking for your trust and your yes.

Contemplative Practice: Lectio Divina

Lectio divina, or "sacred reading," is an ancient way of praying with Scripture as a group.

- First Reading: One reader reads Luke 1:38 slowly. Pause for one minute of silence. Invite each person to notice a word or phrase that stands out. Go around the room and let anyone who wishes say their word aloud, without explanation.
- Second Reading: A different voice reads the verse again. After a minute of silence, ask: "Why do you think this word speaks to you today?" Invite brief responses.
- Third Reading: A third voice reads the verse. Allow two minutes of silence for each person to speak privately to God about what is stirring in them, including any fear or resistance.
- Rest: The leader invites one more minute of quiet rest in God's love, then closes: "Let it be with us according to your word. Amen."

For Further Reflection

Read 1 Samuel 16:1–13 and 1 Corinthians 1:26–31. Notice how God repeatedly chooses the overlooked and unlikely.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, you see us not as we fear we are, but as you created us to be. Quiet the voices that tell us we are not enough. Give us Mary's courage to trust you, to ask honest questions, and to say yes to your love. Let your impossible be born in us. Amen.



December 13: 3rd Sunday of Advent
Good Tidings: Joy Is Contagious | Luke 1:39-56 (CEB)

Opening Reflection

The holidays are supposed to be full of joy, but for many of us, joy can feel distant. Grief, stress, loneliness, and the weight of the world can leave us wondering whether real joy is still possible. Sometimes we need someone else's faith to help rekindle our own.

That's exactly what happens when Mary visits her relative Elizabeth. At the sound of Mary's greeting, the child in Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy. Joy leaps before Jesus is even born! Elizabeth blesses Mary for believing that God would keep God's promises, and Mary responds with a song of praise celebrating a God who lifts up the lowly and fills the hungry with good things. Joy shared becomes joy multiplied. Faith encourages faith. As we light the candle of joy, we discover that joy is not something we manufacture; it's something God gives, and something we spread.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Mary went to visit Elizabeth after hearing the angel's news?
2. Who has been an "Elizabeth" for you, someone whose faith encouraged your own?
3. What is the difference between happiness and the kind of joy described in this passage?
4. Elizabeth blesses Mary for believing God's promises. How does believing make room for joy?
5. What stands out to you in Mary's song (verses 46–55)? What does it reveal about who God is?
6. How can joy and sorrow exist together during the Christmas season?
7. Who in your life might need you to share some joy with them this week?

Formation Invitation

Joy grows when it's shared. This week, reach out to one person who may be finding the season difficult, through a phone call, handwritten card, visit, or shared meal. Then take time to write your own short "Magnificat": three or four sentences praising God for specific ways God has been faithful to you this year.

Contemplative Practice: An Examen of Joy

The examen is a simple prayer for noticing God in everyday life. The leader guides the class through each step, pausing about a minute between prompts.

- Pause: "Become still and remember that you are in God's presence."
- Notice: "Think back over this past week. When did you feel joy, delight, or gratitude, even briefly?"
- Savor: "Choose one of those moments and linger with it. Where was God in it?" Invite each person to write it down.
- Acknowledge: "Was there a moment when joy felt absent? Silently offer it to God."
- Give Thanks: Read Mary's song (Luke 1:46–55) aloud together, line by line.
- Share: Invite volunteers to share their joy moment with the person next to them. Joy shared becomes joy multiplied! Encourage class members to take their written moments home as a reminder.

For Further Reflection

Read 1 Samuel 2:1–10 (Hannah's Song) alongside Luke 1:46–55. Notice the similarities between these two songs of joyful praise.

Closing Prayer

God of joy, you meet us in our longing and fill us with good things. When joy feels far away, send us people whose faith strengthens ours, and make us that kind of presence for others. Let our hearts leap at your coming, and let our lives magnify your name. Amen.



December 20: 4th Sunday of Advent
Good Tidings: Prepare the Way | Luke 1:57-80 (CEB)

Opening Reflection

Turn on the news, and it's easy to wonder: Is there any hope for our world? Conflict, division, and suffering can make peace feel like a distant dream. Yet Advent reminds us that God's good news often begins quietly, preparing hearts and making a way long before its full arrival.

After months of silence, Zechariah finally speaks at the birth of his son John, and his first words are praise. His song celebrates God's faithfulness and announces that this child will prepare the way for the Lord. Then comes one of the most beautiful images in all of Scripture: the dawn from on high breaking upon us, giving light to those in darkness and guiding our feet into the way of peace. Good news prepares us before it arrives. As we light the candle of peace, we are invited to prepare our hearts and our world for the coming of Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the family and neighbors were so surprised by the name "John"?
2. Zechariah's first words after his silence are praise. What might that teach us about how waiting can change us?
3. What does it mean to "prepare the way" for the Lord in our own hearts?
4. How is repentance a way of making room for God?
5. What does the image of a dawn breaking say to you about how God brings hope into the world?
6. Where do you see darkness in our world right now, and where do you see glimpses of light?
7. What would it look like for you to walk "in the way of peace" this week?

Formation Invitation

Each morning this week, if you're able, take a moment to notice the sunrise or the first light of day. As you watch, pray for one place in the world, or one relationship in your life, that longs for peace. Then ask: Is there something I need to clear away to make room for Christ this Christmas? Consider one concrete step: a conversation, an apology, or letting go of a grudge.

Contemplative Practice: Candlelight Prayer

Time: 10–12 minutes | Supplies: a single candle (or battery candle), lighter, Luke 1:78–79 printed

- Prepare: Turn off the overhead lights or dim the room as much as possible. Place the candle in the center of the room or on a table where everyone can see it, then light it.
- Breathe: Invite the group to take several slow, deep breaths together.
- Read: The leader reads Luke 1:78–79 slowly aloud.
- Gaze: Ask everyone to look at the flame for one minute in silence. Then say: "Notice how even a small light changes a dark room."
- Pray: The leader names a few places of darkness: our world, our community, our families, our own hearts. After each, pause for silent prayer as the group imagines Christ's light shining there. Invite class members to name aloud other places or people who need peace.
- Close: Pray together: "Dawn from on high, guide our feet into the way of peace. Amen."
- Share: What does it mean to you that Christ is the light that breaks into darkness?

For Further Reflection

Read Isaiah 9:2–7 and Isaiah 40:1–5. Notice how the prophets speak of light, comfort, and a prepared way.

Closing Prayer

God of peace, prepare our hearts for your coming. Clear away what keeps us from you and from one another. Let your dawn break upon us, shining light into the darkness of our world and guiding our feet into the way of peace. Make us people who prepare the way for Christ. Amen.