

ADVENT devotional 2 • Luke

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December 2018

The Advent devotional is from a larger trilogy.

- 1 • *Christ Foreshadowed* 365 days connecting each Old Testament story to the gospels.
- 2 • *Christ with us* takes a year to go through the four gospels.
- 3 • *Christ's Kingdom grows* is a year of readings from Acts to Revelation.

Advent devotional

two weeks of Advent readings selected from the Old Testament beginning on December 2.

ADVENT devotional 2 • Luke

the Gospel of Luke beginning on December 15, to the Christmas story on December 25.

Luke

will continue to a few days beyond Easter, ending on April 25, 2019.

For each reading for Advent and the Gospel of Luke

- a painting I selected from contemporary Christian artists;
- music from a contemporary artist;
- questions for personal application.

The intention is for the reflection, art, music, and questions to accompany meditation on the scripture reading.

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JESUS IS PROMISED • LUKE 1

- [✓ Dec 15](#) • Luke 1:1-4 Preface
- [✓ Dec 16](#) • Luke 1:5-10 Promise to Zechariah
- [✓ Dec 17](#) • Luke 1:11-20 An angel appears
- [✓ Dec 18](#) • Luke 1:21-23 Elizabeth's hope
- [✓ Dec 19](#) • Luke 1:24-38 Promise to Mary
- [✓ Dec 20](#) • Luke 1:39-45 Elizabeth's joy
- [✓ Dec 21](#) • Luke 1:46-56 Mary's prophecy
- [✓ Dec 22](#) • Luke 1:57-66 Elizabeth's shared joy
- [✓ Dec 23](#) • Luke 1:67-80 Zechariah's prophecy

JESUS IS PRESENT ON EARTH • LUKE 2

- [✓ Dec 24](#) • Luke 2:1-7 Jesus is born
- [✓ Dec 25](#) • Luke 2:8-14 Presented to shepherds

JESUS IS PROMISED LUKE 1

December 15 • Luke 1:1-4 Preface



Saint Luke • Lindisfarne Gospel

Luke set out to write his gospel as an historian gathering information from different sources. One tradition is that Mary, Jesus' mother, was one of those sources, thus accounting for the beautiful birth narratives unique to this gospel. He was a careful historian and many of his details have been confirmed by archaeologists, even in several cases where they once thought he was mistaken. He was accurate about political titles, and he made reference to thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine islands without mistake.

Luke was a Greek, writing for Greeks, and as an educated man and native speaker, his is the most elegant language of the four gospels. He also makes a point of explaining Jewish customs for his readers. He wrote the Book of Acts which continues the story after the Ascension, and he entered the story unobtrusively and modestly, starting in Acts 16 to use "we" as he traveled with Paul.

He was with Paul to the end, and Paul made mention of him in his letters, including Colossians 4:14 where he called him "dear doctor Luke." His bedside manner was good, judging from his tenderness toward the suffering in his narrative. About half of what is in this gospel is not in the others, showing that he did manage to collect information, as he said, from "the early disciples and other eyewitnesses."

For us it is good to know we need not and should not set aside any of our gifts. We may not have Luke's intellectual, critical thinking, or literary skills, but each of us do have something to offer. Our faith is compatible with good analysis, information, historical study, archaeological finds, and our thoughtful examination of these things can give us similar certainty regarding Jesus. His goal was to present Christ, God in human flesh, a message we can receive from him still today.

- *Do I have an understanding of good reasons for faith?*
- *How can I encourage others regarding truth they have been taught?*
- *Is the mystery of God with us on earth one that fills me with wonder?*



[**U25** *O Come O Come Emmanuel*](#)



Jews at Wailing Wall • Henry Ossawa Tanner

Luke's starting point was the promised birth of the prophet John. But as a historian, he set this in the context of the ruler at that time, Herod the Great. Herod, son of a Jewish father and a princess from Petra, the great stone city in the desert, was raised around the Jewish kings, but was a commoner. He saw that real power lay with Rome, and in the conflicted politics of the time, became the client king, answerable to Rome. He was a great builder who transformed the landscape of Judea with astonishing feats of architecture. The Temple where Zechariah served had been rebuilt by Herod in a year and a half, but the great complex would take 46 years to build and become the largest in the ancient world.

The announcement of John's birth took place under the sacred circumstances of Zechariah's selection to burn incense in the Holy Place. A devout priest, he represented the best of the long tradition. But there was a backstory of disappointment in God, because he and his wife had never had a child and were now very old. It reminds us of Abraham and Sarah who waited many years for a promised son. Doubtless, as righteous people, they based their prayers on the encouraging stories of barrenness overcome: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Hannah. Doubtless they were disappointed not to get a positive answer themselves, but clearly he still believed in God's goodness enough to serve as a faithful priest.

Their son would become a great prophet, but this story makes it clear he was also a priest by ancestry. His baptismal work of purification was priestly work, even if outside the boundaries of the temple. The stage has been set, the story begun.

We can examine ourselves and our disappointments. Are there unfulfilled hopes in our lives that leave a question mark about God's goodness and trustworthiness? Are we able to hold any disappointment up to God and continue to love and serve faithfully anyway? Do we wonder (hopefully) what might come out of this disappointment?

- *Are there things I have prayed for I have not (yet) received?*
- *Do I trust God anyway?*



[U2b Wait for the Lord \(Taize\)](#)



• Catédrale d'Amiens

Zechariah's encounter with the angel reminds us that Samson's parents had a similar angelic encounter predicting their son's birth, similar instructions for their son to live as an ascetic, and similar promises of his impact. There is a promise of joy and gladness, greatness, being full of the Spirit and having a powerful ministry.

The appearance to Zechariah by Gabriel will be paralleled by Gabriel's appearance to Mary. Here begins a pattern of stories that match a male protagonist to a female protagonist, making at least 20 pairs in the 24 chapters of Luke, something that is surely not accidental. In the titles a reference to the parallel story is given for comparison to highlight this significant structural choice that Luke made.

Zechariah had perhaps fallen into the kind of discouragement that we do when there is a "no" to our prayers. Long waiting is hard on us frail creatures. We have no strength. Because he questioned this, he was told he would be unable to speak--perhaps to silence sharing his doubt with others. When we have times of hoping or waiting for an answer, sometimes silence is our best strategy as well. The angel promised that the answer would come and it would bring him joy.

His story can be one more encouragement not to give up, but to keep making our requests with faith, hope and joy. There is always plenty to be grateful for in the present, even when there are areas of life that concern us and where we want to see change. We can keep our requests for what we do not have in the context of gratitude for what we do have. The angel came with the message "God has heard your prayer." That same comforting message coming to my heart has encouraged me to have my eyes wide open with expectation to see what will happen next. There is a promise of joy.

- *Am I willing to wait silently for God to act?*



[U2j](#) [Hear Oh Lord \(Psalm 86\)](#)



Tuareg Couple • Hyatt Moore

Elizabeth became pregnant and her response was not, "Finally, God!" or "I deserve this, I've been patient enough" or "How inconvenient at my age!" Instead she said, "How kind the Lord is."

Do I truly believe in God's kindness? Scripture repeatedly returns to this idea, that we have a kind creator who gives us the gifts of life. Because there is so much suffering in the world (and I would classify Elizabeth's waiting as a kind of suffering), we often think that perhaps he is not kind. Why does God allow suffering, we wonder? Yet it is belief in God's kindness that helps us through that suffering, and Elizabeth seemed to have that kind of faith.

Is this my genuine heart response to blessings and answers and gifts from God? Do I humbly recognize I have no right to demand that God meet my preferences, and most importantly, no right to demand things happen on my timeline? In all these things, God teaches me to adjust, to let my heart become more like that of Elizabeth. It requires seeing God as a loving Father or friend, not as one quick to punish me. Elizabeth and Zechariah were one of many who waited many years for a child, just as their ancestors Abraham and Sarah had, and just as many do today. Do we see God's kindness in the gift of life?

- *Do I see God as kind?*
- *Do I see him as one who hears my prayers?*



[U2b](#) [Who But You?](#)



Annunciation • Henry Ossawa Tanner

Centuries of artwork celebrate the moment when Mary received the astonishing message from the angel that she would give birth to a supernatural son. The connection between human and the supernatural fascinates us. The angelic messenger and the virgin birth are not things we grasp rationally, but all of our art shows us how much we want this emotionally and intuitively.

A century-old tradition for Christmas Eve services contains Nine Lessons and Carols. The lessons place this moment in the context of a long history: Adam and Eve's fall, Isaac's rescue from death, Isaiah's prophecies of the coming light and the Lord who will reign over a peaceable kingdom. It continues the story after the annunciation to Jesus' birth, the angel's announcement to the shepherds, the adoration of the Magi, and at the end, John's magnificent prologue announcing the coming of the Word and the Light. The lessons are interspersed with beautiful music, and after the annunciation reading comes a 15th century song, "I sing of a maiden."

I sing of a maiden
That is matchless
King of all Kings
For her son she chose.

He came as still
Where his mother was
As dew in April
That falls on the grass, flowers, spray.

Mother and maiden
There was never, ever one but she;
Well may such a lady
God's mother be.

But it is not only Mary who is to be the Christ-bearer. We also are called to incarnate Christ into the history of our own lives and the context of our own times. She is seen as the model for all of us to become one with Christ, and to be the means of his on-going presence in the world. The miracles are to continue.

- *Does this story satisfy a need for wonder in me?*
- *Does Mary's example encourage me to offer all my uncertainty to God so that he can be brave in me?*



[U2b](#) [Be Born in Me](#)



Benedictine sisters of Turvey Abbey, Visitation

Over the centuries, particularly in the last two, we have developed treasured Christmas customs that include decorated trees, gifts, carols, special food, pageants, and movies. We love it particularly as a time when we spend extra special moments with our families.

We seek to draw out the things that bring us joy. We look for beauty and try very hard to create it in our homes and public spaces. We look for goodness and kindness and try to create it by family and community celebrations. This association between Christmas and joy is deeply rooted, and in this story we have the first celebration of how the coming birth of the Christ Child foreshadows all our joy.

For Mary, going to her cousin Elizabeth's home was presumably a safe place. Neither woman knew about the others' unexpected pregnancy, yet Elizabeth's child leaped joyfully in her womb in welcome of Christ. Elizabeth could not know that her glad cry would be repeated joyfully by millions every year as we recall these sacred stories. These moments of surprised joy are what the celebration of Christmas seems gifted to bring us.

Salutation

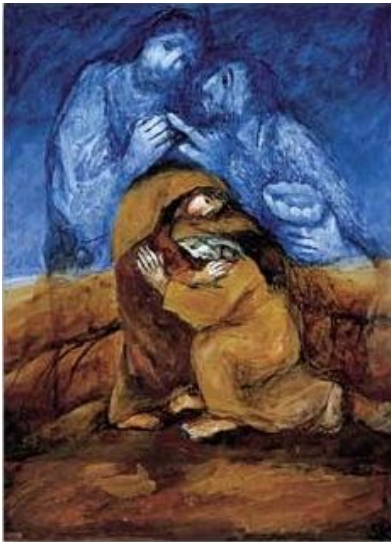
Framed in light,
Mary sings through the doorway.
Elizabeth's six-month joy
jumps, a palpable greeting,
a hidden first encounter
between son and Son.

And my heart turns over
when I meet Jesus
in you. — *Luci Shaw*

- *Am I open to giving and receiving Christmas joy?*



[U2b](#) *Joy to the World*



Magnificat • Sieger Köder

Mary's poem, the Magnificat, serves to connect the past history of Israel to a hopeful future, and Mary's song, which drew on Hannah's ancient song, has become well-loved. Since it has been a daily part of many Christian liturgies through the centuries, it has elicited beautiful musical settings from many talented musicians. A singable contemporary version makes Mary's song one that can become our own prayer of gratitude.

Tell Out My Soul

Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumber'd blessings, give my spirit voice;
Tender to me the promise of His word;
In God my Savior shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out my soul, the greatness of his Name!
Make known His might, the deeds His arm has done;
His mercy sure, from age to age the same;
His Holy Name—the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His might!
Pow'rs and dominion lay their glory by.
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
The hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of His word!
Firm is His promise, and His mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
To children's children and for evermore! —*Timothy Dudley-Smith*

• *Do I joyfully give glory to God for what he does in my life?*



[U2b](#) [Tell out my soul](#)



Benedictine Sisters of Turvey Abbey

Elizabeth had celebrated that God had been kind to her when she became pregnant, and now as her child was born, the same attitude of gratitude for God's kindness pervaded among her friends. She actually could have spent the nine months of pregnancy stressing over her husband's inability to speak. But her gratitude for the child outweighed any distress on his behalf. Perhaps he had written on his tablet for her, explaining that the angel promised this would end when the child was born, and she trusted the promise.

Zechariah used a writing tablet to affirm Elizabeth's pronouncement that the child's name was John. Suddenly he could speak and praise was the first thing to come from his mouth. It says that everyone reflected on these amazing events and wondered what would happen to this child. They did not know to connect him to prophecies of a forerunner for the Messiah, but they knew something wonderful would come through him.

Elizabeth is a model of gratitude and positivity worth following. Focusing on God's gifts and not stressing about the gaps is something to emulate. She had trusted God before she became pregnant, she trusted him during the pregnancy, and now she shared her gratitude at God's kindness in this birth.

- *Do I communicate to others how God has been kind to me?*
- *Is my default thanksgiving and praise?*



[U2b Hallelujah Chorus](#)



Birth of John the Baptist • Tintoretto

His mouth opened, Zechariah burst into a song of praise. It has since been sung on a daily basis in morning liturgies, and set to music by many musicians. His song has three parts: the Messiah is coming, my son is his messenger, and their mission together is to bring light from heaven.

He knew with Elizabeth that Mary's child would be from David's royal line and was the promised Messiah who would rescue Israel. He knew from Gabriel's announcement to him that his son would fulfill the prophecy that Elijah would prepare the way for Messiah, something said in the last few verses of Malachi. Gabriel had said John would persuade many to turn to God, and Zechariah spoke of his message of salvation and forgiveness.

Both would bring light from heaven and guide people toward peace. As this song has been sung through centuries, it has celebrated that Messiah and his messenger came and brought that light. The daily interplay of sunlight and shadows, clouds of all shapes and sizes reflecting the light, moonlight and stars at night, candles, electricity, floodlights, and lamplight all bring home this metaphor for us on a daily basis, inviting us into the beauty of spiritual light, and inviting us to be light-bearers as well.

• *Do I celebrate that God's light lifts darkness and the shadow of death from my life?*



[U2b](#) [Jesus Light of the World](#)

JESUS IS PRESENT ON EARTH LUKE 2

December 24 • **Luke 2:1-7 Jesus is born**



Birth of Jesus • Carol Aust

Once again Luke made reference to the rulers of the time. He was introducing Christ as the King of the new Kingdom, hidden and humble in contrast to ruthless earthly rulers. Caesar Augustus had been known as Octavian and had killed his opponent to gain power. It was into this context where the most powerful earthly ruler was claiming God-like status and relied on murder that Jesus, the true God and true Prince of Peace, was born. In his powerlessness, he would eventually completely eclipse all political rulers. Augustus' decree set Mary and Joseph on their journey to Bethlehem, thereby arranging for Jesus to fulfill the prophecies of the place of his birth.

As traditional Christmas Eve Lesson and Carols begin, the processional is a song written for children in the mid 1800s to explain the incarnation, God in the flesh as a humble child. Jesus came as both the God who is King of all, and as a human king, a descendant of David.

Once in royal David's city,
Stood a lowly cattle shed
Where a mother laid her Baby
In a manger for His Bed.
Mary was that mother mild
Jesus Christ, her little child.

He came down to earth from heaven
Who is God and Lord of all,
And the shelter was a stable
And His cradle was a stall
With the poor, and mean, and lowly,
Lived on earth our Savior holy. — *C.F. Alexander*

- *What emotions does Christ's birth awaken in me?*
- *Do I celebrate the peaceful kingdom he brought to replace the kingdoms of this world?*

[U2b *Once in Royal David's City*](#)



[U2b *I heard the bells on Christmas Day*](#)



Angels appearing before the Shepherds • Henry Ossawa Tanner

Bethlehem, the place of Jesus' birth, had been prophesied. King David had grown up there as a humble shepherd, and Jesus was now presented to shepherds. Nearby Herod had built an astonishing city, Herodium, which involved moving a hill to make a tall fortress with a luxurious palace at the top. The great gardens and pools at the base of the hill involved complex and impressive water systems and a swimming pool large enough for small boats. His wealth, power, ingenuity, and paranoid self-protection were on full display. In contrast, Christ was born in poverty, not even in his own home. Yet who is most revered now? Christ is known throughout the world with multitudes of buildings in his honor, and all that is left of Herod's legacy are ruins.

We have already heard that Christ brings light and at this moment when the angels announced his birth to the shepherds, the radiance of God's glory surrounded them. We try every year to capture something of this radiance with all of our Christmas lights, a beautiful but small glimpse of that brilliant moment. The angels announced a message of great joy and their song is still used today in liturgy with many musical settings.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will.
We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory.
Lord God, heavenly king, O God Almighty Father,
Lord Jesus Christ, only-begotten son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
who take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.
Who take away the sins of the world, hear our prayer. You who sit at the right hand
of the Father, have mercy on us.
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone the Lord, you alone the Most High,
Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in the Glory of God the Father. Amen.

- *What moment in the Christmas story is most meaningful to me?*
- *What Christmas music is most meaningful to me?*

[U2b](#) *Gloria*

DRAFT
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