

The background is a gradient of blue, transitioning from a darker shade at the top to a lighter shade at the bottom. It is decorated with several out-of-focus, circular light spots in various shades of blue, creating a bokeh effect.

*Come
and Sing*

STUDY GUIDE

WEEK ONE – November 28

“Zechariah—the Benedictus”

Come
and Sing

Luke 1:67-80

His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: 68 "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. 69 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David 70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), 71 salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us— 72 to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham: 74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. 76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, 77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, 78 because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven 79 to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." 80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel. (NIV)

Zechariah's song is an encouragement to us to believe, to hope, and to use our voices—not for doubt and anger, but for prayer and praise in celebration for all God has done.

Our first stop on this tour of joy is Zechariah—whose song, named in Latin "Benedictus" after the first word in the lyrics. What is Zechariah's song about? The Benedictus was the song of thanksgiving uttered by Zechariah on the occasion of the circumcision of his son, John the Baptist. The first words in Latin "Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel" are translated "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel."

As we begin, let's set the context. In Luke 1:5, Zechariah the priest is married to Elizabeth, the daughter of a priest. Their union was considered a rare and wonderful thing for a priest. She would understand the demands of the priesthood better than others. The dream of all newlyweds in Israel was to have a large family—something every Jewish bride was taught early in life—because the next son born might be the Messiah of Israel. Every Jewish husband (especially priests) married with that theological hope. If ever there was a couple that had all the right ingredients—from a strictly human perspective—to be chosen as the instrument through whom God sent this Hero to set all things right, it was Zechariah and Elizabeth.

But we know Elizabeth was unable to conceive—and hence, they were childless. With the incredible cultural and familial pressure to have children, childless parents felt deficient—passed over by God. If you've ever longed for something with all your heart, then you know the kind of self-examination and surrender made by Zechariah and Elizabeth. You know how disappointment turns into sorrow—sorrow to despair—and despair into resolve. Now, with the passing of years, they had long-since packed away their hopes.

The time comes for Zachariah and his company of priests to serve their rotation in the Temple. A priest could go years without pulling Temple duty, but Zechariah was about to have a dream come true. Not only has his name been drawn for Temple duty, he's assigned to offer incense—which is a once-in-a-lifetime privilege. When a priest offers incense, he's just outside the Veil—behind which is the Holy of Holies where the Shekinah Glory of God's presence is manifest. Only the high priest was closer to the revealed presence of God, and that only happened once a year. Jewish tradition described a priest who is privileged to offer the incense as "rich and holy" for the rest of his life. It was a BIG day!

While he is carefully going through the steps assigned to him, Zechariah is interrupted by the angel of the Lord—Gabriel. Gabriel tells Zechariah he and Elizabeth would have a son, and he would be the forerunner to the Messiah—Jesus.

Zechariah couldn't bring himself to dream again—and refused to believe the angel (1:18-25). As a result, Zachariah was stricken and unable to speak for the next nine months. The next time Zechariah would speak was nine months later—to name his son John as the angel instructed. In that joyous moment, as he held his son in his arms, Zechariah broke forth in a song of praise to God. It's his "Benedictus." The lyrics to his song take us behind the scenes into the heart of a godly man on the eve of the Incarnation, when God became man.

Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied in Luke 1:67-80. Each line of his song is loaded with deep truth about one overwhelming reality: God has at long last come! Faith will become sight. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Zechariah pours out from his heart joy with a melody about the purpose and meaning of God in the flesh, dwelling among men.

KEY POINTS

As we come to look at, think about, and get in touch with our scripture passage for today, there are some key points for us to consider:

1. Zechariah sings of Messiah's SAVING PURPOSE.

He scatters this theme throughout this refrain, thrilling at the great purpose of God to save us.

This comes out in four different ways:

- a. The price to free us is paid (1:68).
 - b. The power to accomplish our salvation is His (1:69).
 - c. The victory over our enemies is assured (1:71 and 74).
 - d. The erasing of all offenses is certain (1:77).
- Share what these mean to you.
 - What do you hear God saying to you?

2. Zechariah sings of Messiah's PROPHETIC FULFILLMENT (1:70, 72, 73).

As Zechariah glorifies God, he is telling us something that makes God distinct from all other contenders. He establishes His Lordship over time for us by binding Himself to promises the passing of time in no way dims. Someone counted, and there are no less than 456 prearranged signs in the Old Testament to properly identify the Messiah. God does what He says, in His time and His way, for His glory and our good. Praise His Name!

- Do you think we trust God to do what He says He will do?
- What causes us to doubt at times?
- What do you hear God saying to you?

3. Zechariah sings of Messiah's TRANSFORMING ENABLEMENT (1:74-75).

Moved by God's Spirit, Zechariah tells us what this Messiah brings to those who trust and follow Him. He speaks of spiritual transformation, emotional transformation, and behavioral transformation. He speaks of the Messiah (Jesus) who will come so that:

- we who were lost in sin might be lifted up into the service of God.
- we who served another master might serve God our Creator.
- we who fear facing God might be reconciled to Him.
- we who feel disconnection from God's purpose might rediscover it and live life abundantly.
- we who were unholy might have our lives aligned to Him and His ways.

That's the transforming enablement brought about by the coming of Christ to the earth.

- Do you think we seek this transformation—or do we tend to be content with where we find ourselves?
- How might we live our lives differently if we allowed them to be truly transformed by Jesus?
- What do you hear God saying to you?

4. Zechariah sings of Messiah's UMMATCHED IMPACT (1:78-80).

Zechariah's solo closes with one final burst of praise about the Light God is focusing on this world. He uses three very picturesque phrases to help us feel the impact of God's coming:

- a. He calls this the Dawn of Heavenly Sunlight (1:78). Finally, the sun has broken the horizon in a dark world!
- b. It is End of Hopeless Living (1:79a). Picture someone on death row—hopeless, pining away, beyond all human rescue—and then suddenly, light and freedom.
- c. It is Guidance to An Amazing End (1:79b).

This is the difference Jesus Christ makes. When He comes into your life, the shadows flee away. When He comes in, we are released from prison—forever. When He comes in, our feet walk the path of peace with God. That is the unmatched impact of Jesus Christ!

- Do you think we feel this unmatched impact of Jesus on our lives?
- What are some obstacles that keep us from doing so?
- Do we sense the dawn of heavenly sunlight breaking forth into our darkness?
- Do we find sense a release from those things that bind us?
- Do we find ourselves walking in the way of peace?
- What changes need to be made in order for these things to begin to take place?
- How might we celebrate Christmas differently in order to put Jesus in the forefront?
- What changes need to be made in order for this to happen?
- What do you hear God saying to you?

RESPOND

As you think about this entire passage of scripture, respond to the following:

H (Highlight): What would you highlight in this passage? What do you hear God saying to you?

E (Explain): How would you explain the meaning of this passage to another?

A (Apply): How can you apply this passage to your relationship with God and your faith journey?

R (Respond): What response do you sense the Holy Spirit is calling you to make? What will be your response?

WEEK TWO – December 5

“Mary—the Magnificat”

Come
and Sing

Luke 1:26-38; 46-55

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." 29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. 31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." 34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. 37 For nothing is impossible with God." 38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her. 46 And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me — holy is his name. 50 His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. 51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful 55 to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers." (NIV)

As we look at Mary's story, we find her life was completely interrupted by an angel—declaring she will become pregnant and give birth to a son, the Son of God, and name Him Jesus. The angel further tells her the child will be great and reign forever, and His kingdom will never end. Mary, naturally, has her questions—but she's able to listen and continue to trust. She confirms her trust with the promise she is the Lord's servant.

Mary then visits her cousin Elizabeth, and they are both able to give thanks to God for the miracles taking place in their lives. Mary begins to sing in the midst of this celebration and presence of the Holy Spirit. Her song reminds us—in the midst of interruptions and changes, miracles take place. Her song reminds us the Lord finds favor in the humble and creates ways to lift up those you would least expect. It's an invitation for us to find ways to celebrate the humble miracles all around us as we continue to prepare for the miracle of Jesus Christ arriving in us.

As we consider Mary's song, let us step inside these ancient lines and hear the heart of this new mother as she announces a new day has dawned—both for her and for us. There are two stanzas to her song:

1. **First verse: UNDESERVED GRACE (1:47-50).**

A subtitle could be added: "God's Gift, Delivered in Person." We need to pay careful attention to Mary's self-description as she praises God:

- a. *She calls Him God my Savior in the opening line of her song (1:47).* Only sinners need a Savior. Mary sees herself, not as the offspring of an immaculate conception—where she was born without a sin nature—but as a sinner, like all the rest of us, in need of rescue.
- b. *She sings of God looking on the humble condition of His slave (1:48,49).* Literally, she sees her littleness—both in the world's eyes and in God's eyes. Her words tell us Mary felt totally unworthy to be chosen of God—just another poor girl among thousands who live poor lives in the backwater towns of a captive nation.
- c. *She sees God's actions toward her as evidence of His mercy (1:50).* She sings God's mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear Him. That's Mary's poetic way of saying, "God, you didn't give me what I deserve. Instead, You showed me mercy, withholding what I have coming, just as You do for all who fear You."

In the first stanza, we see something wonderful and true about God: He loves the underdog, the disqualified, and the unimpressive. Mary stands before the Lord just like we do—needy, flawed, with nothing to merit His favor, nothing to earn anything but judgment. She's amazed at a God who knows her so well and chooses her anyway. Here we see a gift you won't find under any tree this season—the gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ, who has come for you.

- Do you think we understand the fullness of God's grace and mercy?
- If you were asked, how would you explain it to someone?
- What needs to happen for you to be more open to God's grace?
- What do you hear God saying to you?

In the second verse, Mary turns her attention to this world system and interprets the meaning of Christ's coming for this Earth.

2. **Second verse: RESCUING POWER (1:51-55).**

Let's add the subtitle, "God's Strength Changes Everything." In this stanza, Mary sings of radical reversals from what our world values, shifting everything we try to establish so it magnifies God's justice for His people. Three groups of people will be impacted:

- a. *He will RESCUE THE HELPLESS (1:51).* While Mary is just a young girl, not a political analyst—she understands her son will up-end all the centers of power men have established on this earth. Her baby is God's signal to every strata of society: the end of human strutting and self-centered ambition is at hand.

We are called to allow the song of Mary comfort us. While there will be days when we feel down and out, days when we feel utterly defeated, we need to remember God is in control. There will come a day when God will say, "Enough!" There will be a day when "justice will flow like water, and righteousness, like an unfailing stream" (Amos 5:24), washing away the wrong and setting all things right. The call is for us to bring our case to the Almighty. He is the Helper of the helpless.

- b. *He will EXALT THE HUMBLE (1:52).* God has toppled the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly. Mary's song means we need to reverse our ambitions if we want to succeed in God's world. Don't buy the hype this world system dishes out that says if you're going to get anywhere in life, you've got to be assertive, stand up for your rights, blow your own horn, and pat your own back! There's a higher law at work than the "law of the jungle." Jesus gives it to us: *"Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted"* (Luke 14:11).

We are called to seek humility, not glory, to labor for the Lord, not ourselves, and to stop caring who gets the credit. We are to give without expecting anything in return. We are to be willing to play second fiddle. That's the path to greatness in God's Kingdom. In Isaiah 66:2, God said, *"I will look favorably on this kind of person: one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and who trembles at My word."*

- c. *He will FILL THE HUNGRY (1:53).* God is looking for people who are hungry for Him; He passes right by the self-sufficient. What did Jesus say? *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, because they will be filled"* (Matthew 5:6). That's why 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 says, *"God has chosen the world's foolish things to shame the wise, and God has chosen the world's weak things to shame the strong. God has chosen the world's insignificant and despised things—the things viewed as nothing—so He might bring to nothing the things that are viewed as something, so that no one can boast in His presence."*

The church of Jesus Christ is for people who feel their own emptiness. God loves the forgotten and the passed over. He pledges Himself to those who know they are the handicapped, the nobodies, the losers. He shows mercy to those who don't deserve it, He chooses the lowly over the proud, and He finds the hungry and fills them. God is on the side of those who can't take care of themselves.

- What does it mean to you that God rescues the helpless, exalts the humble, and fills the hungry?
- Can you recall a time when God rescued you? Can you share what that felt like?

- What are some ways we can humble ourselves?
- Do you think we truly hunger and thirst for God's righteousness? What gets in the way?
- What do you hear God saying to you?
- As you think about God's promises, what are you being asked to believe? In what ways are you being asked to trust Him?

RESPOND

As you think about this entire passage of scripture, respond to the following:

H (Highlight): What would you highlight in this passage? What do you hear God saying to you?

E (Explain): How would you explain the meaning of this passage to another?

A (Apply): How can you apply this passage to your relationship with God and your faith journey?

R (Respond): What response do you sense the Holy Spirit is calling you to make? What will be your response?

WEEK THREE – December 12

“Angels—the Gloria”

Come
and Sing

Luke 2:8-20

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." 13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." 15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." 16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. (NIV)

The story of the coming of the Son of God had been a closely guarded secret—until that night outside Bethlehem when Good News for ALL people was announced with an angel choir as back up singing, “Glory to God in the highest—and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests!”

As we draw near to Christmas, we need to be careful as we can find ourselves in danger of losing something—something powerful, something needed, something that can reawaken our souls. We all stand in need of a renewed sense of wonder and awe! We all stand in need of a sense of wonder that comes when our expectations are exceeded, of the wonder of being astonished at the fantastic, jolted by splendor. A wonder that is the byproduct of being in the presence of something that takes your breath away. It also has an element of the will to wonder.

While we don't want to admit it, we can choose to be dull in the presence of glory; to yawn when we should exult; to cross our arms when we should be standing and shouting. Unfortunately, we find ourselves too often in a day and time where we have lost our sense of wonder and awe.

A century ago, G. K. Chesterton wrote, "The world will never starve for want of wonders, but only for want of wonder." This year, the Holy Spirit means to break in on us with the surprise of Christmas. Consider that first Christmas and the wonder of His birth. Marvelous intersections of eternity and time surrounded Jesus' birth. Prophecies were fulfilled and prayers were answered. Elizabeth and Zechariah had a life-long longing satisfied. Mary and Joseph experienced wonder and awe. And then there were the shepherds who had their lives changed by a song. It's recorded for us in Luke 2:8-20. It's the Angels' Gloria—and it holds wonder!

1. GOD CAME TO NOBODIES WITH THE GOOD NEWS (2:8-12).

Let's step into those fields and join the shepherds, and once again be greeted with joyous surprise. It humbles our hearts and quiets our souls to know that God—the God of all there is, the God who is winged with angels who declare His glory, the God to whom messengers attend and move with strength and speed at His will—that God—our God—comes to nobodies. When God chose to reveal the greatest news anyone would ever hear, He went to the least and the last, the social and spiritual outcasts, the despised and the distrusted. We find, at the center of the Gospel, the truth that the knowledge of God is not strictly an intellectual experience. It's not something given only to the powerful or to the educated or the deserving. It's to the shepherds—nobodies.

- Who are the shepherds of our day?
- Have you ever experienced a time when you felt like a nobody—undeserving of the Good News?
- What does this say to you about God?
- What do you hear God saying to you?

2. DON'T MISS THE AWE AND WONDER (2:13-14).

Too often, if we're not careful, we can miss the awe and wonder—not only of the season, but of God Himself. Let us consider some things concerning awe and wonder:

a. *Wonder begins in the presence of God (2:15,16).* The shepherds dropped everything and ran to Bethlehem—the place the angel had told them—and found both Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the feed trough. They were in the very presence of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. They had seen the resplendent light, heard the sounds, and confirmed the signs. The thunder and majesty of an angel chorus was replaced by the cooing of a nursing infant, and wonder crowded out every other emotion. We are called to allow the glory of His nearness to us penetrate past our defenses in order that we may find ourselves lost in wonder, love, and praise.

- Do you think that we are intentional about being in the presence of God? If not, why not?
- What tends to hinder us?
- What are some ways we can be more intentional about letting down our defenses in order that we may be lost in His wonder, love and praise?

b. *Wonder becomes contagious (2:17,18).* When something is wonderful, you just have to tell somebody else about it. And then they get in on it. Wonder is contagious! Is it possible the reason we witness so rarely about Christ is because we wonder so rarely at what God has done for us in Him. What we need to understand is, once we let the truth in, once we drop our guard and are overwhelmed by the glory of it, the truth will flow from us freely like an artesian well of joy—and the wonder in Christ will spread.

- What needs to happen for us to recapture the wonder of God and for the Good News of His love and grace to become contagious?

- c. *Wonder births worship (2:19,20)*. The shepherds saw, heard, and felt God. And then what did they do? *"The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard, just as they had been told"* (Luke 2:20). The shepherds had experienced the wonder of God, and something big happened. That wonder became worship. Discovery created delight. Truth had vibrated their bones. They believed in Christ, and the core of their life was altered forever. That first Christmas was a day that changed everything.

Christmas should be the time we snuggle up close to God to see, to feel, and to hear His heart once more. It's a time when things that cannot be, are. Does your wonder need reawakened? Do you need to see Christmas again for the first time with the awe and wonder of the shepherds? We are called to open our eyes, to see the light. We are called to open our heart and feel the emotions. We are called to open our mind—and understand the meaning.

- Do you think we have a sense of wonder that births itself in worship?
- What needs to happen for this to take place?
- What needs to happen in order to recapture the awe and wonder of the shepherds this Christmas?

RESPOND

As you think about this entire passage of scripture, respond to the following:

H (Highlight): What would you highlight in this passage? What do you hear God saying to you?

E (Explain): How would you explain the meaning of this passage to another?

A (Apply): How can you apply this passage to your relationship with God and your faith journey?

R (Respond): What response do you sense the Holy Spirit is calling you to make? What will be your response?

WEEK FOUR – December 19

“The Hymn of Christ”

Come
and Sing

Philippians 2:5-11

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (NIV)

This week's song is not found in The Gospel of Luke, but rather is one of the hymns sung by early Jesus-followers which made its way into the New Testament. It's found in Philippians 2:5-11 and was written by the Apostle Paul in his effort to inspire the followers of Jesus to become more and more like Himself. Philippians 2:5-11 is called "The Hymn of Christ" because scholars tell us this passage records an actual hymn sung in worship by the early church. It is in this hymn that we find captured the example of Christ Himself.

If we truly want to know what it means to humble ourselves, we need to look at Jesus and adopt His mindset. Verses 6 through 11 explain the mind and attitude of Christ as well as the exaltation of Christ. This text is one of the most important Christological passages in the New Testament. It records a vital statement about the divine nature, redemptive work, and sovereign authority of the Lord Jesus.

1. THE MIND AND ATTITUDE OF CHRIST (2:6-8).

The Bible is clear and consistent in teaching Jesus Christ is God. The pre-incarnate Christ was God by His NATURE. Verse 6 describes Christ as being in "the form of God." This statement refers to the eternal nature of Christ before He came into the world as a human being. Likewise, the pre-incarnate Christ was God in His STATUS. Verse 6 says that he had "equality with God," meaning the pre-incarnate Christ totally shared the fullness of God's nature. So Jesus must never be placed in any category below or less than God.

As we read on in verse 7, it tells us Jesus "made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." The phrase "made himself nothing" translates a verb that means "to empty, make void, drain out, abase, or neutralize." Jesus, who was God, made Himself nothing when He came to earth as a human being. It's important for us to understand in this process Jesus was not emptying Himself of His deity or exchanging His deity for humanity, nor did He ever cease being God. He in essence became something in addition to being God without becoming something less than God. He became what He hadn't been in His eternal deity—a human being.

Finally Paul writes: “he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.” We find here the declaration of Jesus obedience. Jesus freely, willingly, and voluntarily gave up His life. The death of Jesus wasn’t the result of the plot of the religious leaders or the betrayal of Judas or the protest of the crowd or the sentence of the Roman government or the actions of the Centurion soldiers. It was an act of humble obedience on Jesus’ part.

- What does it mean to you Jesus laid His Godhead aside to take the form of a human?
- What can you learn from Jesus, as one of His followers, about the attitude we should have?
- Do you think we take this attitude serious? What might change if we did?
- What changes need to take place for this to happen?
- What do you hear God saying to you?
- How might we help each other humbly follow Jesus?

2. THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST (2:9-11).

Verses 6 through 8 record the humiliation of Christ, and verses 9 through 11 record the exaltation of Christ. These two parts of this great hymn are connected by the first word of verse 9, “Therefore,” which signifies that what’s about to be said is based on what has already been said. Verses 6 through 8 provide a powerful description of how Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, humbled Himself when He came to earth as a man, lived as a servant, and died on a cross. But this second part describes God the Father’s sovereign response to the selfless humiliation of His only begotten Son. If we end the story of Jesus at the crucifixion, we don’t have the whole story. The cross isn’t the end of the story—for God “highly exalted Him.” That phrase, “highly exalted,” is emphatic in the original. It’s a compound term that could be translated, “God super-exalted Him.” God lifted Him above everything. God exalted Him to the highest place. God raised Him to a position of supreme majesty. The humiliation of Christ was fully compensated by God.

Consider the following: Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped (2:6)—but God highly exalted Him (2:9). Jesus made Himself nothing (2:7)—but God has given Him the name that is above every name (2:9). Jesus took the form of a servant (2:7)—but someday every knee shall bow at the name of Jesus (2:10). Jesus humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death on a cross (2:8)—but someday every tongue shall confess Jesus Christ is Lord (2:11). Jesus is not just a baby in a manger or great teacher or mighty prophet or miracle worker or religious martyr. We worship, serve, and trust the exalted Christ who is eternally worthy of an exclusive name, sovereign lordship, and universal worship.

The scriptures make it clear there will be a day when “*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*” We need to note, however, that it does not say or teach every person will be saved. We are called to evangelize the lost because every person will not automatically or inevitably be saved. We are commanded to go and make disciples of all nations

because there will be no universal salvation for all people. But there will be a universal confession of the sovereign Lordship of Jesus Christ. A day is coming when every tongue shall confess Jesus Christ is Lord.

- What does it mean to you to exalt Jesus as Savior and Lord?
- Do you think we take the exaltation of Jesus seriously?
- What changes in your personal life need to take place for this to happen?
- What changes need to take place as the Body of Christ for this to happen?
- Do you think we understand the urgency of sharing Jesus with those who don't know Him?

RESPOND

As you think about this entire passage of scripture, respond to the following:

H (Highlight): What would you highlight in this passage? What do you hear God saying to you?

E (Explain): How would you explain the meaning of this passage to another?

A (Apply): How can you apply this passage to your relationship with God and your faith journey?

R (Respond): What response do you sense the Holy Spirit is calling you to make? What will be your response?

WEEK FIVE – December 26

“Simeon—the Nunc Dimittis”

Come
and Sing

Luke 2:21-35

21 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived. 22 When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), 24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons." 25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. 30 For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." 33 The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." (NIV)

Jesus' family practiced the traditions of the faith as they begin to raise Him as a child. He was circumcised on the eighth day—and 40 days later, they brought Him to offer the sacrifice for the redemption of the firstborn. That day at the temple, they meet a righteous and devout man who had been waiting for this moment all his life based on a promise he'd heard from the Lord that he would meet the Savior Messiah in his life before he died. Simeon realizes this is the moment—and Jesus is that child. He can't contain himself. He grabs hold of the child and praises God and sings a song of gratitude for God fulfilling His promise.

But Simeon's song and words also have some warnings. It's true Jesus will be a light for all people, but He will also cause chaos in Israel and can pierce everyone's hearts, including His parents. Simeon's song is a reminder it is right we give thanks for the Savior Jesus and to celebrate the Savior is here. But his words also warn us Jesus will challenge us and call us to change our lives in response to His arrival.

The closing song of Luke's birth narratives is called the "Nunc Dimittis." It's sung by a weathered old man named Simeon—grayed and stooped, but with a voice that's accustomed to singing. His is a very personal song of joy that sees ancient hopes realized. But it's also a song of dramatic transformation—foretelling the upheaval of culture, the ending of deep divisions, and the stunning truth about ourselves that comes to the surface when Jesus is near.

Let us consider what we can learn from Simeon's song:

1. RECOGNIZE GOD'S PRESENCE WHEN YOU SEE IT (Luke 2:26-29).

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.

It is in this moment when Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the Temple, as was prescribed by the Law, when Simeon beholds Jesus, the Messiah and makes his declaration—a declaration signaling a dramatic change has occurred. Simeon spent his entire life looking for the Messiah, and now he was beholding Him with his own eyes.

- How intentional are we in looking for Jesus in our everyday living?
- What are some of the things that distract us?
- What might we do to be more intentional?
- What do you hear God saying to you?

2. ACCEPT SALVATION WHEN IT IS OFFERED (Luke 2:30-32).

For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

Simeon tells us this birth is a "not-to-be-overlooked" moment. It was a decisive moment for him—and it's a decisive moment for us as well. We need to understand salvation is very personal. It was personal for Mary and Joseph, it was personal for Simeon, and it's personal for each of us. At some point, all of us have to decide what we're going to do with Jesus and how we'll respond to the salvation offered to us. More important than anything this Christmas is whether you are prepared to meet God—seeing in Christ your only hope of reconciliation and peace with God.

- What does salvation mean to you?
- Do you think we see and understand the importance of being decisive about the salvation God offers to us in Christ?
- What does it mean to accept God's salvation and to allow it to have its full effect in your life?
- What do you hear God saying to you?

3. LET HIS LIFE PREPARE YOU TO SUFFER (Luke 2:34-35).

Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Simeon looks at Mary and says, "Mary, this baby is going to divide this nation. He is a sign from heaven that marks the end of neutrality about God." When it comes to Jesus, we need to understand there is no middle ground. You are either for Him—or against Him. People will love Him and follow Him—or hate Him and reject Him.

We need to understand life with Jesus is not going to be easy. His purposes brought Him to the cross. We likewise need to understand, when we follow Him, His purposes will take us there, too. We are called to let the meaning of this Christmas transform all our suffering—whether from illness or loss or lack—so it becomes suffering for Christ's sake. We bear that suffering in a manner worthy of Him, asking for His grace to help in time of need, that the suffering might have its perfect work in us and through us. We do this in order to show those watching that Jesus truly does make a difference.

- How willing do you think we are to allow our suffering to have its perfect work in us and through us?
- How might we be better stewards of our wounds in order that we might show those watching the difference Jesus makes in our lives?
- What do you hear God saying to you?

RESPOND

As you think about this entire passage of scripture, respond to the following:

H (Highlight): What would you highlight in this passage? What do you hear God saying to you?

E (Explain): How would you explain the meaning of this passage to another?

A (Apply): How can you apply this passage to your relationship with God and your faith journey?

R (Respond): What response do you sense the Holy Spirit is calling you to make? What will be your response?