



## WEEK 2 – EIN KAREM

### CHECK - IN

**How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... Christmas is two weeks away! Have you finished your shopping? What's left? Or are you writing off the gift-buying this year, and donating it all to charity? Ready, go!**

### OPENING PRAYER

**Ever-Present Father, help us to find space within our daily lives to connect with you.**

### INTRODUCTION

Well, regardless of the status of your shopping list, we are continuing with week 2 of our series, *Thin Spaces*, where we are taking a pilgrimage through Advent, learning how to slow down, recenter, and prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ on Christmas by

intentionally seeking out times, places, experiences, where the veil between Heaven and Earth gets a little thin. We're moving toward a holiday where God came to Earth. So, it's a time of year when we should naturally be focused on God. And yet, we fill our schedules to the brim and completely miss the thin spaces that should, by the very nature of the season, be all around us all month long. And so, for this month, we're going to talk about how to slow down and recenter, by intentionally building in these thin spaces to prepare our hearts for Christmas. Today, we'll look at how to encounter those *thin spaces* in our daily lives to matter where we find ourselves. But first...

**Review Question: Last week, our first stop on our Advent Pilgrimage was The Temple with Zechariah, who had a thin space moment when an angel appeared to him in the inner sanctuary. We were challenged to make worship a priority every week this month, to take advantage of the built-in *thin spaces* in our church community. Were you able to do that this week? If so, did you have a thin space experience in worship? If not, why not?**

## THE SCRIPTURE & THE SPACE

So, what is the next *thin space* on our Advent Pilgrimage? Well, last week, we left Zechariah immediately following his angelic encounter in Luke, chapter 1. Let's pick up there and hop across the marital aisle to Zach's wife, Elizabeth. See, after Zechariah leaves the temple, he goes home, and... sho 'nuff, Elizabeth gets pregnant. Meanwhile, in a town a few days' walk away, a young woman named Mary has a miraculous conception of her own. If you're reading through Luke, for

now we're going to skip the details of verses 26 through 38 and save that for the finale. What you need to know in order to understand what happens next is, Mary, through the power of the Holy Spirit, becomes pregnant with the Messiah. Let's pick up here...

**Read Luke, chapter 1, verses 39 through 40.**

Mary, after receiving her angelic encounter and miraculous pregnancy, either out of celebration or fear, maybe both, goes to see Elizabeth. Verse 39 says she hurried to the hill country of Judea. We are unsure about the exact location of the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth, but there is a strong tradition that suggests this encounter took place in a town just outside of Jerusalem called...

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Legend suggests this area in the hill country outside Jerusalem is where John the Baptist was born, where Zechariah lived, and thus, where Mary came to see Elizabeth. Today, there is a church built to honor John the Baptist, a church called "The Church of the Visitation" commemorating the encounter between Mary and Elizabeth, and a shrine over the spring where Mary supposedly sang her famous "Magnificat," (Luke 1:46-55.) (See Pastor Mike's pics from Sunday for these sites.) Here is where the second thin space on our pilgrimage took place.

**Read Luke, chapter 1, verse 41 through 45.**

Mary and Elizabeth greet one another, and the child in Elizabeth's womb, the child who would become John the Baptist, leapt within her. Verse 41 then says, "Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit." (NLT). If we're talking about *thin spaces*, it doesn't get any thinner than this.

**Question 1: Consider this story. What stands out to you about the scripture? How do you think Mary and Elizabeth would have felt before, during, and after this encounter? Discuss!**

## REFLECTION

Elizabeth's child leapt within her, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit. That's the very definition of a *thin space*. But here's the thing, when this took place 2000 years ago, there was no shrine to Mary at the spring. There was no Church to John the Baptist. There was no Church of the Visitation with a beautiful mural of this meeting. So, the holy space, the place where the veil between Heaven and Earth got a little thin, was no physical location. It wasn't a Temple where a thin space was supposed to happen like last week with Zechariah. This week's thin space was only in Ein Karem because that's where Elizabeth was. The thin space was not a building or a temple or a church. It was not a sanctuary with burning incense. The thin space was *within* her. This thin space was Elizabeth's very womb. Her baby could feel the presence of Jesus, God-with-Us, in Mary's body. And so, Elizabeth's child leapt for joy *within* her, and caused her, as verse 41 says, to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And here's the point... *Thin Spaces* this Advent don't have to take place in an obvious location like

worship at a church. They don't have to take place in the Temple on Christmas Eve where we are expecting them. As it was for Elizabeth, thin spaces can take place wherever you are because our bodies are Temples of the Holy Spirit and a thin space can happen *within* you, wherever.

**Question 2: Describe a “thin space” experience you’ve had outside the walls of a church. Maybe you were driving in the car and a song caught you up in the Spirit? Perhaps you were hiking in the mountains and the views reminded you of God’s majesty? What about this made the space thin? Can you recreate moments like that?**

Now, for Elizabeth, this thin space was not something she planned, but because she was open to it, she felt the power of the Holy Spirit. For us, we don't have to wait for the Holy Spirit to sneak up on us. We can do some active things to help it along this Advent season. How? Well, we can take a note from someone who lived “thin spaces” as well as anyone in history, a 17th century Carmelite Monk, named Brother Lawrence. His collection of letters, called “The Practice of the Presence of God,” is one of the best places for advice on finding thin spaces within you no matter what situation you find yourself in. See, Brother Lawrence was a cook and dishwasher at his monastery. But rather than loathe his position, he made it an act of worship. In fact, he made everything he did an act of worship and love toward God. And this practice became so powerful that, for him, there became little distinction between the sacred and the mundane; meaning, he

lived in a nearly perpetual state of thin space. Everything, from sacred prayer to washing dishes, was about encountering the presence of God within himself. Can we be so dedicated? Can you make driving through rush hour traffic an act of worship? (And we don't just mean using Lord's name a lot.) Can you make filing papers at work an act of worship and a thin space? Can doing the dishes, cleaning the house, driving the kids around... be a thin space? Can you find a thin space within yourself no matter the situation? That's the goal... but it's tough, so what do we do? Well, let's practice a spiritual discipline designed to help us have a thin space moment within ourselves no matter where we find ourselves.

**Prayer Practice: We often miss thin spaces because we don't take the time to recognize God's presence. Here is a quick discipline that can invite God's presence in no matter where you are.**

- 1) Sit comfortably and take a few deep breaths. Notice that when you focus on your breath, your breathing slows, your body calms, your pulse slows, and your muscles relax.**
- 2) Now, engage your breathing by counting while you breathe. When you breathe in, count slow to four. Hold that breath for two counts. Then exhale for six counts. Repeat this, counting your breaths until the rhythm becomes second nature. If thoughts break your rhythm, recognize them, put them aside for now, and go back to counting.**
- 3) After you've taken a few of these breaths, invite God into the space. Imagine God-with-Us as close as the very air filling your lungs. As it was for Mary and Elizabeth, create space for The Spirit within you... in your thoughts, in your heart.**

- 4) If it helps, use a breath prayer. For example, taking a note from Elizabeth in today's passage, when you inhale, say, "God-with-Us," and when you exhale, say, "fill me with your Spirit."
- 5) After a few moments with God, take another deep breath, return to the space, and discuss your experience with the group.

## CLOSING

Thin spaces don't have to occur where and when you expect them. Unlike Zechariah's, whose thin space was in the Temple, Elizabeth had a thin-space moment through an unexpected visit from the Messiah. And when her child leapt within her, she was filled with the Holy Spirit. You can be, too. Thin Space moments can happen anytime, anywhere, because *you* are a temple for the Lord. And you can help the Spirit along by intentionally making time to slow down, breathe, and invite God into the space for a few minutes. Can you, like Elizabeth or Brother Lawrence, make the mundane a thin space by intentionally seeking out the presence of God? Make it a point this week to build in these thin spaces within you and prepare your heart for Christmas.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations  
and close in prayer.**