

The First Christmas Carol
Growth Group Discussion
Luke 1:39-56

Begin with prayer. Invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you all through God's word, and to lead your discussion.

Opening Questions (get everyone involved in discussion):

- Share about one experience that has brought you joy.
- How would you describe the difference between circumstantial happiness and lasting joy?

Read Luke 1:5-38, and try to enter into the stories of the people involved. These verses serve as crucial context for today's focal passage.

- What sticks out to you about Zechariah's, Elizabeth's, or Mary's experiences in these verses?
- Do you see any kind of criteria in God's selection of these people for his purposes?
- How does Mary's response to the angel differ from Zechariah's?

Read Luke 1:39-45, and then discuss the following.

- Mary had not received any command from the angel to visit Elizabeth, and it was a long, arduous journey. Why do you think she went to such lengths to make this trip?
- What is the significance of Elizabeth's baby's movements in the womb?
- In vv. 42-43, Elizabeth shows uncanny insight into Mary and her pregnancy. What does she seem to know? How might she know it?
- Elizabeth highlights the characteristic of Mary that makes her admirable, in v. 45. What is it?
 - What do you think made Mary able to believe, against all odds, whereas someone like Zechariah would not be so inclined to believe?
 - **APPLICATION:** How easy or difficult do you find it to believe that God wants to use you in his great story? What makes it hard to believe?
- From the perspective of Luke, the Gospel writer, what are we to pick up in these verses about the greater story he is telling?

Read Luke 1:46-56, and then discuss the following.

- Just taking Mary's song at face value, what prompted her to burst out in song?
- Commentators see multiple influences and/or allusions in Mary's song. Explore some or all of the following, and see what overlap you see in Mary's words:
 - Psalm 98
 - Exodus 15:1-18, 15:19-21
 - Judges 5:1-31
 - 1 Samuel 2:1-10
 - 1 Chronicles 16:8-36
- Mary obviously wasn't standing in Elizabeth's foyer or kitchen with multiple Hebrew scrolls open, so what does it tell us about her that these various passages

showed up in her spontaneous song? Is there anything for to learn for ourselves in this observation?

- Mary is clearly bursting with joy. What is the specific source of her joy here?
- Pastor Josh pointed out that the central theme in Mary's song is the great reversal—the way that God's economy is opposite of ours. In Josh's words: ***“God loves taking people who know that they have nothing to offer, elevating them to high status, and doing great things in and through them, even if he has to humble them for them to get to that point.”***
 - How do you see this theme in the passage? How does this theme land with you? Does it provoke any response or questions?
 - In what way does this song—and specifically this theme in the song—foreshadow the ministry of Jesus that would follow?
- The big idea of the sermon this week was that **joy is found in partnering with God in his great rescue mission**, which requires acknowledging that you bring nothing to the table of your own, yet God wants you anyway. Is any part of this concept especially difficult for you at present? Why?
 - To what degree have you experienced joy by saying “yes” to God?
 - **APPLICATION:** Is there any specific way that God is nudging you to “partner” with him, or say “yes” to him, currently? What holds you back? How can our group support you?

PRAYER

- Allow people to share other needs they may currently have, and pray for those needs specifically.
- Have a time of confession: if you have noticed pride or unbelief in yourself, or resistance to God, confess those things. Offer up your “yes” to God's purposes.