

Advent Reflection Guide

Not Your Average Joe



MONDAY 12.19.22~Luke 1:46-55

What did Jesus' birth mean? This week we'll read six Bible answers to that question. We often call today's reading "The Magnificat" (*magnificat* is the first word of Mary's song in the Latin Bible). Mary's song was full of joy, anticipation and hope about the honor of bearing God's Son. Her song (which echoed the song Samuel's mother sang in 1 Samuel 2:1-10) also said her pregnancy showed God's care for the lowly, hungry and oppressed. The eternal king God was sending would upend many human values.

- Mary's song alluded to Old Testament promises that God would one day deliver Israel from oppressors (Romans in her day). More than just being a mother, Mary rejoiced that through her son God would make real the promise of overcoming evil. What are some ways you can think of in which the Christmas child's influence is still helping to reverse evil and oppression? What do you rely on to keep your faith strong in the midst of trials?
- Pastor Adam Hamilton wrote that many of us "fail to realize how subversive, even revolutionary, Mary's song really was.... Mary's words should make us uncomfortable. They point to a concern God has for the poor, and a sense that the rich have received theirs already.... We have the obligation and calling to be used by God to 'fill the hungry with good things.'"¹ In what ways are you rich? In what ways "lowly"? Are you willing to accept help in your "lowly" areas? Are you willing to use your God-given ability to lift the burdens of those who are lowly in areas where you are stronger?

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, I take up the freedom and challenge of living as a citizen of your kingdom, even if it means I'll have to wrestle to live by your values, which are so different from ours. Amen.

TUESDAY 12.20.22~Luke 1:65-79

In a poetic psalm, Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, spoke about the meaning of Jesus' birth, and the role John would play in preparing the people. He said of the child Mary would bear, God "has raised up a mighty savior for us in his servant David's house...He has brought salvation...he has shown mercy." Luke 1:69-72 (CEB) Zechariah said his boy would proclaim, "The dawn from heaven will break upon us, to give light to those who are sitting in darkness."

- John the Baptist played an important role of proclaiming the truth and preparing the people for the coming Christ. Reflect on your path to becoming a Christ follower. Who played John's role in your life—who prepared the way for your faith, and introduced you to the love of Jesus?
- Is there someone in your life who might need your influence to help prepare and guide them into a meaningful relationship with Christ?
- At the end of today's passage we read that Christ was the light God gave to "...guide us on the path of peace." *Luke 1:79* (CEB) In what ways has Jesus rescued you from darkness? Are you currently experiencing peace in your life? What practices keep you walking with Christ on the path of peace?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, rule over my life. Empower me to give more and more of myself over to you, and remain in your perfect peace. Amen.

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WEDNESDAY 12.21.22~Luke 2:21-38

Jesus' parents, devout Jews, followed the laws about a newborn (see Exodus 13:2, 12; Leviticus 12:8 allowed poor Israelites to bring doves instead of a lamb). Joseph and Mary likely wouldn't have known many people in Jerusalem. It must have been unexpected when the elderly Simeon and Anna came up to them. In the busy Temple court, where others saw only a poor couple with a baby, those two elderly saints recognized Jesus as the Savior. They praised God, blessing the parents and the baby.

- Simeon's words echoed Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6, which said "the servant of the Lord" would be a light to the Gentiles. What qualities do you think allowed Simeon to see and accept Isaiah's far-reaching vision?
- Simeon warned Mary that many would reject Jesus, and pain like a sword would pierce her heart. Cary Gibson wrote, "Mary couldn't control or protect Jesus, and the personal cost to her as a mother was severe (John 19:25-27)."² What helps you trust God and live out God's purposes when it's not easy or popular? Has following God ever brought you pain as well as good things?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I look forward to the New Year and the challenges it will bring—because you will be with me to strengthen and uphold me. My hope is in you. Amen.

THURSDAY 12.22.22~Matthew 2:1-6

Matthew uses the Latin word *magi*, which comes from the Greek word *magoi*, (meaning "students of the stars.") to refer to the foreign visitors looking for the Christ child. They most likely came from modern Iran, though "from the east" could mean a whole range of places. They arrived an unspecified amount of time "after Jesus was born in Bethlehem." These notable visitors said, "We... have come to worship him." Israel was just a minor Roman province. No one would expect non-Hebrew scholars to travel far to see, much less worship, a "king of the Jews."

- Roman historians Suetonius and Tacitus both wrote that at the time Jesus was born, an ancient prophecy led many to believe a world ruler would rise in Judea. Both historians said the prophecy must have meant Emperor Vespasian. Those Romans missed the true king, but so did the priests and legal experts. The eastern wise men didn't. In what ways can you keep your mind and heart open so as not to miss where God is at work?
- In Ezekiel 34:1-16, as well as in Micah 5:2, God promised Israel that he would shepherd them. Jesus, grown up, claimed to be the promised "good shepherd," *John 10:11* (CEB) offering those who follow him "life to the fullest" *John 10:10* (CEB). In what ways do ads for everything from cars to computers and food to hair-care products hold out that promise? How easy or hard do you find it to trust, in your day-to-day life, that Jesus truly offers you the fullest, most satisfying life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, keep my eyes and my heart open to signs that you are at work in and around my life. Thank you for being the shepherd who guides me to life to the fullest. Amen.

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FRIDAY 12.23.22~John 1:1-8

The prologue to John's gospel daringly linked the worlds of Greek and Hebrew thought. Numerous Greek philosophers had identified "the Word" (Greek *logos*) as the great idea behind the world. The Hebrew Bible began (like John) with "in the beginning," and said God spoke into being all that is. John's prologue said Jesus embodied all that power and wisdom.

- "In the beginning," in any language, carries us back to areas of mystery of which, even today, science is just scratching the surface. John didn't say the Word "began" in the beginning; he said the Word "was." It was a way of saying Jesus has always been here and will always be here. He is eternal; he is God. In what ways does it matter to your faith that Jesus is more than just a good man?
- "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light" *John 1:5* (CEB) wasn't just poetry. As we will see on Christmas Eve, even a large room full of darkness cannot hide or put out the light of the one small Christ candle when it comes into the room. When has it felt to you that darkness was trying to put out God's light in your life? What spiritual practices have you found that help keep you close to God, so that God's light keeps shining in you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for shining the life-giving light of your love and grace into my life. Amen.

SATURDAY 12.24.22~John 1:9-18

The gods the Greeks and Romans worshipped carried out their purposes far from the day-to-day concerns of human beings. If one of them visited earth, people had best try to placate him or her or get out of the way. But "the Word," John said, was entirely different. He brought light for all people, and gave all who believed in him the right to become children of God. He capped it off with the astonishing assertion that "the Word became flesh and made his home among us." *John 1:14* (CEB) Neither Greeks nor Jews believed even God could bridge a gap that wide. But by becoming flesh, "the Word" showed us what God is really like. The light wasn't just about God—the light was God in person, in our midst.

- John, taking his cue from Jesus (John 3:3-8), said the life Jesus brought is so new it's like being born anew as a child of God. In what ways has walking with Jesus given you a whole new life?
- John's prologue included a tragic note: "the light came to his own people, and his own people didn't welcome him." *John 1:11* (CEB) What blocked people's ability to recognize their Creator? How can you avoid that kind of blockage? How does the person of Jesus shape your understanding of God? What difference does what you believe about God make in day-to-day life?

Prayer: Be near me, Lord Jesus. I ask thee to stay close by me forever and love me, I pray. Amen.

