

*What Child is this?*



**MOUNT OLIVET  
ADVENT & CHRISTMAS  
2024 DEVOTIONAL**





## Luke at Advent and Christmas

**O**f the four evangelists – the people who wrote our Gospels – Luke is, hands down, the best storyteller. His willingness to develop his characters (think of old Zechariah flabbergasted by the angel’s appearance or young Mary trembling in awe at God’s plans for her) gives us a picture of what feels like very real, very ordinary, and very relatable people.

Moreover, and like all good storytellers, Luke isn’t neutral. That is, he hasn’t merely picked a handful of stories to share *in general*, but rather has carefully crafted and arranged a variety of stories into a larger narrative that he hopes will strengthen the faith of all those who read them. He says as much in his short introduction to his Gospel when he promises Theophilus, perhaps a friend or patron, to tell “an orderly account” so that “you may know the truth about the things about which you’ve been instructed.”

Luke, you see, knows that Theophilus and all those reading his Gospel – including us! – knows some things about Jesus but likely still had questions, or wants to know more, or maybe isn’t sure whether what we’ve heard can possibly be true. And rather than offer a Q&A, or provide mere information about Jesus, he tells stories. Because stories are the common currency through which we share our lives. Luke knows this, so he tells us these beautiful stories that introduce us to the people and characters in “the greatest story ever told.”

So enjoy Luke’s care, his intentionality, his eye for detail, and his love for these characters that he hopes (and your pastors writing these devotions hope!) will encourage and inspire you to grow more deeply in your faith during this Advent season and always.

– PASTOR LOSE



# First Sunday of Advent

DECEMBER 1, 2024

WORSHIP:

MPLS: 9, 10 & 11AM

WEST: 9, 10 & 11AM

SCRIPTURE:

*LUKE 1:1-4*

*“GOOD NEWS FOR ORDINARY PEOPLE”*



MONDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2024

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*Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.*

LUKE 1:1-4

**T**he introduction to Luke's gospel leaves a lot of questions unanswered. Which other accounts was Luke familiar with? Who is Theophilus? With which eyewitness was this person familiar? Who is Luke? What these brief verses do reveal is that we are about to enter a story of significance. It's a story that many have sought to tell because of its power and importance. In Luke's estimation, it is a story worth retelling because those reading it will have a sense of confidence and assurance that what they learn and experience about this Jesus character is true and trustworthy. As we enter this story this Advent, pay attention to the ways in which it challenges you, changes you, and comforts you. Listen for the truth of a God who is coming to set you free.

—PASTOR CIESLIK

*God, help us to hear anew the story of your Son, the one who comes to us and for us again and again. Help us to trust in your unending love for us in this whole world so that we can live that truth all the days of our life. Amen.*



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2024

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*In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.*

LUKE 1:5-7

It is interesting that Luke's Gospel begins not with Jesus, not even with Mary and Joseph, but with these two shirttail relatives of the Messiah. Zechariah and Elizabeth would of course wondrously conceive John, who would in turn proclaim the Christ child's coming even from within Elizabeth's womb. If you were writing your autobiography, would you ever consider starting with an anecdote about your first-cousins'-once-removed pregnancy journey? Probably not! But there's something beautiful about Luke's choice here. It is a powerful reminder that there are so many entry points into the story of Jesus Christ. So many heralds announce the good news. So many paths lead you to the manger.

—PASTOR DIXON

*Dear God, you draw us into the story of your son, Jesus Christ, in countless ways. Help us to see the signs of His nearness, and help us to guide others through our joy, our gratitude, and our love for you. Amen.*



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2024

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*Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. Now at the time of the incense-offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside.*

LUKE 1:8-10

**T**here are two distinct convictions expressed in these verses. The first is that God works through the ordinary rhythms and mechanisms of our life to achieve God's purposes. Zechariah is a priest, and priests have assigned duties. Think of this like our rotation of ushers at Mount Olivet. Every four months, usher teams for each Sunday service are on duty. Year in, year out. Totally ordinary. That's kind of what's going on with Zechariah. It's his team's time to serve.

At the same time, Luke tells us that Zechariah was chosen by lot. While that could imply that it was a totally random assignment, it more likely suggests that God was involved. It was not unusual in ancient cultures to make important decisions "by lot" – essentially the equivalent of "rolling the dice" – trusting that what feels like chance isn't merely chance, but an opportunity to discern divine guidance. (For instance, this is how the eleven remaining disciples chose between two possibilities to be Judas' replacement in Acts 1:23-26.)

Both of these convictions have something to offer us today. God works through the ordinary. You do not have to be special, or heroic, or exotic to merit God's attention and use. At the same time, God is involved. God is active, working, a part of what's going on in our lives to fashion us into people who can love and serve those around us and give witness to God's grace.

So watch out this Advent season and always: God may be at work in your life, as ordinary as it may seem, to bear witness to God's extraordinary commitment to love, bless, and save the world!

– PASTOR LOSE

*Dear God, thank you for meeting us where we are, accepting us as we are, and using us as we are to love and bless others. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2024

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*Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”*

LUKE 1:11-17

**M**onths before the angel Gabriel visits Mary, an angel first appears to Zechariah in the temple to announce the birth of his son. We will come to know this boy as John the Baptist, a prophet filled with the Holy Spirit and set apart to serve God and God’s people.

The story of Zechariah, Elizabeth, and John is always one step ahead of the story of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. Though this second family doesn’t get as much attention during Advent, they are an integral part of how God sets the stage for the inbreaking of God’s own flesh into the world. I particularly love this family because they remind me of my family and me. They aren’t the main event or the ones we celebrate during this season, but they are a witness to how we are all called to point to the promise of Jesus and invite others into life with God.

– PASTOR OLSON POPP

*Dear God, you prepare the stage for Jesus through families and people just like us. Prepare our hearts to be ready and used by you to point to Jesus in our lives. Amen.*





FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2024

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*Zechariah said to the angel, “How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.” The angel replied, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.”*

LUKE 1:18-20

**Z**echariah and his wife Elizabeth were old. Very old. Long beyond their childbearing years. So, when an angel told him their prayers had been answered and Elizabeth would bear a son, Zechariah asked: “Um, really? I mean that would be nice, but have you noticed that we’re *really* old?” Or something like that. He doubted. How oh-so-human of him.

How often do you doubt that everything really will be ok? Do you, like me, tend to overthink and worry about everyone and everything? When I read this passage in Luke, I’m reminded that the angel told Zechariah that his words from God would come true *in their time*. Not on Zechariah and Elizabeth’s chosen timeline, but on God’s. And when Zechariah’s human doubt makes him unable to speak, I have to wonder, was this God’s way of getting him to quiet his mouth and heart and his mind and simply “Be still and know that I am God” as we are commanded in Psalm 46?

Elizabeth does, indeed, become pregnant. And while pregnant with the baby boy that will grow up to become John the Baptist, her young cousin, Mary, comes to her with the surprising news that she, too, is with child. Mary’s baby boy, of course, will be named Jesus. Divine.

– PASTOR HAMMERSTEN

*Dear Lord, when our hearts fill with fear, and our minds start spinning with doubt, help us to look to the baby Jesus as a reminder that all things happen in Your perfect timing, and in ways we might never have imagined. Amen.*



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2024

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*Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.*

LUKE 1:21-23

**S**omething was afoot in the House of the Lord.

Zechariah, the priest on duty, was late to exit the sanctuary. The prayers had ended, and the people should have returned home. But instead, they had to wait and wonder what was happening. Until they saw him, they must have asked each other: did he fall? Is he okay? Who will go in after him? What should we do now?

But no one could go and see if everything was okay. Only priests were allowed to enter the sanctuary after much purification and prayer. And so, the people waited and wondered.

When Zechariah did come out of the sanctuary, he was silent and unable to speak. Without words, no one could understand. He could only make gestures, and the people could only make guesses that something holy had happened. Zechariah had seen a vision, but, for now, all that Zechariah could do was go home to wait and wonder what this word of God's activity would mean.

In our homes, in this season, as we wait and wonder at this word made flesh in Jesus, God's activity for us and for the world.

— PASTOR GRANGAARD

*Dear God, give us space in our days as we wait and wonder at the gift of Jesus. When we have no words to describe what we have seen, let us hold fast to your word made flesh in Jesus. Amen.*



# Second Sunday of Advent

DECEMBER 8, 2024

WORSHIP:

MPLS: 9, 10 & 11AM

WEST: 9, 10 & 11AM

SCRIPTURE:

*LUKE 1:5-20, 57-74*

*“JOHN THE BAPTIST”*



MONDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2024

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*After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, "This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people."*

LUKE 1:24-25

It's a miracle! Elizabeth has conceived, just as the angel declared to Zechariah in the temple. She is about five months ahead of her cousin, Mary, as she sings her song of praise to the Lord, thanking God for seeing the depths of her heart and restoring her to a place of honor in her community.

Through Elizabeth's pregnancy, God is bringing a new prophet into this world. However, God is also bringing up a new preacher in Elizabeth, someone who proclaims God's faithfulness through the sharing of her story. Even though Zechariah responded to the news of this son in confusion and unbelief, Elizabeth can't help but respond in joy, gratitude, and awe of the miraculous gift that is this baby in her womb. God has seen the depths of her heart, God has responded in unbelievable ways, and Elizabeth is thankful.

Elizabeth reminds us, and will remind Mary soon, that God has been faithful to each one of us. What would your song of praise sound like?

—PASTOR OLSON POPP

*Dear God, you made the impossible possible through Elizabeth's womb. Make us all preachers of this Good News, and give us a song of praise for the ways you have been faithful in our lives. Amen.*



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2024

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*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

LUKE 1:26-33

**C**an you imagine what was going through young Mary's mind when the angel Gabriel appeared and announced to her that she will be the mother of the savior of the world? Of course, she was perplexed and then some. I've always had a healthy respect for her, after all, she is Jesus' mom.

And the words the angel used: "The Lord is with you" and "Do not be afraid." Notice the angel did not say the Lord *will* be with you, but the Lord *is* with you. Imagine if we embraced those words with regularity, *The Lord is with you*. Psalm 139 says it so beautifully, "The Lord knit you together in your mother's womb. You are fearfully and wonderfully made." Yes, the Lord is with you.

Blessings on your Advent journey.

—PASTOR KALLAND

*Dear Lord, help us to embrace the truth that you love us and are with us always, and nothing in all creation will separate us from your love which is in Christ Jesus. Amen.*



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2024

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*Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.”*

LUKE 1:34-37

**T**he Angel Gabriel is sent by God to tell Mary some impossible news: She has found favor in God’s sight. She will conceive a child named Jesus who will be called Son of the Most High, and, Son of God. What’s more, this child will become a great king whose kingdom will have no end.

All to which Mary can only say: “How?”

Mary can count the ways that God’s possible future is impossible. After all, she is a nobody from Nazareth, the rather anonymous town in northern Israel. She is engaged but not yet married. She is not pregnant. She is not planning to become pregnant – yet.

“How can this be?” Mary asks – and gives us permission to do the same. There is room for questions in faith. How can any of this be?

It is hard to paint a mystery. But it is beautiful to behold. Like us, the angel can only point to God. What is impossible to us is possible for God. God will bend our impossibilities into God’s possibility: Something will come from nothing. The darkness of the womb will hold the light of the world. In Jesus, what is human will also be holy. And, spoiler alert, life will spring from death.

Nothing will be impossible with God.

– PASTOR GRANGAARD

*Dear God, thank you that beyond all that is possible, you have chosen to love us and come to us in Jesus. Amen.*



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2024

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*Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.*

LUKE 1:38

Imagine, if you will, that your young teenage self heard a knock on your front door. So, you get up from the TV to answer it, and there waiting for you is an angel (glowing? translucent? winged?). The angel greets you with the words, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." And then goes on to tell you that you're going to have a baby, the Son of God no less. "Oh, and your kind, extremely old cousin? She is pregnant too!" Yikes!

An angel does not seem like something to be taken lightly. Mary is obviously confused and more than a little scared — who wouldn't be? Both by the angel, and by the news. And yet, still, she somehow manages to utter these most powerful words, so filled with overwhelming trust: "Here am I, servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word." Wow.

It is December. A blessed time of year. We are all running to and fro, seeing friends and family, picking out the perfect gifts, preparing for gatherings large and small. When we get overly busy, taking time for our faith, for the healing and care of our soul and for the true peace that comes only from our Lord, seems to fall by the wayside.

My hope and prayer for us this Advent season is that we set aside time for prayer. At the start of our day for the early birds, or when we crawl into bed for the night owls. Quiet your heart and your mind, share your thanks and your concerns with our heavenly God, and listen to how God is guiding you. It will make a difference, I promise.

— PASTOR HAMMERSTEN

*Let us pray: thank you, Lord, for oh so many things. Remind us to look around at all the myriad of blessings in our lives and give thanks. You have always been here for us. Help us to let go of fear and anxiety, and to trust like Mary. Amen.*



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2024

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*In those days, Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."*

LUKE 1:39-45

**W**hen I was five months pregnant, my dear friend visited me to share the happy news that she, too, was with child. We immediately began to imagine our kids growing up together — birthday parties, holidays, and teenaged camaraderie. For ten years, we have journeyed together as moms of smart, strong-willed girls, validating and supporting one another through the joys and frustrations of parenting.

It's not surprising to me that Mary rushed to her cousin Elizabeth's side after embracing the startling angelic news that she would give birth to the Christ-child. She immediately sought what she needed most: companionship, understanding, solidarity. Mary and Elizabeth each faced significant social barriers. The older Elizabeth likely had been ostracized for failing to produce a child for her husband. The younger Mary was pregnant before she should have been and likely an object of communal scorn. As a high priest's wife, Elizabeth might have shunned Mary, but instead she welcomed her widely. The Spirit united them to each other and buoyed them up with faith and hope in God's promises.

In short, God's presence in the lives of Mary and Elizabeth demonstrates how blessing overcomes stigma; togetherness transforms alienation; joy overcomes fear; and companionship meets our deepest needs.

— REVEREND DR. THERESA LATINI

*Let us pray: surprise us with your blessings, God, and weave our lives together with friends who will celebrate our joys and bear our burdens with trust in your promises. Amen.*





SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2024

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*And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."*

LUKE 1:46-47

**S**cripture tells us very little about Mary. The Gospel of Mark begins at Jesus' baptism in the Jordan as an adult, so nothing's said of Mary and his birth. Matthew's gospel makes a bit more of her. She's a character in the story of Jesus' birth, but Joseph is much more prominent. In the Gospel of John, she's never even called by name. Only the Gospel of Luke tells us much about her and our reading today was part of her only real speech. But what a speech! It's called the Magnificat, Latin for "magnifies," as it is used in her opening line, "My soul magnifies the Lord." Curious wording, don't you think? Some modern translators want to make it easier for us, by rephrasing it in English as "My soul praises God" or "My heart rejoices in the Lord." However, I prefer Mary's original poetry, "My soul magnifies the Lord."

Magnifies implies make bigger, make greater, enlarge. However, a magnifying glass has another very interesting potential, besides making things look larger. Do you remember playing with a magnifying glass as a kid – focusing the bright light, into a tiny, hot point of intensity? When Mary says her soul magnifies the Lord, maybe she's pointing to a possibility we don't always see. Perhaps we can see Mary as one who has faithfully gathered the light of God's love and focused it to a small point of great strength, brightness, and brilliant intensity in human shape and form as Christ was born.

In Mary, God chose the most unexpected person to bear the light of the world. God chose one who was powerless and in trouble: a young, engaged woman who suddenly finds herself pregnant. So I find myself this Advent season, wondering the ways in which I can bring God into focus. It seems to me that every human life, bathed in God's love and light as we all are, has at least an opportunity to focus a part of it and deliver it to the world.

– PASTOR MACLEAN

*Lord, help me to be a bearer of your light and love this Advent season. Amen.*



# Third Sunday of Advent

DECEMBER 15, 2024

WORSHIP:

MPLS: 9, 10 & 11AM

WEST: 9, 10 & 11AM

SCRIPTURE:

*LUKE 1:26-38*

*“GABRIEL VISITS MARY”*



MONDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2024

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*Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.*

LUKE 1:57-58

In Martin Luther's explanation to the First Article of the Apostle's Creed, he writes, "I believe God has created me and all things that exist. God has given me and still preserves my body, soul and all their powers."

Luke's gospel gives voice to this same truth. Because of God's great mercy, we exist.

The Gospel writer makes a point of acknowledging that God is the source and giver of life and mercy, and we, as God's people, are simply recipients who respond in joy with one another.

Believed to be past childbearing age, Elizabeth gives birth to a son who will pave the way for Jesus. The gospel makes clear that God's mercy knows no bounds. God's mercy will be made known in unexpected ways, and rejoicing together is our God-given response.

We rejoice, for we know that each person is an unrepeatable grace with the power to point to God. Elizabeth's son, John, was the cousin of Jesus whose impact continues to inspire us today. John's whole life pointed to Jesus. God's great mercy shone through John. God's great mercy shines through you. May you rejoice in the gift of life that God gives. May you trust in God's mercy that carries you wherever you go. May you know that God has created you and all that exists and continues to preserve your body, soul and all their powers so that you may freely rejoice in and with one another.

—PASTOR FREEMAN

*Dear God, thank you for your mercy which graces us every day. Help us to remember that you are the source and giver of life and help us to rejoice with one another as we recognize the mercy you so freely share with the world. In Jesus' name. Amen.*



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2024

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*On the eighth day, they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, “No; he is to be called John.” They said to her, “None of your relatives has this name.”*

LUKE 1:59-61

**J**ohn’s name wasn’t “John.” Elizabeth, when speaking to the people gathered around her and her newborn son, wasn’t calling out “John! John! We will call him John!” She spoke Hebrew, so she was saying “Yochanan” or some variation on that spelling. This is not just Bible trivia you can use to impress people in line at next year’s Stewardship dinners. This is another detail that foreshadows what the soon-to-be-born Christ child will reveal so perfectly and powerfully about God. In Hebrew, Yochanan means “God is gracious.” In his very name, the first non-divine herald of Christ’s coming in Luke’s Gospel proclaims that the incarnation is, in fact, good news! This is not the arrival of God’s henchman, sent to mete out terrible punishment. No, God is not wrathful. God is *gracious*. And this child is to be God’s grace in the flesh. So call him John or call him Yochanan, but give thanks to God either way.

—PASTOR DIXON

*We thank you God for your grace and mercy which you have declared to us over and over in so many ways. Through signs as grand as this world you created, or things as seemingly insignificant as a baby’s name, you tell us you love us.  
Help us to trust in that love and share it. Amen.*



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2024

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*Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him.*

*He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.*

LUKE 1:62-66

I believe it was Thumper (Bambi's rabbit friend) who taught us, "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all." Or maybe it was the angel Gabriel. Recall that Gabriel earlier in Luke's first chapter caused Zechariah to fall silent after he questioned the angel's announcement that he and Elizabeth would have a child. And now Zechariah is given the chance to say something very nice indeed, and he does! He affirms his wife's declaration that their child will be named John (aka "God is Gracious," remember?), and suddenly his tongue is loosened to praise God.

Maybe Gabriel would put it like this, "If you can't talk about the grace of God, don't talk about God at all!" Who is on the way? What child is this? He will be many things to many people. He will be a stumbling block and a savior. He will be a child and the king of kings. But if you can't confess that he will be God's grace poured irresistibly over the world, what else is worthy of saying?

—PASTOR DIXON

*O God, make us speakers of your truth. Keep your word of grace in our mouths, and faith in our hearts. Amen.*



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2024

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*Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.*

LUKE 1:67-80

**T**his is my favorite passage in scripture, a poetic song from Zechariah after the birth of his son. In it, Zechariah proclaims the promise of God's incarnation months before Jesus is even born. Though this is a prophecy for John the Baptist, it is also a beautiful call to you and me. Just like John, we are called to be prophets of this tender God who comes down in mercy and offers us peace, light, and a new day.

—PASTOR OLSON POPP

*Dear God, use me today as you used John, to be a light in the darkness, to share your forgiveness with my neighbor, and to be an agent of your peace in the world. Amen.*



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2024

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*In those days, a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.*

LUKE 2:1-5

**B**abies change things. Soon and very soon we will be celebrating the birth of the Christ child, the one who will “save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). God sent this baby into the world because God Loves us. The gift of Christmas to all of us is that baby who will change our lives. His work on the cross transforms us and frees us so that we can be a blessing to others.

During this busy season, take time to worship God through Jesus Christ. That baby makes all things possible; that baby changes our lives.

Blessings. The Lord is with you.

—PASTOR KALLAND

*Gracious Lord God, we are grateful for another day. Thank you for coming to us each and every day; we need you. Once again we surrender our wills and our lives over to Your care. Help us to be mindful of your consistent love and grace. Amen.*



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2024

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*While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

LUKE 2:6-7

Jesus wasn't born in a barn or a stable. The Greek word *kataluma*, which gets translated as the inn, in the phrase "there was no place for them in the inn," doesn't really mean inn. If you're at all like me, for most of your life you've heard this story and imagined Mary and Joseph wandering the streets of Bethlehem looking for a room at a first century equivalent of the Howard Johnson. We imagine this poor couple looking for a place to stay, only to be greeted with "No Vacancy" signs.

Two things, Bethlehem was kind of a backwater town. There were no major roads that intersected the town, nobody went there unless they meant to, so it's unlikely that it would have had anything that resembled an inn. But Joseph and Mary didn't really need an inn, they were going home. They were going home to family. But the gospel says there was no place for them somewhere, so if there was no inn, what was full? The *Kataluma*. Which most folks think should be translated as guest room. When all the relatives come to town for the holidays, or a government mandated census, what's the first room in the house that fills up? The guest room. Then folks start shuffling beds, cousins bunk together on the couch, and people get cozy.

An average home, at this time in history, would have likely had one main room where the family lived. On the back of the house, there would have been the guest room. But it was the main room, where the family lived, where the animals would sleep at night and where Jesus was more than likely born. Right there for everyone to see.

— PASTOR CIESLIK

*God, for the gift of this baby that is your salvation hidden in plain sight, we give you thanks. Help us to welcome you into our homes and our hearts, for you have made us family. Amen.*





# Fourth Sunday of Advent & Christmas Communion

DECEMBER 22, 2024

WORSHIP:

MPLS: 9, 10 & 11AM

WEST: 9, 10 & 11AM

SCRIPTURE:

*LUKE 1:39-56*

*"MARY'S SONG"*



MONDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2024

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*In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”*

LUKE 2:8-12

**I**t would have been enough to say that Jesus was born. That would be important history to know or a beautiful example to follow. But instead, Luke writes that the angels say: See – I am bringing *you* good news of great joy for all people. To *you* is born a savior: Jesus the Christ. This is good news of great joy for *all* people.

The God of all creation, of all goodness  
Chose to be born to us as a human being  
With toes and a nose and hair and elbows  
To become a God who looks like us  
and feels like us and struggles like us  
Who knows what it means to be human.  
A baby. A kid. A teenager. A young adult.

Jesus isn't just born. He is born for you. To bring you to God. To make all things new.

Jesus came all the way here – to you  
Went the way of the cross – for you  
Was raised up to new life – with you  
God is so good. And God's goodness is to you. For you. Stuck on you. It's yours!

So Merry Christmas! God has made you God's own: choosing and claiming you forever. And we make God our own when we cling to God's promise by faith: God loves us and is with us and has come for us. This is good news for all people.

– PASTOR GRANGAARD

*Dear God, thank you for being born for us in Jesus. Amen.*



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2024

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*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.*

LUKE 2:13-18

**I**t seems that the shepherds caught the particularity of God's promise. Ordinarily they would have no business intruding on this moment of profound intimacy for Jesus' family. What are these dirty, smelly, social pariahs doing on the doorstep of the house where Jesus has just been born? Who are they to show up here?

They are some of the first recipients of God's good news for the whole world. They are bearers of the news of God's savior that has been born, and so they go with haste to share it. They add to the richness of Mary and Joseph's own experience of this night and this event. The shepherds know that this promise, this event, this baby is for them but not only for them. So, they go. They share. They rejoice.

—PASTOR CIESLIK

*Holy God, give us the courage of the shepherds to share the promises that have been made known to us. Help us to trust that Jesus has come for us and for this whole world, so that we might share in the beauty of this unexpected news. Amen.*



# Christmas at Mount Olivet!

## **CHRISTMAS EVE MORNING WORSHIP SERVICES**

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24

10am, Mpls & West Campuses and livestreamed at [mtolivet.org](http://mtolivet.org)

## **CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP SERVICES**

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24

2-10pm, Mpls Campus and livestreamed hourly at [mtolivet.org](http://mtolivet.org)

1:40pm: Instrumental Prelude

2pm: Cherub and Cathedral Choirs and Orchestra

3pm: Alleluia and Cathedral Choirs and Orchestra

4pm: Hosanna and Cathedral Choirs and Orchestra

5pm: Chapel Choir and Piano Solo with Orchestra

6pm: Chancel Choir and Piano Solo with Orchestra

7, 8, & 9pm: Sanctuary Choir and Orchestra

10pm: Candlelight service with Sanctuary Choir and Orchestra

### **2-6pm, West Campus**

2pm: Cherub, Alleluia, and Cathedral Choirs, String Quartet, and Harp

3pm: Hosanna, Chapel, and Cathedral Choirs, String Quartet, and Harp

4pm: Chancel and Sanctuary Choirs, String Quartet, and Harp

5pm: Sanctuary Choir, String Quartet, and Harp

6pm: Candlelight service with Sanctuary Choir, String Quartet, and Harp

## **CHRISTMAS DAY WORSHIP SERVICE**

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25

10am, Mpls Campus and livestreamed at [mtolivet.org](http://mtolivet.org)



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2024

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*But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

LUKE 2:19-20

**T**he long-expected Jesus, Savior of the world, is here! Born in scandal to an inconsequential young woman, lying in a feeding trough, and surrounded by grimy, smelly shepherds.

Mary has waited nine long months for this moment. Her journey has been unexpected and life-changing: from her encounter with the angel Gabriel to finding solidarity with her cousin Elizabeth, from her sojourn to Bethlehem with Joseph to laboring beside the animals. Now shepherds have appeared praising God and recounting a message from an angelic host.

Through it all, Mary has believed and acted on God's promises. She has extolled God's goodness and prophesied with hope. She ends her pregnancy as she began: by treasuring what she's seen and heard and pondering it all in her heart. Her response to God is contemplative. She listens. She reflects. She wonders. She accepts the unexpected and unexplainable.

While Mary thoughtfully meditates on God's presence, the shepherds exuberantly shout for joy. Their presence at Jesus' birth, like Mary's, shatters cultural expectations. Shepherds lived on the bottom rung of the social ladder, and a host of angels has announced the Messiah's birth, not to the rich and powerful, but rather to them, the poor and despised. For God seeks out and chooses the forgotten, neglected, and invisible ones.

Together the shepherds and Mary present two ways we might go through this Christmas day — with lively merriment or thoughtful reflection, or perhaps something in between. And if we feel grieved or outcast, we can be assured of this: God is with us; God desires us; God speaks and acts through us in surprising and meaningful ways.

— REVEREND DR. THERESA LATINI

*Let us pray: on this Christmas Day, fill us with comfort and hope, God, in the midst of stillness and cheerfulness, wonder and grief. May we see and hear Jesus anew as we gather to share our lives with one another. Amen.*

# Join Us for Worship in 2025!

## **MPLS CAMPUS**

5025 Knox Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55419  
612.926.7651

## **WEST CAMPUS**

7150 Rolling Acres Road, Victoria, MN 55386  
952.767.1500

## **SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICES**

9, 10, & 11am  
Mpls & West Campuses

## **HOLY COMMUNION**

8:30 & 11:45am  
Mpls & West Campuses

## **NURSERY**

9, 10, & 11am  
Mpls & West Campuses

## **DIAL-UP**

833.775.1238  
11am

## **LIVESTREAM**

The Mpls Campus service is livestreamed at  
[mtolivet.org/live-on-sunday](https://mtolivet.org/live-on-sunday)  
at 9, 10, & 11am



