

PART 1

CONNECT GUIDE

The
First
Noel



WALLACE MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH

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AS WE BEGIN

A READING PLAN

WEEK 1

- Luke 1
- Luke 2
- Matthew 1
- Matthew 2
- Luke 1 and 2

WEEK 3

- Luke 1
- Luke 2
- Matthew 1
- Matthew 2
- Luke 1 and 2

WEEK 2

- Luke 1
- Luke 2
- Matthew 1
- Matthew 2
- Luke 1 and 2

WEEK ONE

LUKE 1:26-38

DAY 1

Welcome to our Christmas Study. For the next 5 weeks we will be studying selected passages in the book of Luke. This will be a little bit different than our normal studies. Instead of hearing me drone on every week about historical context and intertestamental connections we will be hearing from different church members each day. Every week will be covering 5 devotions on the same passage, but you'll get to hear a different person's insight on that week's featured section after you do your daily reading. Why do it this way? Well, Christmas is a family time, so we wanted to involve people from all across our Wallace family.

We also hope you'll be able to use this guide as an evangelistic tool. The Christmas season is one time of year that people are open to church invitations and real discussions about Christianity. So, use this book like an advent calendar. Ask your friends, family, neighbors, co-workers or potential dating prospects to join you in reading about the birth of Jesus to celebrate the season.

We hope you enjoy this collection of devotions and perspectives. Each devotion will have the name of the author printed underneath it, so if you learn something, enjoy their writing, or gain some insight then please be sure to find them and thank them for sharing with the congregation.

P. Chase Campbell

Pastor of Discipleship

DAY 2

People in the Bible have a rich history of having dramatic reactions to encountering angels. Given the circumstances, this should not come as a surprise. Imagine going about your day as always, and POOF, a heavenly being appears right in front of you. At the beginning of Luke, we encounter three instances of angels appearing to humanity. First, in Luke 1:11-13, we see Zechariah (the father of John the Baptist) being "terrified and overcome with fear" when the angel appears to him to announce that Elizabeth will have a son. Second, in our passage for this week, Luke details the interaction between Gabriel and Mary. Then, in Luke 2:9-10, an angel appears to the shepherds in the fields, and as the glory of the Lord shone around them, "they were terrified." In each case, the angel responds with a simple message, "Do not be afraid." What's interesting to note in Mary's interaction is that Luke does not mention whether Mary reacted in terror, like the others, but merely notes that she was "troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be." So, while similar, Mary's reaction is more one of being perplexed by the content of Gabriel's greeting, rather than the sheer terror of his appearance.

What's even more important to examine now in this passage is the response of our characters. Zechariah was a priest in the Temple, the holiest place a person could be! Yet still, he questioned and doubted if the miracle would even occur. He is ultimately disciplined by God because his fear led to unbelief. The Shepherds, though terrified, immediately move to action in obedience to the word they received. Mary is the opposite of Zechariah. She is a young, ordinary girl in a humble setting

who showed greater faith than Zechariah the priest. She responds by moving through phases of understanding the angel's message, from perplexity to questioning how the promised miracle will occur, to active and submissive faith.

At different times and in various situations, we're like all three of these characters. Sometimes we immediately doubt God's Word or the purpose behind the things in our lives. We're terrified and confused about why certain things are happening the way they are, to the point of doubt. Other times, we respond like the shepherds in the field. Although terrified at first, we trust God and move quickly to action, ready to face whatever is in front of us with God as our shield.

Ultimately, I think most of the time, we're like Mary: more measured and cautious in our response to God's presence in our lives. To be honest, I think confusion is also our default response during times of adversity when God is moving in our lives. "Why is this happening?" "What's going on?" "What's God doing right now?" So, we pray and ask God to give us understanding and help us understand how he will achieve His purposes. This is where we hope to follow Mary's example, not one of fear, but one of willing and faithful submission to His purpose, plan, and timing in all things. Mary had to work through phases of understanding and faithfulness, and most often, these are the phases we work through in our hearts and minds when we know that God is at work.

Take a moment this week to review each of the accounts we studied today. What specific qualities make Mary's reaction different from Zechariah and the shepherds? How can we

cultivate a response of faith and submission like Mary's in our own lives? What practical steps can we take to overcome fear and doubt when faced with unexpected challenges?

Travis S. Gordon- Member of Wallace Campus

DAY 3

In Luke 1:26-38, the angel Gabriel visits Mary with an unimaginable message: she has been chosen to have Jesus, the Son of God. Mary is not royalty, wealthy, or powerful; she is a young woman in a small village, yet God chooses her for a purpose that will change history. Gabriel's message emphasizes several truths: God initiates His plans, God is faithful to His promises, and He is not moved by human status but by a willing heart. Mary's question, "How can this be?", is not rebellion, but honest wonder. Gabriel's response centers on the moment in God's power: "Nothing will be impossible with God." The original audience, waiting in hope for a Messiah, would have heard this as the long-awaited coming of God's kingdom.

Mary's response is the heart of the passage: "I am the Lord's servant... May it happen to me as you have said." Her faith does not erase fear, doubt, or social risk. Instead, she trusts God beyond her understanding. This obedience reveals a profound truth: saying yes to God often requires incredible courage long before we see clarity. Luke's early readers, many of whom were facing persecution or uncertainty for following Jesus, would have been encouraged by Mary's example. Faith is not passive; it steps forward even when the path ahead is

unknown. It is this type of faith that we see written many years later to the audience of Hebrews 11 – “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”

For us today, Mary's response prompts a question: where might God be asking us to trust Him beyond what we can see or control? Whether He is calling us into forgiveness, generosity, service, or simply deeper faith, obedience often feels risky. Living like Mary means believing that God's plans aren't dependent on our qualifications but on His power. It involves holding our lives with open hands and saying, “Lord, I'm willing.” Faith isn't the absence of questions; it's surrendering our questions to a God who is trustworthy.

For us here at church, we live out this passage by being available for God's purposes in everyday life. Like Mary, we can be people who say yes to God using us, yes to loving the lonely, yes to speaking hope, yes to serving where others overlook, yes to the unknown (even though we might prefer the known). This might look like offering encouragement to someone who feels forgotten, serving in a ministry that stretches us, or stepping into conversations where God's compassion is needed. Like Mary, we can respond with a heart that says, “Here I am, Lord. Use me.” When we walk in obedience, even in small acts, we become people in whom God continues His redemptive work in the world. When even one person does this, it changes everything; it makes a difference. Now imagine a whole church living this out! Want to change your family, your community, your city, your nation, the world

— then it starts with — “Yes Lord, use me, I am your servant!”
Nothing is impossible with God!!

Jeff Stevens - Pastor to Children and Families

DAY 4

“Why Me?” Looking at the scripture of Luke 1:26-38, one can wonder why Mary didn’t ask this question of Gabriel. While she did ask “how” in the scripture (Luke 1:34), it doesn’t explicitly detail in Luke that she asked “Why”. All she asked was “how could it happen,” and Gabriel explained that, through the “power of the Most High”, she would give birth to the Son of God - the true Messiah who would save the world. Gabriel also used her relative Elizabeth as an example of God’s awesome power by allowing her to carry a child though she was thought to be infertile. And Elizabeth’s child would be the one to proclaim the coming of Christ (John the Baptist).

God chose Mary based on her lineage, her chastity, and her location - all which was foretold by the prophets in the Old Testament (see Isaiah 11:1, Isaiah 7:14 and Zechariah 9:9). She was the chosen one to carry God’s one and only Son - the one who would save the world!

For a young girl (it is speculated she was between 15 and 16 years old), this had to have been completely overwhelming. As someone who struggled with fertility, I remember the sense of overwhelm when I finally conceived - and I was almost double Mary’s age. What amazes me is her response to this news. Instead of asking “Why me?”, her response in v38 was simply

"I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true.". What amazing faith and trust for such a young girl.

Have you ever been through something and wondered, or even asked, "God - why me"? Maybe it was a diagnosis that would change your life, the loss of a loved one, a job loss or hardship, or maybe all of the above. While there may be various reasons for the why, one thing is for certain - just as Gabriel said to Mary over 2,000 years ago, "For the word of God will never fail" (v37). We just need to remember to be like Mary and say "I am the Lord's servant" when we are in circumstances that challenge us, break our hearts, and test our faith.

Katie Smith - Member of Wallace Campus

DAY 5

In Luke 1:26-38, we see a pivotal part of not just the Gospel, but the entire Bible, unfolding. We see the angel Gabriel interrupt the quiet, ordinary life of Mary with an announcement that would seem overwhelming and impossible. She would conceive the Messiah through the power of the Holy Spirit. For the people of Israel, this message broke a 400 year silence of God to Israel. They had long been waiting for the Savior to come, feeling the weight of the Romans' occupation; this scene signaled that God had not forgotten his people. Gabriel's words-"The Lord is with you"-assured the weary people of God that his covenant of faith had not faded. The

coming of Jesus was a declaration that God had not forgotten his people.

A key insight to the original audience was Mary's humble response of trusting surrender. This is a striking response to a message that would seemingly make anyone at least doubtful, especially Mary, since she was only believed to be a teenager at this time. However, she responded by saying "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." This response is significant. Luke wants readers to see that Mary trusts God's plan not only in the known but the unknown. Mary yields to God's ultimate plan even when it's unclear, costly, or confusing.

For us in the 21st-century Western culture, how does this message apply to us? We can learn a lot from just this small snippet of verses in Luke. This passage shows us that sometimes our plans get interrupted by God's plan. Mary's story here invites us to expect God to interrupt our plans in ways we don't anticipate. In a world where control is often seen as security, Mary teaches us to trust God's timing and purposes even when they disrupt what we think should happen. Within our Wallace family, remaining open to the Spirit's guidance could look different for everyone. It could be serving in new ways, stepping into ministry opportunities we feel unprepared for, or embracing callings that stretch our faith and trust in God.

Mary, in this passage, also pushes us toward community faithfulness. She did not receive this calling in isolation; God surrounded her with Elizabeth, Joseph, and a community that

would eventually come to support God's plan. In the same way, we are called to walk together as a people who help one another discern God's voice and courageously obey it. When God calls someone in our community, family, or church to something new or difficult. We are to come alongside them, encouraging, affirming, and supporting their obedience.

So the call to action is: Will we, like Mary, say "yes" to God's timing, and plan on our lives. This was more than just a historical moment; it still is an invitation for us to believe that God is still breaking in, still calling, still doing the impossible through ordinary people. If we in our communities lived with a trustful openness such as Mary, imagine the impact it could have on families transformed, neighborhoods loved in tangible ways, and a church awakened to God's surprising work. As we enter into the Christmas season, let us listen to God's plan, and not solely our own.

Eli Servies- Student Ministry Intern - Wallace Campus

DISCUSSION GUIDE: NOVEMBER, 30 2025

WEEK ONE: LUKE 1:26-38

ACTION STEP _____

How will I live out the action step this week?

SERMON NOTES

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CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 1

- Have you ever received unexpected news? How did it impact you? Was it good or bad news? How were your reaction and Mary's reactions the same? How were they different?
- Read Romans 5:12-21. Why was it so important that Jesus was born of a Virgin? How does this release us from the curse of Adam that's mentioned in Romans 5? Why do you believe this particular miracle is a stumbling block for so many people?
- The task that Mary was given was extremely daunting and difficult, yet she replied by accepting her role as a servant. Go read Matthew 28:19-20. How can you respond like Mary to each of these commands in this verse? Answer as an individual, then come up with a plan as to how you can live these commands out as a Connect group.
- In the coming weeks there will be numerous Christmas services, parties, and family get-togethers. How will you share the story of Christmas at each of these gatherings? What specific people are you planning on inviting to one of our Christmas services?

WEEK TWO

LUKE 1:39-56

DAY 1

Wow! Mary has just received this unbelievable news from an angel that she will be immaculately conceiving and giving birth to the King of Kings! She has also been told that her relative and friend Elizabeth has conceived a son under incredible circumstances as well! This must have been a lot to process all at once! At this moment I probably would have taken a good amount of time to process all of this and to get my ducks in a row. Well not Mary! She takes off immediately on a very long journey to visit Elizabeth!

Why would Mary do that with such haste? Because she was so very excited to share her incredible "God story" with her someone that would understand, support her and celebrate with her. I'm sure that Mary was just as excited to hear Elizabeth's "God story" as well! Imagine all the feelings and emotions both women were going through and they desired to and needed to share and process with each other.

As we have walked through the book of Judges with John in the last month, we have learned how important it is to have Christian community to walk through life with. We see this example so clearly in this story as Mary and Elizabeth needed one another. When they were united in that moment the baby leaped inside of Elizabeth, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit! As a believer we know what an amazing undeniable feeling that is! Elizabeth celebrated with Mary in that moment of excitement and Mary began proclaiming the

greatness of the Lord through a beautiful intricately written song of praise!!!! Oh, this moment must have been a glorious time between the two as they shared their "God Stories" of how God was working and moving in their lives. I am quite certain that both women were probably nervous about their new circumstances. One being past childbearing age and the other immaculately conceiving the son of the most high.

This story sets an example of the type of community that relies on each other, shares with one another and provides a strong foundation within a body of believers to be able to share the good news. We need encouragement and continued reminders of God's goodness as we are all sinners that live in a fallen world.

We need to share our "God stories" all the time with our Christian community and with those that do not know Christ. This is a true and perfect way to share the good news of Jesus Christ! When was the last time that you shared a "God Story?"

Katherine Green- Student Ministry Admin and Member of Wallace Campus

DAY 2

This week we are focusing on Luke 1:39-56 and the events leading up to the birth of Jesus. Today, let's focus on the joy of the news of Mary's pregnancy that is shared between Mary and her cousin, Elizabeth.

As seen in the text, Mary knew and accepted the miracle that was her pregnancy. This was a pregnancy that would bring forth her son and our savior, Jesus. However, to everyone around her she would have appeared to be a woman who became pregnant outside of the covenant of marriage – which was scandalous in her culture. The typical reaction to sharing a pregnancy announcement in that context would have been one of disgust. It is hard to imagine that sharing the news of her pregnancy would be easy for Mary or that it was well-received by those around her. Which is why the overwhelmingly joyful response by Elizabeth is such a wonderful aspect of this story.

Mary had just heard from Gabriel when she left to visit Elizabeth. Unlike modern women, Mary couldn't confirm her pregnancy with a pregnancy test or an ultrasound. Instead, it was confirmed by the Holy Spirit through her cousin and the baby boy in her own womb. Immediately, what pours out of Mary is her own joy when she begins to sing, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Mary humbly accepted her pregnancy and then joyfully sings about our God and his plan for salvation for her people.

Many of us also know the joy that can come with the promise of a new life – whether that is through growing a family, pursuing a hobby or career, or witnessing God answer a prayer. I also find that we are more likely to experience the joy that God has for us when we also have gratitude for what has been given to us. Personally, one of the most joyful and humbling moments of my life occurred this year. It came in our recovery room after the birth of our daughter. In the quiet, after we were stable and had moved to our recovery room, I

had an overwhelming sense of awe and gratitude as I stared at my baby girl. I did not have an easy pregnancy and needed to deliver early. But she had arrived and was beautiful and healthy and safe in my arms. God was so gracious to bless us with another child and to keep me safe with close monitoring by my OB. I was holding the product of so many prayers – our own and those who had been praying with us. And I couldn't stop smiling and thanking God for what he had done.

I also know that our joy is not dependent on our circumstances; the Lord can give us joy through our faith in Christ regardless of our circumstances. The gift I have been given is not lost on me, after experiencing our own pregnancy loss and walking with several friends through the pain of miscarriage, longing for children, and longing for marriage.

Today, take some time to reflect and think about the last time you experienced an awesome sense of wonder and joy. Pray that God grants us moments of joy that we can share with those around us as we prepare to celebrate Christmas.

Erin E. Campbell - Member of Wallace Campus

DAY 3

I am writing this in the midst of planning a baby shower for my granddaughter as our family celebrates adding another member to our clan. She recently shared that she never feels closer to God than when she is pregnant. The miracle

and blessing of a baby being formed inside your body is a movement of God. Ever since Eve conceived her first child, it has been an honor and a privilege. Carrying the body of a baby with an eternal soul and a God-given purpose inside your womb should never be taken lightly or taken for granted.

In Luke 1:39-56, we get a glimpse into the reactions and connections of the two women who carried the greatest of all divine pregnancies. These pregnancies were beyond human comprehension, and it was clear that God was involved. Elizabeth's response when she became pregnant in her old age was "How kind the Lord is!" she exclaimed. "He has taken away my disgrace of having no children."

Six months later Mary, a young engaged virgin, is informed by an angel named Gabriel that "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God."

Mary's first response to Gabriel's news after initially feeling confused and disturbed was, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true."

Days after the angel Gabriel told her about how she, a virgin, would conceive the long-awaited Messiah, and Elizabeth, her elderly cousin, was already carrying a baby boy, Mary

traveled as quickly as she could the 90 miles to her cousin Elizabeth's home. We are not specifically told why, but I would want to confirm what Gabriel had said about their pregnancies, and to share with the only other person on earth who could come close to understanding her incredible news of divine intervention and revelation. By this time Elizabeth was six months into her miraculous pregnancy and in seclusion. They really needed each other.

As soon as Mary says hello, Elizabeth's baby boy growing in her womb leaps for joy. She is filled with the Holy Spirit and starts shouting how blessed they both are and acknowledges that Mary is carrying her Lord. Mary breaks out in a song of praise and worship. I would have loved to have been a bug on that wall, taking it all in.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back to her own home. Can you imagine the conversations that took place between them?

Lessons from their lives: You are never too young or too old to be used by God in miraculous ways. God can do more through one ordinary individual who is sold out and surrendered than an army of half-hearted churchgoers.

Both women acknowledged that the Lord was the one who had blessed their wombs with divine appointments. They willingly accepted their assignment in spite of potential criticism and, even more, rejoiced at it. This is exactly what we should do when God asks us to do something to fulfill his plan, even if it puts us in an uncomfortable position.

They were both women of humble yet strong faith that believed God even when it made no sense because they believed the prophecies they were taught from childhood. The Bible stories you may have grown up with are more than just stories. They are intended to give you glimpses into the magnificence of God and His relationship with and ultimate desires for mankind.

By no forethought of their own or self-promotion of any means, these two women found themselves invited into the divine plan of God to provide salvation for mankind through the birth, death, and resurrection of His Son. God is always inviting us into His bigger story if we are listening for His plan and purpose for our individual lives.

Although they were decades apart in age, they were a huge source of strength and encouragement to one another. Building relationships with generations outside of our own is beneficial for everyone. There is nothing as beautiful as being present (body, mind and soul) for others. So, drop that phone and visit someone in need of help today.

Carrying the body of a baby with an eternal soul and a God-given purpose inside your womb should never be taken lightly or taken for granted. Parenthood, not just motherhood, is a privilege that carries with it a huge responsibility of preparing the next generation for their role in God's bigger story.

Robin Wright - Member of Wallace Campus

DAY 4

In Luke 1 we see a glimpse into the stories of 2 New Testament women in the Bible, Elizabeth and Mary. Both expectant mothers were able to encourage each other in ways that no one else could understand.

Let's take a few minutes to look at the story of Elizabeth as seen in Luke 1 before the verses we read today. Elizabeth was the wife of Zacharias from the tribe of Aaron (1:5). Elizabeth was advanced in years (1:18), when she became pregnant with John the Baptist (1:24). For most of her life Elizabeth had been childless, which was looked down upon in her culture. Elizabeth experienced a miracle in her old age. Elizabeth was a relative of Mary, the mother of Jesus (1:36). When Gabriel tells Mary that she will be the mother of the Son of God, the angel mentions Elizabeth's pregnancy to Mary sharing that "For nothing is impossible with God." (1:37).

Following Mary's encounter with Gabriel, she hurries to visit Elizabeth (1:39). When Mary greets Elizabeth, her baby, who we know as John the Baptist, leaps in her womb and Elizabeth

is filled with the Holy Spirit (1:41). Elizabeth is the first person to recognize Jesus as her Lord. She tells Mary, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And how has it happened to me that the mother of my Lord would come to me? " (1:42-43). What encouragement to Mary it must have been to have Elizabeth know that she was carrying the long-awaited Messiah. Mary stayed with Elizabeth for 3 months before going home (1:56). We do not know what happened between Mary and Elizabeth during those 3 months, but I would like to think that they continued to encourage each other during that time.

God places people in our lives when we need it most. Mary was able to start her journey with Elizabeth walking beside her, helping to prepare Mary for her pregnancy. And Elizabeth was able to spend time with Mary, as she prepared for the birth of her son, John. Both women were experiencing miracles that would change the world forever.

- Have you ever experienced an encouraging visit from someone just when you needed it most?
- As believers, we are to encourage one another. Is there someone God is calling you to encourage today?

Kathy Glennon - Member of Wallace Campus

DAY 5

1. What This Scripture Tells Us About God

- God fills people with the Holy Spirit, just as He did Elizabeth.
- God makes promises to His people — and He fulfills those promises.
- God deserves to be glorified.
- God is our Savior.
- God does great things.
- God's name is holy.
- God's mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation.
- God performs mighty deeds with His arm — and only His arm is needed.
- God scatters the proud and knows their innermost thoughts.
- God brings down rulers from their thrones.
- God lifts up the humble.
- God fills the hungry with good things.
- God sends the rich away empty.
- God helps His servants, just as He helped Israel.
- God remembers to be merciful.

This passage reminds us that the same God who moved powerfully in Mary and Elizabeth's lives is still moving in ours today.

2. Perspective and Context

In Luke 1:39–56, we see two remarkable women—Mary and her relative Elizabeth—woven into God’s redemptive story. Mary, likely a young teenager from Nazareth, was pledged to marry Joseph when the angel told her she would miraculously bear the Son of God. Elizabeth, a righteous woman from a priestly family in the hill country of Judea, was much older and had long been unable to have children until God blessed her with John the Baptist. Her husband, Zechariah, was a priest serving in the temple when an angel announced this miracle. These events likely took place around 6–4 BC. During this period, Jewish culture placed strong emphasis on purity, family honor, and faithfulness to God’s covenant. For Mary to be pregnant before marriage would have been socially scandalous and personally dangerous — yet her faith and obedience stand as a testimony to trust in God’s plan.

3. What This Scripture Means for Us

This passage is more than a history lesson — it’s a living word for every believer today.

We Need Godly Community

Mary didn’t walk alone in her calling. God provided Elizabeth — a wise, Spirit-filled mentor who rejoiced with her, blessed her, and strengthened her faith. We need people like that, too — those who encourage us, pray with us, and remind us of God’s promises when life feels uncertain.

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." —
Proverbs 27:17

We Must Believe God's Promises

Elizabeth spoke a powerful word to Mary: "Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her." (Luke 1:45) To believe God's promises, we must first know them. That means opening His Word regularly — not chasing the world's promises but trusting in God's. Sometimes the waiting is long, but His Word never fails. If you're still waiting for God to fulfill something in your life — keep digging into His truth. Know Him, trust Him, and rest in His perfect timing.

We Can Praise God in All Circumstances

Mary's song, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55), overflows with joy and worship: "My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Even in uncertainty, Mary chose to rejoice. When we praise God through the unknown, our hearts shift from fear to faith. Worship reminds us that God's promises are certain, even when the path is not.

We Can Wait and Trust

Mary remained with Elizabeth for about three months — a season of waiting, resting, and being strengthened in faith. Likewise, there are times when God calls us to sit still, to wait, to trust His unseen work. Sometimes obedience looks like staying close to Him and letting His Spirit prepare us for what's next.

"Be still and know that I am God." — Psalm 46:10

Closing Prayer

Father God, Thank You for Your Word that reminds us You are faithful to fulfill every promise. Help us, like Mary, to believe what You have spoken and to trust You in every season — the waiting, the wondering, and the rejoicing. Thank You for the people You place in our lives, our "Elizabeths," who walk beside us and strengthen our faith. Teach us also to be encouragers to others, pointing them back to You. Fill us with Your Spirit, Lord, that we may live with joy, humility, and confidence in Your goodness. May our hearts magnify You in all circumstances, and may our lives reflect Your mercy and truth from generation to generation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Reflection Questions

- What does this passage reveal to you personally about God's character?
- Who is your "Elizabeth"? Who helps nurture your faith?
- How can you be an "Elizabeth" for someone else?
- Are you spending time in God's Word, learning His promises?
- Can you praise Him in your current season — even in uncertainty?

Lisa Keaton - Wallace Women's Ministry Director

DISCUSSION GUIDE: DECEMBER 7, 2025

WEEK TWO: LUKE 1:39–56

ACTION STEP

How will I live out the action step this week?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 2

- Go back and read Luke 1:5-25. How are the messages that Mary and Elizabeth receive similar? How are they different?
- Why was Zechariah bound to silence when he asked a question, but Mary was given an answer?
- Read first Samuel 2:1-11. How are Mary and Hannah's songs similar? How are they different? What does each one tell us about what God had planned for their child?
- Read Luke 1:52. How does Christianity change the perception of social standing and power? The Bible says that Jesus would do this with His life and with His death. How did that happen in His own time? How does following Jesus do the same in our time?
- While many people know the story of Jesus' birth, most people aren't as familiar with this part of the story. How can you share this story to help people understand the meaning of Christmas? Who will you share this story with this week?

WEEK THREE

LUKE 2:1-7

DAY 1

When we read Luke 2, we often picture a peaceful “silent night” nativity scene, and we don’t even think about the disheartening social scene that any Israelite would have noticed: Israel was under Roman occupation, paying taxes to Caesar Augustus, a foreign emperor who claimed descent from the goddess Venus. For the Jewish people, this wasn’t just political oppression; it was spiritual humiliation layered on top of the temple tax they already paid for the right to publicly worship their own God. Joseph was making the journey to Bethlehem to register for taxation—to literally be counted among the subjects of Rome. And he wasn’t traveling alone. Mary, his espoused wife, was nine months pregnant. In Jewish culture, betrothal was legally binding for about a year before the marriage was consummated, so everyone who saw them had every reason to believe that Mary was immoral. And when they arrived at the inn, not even one family would give up their room for a woman who was ready to give birth. Think about that. This wasn’t just bad luck with an overbooked hotel—this was a town full of people who all would refuse help to a baby.

But there was something even darker weighing on Joseph’s mind. To register for this census, he had to trace his lineage back through the royal line of David. Every name he recited was a reminder: he was descended from kings, but he would never be one. God had pronounced a curse on his bloodline

because of king Jeconiah (Jeremiah 22:30): "for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David." Joseph was next in line to be the king of Israel, but God promised it would be a disaster if he, or anyone from his bloodline, would take on that role. Every step he took toward Bethlehem, every time he stated his lineage to a Roman official, was a reminder that Israel was unable to have a king like it had before. Any child of his would bear that curse. The promises God made to David about an eternal kingdom looked dead: there was no throne, and there was no kingdom... just taxation, shame, and scandal.

And yet—God had been planning this for centuries. Long before Jeconiah, before the Babylonian exile, before Israel even had kings, God had set things in motion. In Numbers 36:6-9, God established a principle: inheritance could pass through a daughter if there were no sons. Mary, too, was a descendant of David—but through a different line, untouched by Jeconiah's curse. When the angel told her she would conceive by the Holy Spirit, God was fulfilling what He'd promised all the way back in Genesis 3:15—the Messiah would be the seed of the woman (not the seed of the man, where the seed is biologically located in every other case). Satan likely thought God had painted Himself into a corner, that God might have to break a promise or cheat somehow to get around the curse. But God doesn't operate that way. This wasn't Plan B. This was Plan A all along. The scandal, the taxation, the curse—none of it caught God by surprise. He had woven the solution into the fabric of His law centuries before the problem even arose.

Things looked bleak, to those who knew God. Maybe even unrecoverable. But God had planned every part of the situation, from the beginning to the end. The King of Kings entered the world under the boot of a pagan empire, born to a shamed mother and a cursed father, in a nation so indifferent to human suffering that not even one person cared that someone had to give birth in a barn. But God proved that he keeps every promise he makes, and that circumstances are never an obstacle for him to keep his word. He planned on overcoming every problem, from the beginning of time.

Your love for your own sin is a problem that is much bigger than the bloodline curse that Joseph faced. But God has made a lot of promises to all of us: Whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Romans 10:13, 2nd Timothy 2:11-13). And the terrible things we experience? He will combine them like ingredients to make something good come out of the bad (Romans 8:28). So good, in fact, that we will forget that the bad things even happened (Isaiah 65:17), no matter how bad they were. God arranged history so that Jesus would be born in very unpleasant circumstances that he himself would have to endure. And he also arranged history so you could spend time reading the Bible today and ask him to change you — which he is willing and able to do.

Jerry Rowe - Member of Wallace Campus

DAY 2

There is a great journey we are all on; it is a journey to fill a void, an emptiness that we all feel. The journey is often for something that we can't describe, yet there is a feeling that we will know it when that yearning is satisfied. This quest is for peace. Peace is something in this life that we are all on a journey to find, but the journey can be filled with detours. Bells and whistles grab our attention and fill us with false hope. Waiting easily destroys our peace in the fast paced world that we live in. Our journey includes relationships with others that also bring disturbances in the form of empty promises and trust that is broken, thus hurt lingers and peace remains unattainable. Trust becomes a far off idea so that we think we are the only one that has trust issues while everyone else lives in perfect peace in what appears to be a perfect life. Peace is the ultimate quest. This quest finds its final steps in the birth of Jesus Christ, our Messiah, and promised King.

Even though the words Luke uses to describe the birth of Christ are simple, they put forth an image and truth ripe with peace, hope, and a promise fulfilled. God is working the history of redemption in ways that, though simple, display immense power, control, and care to restore His people. Nativity puts front and center a God who brings his promises to fulfillment for the people he loves and longs to bring them peace. Although God had been quiet for around 400 years before the birth of Christ, it was promised in Micah 5:1-5 that the true King would be born in Bethlehem and nothing would stop God's promise

of hope and peace to his people. The silence would be broken and light would shine forth.

In the midst of waiting, the people were in the midst of oppression by the Roman Empire. They were waiting and yearning for God to fulfill his promise. Luke sees God as the Lord of history and that there is nothing that can stop Him from being true to his word. God uses Caesar and Quirinius and the census to set forth the divine plan and purpose as they are unknowing agents of God to fulfill his promise. God would also move two insignificant parents 70 miles to register at the town of David's lineage; that the Messiah would be born in the humble town of Bethlehem, and not one single detail would be unfulfilled. From such humble beginnings will emerge a humble King, Jesus, with the right heritage, born of a pious Davidic couple just as the prophecy of Michah that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem. Thus, Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the promised ruler. There is nothing that will stop the Lord of history from fulfilling his promises just as He said he would.

All the promises of the prophets were carried on the shoulders of the one born in Bethlehem and the birth of Christ fulfilled them all. Jesus being born in the insignificant town of Bethlehem in humble circumstances is our future hope. The fulfilled promises remind us that the coming of Christ is the result of unstoppable zeal of a God of glorious redeeming grace. The birth of a baby in swaddling clothes, obscurity, and rejection brings prophecies that come to fulfillment in the birth of Christ

in Bethlehem remind us that the great author of history's plot determined that the overarching theme of this story would be one of promises kept. Because of the truth revealed in Bethlehem many years ago, Christians eagerly and joyfully celebrate, trust, and embrace the truth set forth by Luke.

These truths invoke within us a longing of hope, the hope of a journey that has found its end and satisfaction in the one who alone has kept his promises and secured our trust with the birth of Christ. God has insurmountable power to keep his promises and move history to not only keep his promises but keep them perfectly. In the midst of all the broken relationships and unquenchable desires that find false hope, there is a King born in a manger that brings us to an end of this journey. The promise of peace with a reliable, trustworthy God is why we celebrate the incarnation. This rescue from sin that would be sealed by faith in the perfect Christ who would live a perfect life and die as the propitiation of God's wrath, and rise from the grave is what makes Christmas such a joyful celebration. This rescue from sin brings ultimate, overwhelming peace that comes only from Christ. At this time, in that manger, the Prince of Peace is born.

Jimbo Watson - Member of Wallace Campus

DAY 3

A wife went to the mall to get an early Christmas gift for her husband, but had no idea what to buy. As she walked through a store, a man nearly seven feet tall passed by—young, athletic, and looking like he belonged on an NFL roster. She wasn't a football fan, but she thought, if he's famous, maybe his autograph would make a great gift. The mall was nearly empty, and the only other person in the store was a short, odd-looking man browsing in the corner. She didn't want to approach him because he looked so strange, but curiosity won. She walked over and asked, "Is that big athletic guy a famous football player?" The short man looked up and said, "No, that's my bodyguard. I'm Michael Jackson."

Sometimes we can overlook what is right in front of us. The same is true with the Christmas story. In Luke 2, Caesar Augustus was the first emperor of one of the most powerful empires in history. He called for a census to evaluate the vast taxes he had in the Roman Empire. Quirinius was a governor of a large region in Syria that included Israel. The vast earthly glory of these men could cause us to overlook God orchestrating the fulfillment of Micah 5:2. "Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; one will come from you to be ruler over Israel for me. His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times." There, God was going to birth a ruler from the line of King David who would reveal God's glory. (2 Cor. 4:6).

Furthermore, a young man, Joseph, and his pregnant fiancé,

Mary, would be overlooked as candidates as parents of the King of the world. They were not a king or queen. Or wealthy. They were even overlooked when requesting a room to stay in. The word commonly translated “inn” is probably best translated as “guest room” (Lk. 2:7 CSB). This shows they were not just rejected by a hotel manager, but by their own relatives! Their own family overlooked them! The result was that the king and savior was born in an animal feeding trough. If you did not know this was about Jesus, you may even overlook this story because it does not mention his name.

Today, we can overlook Jesus, too. Often, we are so used to Jesus that we can overlook him. We can overlook Jesus for the busyness of Christmas activities. We can overlook Jesus for the fun of Christmas traditions. We can overlook Jesus because we think we know the Christmas story well enough, and we need something new. This is the danger of Christmas—we get so caught up in everything around Jesus, we overlook Jesus. This Christmas season, slow down. Take time to read about Jesus and the Christmas story. Don’t just sing Christmas carols, sing praise to God in worship. This Christmas, don’t just celebrate the holiday, celebrate the Savior.

- What parts of Christmas tend to distract you from focusing on Jesus? (Shopping, parties, traditions, busyness?)
- How might we slow down this year to notice Jesus more?

Adam Diggs - Riverview Campus Pastor

DAY 4

Luke tells the story of Jesus' birth in the most ordinary setting- crowded streets, a long journey, no room available, and a manger for a crib. The King of Kings enters the world quietly, humbly, and in a moment that looked far from ideal. Yet that is EXACTLY where God chose to show up.

This passage reminds us that God works through everyday events and even through inconvenience. The census, something considered political and mundane, ends up guiding Mary and Joseph straight into God's plan. The manger itself wasn't holy- God made it holy by being present in it. And that truth speaks into our lives today. God steps into the places that feel messy, uncomfortable, or uncertain. He isn't limited by our circumstances; He works right in the middle of them.

I've seen this in my own story. There have been seasons where school felt overwhelming, where I wasn't sure about my direction, or where life just felt "too much." Yet those moments often became the places where God met me with unexpected peace or clarity. For years in college, I wrestled with not knowing what to study or where to go next. I considered dropping out after 3.5 years of studying because of uncertainty. I felt like I was standing in an unknown, unfamiliar, and uncomfortable place, much like Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem. But trusting God in that season changed everything. Leading up to the semester that I was going to drop out, I was able to go in several mission trips, and work closely with a lot of the Wallace Family and many of my spiritual

mentors- from there, He revealed Jesus in the middle of my uncertainty, and out of nowhere guided me toward pursuing ministry overseas.

Luke 2 reminds us that God doesn't wait for perfect circumstances. He steps into real life-our classrooms, workplaces, late-night worries, and times of silence. If He can turn a crowded stable into the birthplace of hope, He can work in the everyday places of our lives too.

This Christmas, let's slow down, pay attention, and trust that even when we can't see the full picture, God is painting something purposeful and beautiful. The same God that guided Mary and Joseph to have Jesus is the same God guiding us today.

Isaiah Hicks - Ministry Apprentice - SoKno City

DAY 5

Luke's account of Jesus' birth would have had some clear points to the original readers, like it does to us today. The saying, "Home is where the heart is," represents feelings that most people relate to. Home is a place of physical and spiritual connections. People did not travel far from home in those days because of difficulties and safety concerns. But Joseph and Mary were obedient to the laws of the land, so they set out on a ninety-mile journey to pay taxes as Caesar Augustus

had dictated. Thus, they were traveling HOME to Bethlehem. Imagine the difficulty of traveling so far, especially with Mary expecting a child at any time; and think of the worry and tension Joseph had over such a responsibility.

God's plan for the Messiah was revealed many times in the Old Testament. A majority of Israel would be familiar with these prophecies; however, many lacked the understanding that Jesus would come as a newborn baby. Most expected a Messiah who would rule and reign rather than a newborn as Isaiah 53:3 says, "came to suffer, be despised, a man of sorrows and rejected." God's message is rough by today's terms. He knows our sufferings, and His Son came to walk in it and share it, even to death on a cruel cross.

The original birth message was not meant for the first century people alone. It has been applicable down through time all the way to us today. It is important for us to see Joseph's predicament and the loving care he gave his family by obeying God's leadership. Joseph and Mary set out on a mission that was God-led despite fears and difficulties. Imagine taking your family on a journey with no provisions for comfort, giving birth in a stable, experiencing the cold of night and putting your first-born child in a stone feeding trough wrapped in rags. Jesus' introduction illustrates his humble beginnings as compared to John the Baptist's. Think about the fact that God used a pagan emperor, Caesar Augustus, to fulfill a long-

standing prophecy. This tells us that God sometimes uses unpleasant people and situations to accomplish his plans for us.

We can live out God's plans for us just as Mary and Joseph did. We can put aside our own desires and ask God to reveal where He is working and commit to meeting Him there. Mary and Joseph went HOME to receive God's blessings. Then they followed His instructions for safe keeping by fleeing to Egypt for a period. This fulfilled His promise for protection until a time when it was safe to go back HOME. Going back home enabled Jesus to launch a ministry to show mankind the proper ways to live and serve others. He specifically established the church to serve the nations by modeling His ways and message. We should be forever thankful for His grace, love and guidance as well as give Him praise for His loving care.

All these facts that we know about Jesus should stir our hearts to be more like Him. You might ask occasionally, 'What does it matter or how is all of this important to me?' I urge you to give this some serious thought. Think on the fact that Mary, Joseph, and Jesus entered a crowded city that had no room for them, and things were so busy that Jesus' coming was overlooked. Do you have room in a crowded heart to let Jesus in? Are you too busy to realize His wondrous acts and blessings you have because of Him? Know that God has a plan for you. Following and serving Him leads to glorious outcomes. Let the light of Christ shine through you to brighten a darkened world in this Christmas season and beyond. Open your heart and receive

Him so that the light of Christ will shine through you. He will always give you strength, leadership, and courage to serve and worship Him as your Lord and Savior.

Jesus' birth and life should call all Christians to action in our communities to be a spiritual witness. It is important for me to model Jesus as best as I can to bring about some changes for the betterment of our society. By changing our own hearts and commitments, we can impact the world around us.

Dick Sempel - Member of Cumberland Campus

DISCUSSION GUIDE: DECEMBER 14

WEEK THREE: LUKE 2:1-7

ACTION STEP _____

How will I live out the action step this week?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 3

- For many people, reading Luke 2:1-7 is a family tradition on Christmas day or Christmas eve. What are some of your favorite Christmas traditions? Do you have traditions that are also just for your friends or for your church family?
- Having to travel and give birth in a stable was less than convenient for Mary and Joseph. In our time the Christmas season can often be overly busy and have many inconvenient obligations. How can you make sure that the meaning of Christmas doesn't get lost in the bustle of activity? How can you help your family and friends stay focused on Jesus during this time as well?
- Go read Matthew 1:18-25. Both Matthew and Luke are telling the same story, but from a slightly different perspective? How are they alike? How are they different?
- How can you use the story of Jesus' birth in evangelism? Spend a few minutes coming up with a way to present the Gospel while discussing Jesus' birth. Split up into smaller groups and practice how you are going to do this.

