



Advent

(Week 3/4) Joy: Good News of Great Joy

Small Group Discussion Questions

Connect *How can waiting for Jesus' return be a way to train you more-and-more in hope?*

Warm-Up

1. Other than the Gospel what is the biggest claim you have heard? *Should we be sceptical of such claims?*
2. When was the last time you had a sense of joy that couldn't be contained and you had to express it with words, song, dance, jumping, or some other physical expression?

Read Luke 1:39-45

3. What has happened up to this point in Luke? *What are the backstories of Mary and Elizabeth?*
4. How are the stories of Mary and Elizabeth (and therefore Jesus and John) interwoven? How are they both very surprising stories about expecting mothers?
5. What happens to Elizabeth when she just hears Mary's greeting? What do you think this means?
6. What do you think Elizabeth means by her loud exclamation? Who does she (in the power of the Holy Spirit) identify Mary's baby as?
7. Who is blessed and why? In what way are we 'blessed' to believe what the Lord has promised?
8. What is the significance of Elizabeth's recognition of Jesus as *Lord*? How does this relate to us?

Read Luke 1:46-49

9. Who does Mary recognise the Lord to be? If God is *her Saviour*, what does this mean about Mary?
10. What does it mean that the Lord has been mindful of Mary? How has God been mindful of us?
11. What does it mean to you to know that God has been mindful of you? How can you know that?
12. What has the Mighty One done for Mary? What has the Mighty One done for us?
13. How does Mary respond with humility, delight, and wonder? Is that instructive for us, too?

Read Luke 1:50-56

14. What are the clues in these verses that God's Kingdom is one of justice and mercy? Why is this such good news for the world? *What aspect of God's Kingdom (coming in full) do you look forward to the most?*
15. What is the means by which God's Kingdom is birthed and will come to fulfilment?
16. According to the song, who are the recipients of God's Kingdom? In particular, what do you think it means to fear (or revere) God? How can we express a humble dependence on God?
17. How did Mary enter into the joy of the news that she had received? (Look at her various actions.)
18. How might we — in the power of the Spirit — enter into the joy of the Good News, too?

Apply *How do you typically get ready for Christmas? How can you get ready in light of Jesus' return?*

Pray *Gracious Father, thank you that the arrival of your King also signals the inauguration of your Kingdom. Help us to see the implication of this that our lives would be gripped by your joy. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

GOING DEEPER

Advent **(Week 3/4) Joy: Good News of Great Joy** Small Group Discussion Questions

On Your Front Line this Week

Invite someone along to join you for Carols by Glowstick, this Tuesday & Wednesday night.

For Families

- *Download:* some of the family resources to use at home: stbartskids.org

Listen, Watch, and Read

- *Listen (sermon):* “Jesus the Revolutionary: Mary’s Song” by Tobias Brown:
https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=239728&show_file=254860
- *Listen (sermon):* “The Long Promised Victor” by William Taylor:
<https://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/talk/57507/>
- *Listen (sermon):* “Mary’s Song” by Tim Keller:
<https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/marys-song/>
- *Watch (devotional):* “Mary’s Voice in Advent” by Amy Orr Ewing:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL_gTA_rjswB-rmXRvkiIqo1yV_JpuqJlD
- *Read:* “Mary’s Voice: Advent Reflections to Contemplate” by Amy Orr Ewing:
<https://www.amazon.com.au/Marys-Voice-Advent-Reflections-Contemplate-ebook/dp/B0BV26Y7HP>

Series Resources

- *Read:* “Advent (Fullness of Time Series)” by Tish Harrison Warren. 📖
- *Devotional:* “Sing in Exultation” by Jonanthan Landry Cruse. 📖
- *Devotional:* “The One True Gift” by Tim Chester. 📖
- *Devotional:* “Advent for Everyone: Luke” by Tom Wright. 📖
- *Read:* “What Christians Ought to Believe” by Michael Bird. 📖
- *Read:* “Is Christmas Unbelievable” by Rebecca McLaughlin. 📖
- *Read:* “The God who Became Human” by Graham Cole. <https://bit.ly/3g68RBj>
- *Read:* “On the Incarnation” by Athanasius. <https://bit.ly/3E5gLmB>
- *Watch:* “The Incarnation (Spoken Word)” by Humble Word. <https://bit.ly/3OhgPUP>
- *Listen:* A Carols Playlist (curated by the St Bart’s staff team): <https://spoti.fi/3OaIsTK>

ADVENT

*Week 3/4 “Joy: Good News of Great Joy
by the Rev’d Adam Lowe (14/12/2025)*

기쁨: 큰 기쁨의 좋은 소식 | YUM DE PIJU: Wël Piëth kë Yum dë Piöu |
喜乐: 极大的喜乐的好消息 | மகிழ்ச்சி: மிகுந்த மகிழ்ச்சி உண்டாக்கும் நற்செய்தி

Bible Passage: Luke 1:39-50

*Gracious Father, we thank you for the arrival of the King and the beauty of your Kingdom.
May this good news grip our lives with joy. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.*

GOOD NEWS that will cause GREAT JOY! /

In many ways, that is the claim at the heart of Christmas.

In our household we often hear some big claims, although they’re usually about very trivial things.

Like: I will definitely empty the dishwasher if you just give me a moment?

Or: I will absolutely do whatever you want if I can just have 5 minutes of tech.

Or: I will certainly have a shower first thing in the morning if I don’t have to have one tonight. //

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- *They’re small claims,
pitched with high confidence,
attracting a large dose of parental scepticism. /*
 - But nothing really compares to the claim of some angels,
declared to a bunch of shepherds some 2000 years ago.
 - This news of the angels was gargantuan in both *claimed* substance and also *claimed* effect:
The claimed substance: / this baby will be both the Messiah & Lord — *that is KoK & God;*
The claimed effect: / this news is the cause of GREAT JOY *for all the people.*
 - The claim is not *merely that this good news is BIG, but it has the BIGGEST reach:*
sending a shockwave across the entire universe with eternal consequences. /
 - So if you’re a bit sceptical when you hear this claim, you’re probably hearing it correctly!
 - *Because, if true, this is not news only for me or for some, or that sits neatly, to one side of our lives.
But this is news that affects everyone and has the power to reach into the thick of all our lives.*

- It's the type of news, when encountered, that has the power to cause:
Elizabeth's baby to leap in the womb;
and Mary, *to burst into song.*

Mary had been given *almost* unbelievable news.

- Yet on paper she didn't actually have much to be joyful about. /
- We might think, of course she's stoked:
some people are so excited to announce if they're having a boy or a girl
that they go to elaborate lengths just to share the news...
but Mary, her child, is none less than the Saviour of the world.
- Imagine the pressure. / Consider the questions!
- She wasn't just unwed when she received the news,
but she was *betrothed* to be married.
- She was young and *likely* poor. /
- The news of her pregnancy didn't just have:
the *power* to cast her to the fringes *and margins* of society, but also...
the *potential* to be the cause of rejection by those who were closest.
- She could be: *shamed, socially ostracised, even scared for her life.*
- There would have been so many unknowns. / So much uncertainty.
- She had every human reason to be gripped by fear.
She lacked — by worldly standards — every cause to know joy.

- But somehow, she does.
- She bursts into song! This is the first Christmas carol! //
- So today — *very simply* — let's try to examine the cause of her joy,
and consider if the cause for Mary's joy, might also be a cause for joy for us, too.

Okay, so what reason did Mary have to be joyful?

- Three things. /
- Mary knows joy, because of:
- **The Lord's Mindfulness;**
The Extent of God's Mercy; and
The Arrival of the Saviour.

THE LORD'S MINDFULNESS | VERSES 46-49

주님의 깊은 헤아림 | Tēn dē Nhialic | 和平宣告 | கர்த்தரின் நினைவாற்றல்

First, Mary knows joy because **the Lord has been mindful — of her.** / *Luke 1, verse 46...*

[And] Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.

I’m not sure if you usually burst into *song* when you meet up with extended family, but the very context which precipitates Mary launching into song here, is a meetup between her and her cousin, Elizabeth. / There’s quite the backstory!

- *Two women. Two pregnancies. Two stories intertwined with God’s grace.*
- When the angel told Elizabeth’s husband, Zechariah, that she would have a child, he didn’t believe the news because they were both *really* getting along in years. / They didn’t have any children and despite longing for children. / A part of them must have thought that would never happen. Certainly others, as we’re told earlier, were saying that it simply wasn’t possible.
- In fact, when the angel appears to Mary to tell her of her impending pregnancy, despite all of the barriers that made **that news** seemingly implausible, part of the evidence that the angel appeals to is that Elizabeth was already pregnant.

- “*Even Elizabeth your relative, is going to have a child in her old age!*”
- There had been no pregnancy announcement on Facebook, Elizabeth didn’t text Mary when she found out. / *This is brand new news to Mary!*
- Not only is it a miracle that she will be pregnant, but somehow, by God’s grace, *even* her ageing cousin is pregnant, too.
- That’s the claim. And even better, it is easily verifiable.
- *It’s no wonder, that immediately following her submission to the Lord, and the angel skidaddling,* Mary hot-foots it over 100km from Galilee to the hill country of Judea to see for herself.
- And the moment she walks in the door and greets Elizabeth, not *only* do their two paths converge as expecting mothers, but it is a glimpse of how God’s salvation plans are *converging* and culminating in the arrival of these two children.
- One will point to the Lord, the other is the Lord himself. /
- From the moment Mary walks through the door, it’s like everything clicks into place. /
- Imagine, hearing the news: *that not only that she will be pregnant, but that Elizabeth already is.* Making the trek. And realising it’s true *just as the Lord said!*
- The Lord IS fulfilling his promises and it’s happening right before their very eyes. /
- Amidst all of the uncertainty, all of the questions, and all of the social pressures, Mary had an ultimate cause for joy because she can be confident in God’s faithfulness.

When Mary *sings*, “my soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant,” she’s not making this all about herself.

- She’s amazed that God would be *mindful* of her—of all people!
- This is not like someone saying, I was thinking of you the other day.
Mary isn’t merely the object of God’s passing thoughts,
but she recognises that she is the recipient of his gracious actions.
- Mary isn’t delighting in the divine spotlight being cast her way. *She’s marvelling that the Lord of the universe would **think of her** and **include her** in his salvation plans.*
- Her response is a mix of *humility, delight, and wonder*:
- **Humility**: *because she knows that she is not worthy. She too needs a Saviour. She’s so grateful.*
Delight: *because she’s experiencing the beauty of God’s grace firsthand.*
Wonder: *because she knows that she’s watching God’s salvation plans unfold.*
- The reason that everything unfolding doesn’t unsettle her nerves or go to her head, *is because her joy is anchored to who God is, what he’s doing, and that she gets to be part of it.*
- No wonder she is full of joy! /
- It can be painful when someone who you love ignores you, or pretends you don’t exist. /
It *can* make you feel like you have no value to them. Or that you’re not important to them.
- *It’s horrible. But when someone who is important to you notices you and expresses it, it’s amazing.*

But this isn’t just anyone. This is the LORD. / The Lord is mindful of Mary.
But here’s the amazing news: The Lord is also *mindful of you*.

If you ever feel unseen, remember the *continuous* witness of Scripture. That:

- He foreknew you before you were born.
He watched you being knitted together in the womb.
He hears your cries and collects your tears.
He knows your thoughts and discerns your ways.
He searches your heart and understands your deepest needs.
He prepares good works in advance for you to do.
He cares for you, inviting you to cast your anxieties on him.
He numbers your days. Knows the hairs upon your head.
He sent his Son to save you before you loved him.
His Spirit knows the murmurs of your heart.
His Son intercedes for you at the Father’s right hand.
And when you trust in him, your name is written in the book of life.
- God knows me better than any other. He also has all the reasons to blank me.
Yet the evidence gives me confidence that he is mindful of me. / And also of you.
- *Therefore my soul glorifies the Lord and my Spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.*

THE EXTENT OF GOD'S MERCY | VERSES 50-56

하나님의 긍휼의 크심 | DNhialic ëë kâc dë Piöñ dë cuot | 主的眷顾 | கடவுளின் கருணையின் அளவு

The second reason why Mary has cause for joy is because of **the extent of God's mercy**. Verse 50:

His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.”

Note how quickly Mary *pivots* from a gratitude of God's mindfulness and mercy to her, to a *proclamation* of God's mercy extending to all.

- And what's interesting, is that the focus of the song is not about the baby.
But rich truths about God's Kingdom about to be birthed with the arrival of God's King.
- Instead of singing about the child, she's singing about the implications of his arrival.
- It's like she's looking back and recounting God's faithfulness across history, and *also* looking forward with confidence of what God will do. It's as good as done.
- *It's like she's inviting us in, saying: do you see the inevitable effects wrought by this child?*
- **God's Kingdom is one of mercy and justice.**

- *Mercy that has been witnessed in the past, but will extend from one generation to the next.*
Justice which will involve every evil, every injustice, being overturned and made right.
The physically hungry will be satisfied, and those who spiritually hunger will be fed in full.
- This Kingdom will be one, as Nijay Gupta puts it:

[in which] God will act to right all the wrongs, raise up valleys, and flatten mountains. That is what this hope-filled era was all about. The incarnation was not just the beginning of a new season. It was the formation of a new world. The time had come.

- **And this Kingdom, God's Kingdom will be birthed by his power.**
- We can point to the coming arrival of God's Kingdom, we can even show glimpses of what that will be like, *but—ultimately—wonderfully—reassuringly—God is the one who will do it.*
- Note the emphasis in these verses.
- *He is the mighty one.*
He is the one who does great things.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm.
He has scattered those who are proud.
He has brought down rulers.
He has lifted the humble, fed the hungry, sent the rich away... //
- We're left without a doubt of who will achieve this.

- So often, the reason we might doubt the promises of our leaders, is usually because: *we have little reason to trust them — we doubt they'll be true to their word; or because they simply don't have the power to do it — we doubt they can deliver.*
- Sometimes it's both! That they're neither *willing* nor *able* to do it.
- But the Lord is *different*. He is *merciful and mighty*.
- The **shape** of God's Kingdom is one of *righteousness and mercy*. *He IS merciful so will do it.*
The **power** by which it will be birthed is through God alone. *He IS mighty so can deliver.*

Therefore the **way** that you get connected into that Kingdom...

can have nothing to do with our goodness or our power,
nothing to do with our accumulation or achievement,
but everything to do with us getting connected to him.

Look again at who is welcomed into God's Kingdom: Verse 50...

- Those who fear him. *That is those who revere him as Lord.*
Those who are humble. *Willing to recognise their need to be saved and that is the Saviour.*
Those who are hungry. *Depending on God and spiritually longing for him.*
Those who come to God in need. //
- Those who *revere him, humbly come to him, and are hungry for him.*
We bring nothing to the table, yet we can grip onto the **King** who invites us in.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE SAVIOUR | VERSE 43

구세주의 오심 | Bën dë Duluḗk | 救主的到来 | மீட்பரின் வருகை

That's Mary's third cause for joy: The **arrival of the Saviour**.

Again, it's so interesting that despite all of the lead up about:

the details about these two pregnant women,

the nature of their two converging stories,

Jesus is not mentioned by name in Mary's Song.

But that's because the coming of the Lord is the entire context for her joy.

- Note Elizabeth's exclamation when Mary enters the house: *back to Verse 43...*

Why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

- Elizabeth had plenty of reasons to boast.
She's pregnant despite it being seemingly impossible.
But just as her son, John, will point to Jesus,
Elizabeth recognises, by the very power of the Holy Spirit,
that the child Mary carries, *who she cannot yet see*, is none other than the Lord himself.
- That's why she exclaims: The mother of *my LORD*. Mary's baby is Elizabeth's Lord!

- The emphasis of the greatness is not on Mary, but on her Son.

The ultimate reason that you can be confident,
that God has the mercy and might to bring his promises to completion
of why the birth of Jesus truly is GOOD NEWS that will cause GREAT JOY,
is because he's already proven it to us through Jesus' death and resurrection.

- *Jesus hadn't even been born, but Mary recognises the inevitable consequences of his arrival. We're simply invited, to recognise what he's already done. His victory over sin and death.*
- We haven't witnessed it in the sense of being there when it happened, but we have all the evidence available to us to delve into, *if we only look.*
- When you do, you will have true grounds for joy.
- It opens up a way,
not just for a theoretical joy *because of a confidence about the Kingdom which lies ahead,*
[as wonderful as that is] but an experiential joy in relationship with the King today.

It's why Paul could say to the Philippians,
Rejoice in the Lord always; again I saw, rejoice.
Or why, my good friend John Burgin would respond,
every time you greeted him and asked him how he was,
How am I? I'm *rejoicing. Rejoicing in the Lord.*

- He knew the Lord had been mindful of him.
He knew that the Lord extends his mercy to all.
He knew that the way into God's Kingdom was by revering and rejoicing in his Son.
He knew, that true joy is not the absence of trouble, or a passing emotion,
but the steady confidence that God is in control, working out his plans, and you're part of it,
when you respond with trust in him.

During COVID Lockdowns in London, the LICC published an article by Dave Benson posing the question, what cause — in this time and place — could we possibly have for joy? When a whole city is stuck in lockdown, there doesn't appear to be much cause for joy! Perhaps by worldly standards, right now in your life, there doesn't appear to be much cause for joy. Perhaps, *like Mary,* you have every human reason to be gripped by fear. We're long out of lockdown, but the world is in lockdown still. We're not bound to our homes because of a pandemic, but the whole universe, as Dave Benson put it, is in kind of a cosmic lockdown from sin and death.

We can't escape it on our own.

- But there is a King who has.
We still feel the effects of sin and death, but we can be confident the King is returning. //
- Just after Mary had heard the news... *we read:* at that time, **Mary got ready.**
- She got ready! // We get ready for Christmas in all sorts of ways.
- Buy the ham. / Wrap the presents. / Put up the tree. / Decorate the house.
I'm currently churning my way towards 10 litres of gelato!

- But the best possible way that we can get ready for Christmas, is not by *just* looking back to the arrival of Jesus into our world, but by preparing to welcome him when he returns.
- Mary didn't just hear the news. She entered into it.
The Lord had been mindful of her. His mercy is extended to all. The Saviour had arrived.
But she still had to respond.
- She entered into that joy.
- She **reflects** on who God is with gratitude.
She **remembers** all that the Lord has done for her.
She **reveres** him as Lord, trusting confidently that he will fulfil his promises.
She **rejoices and expresses** that she can know God right now.
- They are rhythms that will help us enter into the joy of the Lord, too.
They are rhythms that will help us keep in step with the Spirit who longs to yield that fruit.
- It isn't a joy that comes naturally but supernaturally.
It isn't a joy that we manufacture but one that we receive.
It isn't always outwards visible, but it's a joy from the Spirit working from the inside out.
- We have the same cause for joy.
And also the same invitation to respond.
- *My soul glorifies the Lord... My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour...*