



THE FIRST CHAPTER OF THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

# JESUS

B.C.



## Luke Chapter 1

<sup>1-4</sup> So many others have tried their hand at putting together a story of the wonderful harvest of Scripture and history that took place among us, using reports handed down by the original eyewitnesses who served this Word with their very lives. Since I have investigated all the reports in close detail, starting from the story's beginning, I decided to write it all out for you, most honorable Theophilus, so you can know beyond the shadow of a doubt the reliability of what you were taught.

<sup>5-7</sup> During the rule of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest assigned service in the regiment of Abijah. His name was Zachariah. His wife was descended from the daughters of Aaron. Her name was Elizabeth. Together they lived honorably before God, careful in keeping to the ways of the commandments and enjoying a clear conscience before God. But they were childless because Elizabeth could never conceive, and now they were quite old.

<sup>8-12</sup> It so happened that as Zachariah was carrying out his priestly duties before God, working the shift assigned to his regiment, it came his one turn in life to enter the sanctuary of God and burn incense. The congregation was gathered and praying outside the Temple at the hour of the incense offering. Unannounced, an angel of God appeared just to the right of the altar of incense. Zachariah was paralyzed in fear.

<sup>13-15</sup> But the angel reassured him, "Don't fear, Zachariah. Your prayer has been heard. Elizabeth, your wife, will bear a son by you. You are to name him John. You're going to leap like a gazelle for joy, and not only you—

many will delight in his birth. He'll achieve great stature with God.

<sup>15-17</sup> "He'll drink neither wine nor beer. He'll be filled with the Holy Spirit from the moment he leaves his mother's womb. He will turn many sons and daughters of Israel back to their God. He will herald God's arrival in the style and strength of Elijah, soften the hearts of parents to children, and kindle devout understanding among hardened skeptics—he'll get the people ready for God."

<sup>18</sup> Zachariah said to the angel, "Do you expect me to believe this? I'm an old man and my wife is an old woman."

<sup>19-20</sup> But the angel said, "I am Gabriel, the sentinel of God, sent especially to bring you this glad news. But because you won't believe me, you'll be unable to say a word until the day of your son's birth. Every word I've spoken to you will come true on time—*God's* time."

<sup>21-22</sup> Meanwhile, the congregation waiting for Zachariah was getting restless, wondering what was keeping him so long in the sanctuary. When he came out and couldn't speak, they knew he had seen a vision. He continued speechless and had to use sign language with the people.

<sup>23-25</sup> When the course of his priestly assignment was completed, he went back home. It wasn't long before his wife, Elizabeth, conceived. She went off by herself for five months, relishing her pregnancy. "So, this is how God acts to remedy my unfortunate condition!" she said.

<sup>26-28</sup> In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to the Galilean village of Nazareth to a virgin engaged to be married to a man descended from David. His name was Joseph, and the virgin's name, Mary. Upon entering, Gabriel greeted her:

Good morning!  
You're beautiful with God's beauty,  
Beautiful inside and out!  
God be with you.

<sup>29-33</sup> She was thoroughly shaken, wondering what was behind a greeting like that. But the angel assured her, "Mary, you have nothing to fear. God has a surprise for you: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call his name Jesus.

He will be great,  
be called 'Son of the Highest.'  
The Lord God will give him  
the throne of his father David;  
He will rule Jacob's house forever—  
no end, ever, to his kingdom."

<sup>34</sup> Mary said to the angel, "But how? I've never slept with a man."

<sup>35</sup> The angel answered,

The Holy Spirit will come upon you,  
the power of the Highest hover over you;  
Therefore, the child you bring to birth  
will be called Holy, Son of God.

<sup>36-38</sup> "And did you know that your cousin Elizabeth conceived a son, old as she is? Everyone called her barren, and here she is six months pregnant! Nothing, you see, is impossible with God."

And Mary said,

Yes, I see it all now:  
I'm the Lord's maid, ready to serve.  
Let it be with me  
just as you say.

Then the angel left her.

<sup>39-45</sup> Mary didn't waste a minute. She got up and traveled to a town in Judah in the hill country, straight to Zachariah's house, and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby in her womb leaped. She was filled with the Holy Spirit, and sang out exuberantly,

You're so blessed among women,  
and the babe in your womb, also blessed!  
And why am I so blessed that  
the mother of my Lord visits me?  
The moment the sound of your  
greeting entered my ears,  
The babe in my womb  
skipped like a lamb for sheer joy.  
Blessed woman, who believed what God  
said,  
believed every word would come true!

<sup>46-55</sup> And Mary said,

I'm bursting with God-news;  
I'm dancing the song of my Savior God.  
God took one good look at me, and look  
what happened—  
I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!  
What God has done for me will never be  
forgotten,  
the God whose very name is holy, set  
apart from all others.  
His mercy flows in wave after wave  
on those who are in awe before him.  
He bared his arm and showed his strength,  
scattered the bluffing braggarts.  
He knocked tyrants off their high horses,

pulled victims out of the mud.  
The starving poor sat down to a banquet;  
the callous rich were left out in the cold.  
He embraced his chosen child, Israel;  
he remembered and piled on the mercies,  
piled them high.  
It's exactly what he promised,  
beginning with Abraham and right up to  
now.

<sup>56</sup> Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months  
and then went back to her own home.

<sup>57-58</sup> When Elizabeth was full-term in her  
pregnancy, she bore a son. Her neighbors and  
relatives, seeing that God had overwhelmed her  
with mercy, celebrated with her.

<sup>59-60</sup> On the eighth day, they came to circumcise  
the child and were calling him Zachariah after  
his father. But his mother intervened: "No. He  
is to be called John."

<sup>61-62</sup> "But," they said, "no one in your family is  
named that." They used sign language to ask  
Zachariah what he wanted him named.

<sup>63-64</sup> Asking for a tablet, Zachariah wrote, "His  
name is to be John." That took everyone by  
surprise. Surprise followed surprise—Zachariah's  
mouth was now open, his tongue loose, and he  
was talking, praising God!

<sup>65-66</sup> A deep, reverential fear settled over the  
neighborhood, and in all that Judean hill  
country people talked about nothing else.  
Everyone who heard about it took it to heart,  
wondering, "What will become of this child?  
Clearly, God has his hand in this."

<sup>67-79</sup> Then Zachariah was filled with the Holy  
Spirit and prophesied,

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel;  
he came and set his people free.  
He set the power of salvation in the center  
of our lives,  
and in the very house of David his servant,  
Just as he promised long ago  
through the preaching of his holy prophets:  
Deliverance from our enemies  
and every hateful hand;  
Mercy to our fathers,  
as he remembers to do what he said he'd  
do,  
What he swore to our father Abraham—  
a clean rescue from the enemy camp,  
So we can worship him without a care in  
the world,  
made holy before him as long as we live.  
And you, my child, "Prophet of the Highest,"  
will go ahead of the Master to prepare his  
ways,  
Present the offer of salvation to his people,  
the forgiveness of their sins.  
Through the heartfelt mercies of our God,  
God's Sunrise will break in upon us,  
Shining on those in the darkness,  
those sitting in the shadow of death,  
Then showing us the way, one foot at a  
time,  
down the path of peace.

<sup>80</sup> The child grew up, healthy and spirited. He  
lived out in the desert until the day he made  
his prophetic debut in Israel.

*(The Message)*

**INTRODUCTION**  
**TO THE 2021 EDITION**

*Back in 2013 our devotions for Advent consisted of selections written by members of St. James. They were asked to reflect on the rich themes presented in the first chapter of Luke's gospel, a chapter which serves as a beautiful prelude to the Christmas story in chapter two.*

*Upon reviewing those devotions it seemed a good idea to share them again. Some members were not yet with us in 2013 and all of us can be enriched by these encouraging words. The title, JESUS B.C., invites us to imagine the fullness of that time immediately before the Christ Child was born.*

*Advent is a season of anticipation of the fulfillment of God's promises. Day by day I invite you to take time to read these devotions and reflect on how Christ continues to come into our world and into your life. The daily selections will also be shared with you by email, so you can forward them to friends.*

*Read, reflect and rejoice!*

*Peace,*

*Richard Holmer*

### MIGHTY ACTS OF GOD IN HISTORY

“My soul magnifies the Lord . . . he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.” Luke 1:47, 51b-53; NRSV.

Today’s Tribune tells of the rise and fall of infomercial king Kevin Trudeau. The proud TV pitchman was found guilty of criminal contempt of court for lying about the contents of his weight loss book. He amassed a fortune and a cult-like following. Now he has been sent to prison. The Lord used the courts to bring down a powerful deceiver from his throne. Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead. That is a sign of his coming.

Karl Barth was a biblical theologian who profoundly influenced me in my late teens and early twenties. He said that a Christian ought to read daily a newspaper and the Bible.

Stories in the newspaper affirm how relevant the Holy Scriptures—especially the New Testament and the Book of Psalms—are today: the powerful are brought down, the lowly (like me) are lifted up, the hungry (like me) are filled with good things, the rich (like Kevin Trudeau) are sent away empty.

My grandchildren and I like to play “Chutes and Ladders.” When you roll the dice and land on a good square, you move up the ladder closer to the goal, the fun party for the winner. But if you land on a bad square, you go down the chute to a lower place, away from the winner’s circle. The ups and downs of this family game mirror real life. Amidst all the uncertainty of our lives there is the mercy and justice of the Lord. What are we to do, then? Like the blessed Virgin Mary, magnify the Lord with joy and awesome wonder, and trust in him.

*Richard Kaeske*

NOVEMBER 29

### STEP BY STEP

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her. At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. Luke 1:38-40

Through modern technology, my mother and I compete to walk a number of steps each day, calculated via electronic pedometers that automatically upload the information to the Internet for us to see and compare. My mother is winning by a landslide at this point. I don’t know how she manages to walk so much every day.

In Luke 1:38-40, Mary left Nazareth to visit Elizabeth, who lived south of Jerusalem. Travel in those days was mostly by foot. Some sources say the route Mary took was 130 miles, one way. If Mary had walked 10,000 steps a day, as my pedometer company recommends, she would have walked for 26 days to reach Elizabeth’s home. I suspect she walked much farther, perhaps 20 miles a day, even though she was pregnant. At that pace, the trip would have taken a week. So Mary spent an entire week walking – precious time to contemplate what angel Gabriel had said to her and to consider the momentous changes happening to her. This Advent season, as I try to walk as many steps as my mother, whose name is Mary, I will think of the long walk taken by the mother of our Lord to share her good news with Elizabeth.

*Jill Rosa*

NOVEMBER 30

## HAIL MARY

And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. Luke 1:28 (KJV)

As a recovering Catholic – forever and always - this portion of the message from Luke is very familiar to me. These words start the “Hail Mary”, the first prayer that I was taught and memorized as a child as it is the main prayer of the rosary. The rosary is my go-to place for prayer. It is my “bead of choice” that I manipulate as I pray, meditate, and use to find Him so I can rest in His care. In fact, several passages in Luke make up the essence of the Hail Mary that I was taught as a young child and memorized even before I could read.

As a child, when I prayed with these words, I learned the discipline of prayer and the power of becoming lost in a prayer that was always available in my mind. As a young woman facing the first and largest failure of her professional career, these were the words and the prayer that helped me come back to life and face a much different life journey. As a mother and wife, it was once again these very words that I repeated daily as my prayer of choice when wrestling with cancer.

I have taught my daughters this prayer, handed over the legacy of the rosary and the hope and faith that comes along with a “go-to” prayer that is always there for them at any time of the day or night. With these words, I have given them a way to reach Him for themselves and for others that ask for prayers. “For with God, nothing shall be impossible.” Luke 1:37. And with these words, all the promises of God shall be within our reach – if only we ask in prayer.

*Susan Beacham*

DECEMBER 1

## THE WAY

I have come to truly appreciate the interpretation of the gospels as they are written in *The Message*, a version of the New Testament in contemporary language. At the conclusion of the first chapter of Luke, *The Message* uses this great imagery:

“Through the heartfelt mercies of our God, God’s  
Sunrise will break in upon us, Shining on those in the  
darkness...

Then showing us the way, one foot at a time, down the  
path of peace.”

For me, that is the purpose of Jesus’ life...to show us the way, one foot at a time: the way to feeding the hungry...the way

to standing for justice...the way to caring for the sick...the way to treating those who are culturally and racially different

than we...the way to extending mercy...the way to sheltering the homeless...the way to kindness...and the way to seeking peace...peace in our homes, in our communities, and in our world.

Jesus’ life showed us how to extend ourselves in all those ways, living for us as an example to imitate. We rejoice, Jesus, that

you came into our world. Now we must be your hands and feet, working in your name.

*Susan Olsen*

DECEMBER 2

## TEEN MOM

Pregnant at 13 or 14 or 15 or 16, what a shock! Teenage, outside of wedlock - pregnancy in our day and age is very different from the time of Mary and Jesus. Now we have a reality show called, "Teen Mom," and recent scandal says that young girls were trying to get pregnant to be on the show. In Mary's day this same scenario was seen as a public disgrace and the law could be strictly enforced leading to the execution of a young girl as an adulteress. Yet after Gabriel's miraculous appearance and declaration, Mary's reply was, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Holy wah! What faith! (My reaction would have been, "Look, you do realize that I could be stoned to death before I ever have this baby, right?") Mary's faith and belief in the word of God are inspirational. And after some very difficult days, God reassures her when she goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth who greets her with these words: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb..." What a blessing for Mary. What a blessing for us all.

Dear Lord, please be with us through this Advent season. Give us faith, like Mary's, to believe your Word and to keep always looking forward to the return of your Son Jesus. In his holy name I pray, Amen.

*Donna Jarvi*

Quotes from NRSV Luke 1:38 & Luke 1:42

## LIFE'S A KICK

It is a sensitive issue. My busiest time in ministry coincided with the sexual revolution, particularly abortion. For two millennia, the Christian view protected the sanctity of life, born and unborn. And suddenly abortion became legal. The church and culture were in confrontation and confusion. Mothers of the unborn came to me for direction, or more usually, grandmothers of the unborn. I attended lectures on the subject by theologians, ethicists, and physicians at the University of Chicago Divinity School. They provided a variety of answers, from life begins at conception to life begins at birth to stages in between.

Eventually, young pregnant Mary's visit to her elderly pregnant cousin Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-45) came to mind. The Visitation is a minor church festival, commemorated remarkably on July 2 about the beginning of the second trimester of Mary's gestation, or about the time when Jesus the embryo became Jesus the fetus. Luke 1: 24-26 suggests that Mary became pregnant six months into Elizabeth's pregnancy, which means that Elizabeth was soon to give birth to John the Baptizer. Twice we hear the intimate detail that Elizabeth's baby leaped in her womb when she heard Mary's greeting. Other than his miracles and parables, the gospels give us very little personal information about Jesus, let alone John the Baptizer.

That something as insignificant as John's joyful leap in his mother's womb, charming as it is, is reported twice, suggests there must be a deeper meaning. Perhaps it is a coded providential message to be interpreted at a future time, such as now, to remind Christians when faith slackens and pagan practices resurface that life is sacred within the womb and without. Little John's kick to his mother's womb was to give 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians a kick as well. And that is how I counseled those dear concerned mothers and grandmothers of the unborn.

*Walter Hamester*

DECEMBER 4

## PATH OF PEACE

As I read the first chapter of Luke, I kept returning to the final verses of Zechariah's Song: "... the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

Peace and reconciliation with God. Looking to the light of Jesus. These are themes of Advent now, just as they were for Zachariah over 2000 years ago. The joy and exhilaration of Zachariah certainly come through in his poetry even though he was speaking in prophecy, trusting that the Messiah would come.

I am looking back on a historical event. I am reading Zachariah's poetry knowing that the prophecy is fulfilled. Am I joyful and exhilarated? Do I trust God to fulfill His promises to me as a Christian? Am I on the path of peace, turning to faith and prayer? I have to admit that I do experience anxiety and find myself off of that path of peace on a regular basis. What better time than Advent to look for that path in the sun?

Praise the Lord for the gift of Jesus to shine on our darkness!  
Praise the Lord for the gift of Jesus to reconcile us to our God!

*Linda Berner*

DECEMBER 5

## GREAT EXPECTATIONS

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. . . .  
that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,  
might serve him without fear,”

Zechariah broke his nine month silence with an inspired song the Church still sings at Morning Prayer. Some expected a savior from Israel’s national enemies. As Cleopas said to Jesus on Easter evening, “we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel” – that he would deliver Israel from Rome. Through the hindsight of Jesus’ response to Cleopas, and the Spirit-guided interpretations of the Apostles, we understand that God went far beyond freeing a small nation from a temporal military occupier; instead, through the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection he saved all his people from sin, death and the devil. Today we anticipate our own surprise, as we look for Jesus’ return. How wonderful the Kingdom of God in its fullness will be, compared to our dim and limited expectations for it!

*Mike Bennett*

DECEMBER 6

### MORNING PRAYER

As I prepare for this Christmas season, I think about Luke 1:38 in which Mary says to the angel Gabriel (after being told that she would give birth to the Son of God):

“I am the Lord’s servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.”

Below is a morning prayer that helps me become a better servant of the Lord.

God of my life, I welcome this new day.  
It is your gift to me.  
I thank you for the grace  
Of being alive this morning.  
I thank you for the sleep that has refreshed me,  
I thank you for this chance  
To make a new beginning.

This day, Lord,  
Is full of promise and opportunity.  
Let me waste none of it.  
This day is blessed with beauty and adventure.  
During this day  
Keep me thoughtful, prayerful and kind.  
May I be courteous and helpful to others.  
Keep me from any word or deed  
That would hurt or destroy or belittle  
And may the thoughts of my mind  
Be pleasing in your sight.

When night comes again,  
May I look back on this day  
With no greed or bitterness in my heart.  
And may no one be unhappy  
Because of anything I have done  
Or anything I have failed to do.

Amen

*Debbie Daniel*

DECEMBER 7

## THE ANNUNCIATION

Strolling through the galleries of Middle Ages and Renaissance paintings displayed in the great museums of the Western world, invariably you will encounter one or more paintings by different artists titled ***The Annunciation***.

The archangel Gabriel is normally standing on the left, and Mary is either seated or kneeling on the right of a painting. Often a bright light beams from above and its source is sometimes even a small face depicting God. Usually a dove is included flying towards Mary. In Christianity the dove stands for the Holy Spirit, and is the metaphor for Mary's virginal conception of Jesus. The archangel is informing Maria of the great news that she will give birth to a child who will create a kingdom with no end. (Luke 1, 29-35).

The virgin birth of Jesus obviously puzzled believers for centuries. Artist helped us to obtain a perspective and image of the relationship between God and his Son in vivid colors:

*"He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary"*

You may want to take the time, look through your art book collection, visit your library or use the Internet and enjoy the many thoughts and paintings provided for the period before Jesus' birth. I created my own picture in my heart in celebration of His birth in a few days, which we will celebrate again together - Happy Birthday!

*Detlef Koska*

*Note: See booklet cover for an example of a painting of the annunciation*

DECEMBER 8

## BLIND FAITH

The concept of blind faith has always made me think. What exactly is blind faith? Some say it is when you truly believe in God even though most of us are not graced by visually experiencing His presence. Which of course makes sense; believing without seeing is what we are taught true faith is. But I do not believe we are never seeing anything that encourages a strong faith. Just as Mary saw angel Gabriel, we too get little surprises throughout our life that make believing that much easier. For example the other day I was studying at Starbucks. I looked up and spotted a young college boy walking an old woman across the street. Now, not only did this put a huge smile on anyone's face that saw as well as make that woman's day, but I am sure gave any Christian the food for thought they needed that day. It was an act of kindness that I can only attribute to a good faith. No, I did not see God that day. But I cannot help but think there was a little piece of Him with those two, and with me once I saw them. It is these sights that continue to fuel my "blind" faith.

*Amanda Beacham*

## **A PROMISE FULFILLED**

Advent is a time of preparation to celebrate the fulfillment of God's promise to his people, Salvation.

Luke tells the story of events leading up to the Savior's birth. Elizabeth was beyond child bearing years and is now having her first child. The Lord has rendered her husband unable to speak. Therefore, he, Zechariah, is unable to tell her of God's plan.

To be in her late years having a first child had to be confusing and shameful. Being a woman beyond child bearing age, I am overwhelmed with the thought of how she felt about her situation. She hid for five months, but in the sixth month Mary visited her. Upon Mary's greeting, as she entered the house, Elizabeth's baby leaped in the womb and she was filled with joy and the Holy Spirit gave her the understanding of God's plan.

Thus, Advent is the time to reflect on God's fulfillment of His promise, Jesus, and the promise of Jesus's return.

*Barb Schultz*

## WAITING AND WONDERING

The story in Luke 1 is one of waiting, anticipation, fulfillment, and joy in God's mercy and grace. Even though we probably can't really imagine what it would be like to have the angel Gabriel visit us, we can recognize the feelings that Zechariah expresses in this chapter.

Because of his initial skepticism, Zechariah was struck dumb, and so had nine months in silence to contemplate the visit from Gabriel, his elderly wife's pregnancy, and the meaning of his new son's birth. But once John was born and named, Zechariah's tongue was freed, and it is clear from his grateful response that he understood the importance of John's role in preparing hearts for the coming Messiah. Zechariah says, "...Through the heartfelt mercies of our God, God's Sunrise will break in upon us, shining on those in the darkness, those sitting in the shadow of death, men showing us the way, one foot at a time, down the path of peace." (Luke 1:78, 79 The Message translation).

We too, go about our work every day; perhaps, on occasion, disappointed in the moment, but still moving along. A great deal of our lives seems to be spent waiting. But as we wait and wonder, we can know that God, our Father, has plans for us, in his time, and in his way. The way is prepared – the light is shining down his path of peace.

*Craig Linn*

## WAITING FOR LIGHT

As I write this, it is an ominously dreary morning. Lights are needed even though it's been daytime for a couple of hours already. Today, I could describe our world in the darkest of contexts. We suffer with family and friends who are in health peril; homelessness and hunger are all too visible; local, state, and national governments are showing their fragility; leadership seems to be vulnerable and unsteady; and even within our Christian faith, our rock, doctrinal tensions emerge too frequently. We wait patiently for small glimpses of light and hope to heal our broken world.

Although vastly different, we can imagine that the world must have seemed equally chaotic and vulnerable for the people of long ago as they awaited news of the prophesied Messiah. Longing, waiting, watching! And then came a glimmer of light. Rumors that a savior would be born spread throughout the hills. Oh, they were so ready for this news! They were so ready for the safety and security that could come only from the Most High.

Two thousand + years later, even though we know he's been here and has left his Spirit with us, we are ready once again. With renewed expectation and hope, we wait patiently, trustingly, and longingly for the light which "no darkness can overcome".

*Betty Albrecht*

### OFFERING AN ACCOUNT

<sup>1</sup> Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. <sup>3</sup> With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

What if I, too, were to write an orderly account of those things which "have been fulfilled", those things "handed down" that I was taught and believe? This first chapter of Luke opens with the author telling us that he is about to write an account so that his readers will "know the certainty of the things you have been taught."

How can I not only tell the story of what has happened to my heart when it intersected with the God of the universe and the savior of my soul, but how can I tell the story so that others will know the certainty of it?

What was handed down to me was a treasure--the very words of life. I learned the truth from my mother, my sister, my church and other believers who reached out to me. And, like many, I didn't value the treasure set before me and "wandered off to find where demons dwell." But God reached out and "gave light to one who sits in darkness" and undeservedly, miraculously, I experienced the fulfillment of God's promises.

So how will others know the certainty of truth that I have experienced the peace that passes all understanding, the guiding of the Holy Spirit, the revelation that leaps off the pages of the bible?

I guess I will have to tell the story.

*Susan Jarzembski*

DECEMBER 13

**BE PREPARED**

Luke 1:11-15

These verses describe Zechariah's reaction to Gabriel's appearing as Zechariah is praying and asking God to bless he and his wife with a baby. Here we find Zechariah, in temple, burning incense and asking God for a blessing (doing basically everything he is expected to do to prepare for praying) and yet Zechariah is surprised and "troubled" by the appearance of one of God's messengers in response to his prayer. It seems to me that although Zechariah's prayers are answered, God doesn't go about answering them in the way Zechariah had anticipated – he was not ready for God to actually send a messenger to respond to his prayer right then and there. Like Zechariah, I know there have been many times where I've prayed to God for something and then an answer comes that isn't exactly what I had anticipated (and in some cases, maybe it's not the answer I wanted). When I read Zechariah's reaction to Gabriel's coming, it reminds me that when we are preparing for God, we need to be truly ready for whatever He has in mind – not just what our expectations are. If we're not open to his message (or his messenger), we could miss it, so be prepared for whatever His plans are.

*Rob Davis*

DECEMBER 14

## TRADITION

Tradition! Yes, sing this in your best Tevya voice...I saw Fiddler on the Roof last week and it is on my mind. But this word also holds a special place in my heart as the Advent season approaches. Do you remember what you got for Christmas when you were 12? Yeah, neither do I, but I can tell you that I had cocktail weenies and broccoli casserole at my grandmother's house on Christmas Eve and was able to see my whole family at our house on Christmas Day. Yes, I got to see my whole family every year on Christmas Day. What a wonderful memory! And I want my kids to remember the traditions we create for them, whether it's attending the Advent Potluck dinners and Advent Vesper service, making Chex Mix with Daddy, or working a shift at Feed My Starving Children. These moments are so much more valuable than that next generation video game under the tree, and they may not see it now, but I guarantee, these moments will be what they remember in 30 years.

*Suzanne Gerber*

## TESTIFY

<sup>1</sup> Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. <sup>3</sup> With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

The first chapter of Luke is lengthy and weighty. The introductory verses, 1-4, speak to me and offer all of us a foundation of faith and hope. Throughout this chapter, God chose to fill the voices of the unsuspecting with a commanding truth – the Savior of the World is coming. God’s Son will appear.

If not for the disciples who “testified” in the New Testament; if not for the parents who bring their wee ones to church; if not for the believers who allow their light to shine in the witness of service....where would we be? These verses allow us to see into the heart of Luke who felt the responsibility to keep telling the Story.

We are taught many things – in school, on the laps of loving grandparents, watching mentors, in art, from best friends, through life experiences. How many of the things we are taught are the important truths of life, let alone the One great truth? Listen, read, study, watch and wait during this Advent Season. The Message has been fulfilled and God reveals the rich blessing of Grace to us daily.

And when you have come to know it, believed it, committed it to heart – tell others. The Story is meant to be shared.

*Shelly Holmstrom*

**FEAR NOT**

Luke 1: 13 But the angel said to him: “ Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John.

Life’s journey has many surprises, so I find comfort in the words “Do not be afraid”. I am reassured that God is with me at all times and hears my prayers. When I look back on life’s surprises I can see where God was present, answered my prayers, and showed me the path I should take.

We read that Zechariah was chosen by lot to go into the temple of the Lord to burn incense. This was a great honor he was given by chance – or was it? God was with Zechariah and heard his prayer. The angel’s news brought great joy for both Zechariah and Elizabeth but also human fears. Could this really be happening to them at their age? Would they be able to be parents at their age? Again they were told to not be afraid. God was showing Zechariah and Elizabeth he was present in their lives.

I have just retired from my day job this year. Will we have enough money to pay our bills? How will Tim and I get along if we see each other during the day? What will I do with my time? “Do not be afraid.” I’m trying to put my trust in God and know that he will continue to guide me and help me to not be afraid as I continue life’s journey.

*Ann Anderson*

DECEMBER 17

## THE JOY OF SERVING

“I am the Lord’s servant” (Luke 1:38)

Mary responded with these words after she was called upon to bear the Son of God. While the significance of Mary’s calling is incomprehensible (at least for me), her sentiment is a reminder that we are all called upon to serve. During the Advent Season, I am grateful for the calling to administer the Bethel New Life Christmas Program. St. James’s participation in the program has helped to bring Bethel families a little joy and happiness over the past 19 years. The kindness and appreciation the families express in return is never expected, but always warm and sincere. With the advent of the Christmas Store and its volunteer opportunities, my two children now share in this calling. In doing so, they see one of our social ministries at work and experience the joy of serving. We are truly blessed. Thank you for the gift of service.

*Michael Grauer*

## FAITHFUL

The book of Luke is one of my favorite books of the Bible. As I reread chapter 1, I was impressed with Luke's love of Christ and God.

Verses 1-4: Luke used his talents as a writer and a doctor to review what had been written by others about the events of those times. Luke wanted them to be accurate for his friends and also for those people who would be followers of Christ.

Verses 5-7: The country was in bad shape. The Romans were in control. People were looking for answers. They were looking for a Messiah. New groups were forming. Luke wrote a summary of the events that occurred. These stories included the angel's visit to Zechariah to tell him that his wife would have a son. Elizabeth thought she was barren. Gabriel, the angel, got annoyed with Zechariah and made him mute until his wife had their baby.

Verses 7-80: Another story involved Elizabeth and Mary, mother of Jesus. Elizabeth told Mary that she, Elizabeth, was going to have a baby. Luke tells us that Elizabeth also knew that Mary was going to have a baby boy. The cousins were very happy that they were chosen to do God's work in this way. This chapter ends with the birth of John the Baptist and Zechariah's dreams and hopes for his son. It is hoped that John would be a minister to Israel and that he would tell people how they can find salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.

Conclusion: Luke's writings are based on historical facts. There was and is only one Christ (Jesus) then and today. Christ was and is the Messiah. He died for our sins and rose again and went to Heaven. We need to trust in Christ and God and listen to the Holy Spirit within ourselves so that we can do **God's** work.

Dear Lord, Help us and all people reject our own wills and obey your will. Help us carry out the work we are called to do. We ask this in Your Name as willingly and faithfully as Elizabeth and Mary and the angels in heaven did theirs. Amen

*Mary Gram*

**FOLLOW**

And you, my child, “Prophet of the Highest,”  
will go ahead of the Master to prepare his ways,

In the musical *Godspell*, John the Baptist sings “Prepare ye the way of the Lord” to a beautiful melody over and over, at first, a cappella, and going on to build energy with increasingly loud music and other singers joining the song. At a church we attended many years ago, there was a man with a beautiful voice who helped us start Advent worship on that first Sunday by processing in by himself, slowly, singing those words. You could have heard a pin drop, as the words wafted around the congregation, settling on each and every person. How do we prepare the way of the Lord? Surely, we are not supposed to do what John the Baptist did – living a life of deprivations, focused on just one message? Shouting and insulting people? Never wavering, never taking “me” time, never backing down?

Did John question his purpose? Did he want this job? His parents did not expect they would have a child. In a way, he wasn’t their child. He was born with a purpose that would take him away from his family and lead to an early death. Yet, Zechariah and Elizabeth rejoiced in his birth and in their roles in bringing him to this world.

John prepared the way. All we have to do is follow.

*Carol Bennett*

DECEMBER 20

## PROMISE

The times were turbulent in the biblical state of Israel. The country was subject to Rome and ruled by the paranoid King Herod. Herod's immense building programs were fueled by onerous taxes on his subjects. Among the Israelites, the wealthy Sadducees used their political power to maintain an elite status. The self-satisfied Pharisees were in total control of Israel's religious practices through strict application of Jewish law. Further, a Jewish sect, the Essenes, believed the entire society was corrupt and predicted imminent apocalypse.

It is in this toxic social environment that Luke tells the story of Jesus' birth. He begins with the foretelling by the angel Gabriel of the good news of John the Baptist's birth and the birth of Jesus. The priest Zechariah, after initial disbelief, and his wife, Elizabeth, faithfully accept their role in God's plan. Likewise, Joseph and Mary, lowly commoners, also believed and accepted Gabriel's pronouncement and their role in bringing to fruition God's ancient promise to Abraham to bless the nations.

In this Advent season, may God grant each of us the peace and assuredness of His promise to see past the discord in our world, and live out the part we each have in His plans.

*Ron Koepke*

When Gabriel appeared to Mary, Zechariah, and Elizabeth, it had been about 500 years since the last prophecy telling of the coming of the Messiah. They are, to say the least, caught off-guard. Even though they are devoted to God, each shows a little bit of disbelief given the extraordinary circumstances around the visitation and the news they receive. The appearance of Gabriel was unexpected. In the many ways the Holy Spirit finds us all, where we are, it is many times unexpected. The beauty of God's grace is found in the sudden moment when you know you are not alone, that you are loved, and that you are welcomed at God's table.

We can relate to the people we meet in the story of the Nativity. These are the first people to whom it is revealed that Christ is coming, that Christ is here. Remember those moments, maybe unexpected, when you first felt the love of Christ in your heart. That feeling is the start of how we prepare for the coming of the Lord.

*Greg MacAyeal*

DECEMBER 22

## LUKE 1

The first chapter of Luke is huge as it sets the stage for the births of John the Baptist and then Jesus. A small part of that is Mary's response to Elizabeth's praise when Mary has come to visit. Her response praises God for choosing her as the Christ's mother, followed by several praises of God's attributes. Early Christians recognized its importance and made it one of the oldest of Christian hymns: "The Magnificat". As she praises God she says in verses 52 and 53 that God has pulled down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree and that God has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. To me this hints of the Beatitudes to come where Jesus teaches how the power and possessions of this world are temporary and of no importance to one's salvation. In a season where our culture emphasizes acquisition and consumption, I find this a good reminder of what is really important. A reminder that these babies in Luke 1 are going to lead us to salvation for our sins, which is something that nothing in or of this world can rival.

*Bruce Hamming*

DECEMBER 23

## LET IT BE

There is real irony in the fact that Mary believed the unexpected and improbable message she received from the angel Gabriel, whereas Zechariah was doubtful and hesitated to trust a similar message from the same source. Mary was young and uneducated. Zechariah was experienced and learned – he was a temple priest! If anyone should have been prepared to hear a word from God it was Zechariah. As a pastor with many years of experience, this irony is not lost on me.

The hazard in being “religious” is that one can assume that he has a handle on what God is up to, what God is likely to do. Though he and his wife had been praying for years to have a child, Zechariah had reached the conclusion that God was not going to grant this request. Zechariah believed in God, but he also believed that having a child of his own was not in God’s plan.

This causes me to wonder if my theological training and years of pastoral experience may have caused me to think I know what God is likely to do. Has my faith become so reasonable and logical that I don’t necessarily expect great things, even impossible things, from God? I need to learn from Mary: an ordinary girl with extraordinary faith in God. I need to open my heart to the living and loving God who is still capable of great things. With our God, the only limit is my willingness to trust that with God, nothing will be impossible.

Here I am Lord. Let it be.

*Richard Holmer*

## WHAT CHILD IS THIS?

Anticipation! Preparation! “What will this Child be?” (Luke 1:66) As we embrace a newcomer into this world, families young or old, even entire villages, have found themselves dwelling on the possibilities. “What will this Child be?” It’s taking the long view, isn’t it? It’s not the same as a simple, lovely life experience: the working and waiting of fresh baked bread about to emerge from the oven, or knowing that next weekend will be good because Dad and I get a day in the shop together working on our project. Oh, boy!

Or perhaps fearful anticipation: “I’ve had it with you today! Wait ‘til your father gets home, maybe he’ll put the fear of God in you!” A puzzling thought, because my fear was not that my father would come. I was always more afraid he might go away, leaving me here.

Thank you, Heavenly Father. We anticipate your coming to free us from our hard to control natures, so life can be lived to its fullest abundance. Let your ever-flowing Spirit fill us with possibilities.

So tomorrow...what then will this Child be?

*Mike Jarvi*

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*This booklet was written by members of  
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