



**SERMON STUDY GUIDE**  
For the sermon preached on  
11/29/2020:  
“A Christmas Carol”  
Luke 1:39-56

**How to use the Study Guide During Virtual Online Group Meetings**

Group life is even more critical during this incredible season. Over and over, group leaders are reporting that suddenly there is a new hunger to connect, share, pray, and meditate on Scripture together, and so we are making these guides available weekly and suggesting a new format during this season.

As you know, our Group Life’s vision is to “practice the way of Jesus.” And while Jesus never had to lead a Torah study over Zoom, he was strategic in his teaching ministry, and we want to be as well.

There are a number of differences between meeting in person and meeting online, ranging from the obvious to the subtle. One is, given our attention spans for online meetings, we want to encourage you to limit the length of your call between 45-60 minutes and we are calling this “Check-In Plus One.” Meaning, spend a few minutes checking in with your group and see if there are any new needs with them (or even amongst their neighbors). The “One” is to spend time in study. As our virtual season continues, our desire for meaningful content and interaction will grow. Given our new format, the study guides based on Sunday’s Sermon will be designed to be more application based (as opposed to unpacking the text with the Inductive Bible Study method). You might consider sharing the passage beforehand with your group in hopes that they might spend more time with the Scripture before the gathering.

As always, we are so grateful for you, your gifting, your servant leadership, and all that you do in practicing the way of Jesus in community.

Grace and peace,  
Pastor Tim Ghali and Pastor Rachel Keeler on behalf of the Group Life Team

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For the Leader: “Check-In Plus One”

Welcome everyone to the Zoom call and outline the goal of this call being 45 minutes. Spend 15-20 minutes checking in with one another, then move into a time of prayer, and then spend some time discussing the application of the Scripture passage.

A “Check-in” question might be, “How are you doing, and is there anything new that has arisen in your life or in your neighborhood that we can pray about?”

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This year’s Advent theme is “Comfort and Joy” and the sermons will continue in the Gospel of Luke. If ever there was a time that we craved comfort and joy, it’s certainly now at the end of a long year, headed into a cold, dark winter. But praise God, our comfort and joy does not solely hinge on our circumstances or the weather. Which is why we celebrate Christmas, the story of our God who came near and brought us salvation. Advent is the time of waiting and expectation and it’s in leaning into the dark themes of Advent that allow our hearts to experience the comfort and joy of celebrating Christmas. Today, we look at the story of Mary visiting her cousin Elizabeth as both women are miraculously pregnant.

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<sup>39</sup> At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, <sup>40</sup> where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! <sup>43</sup> But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”

**Mary’s Song**

<sup>46</sup> **And Mary said:**

**“My soul glorifies the Lord**

<sup>47</sup> **and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,**

<sup>48</sup> **for he has been mindful**

**of the humble state of his servant.**

**From now on all generations will call me blessed,**

<sup>49</sup> **for the Mighty One has done great things for me—**

**holy is his name.**

<sup>50</sup> **His mercy extends to those who fear him,**

**from generation to generation.**

<sup>51</sup> **He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;**

**he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.**

<sup>52</sup> **He has brought down rulers from their thrones**

**but has lifted up the humble.**

<sup>53</sup> **He has filled the hungry with good things**

**but has sent the rich away empty.**

<sup>54</sup> **He has helped his servant Israel,**

**remembering to be merciful**

<sup>55</sup> **to Abraham and his descendants forever,**

**just as he promised our ancestors.”**

<sup>56</sup> **Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.**

**Q – Pastor Bryan quoted a poll that said 40% of Americans are not looking forward to celebrating Christmas this year. How would you describe your mindset for Christmas?**

*(Whether we are feeling the weight of our current realities or whether we are having trouble feeling something at all, Advent gives us an opportunity to ready our hearts for the truth and hope of Christmas.)*

**Q** – Just as we have complicated and mixed feelings about our lives today, both Mary and Elizabeth were dealing with their own mixed feelings and complexities. Read 1:39-45 and try to imagine the scene here.

- What mixed feelings can you identify or speculate on Mary’s part and on Elizabeth’s mind?  
*(Mary is young, unwed and pregnant. Yet she is incredibly honored to be used by God. Elizabeth has gone most of her life wishing to be pregnant, now she must carry a baby at an old age. This could carry both stress and joy.)*
- One of the healthiest practices we can commit to is asking God to help us be honest with our mixed feelings and to ask for the strength to process them as we grow in self-awareness and recognize the needs around us. What mixed feelings can you relate to in either Mary or Elizabeth and what mixed feelings do you have today?

**Q** – Let’s take a few moments and look at the beauty and profoundness of “Mary’s Song.” New Testament scholar, N.T. Wright has called it the “**gospel** before the gospel,” and describes it as “... a fierce bright shout of triumph thirty weeks before Bethlehem, thirty years before Calvary and Easter. It goes with a swing and a clap and a stamp. It’s all about God, and it’s all about revolution. And it’s all because of Jesus—Jesus who’s only just been conceived, not yet born, but who has made Elisabeth’s baby leap for joy in her womb and has made Mary giddy with excitement and hope and triumph. In many cultures today, it’s the women who really know how to celebrate, to sing and dance, with their bodies and voices saying things far deeper than words. That’s how Mary’s song comes across here.<sup>1</sup>

- What part of Mary’s song resonates with you 1:46-56?

**Q** – Let’s finish with the reflection question at the end of the service that asked, “What intentional step(s) can you take to find comfort and joy in this unique season?”

As we end our night in prayer, let us ask God that we experience the first fruits of the Advent theme of comfort and joy and help others believe and experience it too.

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, T. (2004). [\*Luke for Everyone\*](#) (p. 14). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.