



Thanks for checking out our sermon-based Study Guides! If you've never used our Study Guides before, you'll find some basic instructions beginning at the bottom of page 2.

SERMON-BASED STUDY GUIDE
for the sermon preached on November 28, 2021
“Loved Means Being Seen”—Luke 1:5-25



Of the four traditional Christmas themes—Peace, Joy, Hope, and Love—Love seems to be what most people are longing for, after a long season of isolation and conflict. Christmas means we are LOVED, in all the fullness of that word. All that's left for us to do is believe it, receive it, and share it with the world. Through the weeks of Advent this year, as we consider the experiences of various characters in the biblical narratives, we will discover multiple dimensions of what it means to be LOVED, and how the Christmas event demonstrates that love.

Group Discussion Questions

Q – Can you think of a time when you felt truly *seen* by someone? A time when someone else really seemed to notice and understand what you were experiencing, and then reached out to you in a response of love and concern? What was that like?

Q – Invite a member of the group to read Luke 1:5-7, 23-25 aloud:

⁵ In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. ⁶ Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. ⁷ But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old. . . .

²³ When his time of service was completed, he returned home. ²⁴ After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. ²⁵ “The Lord has done this for me,” she said. “In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.””

- List all the things we learn about Zechariah and Elizabeth in these six verses.
- What can we infer from these passages about how Zechariah and/or Elizabeth were seen by those around them?
- What can we infer from these passages about how Zechariah and Elizabeth were seen by God?

Q – One of the duties of the priests in the temple in Jerusalem was to make sure that there was always incense burning on the altar in front of the Most Holy Place. Try to imagine the sense of awe and wonder Zechariah must have felt as he entered alone into the Holy Place to offer incense on behalf of all the people, a rare and coveted responsibility.

- What emotions do you think you would experience in this moment, if you were in Zechariah's place?
- Why do you think God chose this particular setting to reveal to Zechariah the news that he and Elizabeth would have a son?
- Why do you think Zechariah had such a hard time believing the angel's message?

Q – Near the end of the sermon, Pastor Ruthie brought us a little further in the first chapter of Luke, when Elizabeth says to her young relative, Mary: "Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" (Luke 1:45)

- What connection do you see between what Elizabeth says to Mary, and what Zechariah and Elizabeth themselves had just experienced? Or, to put it another way, before Zechariah encountered Gabriel, on what basis could Zechariah and Elizabeth have believed that God indeed saw them and loved them?

Q – Pastor Ruthie invited us to think about whether we've ever been in a place where we wonder if God really does notice us at all. Have there been times when you questioned whether God really sees what you're going through, hears your prayers, and knows the longing in your heart? Have you ever felt forgotten or disappointed or unseen, when your prayers went seemingly unanswered?

- How can the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and the Christmas story more generally, be an encouragement to us in times when we wonder if God sees us?
- Who in your life might be feeling forgotten, disappointed, or unseen right now? How can you be God's love for that person in a concrete way in the next few weeks?

How to Use These Study Guides:

- Consider sending out the Scripture passage to your group members ahead of time.
- Begin each meeting with a short time of checking in with one another.
- You may want to begin the discussion by reading the Scripture passage together out loud, or by summarizing the passage if everyone has read it ahead of time.
- Don't feel like you need to discuss every question included in the Study Guide. Pick one or two to start with, and see how the conversation flows.
- If your group meets over Zoom:
 - You may need to do more overt facilitating over Zoom than you would in person. Feel free to call on people to invite them to share.

- Try to be sensitive to attention spans over Zoom—keep the meetings shorter than they would be in person.
- Be sure to set aside time for sharing prayer requests and praying together.

Group Leader Support: Please reach out to your Campus Pastor or your Coach if you have any questions about leading your group or concerns about your group dynamic. If you have questions about or feedback on the Study Guides, please reach out to Pastor Tim or Pastor Rachel from the Group Life team.