# Table of Contents

**Jesus’ Birth**

Lesson 1  
Hushed by an Angel ........................................................3  
*Luke 1:5-25*

Lesson 2  
Just Say Yes ......................................................................8  
*Luke 1:26-38*

Lesson 3  
Leaping for Joy ..............................................................13  
*Luke 1:39-56*

Lesson 4  
It’s Your Turn to Carry the Baby .................................18  
*Luke 2:1-20*

Lesson 5  
A Visit from the Sunrise on High .................................23  
*Luke 1:57-80*
WHAT’S IN YOUR TEACHING GUIDE

This Teaching Guide has three purposes:
➤ to give the teacher tools for focusing on the content of the session in the Study Guide.
➤ to give the teacher additional Bible background information.
➤ to give the teacher variety and choice in preparation.

The Teaching Guide includes two major components: Teacher Helps and Teacher Options.

Teacher Helps

Find Relevance
helps you zero in on why each session is important for the adults you teach.

Seek Understanding
presents helpful Bible Background informations and insights that will help you better understand the Scripture.

Teacher Options

Offer Illustrations
presents material that will help you paint a picture of the session. This section often presents items from church history, current events, or interesting anecdotes that help introduce the session.

Discussion
provides teaching activities that will help learners discuss the Scripture text.

Questions
presents multiple collections of questions for various kinds of adults.

Involve Learners
helps learners become actively involved with the Scripture text for a particular session.

Closure
gives you a means for wrapping up the session.

You Can Choose!

There is more material in each session than you can use, so choose the options from each section to tailor the session to the needs of your group.

Prepare Before the Session

Read the session for today in the Study Guide. Then read the options in this Teaching Guide, placing checkmarks beside the activities you plan to include. After you have decided which options to use, gather the appropriate materials.
Find Relevance

Why do/should adults care about this session? Have you ever wondered exactly what it is that we accomplish during intercessory prayer? When we pray for those of our faith community who are sick, do we expect healing? When we pray for our community, do we count on change? When we pray for peace and the end of world hunger and international priorities that make biblical sense, do we feel like those are realistic hopes? Or perhaps you have often wondered whether intercessory prayer is anything more than just a time of “Wouldn’t it be nice if...?” But we all know better, don’t we?

If you put Zechariah and Elizabeth’s names together, what you end up with is the affirmation that God remembers God’s promises. And as you read this couple’s story, you realize that God also fulfills those promises through people—ordinary humans! Zechariah and Elizabeth raise John (meaning “God has been gracious”), who prepares the way for Jesus (meaning “salvation”). True, the couple is not told that everything has been taken care of, but they are instructed to get ready. Namely, although they are not given “salvation,” they are told to work toward it.

What if, in the middle of intercessory prayer, an angel were to show up at your doorstep, and only after calming you down, say something to the effect of, “God hasn’t forgotten, and God is going to accomplish all God’s promises. Oh, and by the way, God’s going to do that through you”? Such an announcement is bound to leave anyone dumbstruck.

Seek Understanding


To be precise, Zechariah and Elizabeth are described in such a way as to make any reader conjure up images of the old stories: Sarai and Abram, Rebecca and Isaac, Rachel and Jacob. And continuing with Hannah and Elkanah, all that has been funnels into the present and time slows down: “From verses 5 to 13, the speed of the narrative slows from years to days to hours to the moment...” (Culpepper, 45).

As we continue to maneuver our way through the narrative, however, we move from a tight focus on a moment of epiphany and begin to spiral back out. First there are the moments as the crowd awaits Zechariah’s return from the inner sanctuary (v. 21-22). Then there are the days as he finishes his time of service (v. 23). And of course, there are also the months that Elizabeth is in seclusion (v. 24) (Culpepper, 47). The past that culminated into one pinnacle moment now trickles out into an unknown future. And hopefully, we will be able to enter that future...
with hope, because we have seen God remain faithful and constant in the past. Yet, at the same time, we also enter that future with fear, because we know that we play a fundamental role in what that future will entail.

Introduction: To place Zechariah and Elizabeth into the history of Israel is to be reminded that God has always followed through on God’s promises. Likewise, we expect God to continue to be faithful in fulfilling God’s promises.

I. Looking Around: As he officiates in the inner sanctuary, we find Zechariah in the Temple at the high point of his priestly career, but only at the starting point where other things are concerned.

II. Gabriel appears with the news that Zechariah and Elizabeth’s prayers are about to be answered.
   A. Their Personal Prayers for a Son
   B. The Prayers of Their Nation and Their Faith for the Coming of the Messiah
   C. Prayers They Don’t Even Know About

III. Zechariah responds with doubt.

Conclusion: The passage we are going to look at—which is also the passage that introduces the entire Gospel of Luke—will leave us anticipating the rest of the story.

Resource

My Teaching Plan

Offer Illustrations
How can I help learners think about the issues?

Advertising and God
Open a magazine—any magazine—and the odds are good that you’ll find one of those ads with the “before-and-after” pictures. The “before” portion of such a duo is intended to be suggestive of your past and is supposed to depress you, while the “after” picture represents your possible future and is supposed to impress you. The advertisers want you to associate their product with the quickest and easiest route to getting from your past to your future. Drink this, take that, use this...But what the ads don’t tell you, and should go without saying, is that what makes the difference between the before and the after pictures—in other
words, the difference between your past and your future—is what you get accomplished between the two.

God never plays games with us. God never suggests that God will take care of it all, or that all we have to do is take what God has to offer, escape our past, and embrace the future we’ve always wanted. God is not about selling a product. God doesn’t promise to meet our every desire in response to our belief. Granted, religion often markets God this way, but it’s an utter misrepresentation. God wants us to know that God has been constant in the past and will be in the future, that what matters now are the choices and decisions we make in the present. God never pretends there’s an easy fix—quite the opposite, in fact! Pick up your cross and follow, trust and obey.

Questions
➤ Is it easier to “sell” the idea of “prosperity theology”—the notion that God gives us what we want—or the prospect of a cross? Why would God choose a “hard sell” as the fundamental reality of the faith?

➤ If you were to imagine some “before” pictures depicting aspects of your character that you’re not entirely pleased with, and some “after” pictures much more in tune with who you’d like to be, what choices and decisions could you make to ease the transition?

❍ A Narrative
A notoriously naughty neuropathologist from Nashville named Neil loved to nag his naïve and easily nettled neighbor Nell, who had trouble with her nerves. Nevertheless, at noon one November day, Neil—neutralizing his normal narcissism—noticed that the implications of new studies in neurology could mean nice news for Nell. A complete novice at the notion of niceness, Neil nonetheless nudged his perennially numb (next to non-existent) nobility, nourished the noteworthy news, and that night pointed his nose toward North Nashville (the neighborhood of Neil and Nell) to inform Nell of the news concerning her nerves. But another neuropathologist named Norman (more neurotic than Neil, but with more rank) nipped Neil’s nocturnal journey in the bud. “I need you to go to Nan-jing,” noted Norman. Norman’s needs were non-negotiable, so Neil navigated his nose to Nan-jing. From Nan-jing to New Zealand, from New Zealand to New Brunswick, from New Brunswick to New Orleans, Neil navigated. And so Nell’s nerves did not initially benefit from Neil’s new knowledge. Finally, his nomadic wanderings brought Neil back to the neighborhood in North Nashville as a knight in shining armor with the noteworthy news for Nell’s nerves.

No news is rarely the news we need. And sometimes the news is so important that we can’t even wait to share it. In such cases, any delay that we might encounter in getting vital news out only adds to our anticipation and frustration.

Questions
➤ Have you ever had incredibly important news to share with someone, but been delayed from delivering it? Called someone only to find that the line was busy? Gone over to see someone when they weren’t home? What do these things feel like? Do you share the stories of God as if they contain the best news you’ve ever heard?

➤ Conversely, have you ever expected or needed to hear news from someone, but been disappointed that they never called or came by? What does that feel like? Have you ever thought about hearing the stories of God in this way?
Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

All That Is Yet To Be

What would it be like finally to arrive at the zenith of all your professional and spiritual aspirations, only to discover that all those high and lofty hopes merely represent the beginning of what is yet to be? What would it feel like to be in the midst of celebrating accomplishment and achievement, only to discern that God has so much more in store for you? Would it make you angry? “I thought I had arrived!” you exclaim. Or would it deepen your sense of appreciation and wonder? “There’s immeasurably more!” you insist. Maybe a little of both?

Even as far as we’ve come, we’re just beginning our preparations for what is yet to be. This year, we can ask ourselves the following questions: Can Advent represent for us an opportunity to learn from our past, to dream toward God’s future, to exceed any expectations of what can be? Might we move toward Christmas this year with the expectation that God is in eternal pursuit of our very lives, that transformation awaits us?

Questions

Questions about Scripture

➤ If you were writing a Gospel, what might you intend by setting off the action in the inner sanctuary of the Temple?
➤ Why do you think the author would note, “Fear not, for your prayer has been heard,” as the first spoken words of the Gospel?
➤ How many biblical characters can you think of who offer excuses when called by God? How many of these excuses did God accept?

Questions for All Adults

➤ Considering all the excuses offered in Scripture, what have your own excuses been?
➤ When have you been scared of who God is and what God demands of you?
➤ When have you been so filled with joy at what God is doing in your life that you could scarcely contain yourself?

Questions for Mature Adults

➤ What would it be like, in the midst of acknowledged age, to be confronted with the potential of youth?
➤ What would you identify as the loftiest dream in your life? How is this particular ambition related to God?
➤ How has God surprised you recently?

Questions for Younger Adults

➤ How do you feel about high expectations, such as John endured, being laid upon a child?
➤ Why do you think John embraced his calling? What might push you to accept such a call?
➤ If the presence of the Divine were to confront you, relaying both expectations and affirmation that your life matters, how would you change your life?

Questions for Adults with Children

➤ Who was the first person with whom you shared the news of your pregnancy? What would it have been like not to be able to tell them?
➤ How do you explain for your children the joy of your personal relationship with God?
➤ How do you prepare your child for the fact that life is not easy, and that life led as a disciple is even harder?
**Involve Learners**

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

**❍ Remembering**

Ask the members of your group to think back to their high school graduations, encouraging them to consider how they have changed since this milestone in their lives. Do you remember feeling at 18 as though you had finally “made it” into adulthood? Do you remember also looking forward to and anticipating what was to come, feeling optimistic, as if the world were yours for the taking?

As they reminisce, ask your class members if they have any regrets. More specifically, have they made decisions that have come to affect them in big ways, decisions that seemed trivial at the time? But perhaps the more important question is, how can they prevent this from happening from now on?

**❍ Word Study**

Photocopy the pages in a biblical Concordance that identify Scriptural passages in which the word “fear” is mentioned. Point out that fear typically has negative associations, so naturally we tend to resist its influence, especially when somebody brings up the concept of fearing the Lord. After all, we prefer love, so we aren’t too keen on the idea of working out our salvation with “fear and trembling”—even though Scripture seems to be full of people who fear God.

Invite your participants to form four or five small groups, giving a photocopied page to each. Have each group look up as many references as they can in a given time frame, somewhere around 5-7 minutes. Once work seems to have dwindled, facilitate a discussion as to whether there is anything particularly significant about being afraid of God that we might be missing.

**❍ Preparing for Worship**

Distribute to each person in your class a worship bulletin for the morning’s service. Explain that you thought it might be a good idea to prepare more intentionally for worship this unit. Starting from the beginning of the service, move sequentially through the order of worship, asking whether each step requires us to address God, or God to address us. Ask your learners to note their answers in the margins of their bulletins alongside each corresponding part of the worship service.

As you dismiss the group, encourage them to use their annotated bulletins during worship. After all, even as clearly as we speak and make our commitments to God during worship, God’s intentions for us are only that much more clear.

**Closure**

How do I lead learners to respond?

**❍ Taking Note**

Pass out copies of the Resource Kit page for this session to each member of your class. Tell them that as they go into worship with their annotated bulletins, they should take these sheets with them, along with their pens or pencils. As they progress through worship, ask them to take notes in the space provided of what is said either by them or to them.

Meanwhile, use this adaptation of the words to the hymn “Open Mine Eyes” as your closing prayer:

God, open our eyes that we may see glimpses of truth You have for us.
Open our ears that we may hear voices of truth You send so clearly. We wait for You, our God; we wait to see Your will. Illumine us in our worship, Spirit divine. Amen.
Find Relevance

Why do/should adults care about this session? We live in daunting times. So many factors seem to be not just out of our control, but indeed, completely beyond any semblance of control at all. The headlines flow easily, simultaneously noticed and ignored like a great river on whose banks we live and work. Children shoot each other in front of other children on school playgrounds and in front of soldiers on bloody battlefields. People starve in the wealthiest nations on earth just as quickly as they do in some of the poorest. Religions lead to killing in the name of God here and to hating in the name of God there. And meanwhile—as if all that weren’t enough—racial invective is painted on walls and windows of synagogues and churches, businesses and homes.

Unfortunately, politics isn’t about sound leadership anymore, but rather, has evolved into a hunt for figureheads who are merely adequate at best. “There’s no one to believe in!” people everywhere bemoan. And to make matters worse, not even the Church has managed to avoid this so-called “leadership meltdown.” In fact, the Church has come to be perceived as little more than a collection of hypocrites. But the waters are rising, sure enough, and those horrors to which we’ve deadened ourselves are threatening to drown us. In such times of desperation and despair, we need now more than ever the affirmation that with God nothing is impossible. In fact, the alleged “impossible” may well be all that we have left in which to find hope.

Seek Understanding

What do these Scriptures mean? “For with God nothing will be impossible.” Gabriel’s words of reassurance to Mary echo God’s foregoing response to Sarah’s doubt: “Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?” (Gen 18:14). As a matter of fact, Jesus’ later affirmation is often cited as the summary of Luke’s understanding of signs, miracles, and wonders (Tiede, 51): “What is impossible for mortals is possible for God” (Lk 18:27). Indeed, this thread is intricately woven throughout the biblical narrative. For the God who frees the enslaved, who parts the sea, who makes water flow from rock, who opens the womb of the old and the barren and the virgin—nothing has been impossible. For the God who heals the sick and makes the lame to walk and the blind to see, nothing is impossible. And for the God who makes the dead to rise again, nothing ever will be impossible. Hear now the good news. It hangs on a thread: nothing is impossible for God.
Introduction: God works through neither expected people nor expected ways. But by the same token, God does not force anyone who is unwilling to participate in Kingdom work.

I. Gabriel delivers God’s messages to Zechariah and Mary.
   A. Similarities
      1. Each conversation begins with the angel saying, “Don’t be afraid.”
      2. Zechariah and Mary are both greeted by name.
      3. Each is informed of the imminent birth of his/her child.
      4. Each is given the name of his/her child.
      5. Each is given a description of the impact his/her child will have on the world.
   B. Differences
      1. Zechariah
         a. The birth is an answer to a prayer.
         b. The announcement happens in a holy place: the inner sanctuary of the Temple in Jerusalem.
         c. The message is revealed to an old man, who is married but with no children.
         d. The message is received with skepticism and doubt.
      2. Mary
         a. The birth is unexpected.
         b. The announcement happens in a backwater town.
         c. The message is revealed to an unmarried young girl.

II. Mary is offered the opportunity to deliver God’s own messenger—the Word made flesh.

III. Because God works only through invitation, Mary is free to say no to God’s gift.

IV. However, she says yes: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

Conclusion: We, too, must make a conscious decision as to whether we will allow God to be born into our lives.

My Teaching Plan

Resource
Offer Illustrations

How can I help learners think about the issues?

❖ Within Our Political Heritage
On January 20, 1961, President John F. Kennedy coined this famous line in his inaugural speech: “And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.” His sentiments are based on the words of another politician, mind you, but just as easily could have come from Scripture. After all, church is often turned into a marketplace where choices are made based upon which worship programs you like, and faith is based on “what’s in it for you.”

In light of this, it is not hard to imagine the prophets protesting, “Ask not what God can do for you, but what you can do for God.” Neither is it difficult to imagine the saints marveling at the arrogance of those who concentrate all their energy into seeking favors from God instead of working to earn God’s favor.

Questions
➤ Do you consider it an honor to serve God? Explain.

➤ What evidence is there to indicate that generally we tend to be more preoccupied with what we get rather than what we give?

❖ Translation Woes
According to a story about a Brazilian doctor working in the United States, said physician—apparently coming along nicely but still learning the English language—was overheard giving a patient CPR. While pumping the unconscious person’s chest, he repeated aloud, “Inspire...expire...inspire...expire.” How ironic that when inspiration is not to be found, we are indeed close to expiring.

Questions
➤ What are your primary sources of inspiration? How much comes from your church, the Scriptures, and prayer?

➤ What public figures have inspired you? Explain.

❖ A Simple Yes
“Will you marry me?” What a momentous question—especially considering everything it assumes! Even the single members of your class probably know enough married people to understand the implications of such a decision.

Consider, there is that wonderful time when a couple first meets. Then comes all the dating and getting to know each other—all the risky vulnerability and the heartache and the excitement and the giddiness and the tears and the laughter. And of course, who could forget the ever-so-fun getting to know each other’s friends and family? And if the happy couple survives all that, then comes the relentless succession of questions: Is this the one? How do I know? What if this isn’t right? How do I propose? Where? When? What if they say no? That’d be huge. What if they say yes? That’d be even “huge-er”!

And then somewhere, sometime, somehow, the question is asked. And a simple “yes” changes lives forever. From this perspective, Mary’s simple, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your will” is made all the more momentous.

Question
➤ Do you think of your “yes” to God in terms of a lifetime commitment that will affect the way you live every day?
Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

Here I Am

George Mason, pastor of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, adamantly suggests that our calling is not based on our intimate knowledge of God, but rather, on God’s intimate knowledge of us.

“Here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your will.”

Might we paraphrase Mary’s response as: “Here I am, Lord; search me and know me”? Know me in my weakness and my limitations. Know me in my beauty and my potential. Know me as a sinner created in the very image of God. And then, having searched and known me, let it be with me according to your Word—not anyone else. Let it be with me. Let your Spirit come over me just as I am and let it be according to your Word. Let your Word be made flesh in me. I am thrilled. I am excited. I am scared. I don’t know why you chose me. But I trust that you know. I trust that you will continue to be a part of this process and that through it, I will come to better know you as well as myself. “Here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your will.”

Questions

Questions about Scripture

Scripture provides no insight into what made Mary the “favored one.” What qualities do you think she possessed that may have earned her this title?

When you hear the affirmation that “nothing is impossible for God,” what biblical stories immediately come to mind?

When you read the statement, “Here I am, Lord, let it be with me according to your word,” what biblical characters do you recall?

Questions for All Adults

What’s the most important “yes” you’ve ever said? Why did you say it?

What’s the most important “no” you’ve ever said? Why did you say it?

Do you think that we might have overlooked in Mary a worthy model of discipleship? Explain your answer.

Questions for Mature Adults

When have you witnessed firsthand God’s using young people for heavenly purposes?

How do we allow our young people to teach us, while at the same time helping them realize that they in turn have much to learn from their elders?

Have you ever experienced the satisfaction of recognizing and blessing the gifts of a young person in your church? Explain.

Questions for Younger Adults

How do you think we can cultivate openness and enthusiasm as opposed to the cynicism that seems to prevail in our culture?

How can we appropriately use the feelings of fear and perplexity to teach young adults about the realities of the Christian faith?

Questions for Adults with Children

How do you teach your children that they are to be obedient people of God?

How do you remind yourself to be an obedient child of God?

What factors outweigh the pain that children inevitably bring? How do we acknowledge and celebrate that within the life of the church?
Involve Learners
How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

❖ Stories
Call some of the married members of your class to reflect a bit on their engagements for the remaining members in your group. Ask each of them to pay particular attention to what that “yes” has come to mean that they never could have known or even suspected when the question first was asked.

Next, have your learners consider other choices in their own experience that have proven momentous. Invite any volunteers to share who wish to do so, asking that they put the most emphasis on how these situations eventually worked themselves out in ways they never would have known or suspected initially.

❖ In the News
Distribute scissors to each of your participants, along with copies of the local newspaper from the preceding week. Ask them to cut out any headlines that strike them as urgent, but beyond their ability to effect change. You may even want to collect the cutouts and glue them to a huge piece of construction paper, making a large montage. Once you have allowed ample time for all the newspapers to be perused, display the montage in a focal point in your meeting area.

As a side note, it may be helpful to present the information from the Find Relevance section of this Teaching Guide before discussing what it’s like to feel out of control. Regardless, though, be sure to consider all sectors of life as you review the following questions.

Questions
➢ Are there certain situations that make some people feel helpless to effect change, but make others feel empowered to make an impact?

➢ Is there anything your group might be able to accomplish collectively that no one member could do alone?

Closure
How do I lead learners to respond?

❖ Litany of Affirmation
Pass out copies of the litany found on the Resource Kit page for this session, along with pens or pencils. Point out to your learners that most of the “Leader” segments are purposefully left partially blank, so that they can be filled in with their personal ideas.

If you opted to make the montage during the previous section, prompt your class to remember the conversation they had surrounding it. If you did not choose this exercise, however, reread the suggested activity in the “Involve Learners” section. Obviously, you will need to facilitate some degree of conversation about what current issues are experienced as inexplicable, infuriating, frightening, or overwhelming.

As you discuss, move the group toward agreement—preferably unanimous—on how to fill in the blanks on the Resource Kit page. Then have everyone fill in their copy of the litany with the agreed-upon issues. Finally, after someone has read this lesson’s Scripture passage just once more, ask someone else to lead the litany for the group. Before you close in prayer, have another volunteer read Romans 8:31-39.
Find Relevance

Why do/should adults care about this session? She leaps into the air and drains the shot just as time expires. As the team rallies, the crowd erupts into chants and songs, chock full of applause and encouragement. The championship is won, and the party goes on for days. People even hover around the airport gates, waiting anxiously to welcome the team back home. Those left behind line the streets, each one hoping to get a glimpse of their heroes, but all at least ready and waiting to throw handfuls of confetti. And even after listening to all the speeches and reading all the newspaper accounts and magazine articles, they still go out and buy the video! For months, they talk of nothing else but the team and the season and the last game and that last shot—at the office, at the bar, in the dining room, basically anywhere conducive to conversation. And we compare this to the dutiful waving of palms on Palm Sunday, the ritualistic “alleluias” at Easter. And the ties that bind—across states, countries, and indeed the world—are the athletes that these fans belong to. And we have to wonder, don’t we?

Seeking Understanding

What do these Scriptures mean? At the very beginning of his Gospel, Luke introduces two story lines: namely, the imminent births of both John the Baptist and Jesus. In this lesson’s passage, however, he brings these two story lines together. Along with the additional allusions to stories and characters from the Old Testament, this technique of interweaving serves as a structural metaphor for what God has accomplished throughout history.

To look at history through the eyes of faith is to see God woven throughout human experience, binding together peoples, places, and events. Tracing the pattern of this divine thread, we see the consistency of the One made incarnate—recognized as Lord by Elizabeth and named Savior by his mother, Mary. Mistakenly, though, we often think solely in terms of Jesus when we hear the word “Savior,” but we must remember that salvation—the actual action of saving—is who God is, always has been, and always will be.

As our text draws to an end, we are issued the reminder that God’s promises to Abraham—however ancient—continuously remain in effect (Gen 17:7; 18:18; 22:17). Keep sight of the context into which Luke writes: Rome is the world, and there is a very real possibility
that Israel has been conquered and the Temple left in ruins. Without a doubt, the response of Luke’s original audience must have paralleled Abraham’s own astonishment and disbelief concerning God’s ongoing work.

**Outline for Teaching**

Introduction: Even this very second God is at work within human history, just as God always has been.

I. Mary goes to Elizabeth. The birth of Jesus takes its place within the history of God’s people. Compare John’s leap in Elizabeth’s womb to the struggling of Jacob and Esau in Rebekah’s womb (Gen 25:22).

II. The birth of Jesus is the culmination of the history and the future of God’s people. It is not merely consistent with what God already has done, but also is the very event to which everything else has led.

III. Elizabeth blesses Mary and Jesus.
   A. Blessed are you among women (1:42).
   B. Blessed is the fruit of your womb (1:42).
   C. Blessed is she who believed in the fulfillment (1:45).

IV. Mary blesses God using the Magnificat. The hymn takes its place within the history of God’s people. Compare it to Hannah’s hymn (1 Sam 2:1-10).
   A. God is praised for having inverted the values of the world.
      1. God has scattered the proud (1:51).
      2. God has brought down the powerful and lifted up the lowly (1:52).
   B. The hymn expresses the culmination of the history and the future of God’s people. This is all according to the promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham, and thus, to his descendants forever (1:55).

**Conclusion:** God can—and will—work both in and through our lives in order to continue the divine agenda in our world.

**My Teaching Plan**


**Resources**


Joseph R. Jeter, Jr., *Re/Membering: Meditations and Sermons for the Table of Jesus Christ* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1996).

Offer Illustration

How can I help learners think about the issues?

❖ The Power of Recognition
The pastor of a church in Atlanta, James Lamkin is especially fond of the verb “to recognize.” In fact, often when someone new joins the congregation, he will say something to the effect of, “They have visited with us, and they have recognized us.” Such recognition implies something profoundly important held in common, some kind of unifying force. It implies a depth that is surprising, because we generally expect to develop that kind of relational depth rather than discover it. Though they have been with us for only a short while, Lamkin is suggesting, they have nevertheless recognized in us something important. Likewise, Elizabeth recognized in Mary someone profoundly important, and she blessed her kinswoman because of it.

Questions
❖ Have you ever had the experience of “recognizing” someone? If so, what was that like?
❖ What about you do you want to be recognized by others? Does that change depending on where or with whom you are? Explain.
❖ When did you recognize Jesus? Or maybe the first question should be, have you recognized Jesus? Elaborate on your answer.

❖ In Remembrance
When we celebrate communion, we take of the bread and the cup in remembrance of Jesus, whom Elizabeth recognized as Lord and deemed as Savior. In times of tribulation in Wittenburg, Martin Luther offered his congregation communion with these words:

For this bread is a comfort to the sorrowing, a healing for the sick, a life for the dying, a food for the hungry, and rich treasure for all the poor and needy. (Jeter, 70)

If you think for a minute, you realize that which is done in remembrance of Jesus sounds a lot like that which Mary sang in anticipation of Jesus.

And so, we come back to the consistency of God. The God who worked to save throughout the Old Testament is the same God made incarnate in Jesus. The same God who saves is the same God who took on the flesh of the body of Christ to continue in this good work.

Questions
❖ Have you ever thought of communion as your commitment to the continuation of God’s work? How does such thinking affect your understanding of communion?
❖ How is your church’s celebration of communion a “comfort to the sorrowing, a healing for the sick, a life for the dying, a food for the hungry, and rich treasure for all the poor and needy”?
Discussion
How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

❖ The Battle of the Churches
On the corner of Fourth and Fifth, First Church holds brilliant and insightful Bible study classes. Meanwhile, a ways up the road Second Church goes all out in the way of community and social ministries. And nestled a little further down from them, Third Church has a real sense of enthusiasm and joy about what they do. Well, First Church thinks that Third Church is emotionally manipulative, Second Church thinks that First Church is dead, and First and Third Church both agree that Second Church flaunts its differences and is just too far “out there.”

Unfortunately, however, all three churches have missed the boat altogether by taking something intended to be holistic and breaking it into its various parts—at the expense of the whole, we might add. Instead of heeding Paul’s images of the whole body as a metaphor for the Church (1 Cor 12), instead of celebrating head and heart and arms, we seem to want to amputate our churches into homogeneous institutions so that everyone can choose where they’re most comfortable. So, we end up with a stack of heads at First, a bunch of arms at Second, and a collection of hearts at Third. What measures could we take to practice combining critical thinking and appropriate emotion and hard work in the life of our church? But more importantly, what advantages could this give us over those who seek to hinder the message of the gospel?

Questions
Questions about Scripture
❖ Mary rushes to a town in the hill country of Judea, to Zechariah’s house, to Elizabeth. At this point in the story, Luke’s focus draws in even closer to the child leaping in Elizabeth’s womb. Both narratively and otherwise, why do you think he chose to do this? What effect does it have on the reader?
❖ What might be an appropriate way to fit the Magnificat into a service of worship?

Questions for All Adults
❖ What can you do to facilitate more sharing within your family?
❖ How might your day change if you were to focus intentionally on blessing those around you?
❖ How can we empower each other to experience joy?

Questions for Mature Adults
❖ Whom have you blessed? What did that mean to them? What about to you?
❖ What treasured memories do you have of an era when families were more connected than they are today?
❖ What have been your most joyful experiences?

Questions for Younger Adults
❖ Do you think contemporary adults know what joy is? How do they distinguish it from happiness? How do you?
❖ Have you experienced the blessing of another? If so, who? What did that mean to you?
❖ How many of your friends do you think receive blessings from their parents?

Questions for Adults with Children
❖ How did your conversations with loved ones change when you were expecting?
❖ How can you be more intentional about sharing with your children what they teach you?
❖ How can you be more intentional about sharing with your children how much joy they bring you?
**Involve Learners**

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

- **Can I Get a Witness?**
  Ask your learners to take a moment to reflect on the first time they acknowledged God as their Savior. Then ask them to focus specifically on how they remember feeling at that time, tracing their feelings as they shared their news with family members, loved ones, and their church. Did their feelings change? In substance? In intensity? What is it like now to recall those feelings?

  Before moving on to the next option, invite any members who feel comfortable doing so to share their memories. In the meantime, be prepared to share your own testimony to God’s saving grace as well as the feelings you associate with that process.

- **Practice Blessing**
  In one of his poems, Kentucky poet and essayist Wendell Berry recommends that one “practice resurrection.” What an intriguing concept! After all, our text in this lesson certainly suggests that blessing was a singularly important dimension to Elizabeth and Mary’s relationship. The bottom line is that we are remarkably deprived of blessing in our culture, which is just all the more reason to take advantage of this chance to offer your group the opportunity to bless their peers.

  To get things rolling, ask everyone to form a circle and offer a blessing to the person standing next to them. You might want to define blessing as recognizing in someone else the good gifts of personality or discipline, and as a result, commissioning those good gifts to the service of God. Conclude by going around the circle once more, only this time ask each of your participants to bless God, to recognize some specific way in which they have experienced God’s good gifts, and to give thanks by sharing that with others.

  An alternative, of course, would require you to tape blank pieces of paper to each person’s back, encouraging participants to mill around “blessing” one another by writing on these sheets. Again, explain what it is that you want them to write, providing examples if necessary. The benefit to this version of the activity is that everyone gets to go home with something extremely meaningful. If you do opt for this twist, be sure to add the blessing God component as described above once everyone has signed each other’s paper.

**Closure**

How do I lead learners to respond?

- **Blessing Campaign**
  Discuss with your group what it would be like to organize a “blessing campaign” in your church. Even if each member of your class were to commit for only a month to blessing one person each time the congregation gathered, there would be a whole lot of blessing going on. You will have to organize, of course. And most obvious, you also will have to target people for blessing, which could be made less daunting of a task with the guidance of the Resource Kit page for this session.

  There simply is no way around it: there are people in every congregation who are popular, outgoing, gifted—in other words, very easy to bless. But without a plan, it will be those people who often get blessed the most—even though they may be the ones who need it least! You may even want to consider talking with your church staff about other possibilities for blessing.
Find Relevance

Why do/should adults care about this session? Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to God’s people on earth—these are such familiar words to anyone who is a part of “congregation life.” Do you think there also could be a connection between the two affirmations contained in this phrase—in other words, some insight into how heaven and earth meet? Is it legitimate to suppose that peace is somehow glorifying of God and that, in turn, those who work for peace glorify God? If there is such a connection, then what are the implications for the divisiveness within the Church and between Christians?

Granted, there will always be differing perspectives and interpretations—in all disciplines, let alone among Christians. And admittedly, when we fall short of God’s ways, prophetic anger and confrontation are sometimes necessary. But dare we ever allow ourselves to accept difference, anger, and confrontation so long as we know that peace—and thereby, the glorification of God—awaits us somewhere beyond?

Seek Understanding

What do these Scriptures mean? The Scripture selection for this unit begins with power, as the Emperor issues a mighty decree that the entire world should be taxed. Then, moving from this spectacle of influence that sets it all into motion, we shift our focus to one small family traveling from Nazareth to Bethlehem. When the time comes for Mary to deliver, the only place she has to lay her newborn babe is in a manger. And so the story moves from one boasting all the trappings of power to an innocent baby—yet, the story still goes on.

And there we have it: the irony of God’s work among humanity. To be specific, more often than not, God has continually used the weak, the lowly, the least expected to overcome and confound the great and the powerful, a tactic which serves as a constant reminder for people of faith that God can be trusted and that God is always with us. God is present even in the most difficult times, working both with us and for us. The story moves on because God is always moving forward in purpose and intent. Even in the face of Roman might and brute force, God has the last word, and all by means of a small child born in a manger—Jesus.
Introduction: Jesus arrives on the worldly scene, turning order and expectations upside down.

I. The son of God is born into rude circumstances while angels sing elsewhere.
   A. The plain birth scene echoes the inversions noted in the Magnificat.
   B. God has brought down the powerful and raised the lowly.
   C. God has filled the hungry and sent away the rich.

II. The joyous good news that the angels sing to the shepherds also echoes the Magnificat’s affirmations.

III. The shepherds go to see Jesus.

IV. The shepherds proclaim what they have witnessed.

Conclusion: In his birth, Jesus surpassed all expectations. In his return, he will do the same. The question we must ourselves is, will we celebrate the good news?

Resource
Offer Illustration

How can I help learners think about the issues?

❖ And Now from the World of Sports...

Story #1: David Robinson, one of the San Antonio Spurs’s long-time premier players, accepted a lesser role when the team acquired collegiate star Tim Duncan. Having been the “go-to guy” for so long, Robinson willingly consented to become the “go-to-him guy” instead. In fact, much has been made of his allowing Duncan to commandeering the spotlight, since after all, it was one of the major factors contributing to the team’s winning a NBA championship.

Story #2: In both the basketball and the football worlds, numerous stories circulate of star players who rake in multi-million dollar salaries, but renegotiate their contracts in order to free up monies under salary-cap regulations, so that high-caliber players can be brought in. In other words, they sacrifice themselves for the sake of the team. Although this is rarely as altruistic as it sounds, in the abstract it really sounds quite impressive.

Questions

❖ What is your “gut response” to stories about people who “sacrifice for the sake of the team”?

❖ While many stories of sacrifice might remind us of the nature of Jesus, how do they also serve to highlight the qualitative difference of Jesus’ sacrifice?

❖ And Now from the World of History...

Story #1: According to popular legend, Hitler commanded the Danish king at that time to force all Jews living in Denmark to wear the yellow star. Identifying the Jews was, of course, prelude to further action. The next day, however, the monarch appeared in public wearing a yellow star himself. Other Danes followed the example of their leader, and Denmark took care of the Jews living within its borders.

Story #2: Vidkun Abraham Lauritz Jonsson Quisling founded the Norwegian Nazi Party. When the royal family and members of Parliament were forced to leave the capital in April of 1940, Quisling took over with the support of the German leadership. Since then, his name has been associated with political treachery, and as a matter of fact, a “quisling” is defined by Webster’s Dictionary as “a traitor, especially one collaborating as the puppet of an occupying enemy force.”

Questions

❖ Identifying himself with the powerless, the Danish king’s memory lives on as a blessing to all who strive for peace. The Norwegian Nazi, on the other hand, identified himself with power yet lives on in infamy. Can you think of other examples when identification with the powerless effected great change for the better?

❖ What relation do we have to the oppressed and the powerless in our society?
Discussion
How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

Practicing Discernment
Have you ever heard of discernment as a method of conducting church business? Basically, it requires all involved to jettison democracy’s golden rule that the majority wins. To be precise, a group practicing discernment comes to no decision until the whole group unanimously agrees on a resolution. Naturally, veterans of church business meetings groan at the very notion of this, insisting that nothing would ever get accomplished. Then again, supporters assert that we place way too much value on “accomplishing.” In other words, their argument is that the discernment method affirms that the process by which a decision is made is equally as important as any actual “accomplishment” itself. Prayer replaces voting, and questions center not on what “I” want, but rather, on what God wants. To be sure, power is inverted.

Questions
➤ What is your initial reaction to the discernment method?
➤ Do you know of any congregation that practices this approach?
➤ Is it a viable technique for your church? What about for any church?
➤ What about this method makes you uncomfortable?
➤ Is the discomfort grounded in anything more substantial than the typical, “That’s not how we’ve always done it”?

Questions about Scripture
➤ Does the ironic tension of God’s Son laid helpless in a feeding trough encourage or discourage you? Explain your answer.
➤ How have you experienced “angels” glorifying and praising God?

Questions for All Adults
➤ How have you experienced God’s being born into your experience?
➤ What has been your response to the presence of God in your life?
➤ Which of your experiences do you associate with this story from Luke?

Questions for Mature Adults
➤ What is the most effective presentation of this story you’ve ever experienced? What made it so?
➤ What do you think was the most effective presentation of this story you’ve ever shared with someone else? What made it so?
➤ Inherent within every birth is a potential story of great hope. What births have you celebrated?

Questions for Younger Adults
➤ How might Jesus’ birth story be a commission to invert the systems of power in our world?
➤ The popular TV show Touched by an Angel brought God to television screens on a weekly basis. As far as I know, Jesus never once has been mentioned on this particular program. Why do you think that is?
➤ With which individual or group do you most identify in this story? Explain.

Questions for Adults with Children
➤ Have you told your children the stories of their births?
➤ Who gathered around your babies when they were born? Do your children know these people now? Do they have a close relationship to any of them now?
➤ Do your children know that they are expected to work for peace?
Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

Identifying with the Oppressed
Invite those in your church who are responsible for missions (staff, mission’s council or committee, etc.) to meet with the class to discuss ways in which your church identifies with the oppressed in your community. Use this forum to address how your church works to feed the hungry, visit the sick and imprisoned, and cloth the naked. Then, collectively brainstorm additional possibilities for service, especially those that indicate that the church has embraced the message evidenced in the birth of Jesus: God identified with the powerless in order to work for their redemption.

Eagerness and Enthusiasm
Ask your participants to identify something about which they have recently shown great enthusiasm. Their answers could range to any number of things, from a recently released movie, a show or a concert, a book, a TV program, a restaurant, or even a health club. Next, help your learners reflect on their faith by asking them to compare their willingness to share this enthusiasm with their friends to their willingness to share the good news of great joy with all people.

Questions
➤ Do you honestly think of your faith in terms of enthusiasm and eagerness?
➤ How does faith fare in comparison to other arenas of your life that garner your enthusiasm?
➤ Is it possible to become more genuinely enthusiastic about our faith? Explain.

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

Time to Reflect
As you take out your Bible, assure your class that you know they’ve heard these words a hundred times before, but that you want to read this story to them just once more. Meanwhile, encourage them to use this time to reflect on your recent discussions as they hear the story again. If you sense that your learners need some guidance, the following is an incomplete list of some possibilities for reflection:

• God who empties self in order to become human as we are...
• God born in a manger...
• God born into human systems in order to turn them over and not by might...
• Shepherds who can’t keep the good news to themselves...

Finally, urge your participants to continue thinking about the implications for our own living embedded into this story. Then, before dismissing everyone, read Luke 2:1-20 and close with prayer:

God as You are, You always have been and always will be. We wish to be more than we have been, so that our future might be more of what you would have it be. Be born in us today. And may we like shepherds so long ago, glorify and praise You for all we hear and see, as it has been told us. Amen.
Find Relevance

Why do/should adults care about this session? The holiday season is always filled with multitudes of familiar Christmas images and seasonal events. In fact, we have become so accustomed to the “Christmas rush” that many of us have learned to kick into autopilot until all the hoopla is over. Unfortunately, however, this common coping mechanism also shields us from recognizing God’s work—not only in our own lives but also in the lives of others. Perhaps in order to avoid missing anything, rather than taking our cue from the traditional advice just to “open our eyes” or from our natural tendency to “run our mouths,” we should shut them both completely—even if only for a moment—so as to allow God enough time and space to speak to us. It worked for Zechariah.

As talk of the new year lingers in the air, we—just like Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, and John the Baptist—have a priceless opportunity to witness and embrace the good news. Maybe this is our opportunity to commit our lives to the way of peace, the way that glorifies God. We should be unabashed to sing and shout our praise of the same God who so long ago proclaimed, “I am about to do a new thing” (Isa 43:19). In fact, centuries later this same God still “does new things,” working wonder upon wonders even to this very moment.

Seek Understanding

What do these Scriptures mean? Remembering the angel’s message, Elizabeth insisted that her son be called John rather than be named after his father. And to the neighbors’ dismay, Zechariah—also with Gabriel’s words freshly on his brain—confirmed his wife’s wishes. In fact, Zechariah’s definitive declaration concerning the child’s name held a two-fold purpose. On the one hand, it was considered the father’s duty to name the child, but by the same token, it was also Zechariah’s declaration of faith. By accepting the name “John” for his son, Zechariah was affirming his belief in a reality completely beyond him, a reality that requires “assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1).

God’s promises and assurances, including the covenant made with Abraham and Sarah and their descendants, provide the foundation on which this and even the entire biblical story rest. And perhaps for the first time, we begin to understand that the same God is still at work today, still fulfilling promises and lending assurance, and of course, still expecting us to live up to our end of the covenant.

A VISIT FROM THE SUNRISE ON HIGH

Luke 1:57-80
Introduction: When we were first introduced to Zechariah, he was struck mute. Now we re-enter the story at John’s birth.

I. The Birth of John
   A. All the neighbors gather and rejoice.
   B. The expected religious rituals take place on the eighth day (Phil 3:5).

II. Expectations Turned Upside Down
   A. In keeping with tradition, the community wants the baby to be named after his father.
   B. Elizabeth and Zechariah both disagree.
   C. The community is amazed.
   D. Zechariah’s tongue is released, at which point he immediately begins to praise God.

III. Community Wonders about John
   A. News of John’s birth begins to spread, and the community begins to wonder “what will become of this child.”

IV. Zechariah’s Psalm
   A. God is and always has been consistent.
   B. John is to be the prophet of the Most High.

V. The Dawn of Salvation

Conclusion: Once again, Luke affirms for us that “the God who began a good work among us will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6).
Offer Illustrations
How can I help learners think about the issues?

❖ The Claims of Politicians
During the heat of political campaigns and debates, you are sure to hear almost every candidate claiming to “walk in the footsteps of our venerated ancestry.” You know the type: the likes of Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson. It is interesting to note, however, how often history is distorted to meet the needs of the individual.

For instance, in debates over the Confederate flag, politicians seeking one goal were quick to point out that Lincoln’s desire was for states to make their own regulations about state matters. On the flip side, however, politicians seeking an altogether different goal claimed that Lincoln did indeed prefer states to deal with their own matters—that is, unless they were wrong, at which point it was the responsibility of the federal government to step in.

Questions
➤ Why do you think politicians have made such a habit out of claiming to follow the tradition of our heralded ancestors?

➤ Why is it so important for Christians to follow in the tradition of our God?

➤ How do we go about determining whether we are following in the tradition of God, or following a path that merely serves our own interests?

❖ A Rabbi’s Insights into Truth
Samuel H. Dresner noted that after a near fatal heart attack, Abraham Joshua Heschel insisted that his first feelings were of gratitude for the life he had been given. Heschel added that it was this very gratitude for life which he was trying to convey when he wrote in the preface to one of his books, “I did not ask for success; I asked for wonder. And You gave it to me” (Dresner, vii).

The beginning of Luke suggests that God continues to offer people wonder, for the Gospel implies that God is always there for those with eyes to see. In everything is God. In fact, employing words that seem particularly suited to the beginning of Luke’s Gospel, Heschel wrote: Sometimes we wish the world could cry and tell us about that which made it pregnant with fear-filling grandeur. Sometimes we wish our own heart would speak of that which made it heavy with wonder. (Ibid., 2)

Questions
➤ Do you prefer success or wonder? Explain your answer.

➤ Does your heart feel heavy with wonder? If so, does your heart speak out?

➤ How has God brought wonder into your life and how have those events affected you?
Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

Calculating Success

We live much of our lives according to our own calculations, which go something like this:

* If I major in this in college, *then*...
* If I invest in this relationship, I *should* gain...
* If I give this much here, I *should* get that much there...
* If I appear to be interested, that *should* be enough.

Certainly there is much to be said for a carefully considered approach to life. After all, it is imperative that we exercise both caution and responsibility when facing “the big decisions.” When it comes to the economy of God, though, calculation will get you nowhere. What God asks of us is more than we could ever deem safe to give, and the way God computes returns is just not comprehensible to us humans. Living in a success-oriented culture, we are a people for whom faithfulness is generally a short-term idea. Yet, Jesus teaches us a way of living for which our constant desire should be “not my will but yours be done” (Lk 22:42).

Questions

Questions about Scripture

* Interestingly, John means “God has been gracious.” How is this particular name especially meaningful within the larger context of the story?
* Luke affirms that “the hand of the Lord was with [John]” (1:66). What do you think would constitute evidence that the hand of the Lord is with someone?
* What does it mean for us to be “faithful” to God? In turn, what does it mean for God to be “faithful” to us?

Questions for All Adults

* How does your light from God illuminate some of the darkness around you?
* How do you experience God’s guidance toward the way of peace?
* What is your experience with people who accept the “glory” that is due God rather than pointing beyond themselves to the One who has made that glory possible in the first place?

Questions for Mature Adults

* What are your best memories of children growing up to fulfill hope?
* What are your best memories of churches fulfilling God’s hope?
* How do you affirm what God has done in your life in the past, as well as what God is doing in your life right now? How does that inform your hope for what God will do in the future?

Questions for Younger Adults

* Why do you think John was willing to accept a subordinate role to Jesus?
* How do we talk about obedience to God’s will in terms that are relevant to the contemporary world?
* How do you think we can encourage people to become all that they can be?

Questions for Adults with Children

* Is there any particular history behind the names you chose for your children? Explain.
* Surely John grew up listening to the stories of God’s promises to Abraham and how he was a part of that tradition. Into which larger stories have you placed the stories of your own children?
* What do you believe God has in store for your children?
**Involve Learners**

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

❖ **Blessing the Children**

Luke’s Gospel contains numerous blessings associated with the announcements of birth as well as the actual birth narratives themselves. Note for your group how God is praised, parents are dedicated, and children are commissioned, before facilitating conversation about how your church blesses the birth of each child in the congregation. Allow your participants to speak openly about your traditions. Is there a rose placed in the sanctuary when a baby is born? Is that rose then delivered to the new parents? Is a parent/child dedication usually integrated into worship? Is God praised? Are the parents and congregation dedicated and the child commissioned? Once discussion starts to dwindle in these areas, brainstorm other possibilities for blessing the children of your church.

Before the session, you may even want to acquire a copy of the register of children in your church’s nursery. That way, each member of your class could write a prayer of blessing for one of these children. The elements of the prayer might include: praise of God, a commitment of the person writing to the welfare and the development of the child, some expectation of who we expect and pray that the child will grow up to be, and so on. When the prayers are complete, collect and bind them together to give to each respective parent. It is a gift they will treasure long after their children aren’t children anymore.

You might even have your learners consider other ways in which to create and foster relationships between the members of your class and the babies of the church. Ask the group to consider volunteering to work in the church nursery on a semi-regular basis, and urge them always to be on the lookout for other means of blessing the babies. Is there an artist in your class, a calligrapher, a composer, or a financial planner? Does your class want to offer a gift to these children at baptism or even at other significant times of transition in their lives?

❖ **The Gifts of Silence**

Zechariah’s attitude before his enforced silence is markedly different from his attitude after months of imposed silence. Barbara Brown Taylor suggested in a sermon that the time of enforced silence might actually have been more of a gift than punishment. Besides, the silence afforded Zechariah the opportunity to tune his ears to hear what was truly important.

Silence is a gift many of us need in this noisy world of ours, so arrange some time for your group just to sit quietly in reflection. If you’re afraid your learners will get bored with this too easily, provide them with concordances and have them look up occurrences of the word “silence” or “silent” in Scripture. Meanwhile, if you wish to review some resources for a communal time of silence, contact *Seeds of Hope* Publishers, 602 James Avenue, Waco, TX 76706.

❖ **Light in My Darkness**

Pass around to each person in your group a copy of the Resource Kit page for this session, along with a pen or pencil, of course. As your class reflects on the verses printed on the page, ask them to jot down ways in which the truth of these verses has surfaced in their own lives. For example, how have you received light into your darkness? How has peace been a gift to you from someone else? How have you made the truth of these verses real in another person’s life?
Closure
How do I lead learners to respond?

❖ Role-Playing
Granted, each character in the Gospel of Luke has their own role to play, but regardless, everyone’s role fits into the context of the larger story of God. And likewise, everyone’s role also serves to move the larger story along, but at the same time, the larger story is not dependent on the smaller ones that comprise it. In our study, each character’s role has had something to do with looking forward to Jesus. If you continue to read the Gospel, once Jesus is here, everyone’s role is largely determined by each individual’s response to Jesus.

Even today, we take our place within the larger story. Ask class members to consider how their own lives fit into the story of the Gospel. Then, as you send them off, encourage them to consider the following questions: Are we willing to take our place in the story of God’s work? Are we willing to accept our role(s)? How have we responded to Jesus?.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I Say to God...</th>
<th>What God Says to Me...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Page 29
Litany of Affirmation

Leader: We gather as the faithful followers of our God in difficult and trying times. We gather as a people called to believe in a future in which we find it difficult to hope. Remind us, Lord, that you work through us and beyond us in ways that far surpass our ability to comprehend. We commit to your will, trusting that you know far more than we can suspect.

People: Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your Word.

Leader: We don’t understand....

People: Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your Word.

Leader: We are angry at....

People: Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your Word.

Leader: We are frightened by....

People: Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your Word.

Leader: We are overwhelmed by....

People: Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your Word.

Leader: We face the problems of our time with steadfast courage and hope...

People: ...For nothing is impossible with God.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Person to Be Blessed</th>
<th>Name of Person Offering the Blessing</th>
<th>Date of Blessing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A LITTLE “LIGHT” READING

By the tender mercy of our God,

The dawn from on high will break upon us,

To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

To guide our feet into the way of peace. (Lk 1:78-79)