

Family Advent Guide



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November - December 2016

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The Purpose of This Guide

The primary purpose of the all Scripture is to exalt the name of Jesus. Therefore, the Bible is all about Jesus. The Old Testament points to him, the Gospels tell us about him and the all the rest of the New Testament points back to him. He is the glorious focal point of all scripture and of all creation, "For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things and in him all things hold together." (Col 1:16-17)

We see this truth exemplified clearly in days leading up to and the events immediately following the birth of Jesus. Here in the opening chapters of the New Testament, we see promises God made to his people in the Old Testament fulfilled in the coming of Christ. The birth of Christ also sets the stage for all that will come after, including the cross, the empty tomb, the day of Pentecost, the conversion of Saul, the spread of the church throughout the earth, and that our very hope of salvation comes to us through the incarnation. God "became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

During the Christmas season, we turn our eyes to the moment of Jesus' arrival on earth. He came not as a triumphant king but as a baby, born of a virgin. In this study we will look at the story of Jesus' birth in the Gospel of Luke, see how Jesus' birth fulfilled ancient prophecy, set the stage for the ultimate defeat of evil, and ushered in a new covenant between God and his people. The story is not a simple one. The account of Jesus' birth and the events surrounding it are full of danger, suspense, symbolism, and the overarching faithfulness of God toward his people. As we read and study these chapters, may we be reminded this Christmas of the supremacy of Christ in all things and the indescribable faithfulness of God toward us in Jesus Christ our Lord.

How To Use This Guide

This guide is written as both a personal study and a family devotional guide. The sessions are written to coincide with each week of Advent, beginning with the Sunday after Thanksgiving and concluding on Christmas Day. Each week will seek to answer a question about Jesus as the Son of God and the long-awaited Messiah.

- Week 1 (11/27 12/3): Breaking the Silence (Isaiah 40:1-9, Luke 1:1-25)
- Week 2 (12/4 12/10): Nothing is Impossible (Psalm 110, Luke 1:26-38)
- Week 3 (12/11 12/17): Taking the Land (Joshua 14:6-15, Luke 1:39-45)
- Week 4 (12/18 12/24): Singing a Song (2 Samuel 2:1-11, Luke 1:46-56)

Each week will have a personal devotional written primarily for adults and older students. The purpose of these devotionals is to work in accord with the Sunday morning sermon and to encourage a more in-depth study of God's word. These sessions will include a scripture reading, commentary, questions for personal reflection, and further reading suggestions.

Each week will also include a family devotional leading to Christmas. The intention of this is that each week, families would gather together to read God's Word and reflect on its truth. These sessions will be geared toward younger children. They will include a family devotional, discussion questions and a suggested family activity.

Our hope is that this resource will be used to minister to you, your families, and our church this Christmas as we seek to exalt the name of Christ above all things in our celebrations and traditions. Merry Christmas and to God be the Glory!

In Christ,

The Pastors of Lake Murray Baptist Church

Breaking the Silence (Isaiah 40:1-9, Luke 1:1-25)

Week 1

¹ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." The Word of God Stands Forever ⁶ A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it; surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. The Greatness of God ⁹ Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!"

Isaiah 40:1-9

¹ Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us,

² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us,

³ it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ that you have been to also account for you have been to

⁴ that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. ⁵ In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.

⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

⁸ Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty,

⁹ according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense.

¹¹ And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

¹² And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him.
¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

¹⁴ And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

¹⁶ And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, ¹⁷ and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

¹⁸ And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years."

¹⁹ And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.

²⁰ And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time."

²¹ And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple.

²² And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute.

²³ And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

²⁴ After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying,

²⁵ "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

Luke 1:1-25

R eading the Bible as a historical document is imperative to understanding the full message of the text. Hundreds of years had elapsed from the beginning of the Old Testament to the beginning of the New Testament. During this time there were vast changes to the political, cultural, and religious climate. Israel was under the rule of the Persian Empire at the end of the Old Testament. Many Israelites had returned to rebuild Jerusalem, but it was in the beginning stages. However, as the New Testament opens, Jerusalem had been rebuilt and a decree from Caesar was sent to conduct a census in Israel. The people were still under the rule of a foreign government, the Roman Empire. The cultural climate also experienced change. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the language of God's people. The New Testament would be written in Greek, the language of the Empire. The religious climate underwent change as well. The New Testament mentions groups like the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Scribes, as well as, institutions such as the Sanhedrin and the Synagogue. None of these were mentioned in the Old Testament, yet they dominated the religious landscape of the New Testament.

The people had been through great turmoil in the years between the Testaments. They had been conquered by the Greeks, and they went through a painful and bloody war. Finally, they were conquered and placed under Roman rule for many years. Perhaps most troubling of all, they had not heard from the Lord. The last prophet to bring a message from the Lord was the prophet Malachi. He had written around the year 430 BC, meaning God had been silent for 400 years.

Had the Lord forgotten his people? Had he forgotten that he promised the wicked serpent that one would come and crush his head? (Gen 3:15) Had he forgotten that one would come that was greater than Moses and lead his people out of their slavery to sin? (Deut 18:18-19) Had God forgotten that he promised to put the descendant of David on the throne forever? (2 Sam 7) Had he forgotten the great promises of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or Daniel? (Jeremiah 31; Ezekiel 37; Daniel 7) The last sentences of Malachi (also the last few lines of the OT) left the people with a promise that the Lord would send "Elijah the prophet" and would "turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers". Had he forgotten? The time between the Testaments reverberates with the deafening silence of God.

In Luke chapter 1, God broke his silence. A priest named Zechariah along with his wife Elizabeth, were confronted by an angel that had come with a message from the

Lord. Though he and his wife were advanced in age and were not able to have children, this angel promised that a child would come to them. Not just any child. This child would "turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God", and he would go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children". This one who would be born to them would "make ready for the Lord a prepared people" (Luke 1:16-17). Their child would be the child of a promise given to the people through the prophet Malachi, this child would announce that the Lord would return to his people again.

The baby they were promised would be John the Baptist. The one that would be a "voice crying in the wilderness". The one who would prepare the way of the King! The one who would fulfill the promises of Isaiah 40, and say to a longing people, "Comfort, comfort my people...Behold your God!!" (Isaiah 40:1-9)

Questions for Reflection

1. Why do you think it is important to see the Bible not only as inspired scripture, but as a historical document? How does history help us to better understand the text?

2. Have you ever been through a period or season where you felt as if God was silent? What type of emotions did you feel during that time? What did God teach you through this experience?

3. The concept of waiting on the Lord is throughout the scriptures. Take some time to read the following passages (Ps 27:13-14, Ps 40:1-3, Ps 62:5-7). How is God working in our waiting? What should be our response when God seems silent?

Memory Verse

"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

2 Peter 3:9

Family Devotion

Read Luke 1:1-25

When was the last time you had to wait for something? Maybe it was today or last week or a long time ago, but everyone at one time or another has had to wait. Do you like to wait? Why not? Most people don't like to wait for things. Waiting is boring. Waiting takes forever. Why can't we just get what we want when we want it all the time? It sometimes feels like we are always waiting for one thing or another, especially when you're a kid.

Did you know the Bible has a lot to say about waiting? But unlike what most of us would say, the Bible says that waiting can be good for us if we wait in the right way, on the right things.

In the Old Testament, God chose a group of people called the Israelites to be his special people. Throughout the Old Testament, God promised that he would send a King to rule his people. This King would not be like the earthly kings, this King would be a good king, a fair king, a merciful king, in fact this King would be God himself! However, God didn't tell the people when the King would come. So throughout the Old Testament, the people of God were waiting and looking for God's King. At the beginning of the New Testament, God's people (the Israelites) had not heard from God in over 400 years! That's a long time to wait. During that time, a lot of things had changed. The Romans had conquered Israel and ruled over its people. An entirely new group of religious rulers were teaching the people about God's law. Even the language the people used to speak to one another had changed. Many people started to think that maybe God had forgotten about his people. Maybe God wasn't really going to deliver a King who would rule over God's people with love, mercy, and justice. The people were worried. Had God forgotten his promise? Right in the middle of all their waiting and wondering God spoke to his people again.

God chose to speak to his people again through a priest named Zechariah. Zechariah had a wife named Elizabeth, who was barren (that meant she couldn't have children). God sent an angel to Zechariah to inform him that Elizabeth would have a child, but this child would be a special child. The child of Zechariah and Elizabeth would be the one that would prepare the way for the long awaited King!

Even though God had not spoken to the people in a long time, he was working in their waiting. He was teaching his people to trust his promise, even when they didn't hear his voice.

Family Discussion Questions

1. Read these passages together as a family (Ps 27:13-14, Ps 40:1-3, Ps 62:5-7). What do these verses teach us about waiting on God?

2. God is still speaking to his people today. What has God given us that helps us to hear his word today?

3. What is one promise that God has made in the Bible that you need to remember today? Write it down and ask God to help you remember that he always keeps his promises!

Family Activity

Play the silent game. See who in your family can go the longest without saying anything. (You're welcome, parents). After the game, ask them a few questions:

- •Was it hard not to say anything?
- Did it feel like the game lasted a long time?
- •When someone finally spoke, what did they say?

Now remind them that God was silent for more than 400 years! So when God finally spoke, what he had to say must have been very important, and it was! God was sending the King to come rescue his people.

Family Memory Verse

"Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage, wait for the Lord!" Psalm 27:14

Week 2

Nothing is Impossible (Psalm 110, Luke 1:26-38)

¹ The Lord says to my Lord:	
"Sit at my right hand,	
until I make your enemies your footstool."	
² The Lord sends forth from Zion	
your mighty scepter.	
Rule in the midst of your enemies!	
³ Your people will offer themselves freely	
on the day of your power,	
in holy garments;	
from the womb of the morning,	
the dew of your youth will be yours.	
⁴ The Lord has sworn	
and will not change his mind,	
"You are a priest forever	
after the order of Melchizedek."	
⁵ The Lord is at your right hand;	
he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.	
⁶ He will execute judgment among the nations,	
filling them with corpses;	
he will shatter chiefs	
over the wide earth.	
⁷ He will drink from the brook by the way;	
therefore he will lift up his head.	
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Psalm 110

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,

²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"

²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,

³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom

there will be no end."

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"
³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God.

³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.
 ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God."

³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:26-38

Luke's gospel tells us that the angel Gabriel came to Zechariah and foretold the birth of their son, John. In many ways, this was a miracle. Luke 1:7 tells us that, "they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years." As he had done many times in the Old Testament, the Lord was going to act. There would be no question that he had done it. The angel Gabriel appeared again, six months later, to another couple. This couple was not advanced in years; this couple was young, very young. They were engaged to be married and living in Nazareth, a small town in the northern region of Galilee. While it was amazing that the older barren couple would bear a child, the next statement of the angel seemed nearly impossible.

He came to the virgin named Mary and proclaimed to her, "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son." Mary was skeptical, like most of us would be. Her question, "How will this be?" seems almost restrained to the ridiculous statement of the angel. Not only would she, a virgin, conceive a child, he would also be the "Son of the Most High. And the Lord will give to him the throne of his father David." Mary was stunned. How could a young girl, like her, give birth to the Son of God? How could a girl from Nazareth give birth to the King, the "Son of David"? The angel's response was simple: "Nothing will be impossible with God."

In 2 Samuel 7, the Lord had visited David and made him a promise. The promise stated that one of his "offspring" would reign on the throne forever. The Lord told David, "I will be to him a father and he will be to me a son." (2 Sam 7:14) When questions arose about the identity of the Messiah, Jesus asked the Jewish leadership who the Messiah would be, and the resounding claim was that the Messiah would be the Son of David. However, it is at that point that Jesus quoted the first verse of Psalm 110, "The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." David wrote Psalm 110. So Jesus is making the point that the Messiah would not only be David's Son but also David's Lord; because he will be God's Son! Jesus is affirming that he is more than just mere mortal, he is the God-Man.

That is why the news that was brought that day was so incredible. By being the Son of the Most High and Son of David, Jesus was the only one that would be uniquely

qualified to be the Messiah, who would bring salvation to his people. He was born of a woman so that he might be human, and by being human he was able to redeem fallen humanity back to God. He was born of a virgin to demonstrate that he did not inherit sin from humanity, and also to fully testify that salvation comes from the Lord! With the Lord all things are possible!!

Questions for Reflection

1. What made the difference between the responses of Zechariah and Mary? Why did the angel punish Zechariah but answer Mary's question? What can this teach us about how we respond to the Lord?

2. Read Mark 12:35-37. What is the significance of the Messiah being not only David's descendant, but also David's Lord? What is Jesus trying to communicate to the crowd through his quoting of Psalm 110? 3. Have you ever seen the Lord move in a seemingly impossible situation? If so, what do you think God was teaching you through exerting his power in a difficult circumstance?

Memory Verse

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."- Matthew 19:25-26

Family Devotional

Read Luke 1:26-38

Have you ever heard someone say, "That's impossible"? We hear the word impossible used a lot in our world. Some people will say things such as, "That was an impossible catch," or "It's impossible to get across town right now." Most of the time when someone says 'impossible', what they really mean is 'improbable'. If something is improbable it means that it's really hard, but that it could happen. Impossible is different. Impossible means that unless something supernatural (a work of God) occurs, it can't happen.

There are many things that happen in the Bible that are seemingly impossible. In Genesis, God promised to make Abraham the father of a great nation, which seems impossible because Abraham had no children. Then in Chapter 17, God tells Abraham (who was 100) and his wife Sarah (who was 90) that they will impossibly have a son in their old age. In Exodus the Israelites are trapped between the Red Sea and the entire Egyptian army. It seems as though they will surely be killed or captured, and then the impossible happens: God parts the sea allowing the people to walk through on dry ground. In Joshua, the people of Israel are in a battle with the Amorites. Israel wins the battle, but the Lord does the impossible causing the sun to stop in the sky so that his people can rout the Amorites and take the promised land. The Old Testament is full of stories of the impossible becoming possible through the power of God. In last week's devotional, we saw God miraculously work by giving a child to Zechariah and Elizabeth, who were barren. However, this miracle cannot compare to what God was about to tell Mary. When the angel visits Mary, he comes with another message of the impossible. The baby in her womb is not just any baby, this child is the promised Messiah, the Savior of the whole world, the long awaited King. The baby in her womb is God himself.

Mary was taken aback by this news. She asks the angel how what he has said can be true. Then the angel responds by saying, "For nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37). What a statement! Nothing is impossible with God. He can make a way where there is no way. He can move mountains and part seas. No one can stop him from doing what he says he will do. Let us wonder in amazement this week at who he is. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14)

Family Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between something that is 'impossible' and something that is 'improbable'? Why is it important to know that only God can do the impossible?

2. We talked about three stories in the OT where God did the impossible. Can you think of any other stories in the Bible of God doing the impossible? Share these with your family.

3. What does the truth, "For nothing will be impossible with God", teach you about God? How would this truth help you to trust him more?

Family Activity

Make a list of all the miracles in the Bible you can find. After you are done, read this list aloud as a family to marvel at the power of God. Post your list somewhere central in your house so you will be reminded that nothing is too hard for the Lord.

Family Memory Verse

"For nothing will be impossible with God." - Luke 1:37

Taking the Land (Joshua 14:6-15, Luke 1:39-45)

⁶ Then the people of Judah came to Joshua at Gilgal. And Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, "You know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God in Kadesh-barnea concerning you and me.

⁷ I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land, and I brought him word again as it was in my heart.

⁸ But my brothers who went up with me made the heart of the people melt; yet I wholly followed the Lord my God.

⁹ And Moses swore on that day, saying, 'Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance for you and your children forever, because you have wholly followed the Lord my God.'

¹⁰ And now, behold, the Lord has kept me alive, just as he said, these forty-five years since the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, while Israel walked in the wilderness. And now, behold, I am this day eightyfive years old.

¹¹ I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war and for going and coming.

¹² So now give me this hill country of which the Lord spoke on that day, for you heard on that day how the Anakim were there, with great fortified cities. It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out just as the Lord said."

¹³ Then Joshua blessed him, and he gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh for an inheritance.

¹⁴ Therefore Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite to this day, because he wholly followed the Lord, the God of Israel.

¹⁵ Now the name of Hebron formerly was Kiriath-arba. (Arba was the greatest man among the Anakim.) And the land had rest from war.

Joshua 14:6-15

³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah,

⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit,

⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!

⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

Luke 1:39-45

A fter the Lord led the people out of slavery in Egypt, he led them through the wilderness to the edge of the promised land. As they had marched to the promised land, the Lord had taken care of them every step of the way. He had protected them from the army of Egypt. He had provided food to eat and water to drink. He had placed a cloud over them to protect them from the sun. God was showing himself to be mightier than the gods of the world and faithful to his promises. He led them to the border of the promised land, and prepared them to enter.

In preparation to enter, Moses called 12 spies, one from each tribe of Israel. When the 12 returned, they told Moses and the people that the land was everything the Lord had said it was. They reported, "It flows with milk and honey." However, this good report was tainted by the reality of the inhabitants in the land. The people that lived there were "of great height" and they "devour" their enemies. More than that, the land was rough, hilly, and had terrain that would be hard to traverse. The spies were fearful because they did not believe that they could defeat the inhabitants of the land. They did not think that the promised land could be taken as God had said it could be. The enemies were giants and the hill country was treacherous.

There was one spy who spoke up. His name was Caleb. Caleb believed the Lord's promises and was ready to take the land because he knew it would be God fighting for them. He said before all the people, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." (Numbers 13:30) Of the 12 spies, only two, Caleb and Joshua, believed that they could take the promised land. Because of the people's disbelief, the Lord made them to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. The Lord gave the promised land to Caleb and Joshua and the children of the generation who had disbelieved.

The book of Joshua tells how the people entered the promised land and how the Lord caused them to conquer the cities and possess the land that he had promised. When the time came to divide up the land, Caleb was given first choice. Surprisingly, he did not ask for the valleys or the plains, but the hill country. Caleb was eighty-five years old and still ready for battle. "So now give me this hill country," Caleb asked, because of the "giants". Although all the people were afraid of the giants, Caleb was not afraid, for he knew that the Lord would be with him and would "drive them out just as the Lord said." (Joshua 14:10-12) The hill country became Caleb's inheritance and he did just as the Lord had said. He drove the giants from the land and "the land had rest." God had kept his promise and Caleb believed. Over 1200 years later, the hill country of Judah still had rest. Mary, having been told that her relative Elizabeth was also pregnant, went into the hill country of Judah to visit her. When Mary entered into the home and greeted Elizabeth, the baby in her womb leapt for joy. Elizabeth, "full of the Holy Spirit," asked "Why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43) This is the first profession in the Bible that Jesus is the Lord. How fitting is it that it is in the hill country? The place where the giant killer, Caleb, had brought rest. The baby in the womb of Mary is truly the Lord that would one day climb a mountain, Mt. Calvary, and slay the giants that face us all; the giants of sin and death. He has conquered them and ended their reign, so that all his people can have rest.

Questions for reflection

1. List 5-10 ways that the Lord has provided for you in the last few weeks. In light of the ways God has provided, how should you respond to him? Why are we so often quick to react in fear or disbelief to God's promises?

2. It would've been easy for Caleb to simply go with the crowd. What enabled Caleb to speak up for what was right in the face of adversity? What can we learn from Caleb's actions? How can you begin to prepare yourself now to speak truth in difficult circumstances?

3. Caleb inherits the hill country at the age of eighty-five. How can Caleb's unwavering vigor for the Lord inspire us, particularly those of us who might be older? What was Caleb's reward for his faithfulness?

Memory verse

"I lift my eyes up to the hills, where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth." – Psalm 121:1-2

Family Devotion

Read Numbers 13:1-3, 17-20, 25-32; Luke 1:39-45

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you had to do the right thing, even when everyone around you was doing the wrong thing? Was that hard? Sure it was! Nobody wants to feel like they're the only one doing the right thing, yet that's exactly where we find Caleb and Joshua in Numbers 13.

God delivered the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and told them that he was going to lead them to a new home, a land he had promised their ancestor Abraham hundreds of years earlier. This new home, this promised land, was called Canaan. As the people arrive at the outskirts of the land of Canaan, Moses sends 12 spies into the land to see what it was like. When the spies return they tell Moses and the people that the land is great! It is a land that is "flowing with milk and honey" (meaning there was plenty to eat and drink) and would be a wonderful new home for God's people. The only problem was that the land already had people living in it. These people were a fierce people who would destroy the Israelites if they tried to move into the land. Even though God had promised the land to his people, his people were afraid and refused to go into the land. Ten of the spies gave a bad report, but two of the spies trusted God more than they felt fear. Caleb and Joshua tell Moses that if God is with them, no one can stand before them. If God has promised, then God will deliver! But the people do not listen to Caleb and Joshua, and they refuse to go in. This makes God angry. He tells Moses that because of the people's unbelief, they will not enter the promised land. God will make the people wander the desert for 40 years and then he will give the land to their children. Of an entire generation, only Caleb and Joshua will be allowed to enter the land.

Sure enough, 40 years later, Caleb, Joshua, and the children of Israel enter the promised land (you can read all about this in the book of Joshua). God allows the Israelites to defeat all the people of Canaan and to build a new home for themselves in the land. God blessed Joshua and Caleb for believing God and gave them the land of promise.

Many years later, Mary, the mother of Jesus, would travel in this very land to visit her cousin Elizabeth. When she arrives, Elizabeth asks her "And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Elizabeth knew who Mary was carrying in her womb: God's promised King who had come to save God's promised people in God's promised land. Long before this day, Caleb and Joshua's obedience set the stage for where God would one day send the Messiah.

Family discussion questions

1. Why did the people of God not want to cross into the Promised Land? Have you ever been afraid of something? Read Psalm 56:3. What does the Bible tell us we should do when we are afraid?

2. God promised the land to Abraham many hundreds of years before the people conquered the land. What does this tell us about God's promises? Should we get discouraged when it seems like God is being slow? Why or why not?

3. What can we learn from Caleb and Joshua's response to the people? What was God doing through their obedience to him? How should this help us to obey God even when it might be hard?

Family Activity

Trust Walk – Blindfold one of your kids and have them navigate an obstacle course by only listening to your directions. Make it more difficult by asking other siblings or family members to shout out false directions. Make sure your child knows that they are to listen to your voice over all the other voices. Allow every sibling to have a turn. Ask these questions:

- 1. Was it hard to hear the right voice over all the voices?
- 2. What did you have to do to hear the right voice?
- 3. What has God given to us so that we would know his voice?

Family memory verse

"When I am afraid, I put my trust in you." - Psalm 56:3

Singing a Song (2 Samuel 2:1-11, Luke 1:46-56)

¹ After this David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?" And the Lord said to him, "Go up." David said, "To which shall I go up?" And he said, "To Hebron."

² So David went up there, and his two wives also, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel.

³ And David brought up his men who were with him, everyone with his household, and they lived in the towns of Hebron.

⁴ And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. When they told David, "It was the men of Jabesh-gilead who buried Saul,"

⁵ David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-gilead and said to them, "May you be blessed by the Lord, because you showed this loyalty to Saul your lord and buried him.

⁶ Now may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you. And I will do good to you because you have done this thing.

⁷ Now therefore let your hands be strong, and be valiant, for Saul your lord is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them."

2 Samuel 2:1-11

⁴⁶ And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

- ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
- ⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
- ⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
- ⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.
- ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
- ⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate;
- ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.
- ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
- ⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

Luke 1:46-56

T here was a man named Elkanah who was always faithful to the Lord. He would attend worship and regularly sacrifice to the Lord. He loved his wife Hannah very much. He loved her even though she was not able to give him a child. Her enemies mocked her and teased her because she was barren. But not Elkanah. He spoke kindly to her, which only caused her to want to bear him a child all the more. One day she was in the temple crying out to the Lord and "weeping bitterly." She prayed to God, and said that if God would give her a son she would dedicate him to the Lord for his entire life. God heard her prayers and much to her joy and elation Hannah conceived a son, whom she named Samuel.

Hannah dedicated her son to the Lord and to his work, just as she promised. Like many OT figures that have been blessed by God and seek to worship him, Hannah began to sing. In 1 Samuel 2:1-10 we find Hannah's song of worship. Her song is laid out in three stanzas. In the first stanza (v.1-3) Hannah speaks of God's personal salvation. She notes in particular how the Lord has come to her. God is the judge rather than her enemies. God has loved and cared for her, and "There is none holy like the Lord; there is none besides you; there is no Rock like our God." (v 2). The second stanza, (v. 4-8) Hannah sings of God's general care over his people. It is the Lord that feeds the hungry, gives children to the barren, owns death and life, gives wealth and takes it away, provides for the needy, and gives an inheritance to the poor. It is the Lord's world and he is ruling over it in justice and faithfulness. The third stanza (v. 9-10) points to the future and how the Lord will finally reign on the Earth. For Hannah, the birth of her son is not some ordinary act of God. It is a glimpse or earnest of what God will one day do in establishing his kingdom on the earth. His faithfulness in Hannah's request points to his faithfulness in his promises for the future. He will place his king on the throne and "exalt his power." (v. 10)

What Hannah looked forward to, God's faithfulness in sending his King, is what we are celebrating during this Christmas season. Her song points to the song of another one of God's faithful servants, the song of Mary in Luke 1:46-55. In contrast, Hannah points to what God "will do," Mary sings about what God has done. The sending of Jesus to be born of Mary is not just a fulfillment of God's promises, it is the fulfillment of all of God's promises. The baby in Mary's womb is the one that will bring judgment to all of God's enemies and salvation to all of his people. He is the one that will "fill the hungry with good things." 1. Hannah was faithful to pray to the Lord for a son, even when it seemed the Lord had closed her womb. What can we learn from Hannah's faithful petitioning of the Lord through prayer over an extended period of time? What does this also teach us about the Lord and his response to prayer?

2. What were the three stanzas on Hannah's song? How do these verses fit together to give us a full picture of God's faithfulness to his promises?

3. What are the similarities between Hannah's song of praise in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 and Mary's song of praise in Luke 1:46-55? How do the circumstances surrounding Mary's song act as a fulfillment to the hopefulness of Hannah's song?

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior, for he has looked upon the humble estate of his servant." – Luke 1:46b-48a

Family Devotional

Read: 1 Samuel 2:1-10, Luke 1:46-55

What is your favorite song? I bet you're singing it in your head (or out loud) right now. What do you like about that song? The words or the beat, the music or the melody? Music and song have a special way of helping us express something that we might not be able to express another way. Did you know there is a whole book of the Bible filled with nothing but songs? The book is called the Psalms (which means songs) and it contains 150 songs to and about God! For example, read Psalm 98:1-9 as a family. This is a song all about how we should sing to God for who he is and all that he has done.

There are other songs in the Bible outside of the Psalms too. In fact, many times in the Old Testament when God would do something amazing for his people, they would sing a song to him. In 1 Samuel chapter 2, we find a woman named Hannah singing a song to the Lord. Hannah had prayed for a very long time for a baby. She was married to a man named Elkanah and she was very sad that they had no children. One day, Hannah prayed and told the Lord that if he gave her a child, she would dedicate the child to the Lord's service. Soon after, God answered Hannah's prayer and gave her a son, whom she named Samuel.

Hannah was so happy God had answered her prayer, she sang a special song to him. In the first part of the song, she sings about how God has helped her and saved her, singing, "there is none holy like the Lord, there is no one like you; there is no rock like our God" (v.2-3). In the next part of the song, she sings about how God not only helps her, but he helps all of his people, "The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts" (v.7). Then finally, in the last part of the song, she sings about how one day, God's chosen King would rule the whole earth, "he will give strength to his King, and exalt the power of his anointed" (v.10). This last part of the song is especially important, because God uses Hannah's song to make a promise to his people that the King will one day come to rescue God's people from their sin.

In Luke chapter 1, the Lord makes good on his promise. He has come to Mary and told her that the child in her womb will be the long awaited King. How does Mary respond to this news? By singing a song to the Lord of course! Mary's song sounds very much like Hannah's song in its praise to the Lord, but the end of Mary's song is different. Hannah ended her song singing about what God would do. Mary ends her song with what God has done! God had come through on his promise and sent the King to his people and Mary, like Hannah, responds in joyful praise.

Family Discussion Questions

1. What book in the Bible is filled with songs about God? Why do you think God would put a whole book of music in the Bible?

2. How many parts are in Hannah's song to the Lord? How does Hannah use each part to praise God?

3. What does God promise his people through Hannah's song? How are Hannah and Mary's songs similar? How are they different?

Let each person in your family select a Christmas carol, hymn, or praise chorus to sing together as a family. After each song, ask them why they chose that song and what that song tells us about the Lord. Use these moments to foster a love for singing praises to God in the lives of your children.

Family Memory Verse

"Oh sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things." - Psalm 98:1

Christmas Day

REJOICE! (Luke 2)

¹ In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria.

³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town.

⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David,

⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.

⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.

¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest,

and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.
²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

²¹ And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

²² And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord

²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord")

²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law,
²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

²⁹ "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word;

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation

³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.

³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed

³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

³⁶ And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin,

³⁷ and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.

³⁸ And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

⁴¹ Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.

⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom.
⁴³ And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it,

⁴⁴ but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances,

⁴⁵ and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.

⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

⁴⁸ And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress."

⁴⁹ And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

⁵⁰ And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.

⁵¹ And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

Luke 2

Advent Daily Reading Guide

A daily reading for each day of Advent. This guide was originally published in "The First Days Of Jesus" by Andreas Kostenberger & Alexander E. Stewart.

December 1st, Thursday	Luke 1:1-4
December 2nd, Friday	Genesis 49:8-12
December 3rd, Saturday	Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-5
December 4th, Sunday	Micah 5:2-4
December 5th, Monday	Matthew 1:1-17
December 6th, Tuesday	Matthew 1:18-25
December 7th, Wednesday	Matthew 2:1-12
December 8th, Thursday	Matthew 2:13-15
December 9th, Friday	Matthew 2:16-18
December 10th, Saturday	Matthew 2:19-23
December 11th, Sunday	Luke 1:5-25
December 12th, Monday	Luke 1:26-38
December 13th, Tuesday	Luke 1:39-45
December 14th, Wednesday	Luke 1:46-56
December 15th, Thursday	Luke 1:57-66
December 16th, Friday	Luke 1:67-80
December 17th, Saturday	Luke 2:1-7
December 18th, Sunday	Luke 2:8-21
December 19th, Monday	Luke 2:22-40
December 20th, Tuesday	John 1:1-5, 18
December 21st, Wednesday	John 1:6-8, 15
December 22nd, Thursday	John 1:9-14
December 23rd, Friday	John 1:16-17
December 24th, Saturday	Isaiah 52:13-53:12
December 25th, Sunday	Revelation 21:1-8

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