

LIFE GROUPS

TEACHING PLAN



Study of ADVENT

DECEMBER 6

20

MARY'S SONG

LUKE 1:39-56

DECEMBER 6, 2020

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Luke 1:39-56. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: GOD PROVIDES CONFIRMATION FOR THE PROMISES HE GIVES.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: MARY WAS SO EXCITED ABOUT THE NEWS CONCERNING JESUS THAT SHE RAN TO TELL HER COUSIN ELIZABETH, THEN SHE CELEBRATED THE LORD'S GREATNESS IN A SONG TO HIM.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS IS WORTH CELEBRATING.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- 1 How would you define authentic joy? How is it different than happiness?
- 2 Can you share about a time when you were genuinely joyful? How do you typically express your joy?

Jesus' identity as our Savior is the ultimate demonstration of God's grace. We did nothing to deserve a Savior, but through God's Son, a way was made for us to experience redemption, the atonement for our sins and eternity with God. The truth of God's grace should be a source of immeasurable joy for us, as it was for Mary. Today, we will see the joy of Christmas that Mary shared with her cousin Elizabeth.

Historically, dancing, like leaping, was an expression of joy. Jewish people recognized that the fetus was able to sense and respond to stimuli. (Indeed, while occasionally suggesting that the fetus's gender could be changed by prayer up until birth, some later rabbinic tradition also affirmed that infants could sin, sing, and so forth in the womb.) Some pagan stories also told of babies dancing in their mother's wombs or speaking in infancy, but pagans generally regarded these events as evil omens. In today's passage, John's activity was instead a result of his prenatal sensitivity to the prophetic Spirit.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Notes:

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 1:39-45.

Mary set out for the region of Judea to visit Elizabeth. Because of Elizabeth's unique situation, Mary knew they shared a common bond. Elizabeth understood Mary's situation like no one else. Upon Mary's arrival, Elizabeth exclaimed with a loud cry. This showed her excitement at the opportunity to visit with Mary. It could also be an indication that God inspired Elizabeth's blessing that followed.

- Describe the setting of these verses and what you think this experience meant to both women.
- What is the significance of each statement in Elizabeth's greeting to Mary (vv. 42-45)? How did Mary respond to her greeting?
- Do you think Mary hurried to visit Elizabeth because she wanted to see if the angel's information was correct, or because she believed the angel's information was correct? Explain.
- Why did Elizabeth respond as she did when Mary visited her? What did the Holy Spirit reveal to Elizabeth about Mary's child?

Elizabeth referred to Mary as the most blessed of women. The superlative "most" emphasized Mary's status as blessed above all others. God chose her for a high purpose. Additionally, Elizabeth stated, "Blessed is the fruit of your womb!"

She acknowledged the unique nature of the Child that Mary would bear. Elizabeth humbly wondered, “Why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”, expressing her sense of unworthiness to receive Mary as a guest. Note, however, that the emphasis in this comment rests on the Child. Although God worked in a miraculous way to provide a son for Elizabeth, she proclaimed the superiority of the One Mary was carrying.

Notes:

Evidence of Jesus’ special character came to Elizabeth when her baby leaped for joy inside her. She interpreted the movement of her baby as confirmation of the supernatural nature of Mary’s child. The joy of Elizabeth’s child resulted from his awareness of Jesus’ divine nature. John, though unborn, acted in a way that showed joy.

Even in this unsettling circumstance, Mary experienced a blessed state or happy assurance because she believed and trusted God. Her faith anticipated that what was spoken to her by the Lord would be fulfilled! What a contrast to Elizabeth’s husband Zechariah. When introduced to the concept of a miracle birth for his own son, Zechariah had doubted God (see Luke 1:18).

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 1:46-56.

Mary burst out in a song of praise (1:46-55). This passage has been called the Magnificat, the first word in the Latin translation. The song verbalized Mary’s gratitude that God selected her. She said, “My soul magnifies the Lord.” The reference to “soul” and “spirit” (see 1:47) meant that Mary praised God with all her being. Her first words exclaimed God’s greatness. She also understood the eternal impact of what God was doing through her.

- What is the central theme of Mary’s song? What can this teach us about the themes in our worship songs?

- In Mary's culture, it was a disgrace to be unmarried and pregnant. Why, then, did Mary rejoice over God's actions toward her?

Notes:

Mary reflected on God's greatness shown in His actions toward her. Only God displays that kind of ability. The tense of the verb *proclaims* indicates that Mary "kept on proclaiming." Her confident assurance lasted beyond this one ecstatic moment. Mary continued, "And my spirit has rejoiced." From the depths of her being, Mary conveyed a holy joy. Here the tense of the verb *rejoiced* reflects one significant expression of joy.

Mary's joy came from her realization that God was her Savior. Mary rejoiced that God came near to her and rescued her from her lowly state. He bestowed on her a unique privilege. She experienced the freedom to serve the One who showered His grace on her. Later, she would realize that God's salvation in the Child she was carrying went far beyond earthly status and human privilege.

- What aspects of your relationship with the Lord bring you joy?
- What does a joyful life look like? Why should joy be a characteristic of a believer?

Mary acknowledged that God looked on her with favor. This divine act of kindness served as the basis for her praise. God saw the humble condition of His slave. A young girl from an obscure town meant little to people in that society. Mary grasped the lowly situation in which she existed. In her mind she deserved no rescue. God chose to use her anyway. As a result of God's selection, Mary realized that coming generations would call her blessed. Believers in the future would acknowledge the mighty work God did in her. This served not for her praise but for God's. Jesus' birth took place because of God's work. Similarly, Mary's blessing came through what God did in her. He enabled her to serve Him in ways that called attention to God's greatness.

- Do you struggle with feelings of inadequacy when it comes to serving God? How does Mary's story encourage or inspire you?

Notes:

Some believers feel as though their gifts fall short of being God-worthy. The humility demonstrated by Mary provides us a good example. She possessed no obvious resources for quality service, but with God's help and support she proved to be the servant God needed at the time.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

- Mary sang her joy and shared her joy. How do worship and evangelism relate to one another? How are you investing in both?
- How can we make time in this group not only to share prayer requests but to share the joy that we have found in following our Savior?
- Who in your life most needs to hear about the joy of Christmas? Would they be open to having a conversation? How could you use this time of year as a jumping off point?

PRAY

Close in prayer, giving group members the opportunity to voice prayers of thanksgiving and praise for who Jesus is and what He has done for us. Then ask who we might share that joy with.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

Notes:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - Read Luke 1:51 again. One of the things Mary praised God for was His power. How does God exert strength in the power of His arm over the world?
 - How have you seen His power at work through our church recently? Through your life?

- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

- > The challenge to memorize Luke 1:46-47.

- > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: Luke 1:57-80.

LUKE 1:39-56

1:39-41. Ready to serve but also anxious to see evidence of God's other miracle, Mary headed for the hill country to visit relatives. First words of greeting brought encouraging confirmation in two ways: the baby jumped in the womb and the Spirit spoke.

Notes:

1:42-45. Spirit-inspired words from Elizabeth rained blessing on Mary. They distinguished Mary from all other women. She had God's grace and presence (v. 28) in unique measure, but not in measure that lifted her up for eternal praise and worship. Mary's blessing came not from who she was or would become. Mary's blessing came from the holy baby whom she carried in her womb. This blessed child placed Mary in the position of blessing. God had turned his eyes to Elizabeth (v. 25) but had set his Savior in Mary. Just to stand in such presence awed Elizabeth. How did she deserve the opportunity to stand in the presence of the mother of her Lord? Even before his birth, Jesus was recognized as Lord, the Messiah of God. Such recognition came from humble priestly folks in the Judean hill country, not royal people in the nation's capital. The same humility characterized Mary. Now we see why she was blessed. She believed God's promise. She expected God to accomplish what he said he would do. Faith brings blessing.

1:46-49. Mary's faith displayed itself in praise. In a song resembling Hannah's in 1 Samuel 2, Mary praised God for his great acts for her. Her praise included two actions: giving glory to God and rejoicing in the presence and actions of God. The Lord had looked down on Mary with loving care. He saw the low economic and social state in which she lived. Such a state would be short-lived. God had placed her in a state of blessing. Because of her son, humiliation would disappear. From now on throughout all history people would recognize who she was and the state of blessing she occupied. She did nothing to earn or deserve this. The almighty God had caused it with his mighty acts. So praise him. Call him holy. See him as the

transcendent God so uniquely pure and separated from sinful humans.

1:50-53. This holy one is not totally separated. He reaches down in mercy, finding in each generation people who worship him. He attacks the proud, removing them from political power and position. He pays careful, loving attention to the humble, raising them up to new positions of importance. The poor find food from him, while the rich are given nothing. No wonder the young virgin praised God.

1:54-55. Such praise reflected historical reality. The history of Israel tells the story of God's mercy. Start with Genesis 12 and read onwards. Each page recalls tender, loving salvation for an undeserving people. Yes, God does what he promises (cf. v. 45).

1:56. Mary stayed until Elizabeth was ready to give birth to John (see v. 36), then she returned to her people. What a surprise for Nazareth! An unmarried local girl comes down from the hills at least three months pregnant. It made no difference to Mary. God had confirmed his word for her. A baby leaped. The Spirit moved. Elizabeth blessed. God gave her a song of praise. Let the people say what they would. Mary was willing to bear the disgrace in order to become God's instrument of grace.

Notes: