

12/14/25
3rd Sunday in Advent
For Group Meetings from December 7th – December 13th

OUR MISSION: As a missional congregation we *celebrate* Christ's presence, *invite* people into a growing relationship with Jesus, and *equip* them to *serve* in a broken world.

Prayer of the Day: God of surprising grace, you step into ordinary places and speak hope into troubled hearts. As Mary once heard your promise and trusted your word, speak to us again today. Stir our courage, dispel our fear, and make room in us for Christ to dwell. We pray in the name of the One who comes. **Amen.**

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING TOGETHER

Share: How did last week's scripture (Luke 1:5-25) work in your life this week?

Mission:

- What was most satisfying about your ministry last week?
- Where do you see God at work?
- How did you participate in God's missional activity?
- How did inviting go last Sunday?

Hear: Luke 1:26-38

Explore Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. What do you notice about Mary's reaction that is noteworthy?
2. How is Mary identified in this text? What does Luke want us to know about Mary?
3. What does the angel tell Mary about Jesus?

Connect Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. When have you experienced both fear and a sense of call in your life?
2. Where do you most need to hear the angel announcement "Do not be afraid"?
3. Who has been an "Elizabeth" in your life (someone who strengthens your faith)?

Memorize this verse: "Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her." (Luke 1:38) Where or for whom can serve during this Advent season?

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING APART:

Obey: During this week follow through on your intentions.

Meditate: Meditate on Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26. How does this speak into your life?

Reflect: What have I learned in my week of living with this text? What can I share with my group when we next meet?

Notes for ChristCare leaders:

Martin Luther loved Mary. You may already have known that. As a Lutheran pastor, I have regularly been surprised by how few Lutherans know that. I suspect that's because, while we Lutherans often know too little about our Roman Catholic kindred, one of the things we do know is that Mary has a significant place in Roman Catholic piety and so assume Luther would not have been a fan. But he was. In fact, he was a huge fan. To Luther, Mary represented the typical pattern of God's interaction with humans. Indeed, not just interaction, but election. It wasn't Mary's goodness or innocence or beauty or even her willingness to serve God that Luther focused on. Rather, it was the plain and simple fact that God chose Mary to bear the Christ child. And that fact, to Luther, is not simply plain and simple but also surprising, perhaps even shocking. God didn't choose a royal princess or holy priestess, but a plain and, at least to the world's eyes, utterly insignificant young girl. God chose her. God elected her. God addressed her, honored her and elevated her.

Nobody would have expected this. Which is why Luther just loved Mary: because she stands for all of us, all of us who have no right to expect God's attention and favor and yet are surprised to discover that God has chosen, elected, called, addressed, and honored each of us. Which in turn helps explain Mary's response. Surprised, frightened, even confused, nevertheless Mary, when she was chosen by grace to play this significant role, can only allow herself to be caught up in God's gracious plans and so receives God's invitation in joy. Which of course does not mean that she wasn't still rather surprised, a bit frightened, and still confused. When you think about it, this surprising choice of God isn't limited to Mary but rather is a theme of the whole of Luke's story of the nativity. Because no one would have imagined that shepherds would have been the chosen audience of the angels, either. We tend to romanticize shepherds, but most folks in the first century would have found nothing romantic about them. At the bottom of the socio-economic ladder, dirty and smelly from their work, with no social standing to speak of, shepherds were just a rung above outcasts. Yet the angels don't appear to those at the Temple in Jerusalem or to the well-to-do of Bethlehem, but to the shepherds. The last people anyone would have expected.

Of course, once we've gone this far, we realize that this is the paradigm for most of the biblical story. Why the Jewish nation and not one with greater armies or territory? Why the strange assortment of characters that become prophets? Why the old and childless Abraham and Sarah? Why mischievous if not downright crooked Jacob? Why adulterous King David? And on and on and on. The list goes right on down, all the way until you get to us. We don't have our lives together as we should, or even as we'd like. We come with a mix of hopes and fears, moments of faith and an equal number of moments of failing. We come with very little to boast about, if truth be told, and much to confess. We come as those, finally, with no more right to expect God's attention, let alone God's favor, than Mary and the shepherds and all those we will hear in Luke's story. We come into this story as those who should not expect God's attention and we leave as those who recognize, perhaps again with some measure of surprise, confusion, and even a bit of fear, that we are also those whom God has addressed, called, honored, and elevated. We are God's own beloved children, and the whole of the Christmas story is intended to assure us of God's love and presence that we might turn and share that good news with others.

Thanks be to God,

Pastor Thadd (tbook@desertcross.org)

Traditional version:

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us
from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power,
And the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Contemporary version:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those
Who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the
power, and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. Amen