Breaking In Advent Study Week 2

Below is a guide for your group to dig deeper into this week's advent sermon. I recommend following each step but also allowing for your group to explore what comes to your hearts and minds and allow space for God to Break In.

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When we gather together, the best way to begin is with a word of prayer. As a group, please choose someone to lead your opening prayer.

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Please go around the group and introduce yourself by name and then answer this icebreaker question:

What is your favorite holiday cookie or candy or snack?

We value this time together and want to ensure that all feel safe and heard. Below are your promises to each other. Please read each one individually and ask for a group consensus that all are in agreement.

- 1. We will do our best to attend each meeting and to be on time.
- 2. We will listen with open hearts.
- 3. We will be compassionate and affirming to others.
- 4. We will share time equally amongst each other.
- 5. Anyone has the right to pass on any question.
- 6. We will not give advice.
- 7. Each individual will speak only for themselves.
- 8. We will all engage as much as possible, and not just be observers.
- 9. Each individual is accountable for their own growth.
- 10. We will all keep each other in our prayers
- 11. We will respect the confidentiality of each other. This is strictly required. What is said in the group stays in the group. If you want to tell someone outside of the group what you said in the group, that's up to you, but do not tell what anyone else says. We will extend this respect to one another.

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Give the group a minute to reflect before inviting responses to the following questions and then give everyone a chance to respond.

How is it with your soul?

- Given the ups and downs that life throws at everyone, what is the state of your inner being today?
- Think back over the past week. What was your highest high (the time you felt most encouraged / closest to God) and your lowest low (felt most discouraged / distant from God)? And how are you feeling right now (encouraged/discouraged/somewhere in between)?

Read Luke 1:8-23 (I am using the NRSVue translation.)

When Zechariah went to the temple the day he met the Angel Gabriel, it is likely Zechariah was just going through the motions. He was a righteous man in his community, a member of the Davidic priesthood that had spanned generations. Also, Zechariah was old. His priestly career would have spanned dozens of years. He's a pillar of the community and a man of faith. He's fulfilled his role of showing up to draw lots for which priest would enter the sanctuary and offer incense to God many times before. As far as we know, the ritual never yielded anything remarkable. Commentators even suggest that it would have been "banal."

Yet, when Zechariah goes to do his religious duty (this previously unremarkable obligation) something thoroughly unexpected occurs. God breaks into Zechariah's routine, and he and his wife Sarah are swept up into God's salvation history. There will be no quiet senior years for them...because Sarah is pregnant, and their son John (the Baptist) will play a pivotal role in heralding the arrival of Jesus: the messiah, God incarnate, the one for whom all of Israel has been waiting.

Pastor James R. Luck, Jr. challenges us to see this story unfold in our time. He writes, "The days of Herod were not easy days for God's people; yet in the midst of such times, God spoke to and through a faithful couple. These days of post-modernity are also not easy for God's people. Yet even today the world is pregnant with divine possibilities. Perhaps those who can be still and nonanxious enough to watch and wait may again hear the glad tidings of the angels." [Feasting on the Gospels. Luke, Volume 1. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014. p. 12]



- 1. When you think of the word "angel" what image(s) come to mind? What words would you use to describe angels?
- 2. How do the characters in the Advent and Christmas narratives react to the angels who appear? (Read together Luke 1:11-12, Luke 1:26-29, & Luke 2:9-10.)
- 3. Sometimes God's "breaking in" is more subtle than the appearance of an angel. What characterizes the presence of God in these passages? (Read together 1 Kings 19:11-3 & Romans 8:26.)
- 4. Have you ever felt the gentle assurance of God that you should continue in the direction you have chosen? Did this happen at a certain time in your life? Please share with the group about that experience and your response to God "breaking in" in this subtle way.
- 5. Have you ever felt God calling you to change direction in your life in a startling or profound way? Please share with the group about that experience and what changed in your life by responding to God's "breaking in".
- 6. What are some ways that you might attune yourself or be open to Jesus "breaking in" during this Advent and Christmas season?



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Please share with the group any prayer requests you may have this week. These could be things you are grateful for, people in your life you are praying for, or places in your own life that you desire God's presence. It is not a requirement to share a prayer request.

And then ask someone to close in prayer.