Breaking In Advent Study Week 3

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.

Pastor Chris

Opening Drayer

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.

Introductions

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

What is one Christmas present you recall giving to someone?



Group Promise

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.





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 1:26-38. Pause and then read Luke 1:39-56. (I am using the NRSVue translation.)

Bible commentators use an unusual word "pericope" [puhrik-uh-pee] to describe a section of the biblical text. A pericope is simply "a selection or extract from a book" (thank you, Dictionary.com). In biblical scholarship, a pericope usually contains one story or coherent thought. Today, we are exploring two pericopes (or pericopae - if you want to be fancy).

The first pericope is traditionally called the annunciation. In it, we hear the story of the Angel Gabriel visiting a young woman named Mary. The angel has some very startling news for Mary: particularly that, though she is a virgin, she will conceive a child by the power of the Holy Spirit who will be the long-awaited Messiah (savior of her people) and also the Son of God. Mary is a highly unlikely person to be chosen for this task. She is young, unmarried, poor, and living in an unimportant, backwater village called Nazareth. That does not stop God from sweeping her up in God's audacious breaking into human history. Mary may be young, but she is also deeply devout and unafraid. She consents to her part in God's mission (Luke 1:38), and she takes on the role (as she is often described in the Greek and Russian Orthodox faiths) of theotokos (or God-bearer).



In the second pericope, Mary goes with haste to visit her much-older cousin, Elizabeth. Elizabeth is also pregnant by miraculous means (having become so after the age of menopause), and she will be the mother of John the Baptist. When Mary arrives, John the Baptist leaps in Elizabeth's womb - signaling to Elizabeth that Mary has been blessed with this unimaginably important task. Elizabeth welcomes Mary, encourages, and pronounces a blessing over her. Elizabeth also is the first person in the Gospel of Luke to make a "christological confession." In other words, when she calls Mary the "mother of my Lord," Elizabeth is articulating that the baby about to be born of Mary is equal to God. As scholar Patrick Gray writes, "Christian readers are so accustomed to calling Jesus 'Lord' that the audacity of this statement may at first elude them." It is a radical claim.

The song of praise that Mary sings right after Elizabeth's confession is based on the Song of Hannah in the Hebrew scriptures. It thoroughly connects the present activity of God with the past, and yet God is also revealing Godself to Mary and Elizabeth in audacious new ways. These two women represent fidelity to God's covenant with the people of Israel and openness to God's present action. They invite us to honor our traditional faith as we rejoice in the new thing that God has done in Jesus and continues to do in our time and in every moment.





- 1. When you were growing up, how did you think about Jesus' mother Mary? What did you know about her? What words would you have used to describe her?
- 2. What word or words would you use to describe Jesus' mother Mary today?
- 3. Mary finds herself in a very difficult position when she becomes pregnant, so she goes to talk to her older cousin Elizabeth. When you find yourself in a difficult situation, who do you go to for support and advice?
- 4. Elizabeth supports her younger cousin with presence, affirmation, and blessing even though Elizabeth could have been rather scandalized by what was going on in Mary's life! Who is someone in your life that is younger or less experienced than you to whom you could offer the gift of presence, affirmation, and blessing this season?
- 5. Re-read Mary's song of praise (Magnificat) in Luke 1:46-56. What parts of this song jump out to you? What parts challenge you? What parts inspire you?



Drayer Regnests

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.

