

Advent Prayer and Reflection
Week 3: Christmas at the Home of Luke

Opening Prayer

Warm Up Question

How do you decorate the outside of your house at Christmas? What has been a favorite outdoor Christmas display you have visited or seen?

Luke's House; drawing by Kevin Burns



What do you notice about Luke's house? Does it remind you of any houses you have visited or seen?

Where does the Good news begin?

Mark 1:1—*The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

Matthew 1:1—*An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

Luke 1:5—⁵*In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.*

Luke 2:1-2—*In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.*

Luke 3:1-2—*In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.*

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He 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 ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The angel said to 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 holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸Then 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.

1. What do you notice in this passage? What surprises you?

2. What is different from the announcement of the angel we read in Matthew last week?

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” ¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

3. What do you notice in this passage? What surprises you?
4. What is missing in Luke’s telling of the story that we read in Matthew’s telling of the story?
5. The angels’ heavenly music is not just a pious sentiment. What meaning do you think Luke intends to convey by including the song?
6. Caesar Augustus styled himself as lord and savior of the world over which he ruled, and worshipping the emperor was part of the fabric of the culture. In our own time, can you identify persons, groups, or prevailing systems that seem to compete with Jesus Christ for our allegiance? If so, where do you see evidence of this in the current holiday season?

Luke 1:46-55 (Mary's Song—the Magnificat)

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵²He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Luke 1:67-79 (Zechariah's Song—the Benedictus)

⁶⁷Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy: ⁶⁸"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. ⁶⁹He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, ⁷⁰as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, ⁷¹that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. ⁷²Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, ⁷³the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us ⁷⁴that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. ⁷⁶And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. ⁷⁸By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, ⁷⁹to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

7. Zechariah and Mary sing songs through eyes of faith in the first chapter of Luke's gospel. Where do you see glimpses of God's promises in their songs/prayers/prophesies?

Peace on Earth by Ann Weems

"Peace on earth, good will to all..."

The song came out like one loud hosanna
hurled through the earth's darkness,
lighting the Bethlehem sky.

Sometimes I hear it now,
but it means a baby in a manger;
it means a time of year,
a cozy feeling,
a few coins in the Salvation Army bucket.

It doesn't mean much—
and then it's gone,
lost in the tinsel.

Where did the angels' song go?

Who hushed in the alleluias?

Was it death and war and disease and poverty?

Was it darkness and chaos and famine and plague?

Who brought violence and took away the sweet plucking of heavenly harps?

Who brought despair and took away hope?
Who brought barrenness and crushed the flowers?
Who stole the music and brought the silence?
What Herods lurk within our world to kill our children?
Are there still those
 who listen for the brush of angel wings
 and look for stars above some godforsaken little stable?

Are there still those
 who long to hear the angel's song
 and touch a star?
To kneel beside some other shepherd
 in the hope of catching a glimpse of eternity in a baby's smile?
Are there still those who sing
 "Peace on earth, good will to all"?
If there are—then, O Lord,
 keep ablaze their flickering candle
 in the darkness of this world!

Sharing Joys and Concerns

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

We give you our praise and thanks, O God, for all gifts of love we have received from you, and for your persistent mercy in Jesus Christ.

Especially we thank you for

Work we have accomplished pleasing to you...

The faithful witness of Christian people...

The example of righteousness we see in parents and teachers...

The innocence and openness we see in children...

All works of Christian compassion...

(Other prayers of Thanksgiving may be offered silently or aloud.)

We give you our cares and concerns, O God, because we know you are kind and care for your children in every circumstance.

Especially we pray for

Those who struggle with doubt and despair...

People afflicted with disease...

Those called to special ministries...

People neglected and abused...

The churches in Fayetteville and in other communities represented here...

(Other prayers of Intercession may be offered silently or aloud.)

To you, O God, we give up the burdens of this day, trusting your love and mercy. To you, O God, we surrender ourselves, trusting our risen Lord to lead us always in the way of peace, today, tomorrow, and forever. Amen.