

Instructions:

Group leaders, take some time before your gathering to look over these questions. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you pick 3-5 questions to discuss that pertain to your group's unique style and needs.



Series: Good News of Great Joy

The theme of joy comes up over and over again in the Christmas story. People experienced joy in times of darkness, uncertainty, and challenges back then, and we can too still today. Join us this Advent as we explore the moments of deep joy found throughout the story of Christmas in Luke and discover ways to cultivate that joy today. In this series, we don't just want to talk about joy, we actually want to practice experiencing joy in community together. Make plans to join us for one of the many ways we hope to experience the joy of Christmas this year!

Message description:

Rejoice with those who rejoice. The neighbors and relatives of Elizabeth and Zechariah play a crucial role after the birth of John the Baptist; they journey with the family in every emotional stage and help them find joy in praise and thanksgiving to God for who this child will be. From rejoicing, to questioning, to wonder, awe, and fear, these neighbors show us the gift of lived community; to bear witness together to the mighty acts of God and to anticipate with joy the world to come. How have your neighbors and friends helped you see God at work?

Key Scriptures

Luke 1:57-80

Questions Related to This Week's Message:

1. Where are you finding joy right now?
2. What stands out to you about the role of the neighbors and family in the naming and presentation of John?
3. What do you think it means that "fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea," (verse 65)?
4. How did the neighbors move to anticipate joy along with Zechariah and Elizabeth? When have you seen this happen in your own life?
5. Where have you seen God at work lately, and how can we celebrate this work with you?
6. How can this group help you expect to experience God, receive gifts with joy, and share the good news this Advent?

Going Deeper

On Communal Life:

Romans 12-16 gives direct instruction to the Christians living in Rome from the apostle Paul on living together in Christian community. (After 11 long chapters of theological discourse on the law, Jesus' power over sin and death, and Judaism, he finally gives some practical advice for the people! 😊)

If possible, read Romans 12-16 in preparation for your time together. Focus on Romans 15:1-7.

- What stands out to you in this passage?
- What do you think it means that the strong have an obligation to bear the failings of the weak?
- Where do you see hope articulated in the passage?
- Where do you see joy experienced in the unexpected, in relationship with neighbors, and/or in glorifying God?
- Read Romans 12, specifically vv 9-21. What in this passage challenges our church and/or you personally?

On the Canticle of Zechariah, the *Benedictus*:

- This is a hymn of praise with roots with a traditional Jewish psalm or credited to Jewish Christians
- The blessing locates the work of John in reference to God's promises to Israel and the saving work of Jesus.
- The song reaches backward in time to the words of the prophets, ancestors, Abraham, and to the character and purpose of God (one scholar claims 32 references to the Old Testament here!)... **What John will become can be appreciated only against the backdrop of what God has been doing.**
 - o **How is this similar to Mary's song (vv 46-56) and her ability to look backward to God's faithfulness and forward with assurance and hope?**
- "...to guide our feet into the way of peace" is the first of 14 references to peace in the gospel of Luke. **God's people cannot have redemption without peace.** Redemption, not just from political oppressors (Herod), but the creation of conditions where God's people are free to worship and serve God without fear... "all the days of our lives."
 - o Peace is closely associated with the redemptive work of God and the salvation that comes to God's people: angels announcement (2:14), peace to Simeon (2:29), the woman who wept on Jesus' feet (7:50), the woman with a hemorrhage (8:48), disciples on mission announce peace (Acts 10:36)... Jesus appears to disciples, peace be with you (24:36).
 - o **Choose 2-3 references of "peace" in Luke.** What does peace look like in each case? How is it tied to the redemptive work of Christ in those moments? What can peace look like for us today?