

**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: Word: blessings for a new beginning**

Advent is a time of preparation. We prepare our homes and our hearts to celebrate Christmas once again, when the birth of Jesus ushered in a new age; new ways of living and loving with hope, joy, and purpose. Advent is a journey toward this new beginning. And like on any journey, we need reminders, words of blessing that feel like steady ground as we step forward into the unknown.

Join us this Advent as we return to the familiar scriptures and traditions that root us in the fundamental truths of our faith. You are a blessing, we can't go alone, hope is always worth the risk, and love knows your name.

As you journey through this season, may you find words for courage and hope to begin again as we look forward to celebrating the ultimate Word coming to us; the Emmanuel, God with us.

**Message Description:**

Mary of Galilee is an unlikely vessel for God's incarnation. When introducing God's plan for redemption for the whole cosmos, you might expect an angel to appear to a king or a governor or someone well known and famous. At least someone wealthy, with resources, clout, and following. Surely, that person could have had a wider influence. But God chose Mary; young, unmarried, likely poor from a farming family, and living in *Nazareth*.

In response to the favor God had shown her, Mary proclaimed, "all generations will call be blessed." Mary was a blessing. And just like Mary, no matter how ordinary or small or forgotten you might feel, you have been invited into God's redemptive story as well— because each of us has the potential to carry God's love into a weary world. **We start this Advent journey with this core truth; *you are a blessing*.**

**Key Scripture:** Luke 1:26-38; Isaiah 43:1-7

**Questions based on this week's teaching:**

1. When you were a child, did you receive the message that you were a blessing? If you were raised in a faith tradition, did your faith teach you this message? If so, how did that shape your self-image and perceptions of others? If not, what messages did you internalize and receive? How did those messages shape you?
2. When have words become a life raft for you, buoying you through a difficult or uncertain season?
3. Though she may have been perceived as a "lesser one," Mary instead is chosen and named a "favored one." What does this teach us about who God claims and calls?
4. In her commentary, Kayla Craig claims: "We can't work our way to receiving God's compassion. It's already there—as present as the twinkling stars in the sky, as near as the clouds of breath on a cold night. *You are a blessing* because the One from whom all blessings flow sees you, knows you, and calls you by name." How do you receive this message? Do you embrace it? Do you resist it?