

Advent/Christmas texts
Bible Study class
Lesson 4 outline
July 9, 2017

Introduction

As was the case with our study of Matthew's "birth/infancy" texts, there is too much material in this section of Luke's Gospel to cover in one week. In fact, we would need several weeks to do this section justice.

Our Advent devotions will help the congregation understand and reflect on these passages, so for Sunday School we will be looking at the "big picture" in Luke 1-3. What themes emerge from study of this passage?

To prepare for this section, it is best to read it through in one section. Or, at the very least, read all of chapter 1, then chapter 2, then chapter 3. This will help you understand the overall theme.

As you read, you may want to make a list of the people you meet. In these accounts, who is "important?" Who or what makes them important? In what ways are the normal expectations of life and faith "turned upside down" in these passages?

Luke 1:5-25

1. What kind of people are Zechariah and Elizabeth?
2. Was Zechariah's question unreasonable? Is Gabriel's response unfair?
3. Who has power in this passage? Who thinks they have power? Who is weak?
4. In what ways are the normal expectations of life and faith changed?
5. What will John's role be in people's lives? What will this look like?

Luke 1:26-38

1. What kind of person is Mary? What has she done to deserve being chosen in this way?
2. How is her question to Gabriel different from Zechariah's?
3. What does power look like in this passage? Who is strong and who is weak?
4. We know from Matthew's gospel that people doubted Mary's story. Mary was the one person on earth from whom Jesus' conception was not a matter of faith; it was a matter of fact. How might this knowledge help and/or frustrate her when people doubted her story?

Luke 1:39-56

1. Many times people seem afraid to be used by God in significant ways. But these two women were both overjoyed and humbled by their calling. Why is their response different from ours? Did they have more to gain by accepting their place in God's plan, or did they have more to lose? How does this kind of thinking impact our availability for God to use?
2. Luke 1:46-55 is commonly known as the *Magnificat*. When you read these passages carefully, you see that Jesus' ministry will challenge the expectations and power structures of the day. How? What stories from later in Luke's gospel seem to confirm what we read here?

Luke 1:57-80

1. John's naming ceremony was very unusual. What lessons do you think Zechariah learned from his enforced silence?
2. In Zechariah's song about his son John—the *Benedictus*—what does salvation look like? In our study of the OT Advent texts, we noted that the prophets seemed to place a higher emphasis on justice, mercy, and fairness than they did the more "spiritual" aspects of faith. Does the *Benedictus* continue this theme?

Luke 2:1-7

1. Remember the prophecy from Micah 5:2-5a. Noting that, who has power in this passage?
2. Compare Emperor Augustus and the infant Jesus. Remembering that OT prophetic passages talk about a new social and political order (remember Isaiah 2:1-5), does the Messiah coming as an infant seem to make any sense? Why would God work this way?

Luke 2:8-20

1. Sometimes, it can be difficult to interpret passages like this one—we sing about it, see children's plays about it, and hear it read nearly every Christmas. What stands out to you?
2. Again thinking about our study of OT prophetic texts, we cannot overlook that the OT writers gave theological commentary on the political events of their day. Now that the Messiah is here, who notices? What kind of Messiah is this? Again, why would God work this way?

Luke 2:21-40

1. What do we learn about Joseph and Mary in verses 22-24? How important do they seem to be, in terms of their community?
2. Simeon and Anna seem like “strange” people. We might describe them “mystics.” The way they express their devotion to God is different from what we expect. Have you ever known anyone like them? What do their words about Jesus tell us about him?

Luke 3:1-18

1. John is a challenging character. In what ways does he challenge those who are coming to be baptized? Are his words of challenge appropriate? Would we want them to be the content for sermons today?