



WEEKLY STUDY

Week 1

This is the first week of Advent—a season in which we wait expectantly to celebrate Jesus’ birth in a manger. In the weeks leading up to Christmas eve we will be looking at the Christmas story through the eyes of Mary. This week we heard about the announcement given by the angel Gabriel to Mary. She wasn’t expecting a conversation with an angel that day, and she certainly wasn’t expecting to find out that she would become pregnant as a virgin. How we react to a change in plans says a lot about who we are. When God is the One changing the plans, we can react like Mary did. Even though she was frightened and thrown off by the news she received, she was able to submit to God’s will. Pay attention this week to God’s big and small changes of plans in your life.

Peace of Christ,
Dr. Mark Youngman
Pastor of Discipleship

If you are studying with your Providence Small Group or Discipleship Group, you can share from daily readings as well as the additional questions at the bottom of this guide. If you would like to get connected visit prov.church/smallgroups.

Find a time each day to read the passage of scripture and follow the daily prayer prompt. Pray this or another prayer as you move into your day.

*Unexpected God,
You show up in ways that often disrupt our expectations.
Some of the best moments in life stem from a surprising move on your part.
A surprise visit with a friend. A surprise baby. A surprise job offer. A surprise day with nothing scheduled.
Thank you for pushing me away from my plans in order to live in the wild reality of your plans for me.
Amen.*

DAILY STUDY

MONDAY: LUKE 1.26-34

In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee,²⁷ to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David.²⁸ Gabriel appeared to her and said, “Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!^[E]”

²⁹ Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. ³⁰ “Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ And he will reign over Israel^[1] forever; his Kingdom will never end!”

³⁴ Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.”

- Mary’s life was on a particular course. She was engaged to be married to Joseph, a descendant of King David. In those days, engagement was a legal status. This was happening! However she felt about her upcoming marriage, her life was set before her. Now, in a few short sentences, an angel of God changed everything. She had to be wondering, “How am I talking to an angel? How am I considered a favored woman? And how will I give birth to a son?” How can this happen? Have you ever had an alternate course present itself to you? Were you able to make a pivot? Have you ever felt that God was involved in your major life change?
- *God, thank you for laying out a new plan for your people—a plan that could lead to my own rescue. May I be open to your surprising words today. Amen.*

TUESDAY: LUKE 1.35-38

The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ What’s more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. ³⁷ For the word of God will never fail!”

³⁸ Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” And then the angel left her.

- The angel replied to Mary’s reasonable question in yesterday’s text (How can this happen?). The answer is God. God, through God’s Spirit, would cause Mary to conceive and give birth to a child. That’s a lot to take, but also her elderly relative Elizabeth was a few months away from having her first child. Mary seemed to begin to understand that she was a part of something that was much bigger than herself. This was a movement of God. And God’s word will never fail. There is a kind of surrender that has to take place in order to be a part of a bigger story. Mary identifies herself as God’s servant. Have you ever experienced this kind of surrender to God’s big plan?
- *Jesus, increase my faith today, that I may have faith to say yes to whatever God is calling me to. Amen.*

WEDNESDAY: LUKE 5.24b-26

Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, “Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!”

²⁵ *And immediately, as everyone watched, the man jumped up, picked up his mat, and went home praising God.*
²⁶ *Everyone was gripped with great wonder and awe, and they praised God, exclaiming, “We have seen amazing things today!”*

- This is just one example of how Jesus, the one who came through a surprise virgin birth, changed the expectations of so many others by inviting the lame to walk, the blind to see, and the prisoner to be set free. Everyone was gripped with great wonder and awe when a paralyzed man jumped up

and praised God. Is there an ailment or difficult situation that you long to hear Jesus invite you out of?

- *God of hope and healing, I long to hear the voice of your son calling me to life. Amplify his voice and make my heart receptive to his surprising healing power. Amen.*

THURSDAY: ISAIAH 2.1-4

This is a vision that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

² *In the last days, the mountain of the Lord's house
will be the highest of all—*

the most important place on earth.

It will be raised above the other hills,

and people from all over the world will stream there to worship.

³ *People from many nations will come and say,*

*“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of Jacob's God.*

There he will teach us his ways,

and we will walk in his paths.”

For the Lord's teaching will go out from Zion;

his word will go out from Jerusalem.

⁴ *The Lord will mediate between nations*

and will settle international disputes.

They will hammer their swords into plowshares

and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will no longer fight against nation,

nor train for war anymore.

- The prophets were called to give hard words of truth to the people around them, but also to provide a picture of the future. The picture here is of a time when things will be made right. God Himself will settle disputes around the world, and weapons of war will be turned into tools of harvest. Mary's humble acceptance of her role in the fulfillment of these words through Jesus made way for the coming resolution of all of our striving. Spend time considering all of the conflicts around the world. Can you imagine what it looks like for God to settle these disputes? Come Lord Jesus!
- *God, Your word is beautiful. It gives us hope today to know that thousands of years ago you were preparing a way for the redemption of the world. A redemption that is not yet fully realized. Amen.*

FRIDAY: ROMANS 13.11-14

This is all the more urgent, for you know how late it is; time is running out. Wake up, for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here. So remove your dark deeds like dirty clothes, and put on the shining armor of right living. ¹³ Because we belong to the day, we must live decent lives for all to see. Don't participate in the darkness of wild parties and drunkenness, or in sexual promiscuity and immoral living, or in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ Instead, clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And don't let yourself think about ways to indulge your evil desires.

- Even though these words from Paul were written almost 2,000 years ago, their urgency is just as true today. Salvation is nearer than when we first believed. Followers of Jesus can not grow complacent. The feelings of pregnancy that Mary began to feel can also apply to our time.

Salvation will soon be here, so don't despair and give up. Hold on, Jesus is coming into the world!
Are you seeing signs of expectancy in the world today? What signs give you hope?

- *Jesus, I welcome the day of your salvation and long for this long night to end. I commit myself to living in the light. Amen.*

SATURDAY: PSALM 72.1-5

*Give your love of justice to the king, O God,
and righteousness to the king's son.*

²*Help him judge your people in the right way;
let the poor always be treated fairly.*

³*May the mountains yield prosperity for all,
and may the hills be fruitful.*

⁴*Help him to defend the poor,
to rescue the children of the needy,
and to crush their oppressors.*

⁵*May they fear you as long as the sun shines,
as long as the moon remains in the sky.
Yes, forever!*

- When God sent a surprising message to a young unwed virgin in Galilee, the order of things was set to change. When we find ourselves in positions of influence (like King David and Solomon referred to in Psalm 72), our way of leading should be framed completely by that new reality. Where do you have influence? How does God's arrival in Jesus impact the way you use that influence?
- *God I am humbled by whatever position of influence I have. Remind me today that it comes from you and that I am your servant. May everything you have said about me come true. Amen.*

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Pastor Jacob said,

"Mary becomes the one we want to name our daughters after because she makes the expectation shift by claiming her identity in who God says she is. She is named bitter. She is a part of the nation of former slaves. Her people are the long suffering ones. She is just a girl in a patriarchal society. She lives in Nazareth. And God says YOU ARE HIGHLY FAVORED. And by claiming what God says, she changes what her name means forever. I am who you say I am. I want what you are saying is possible... to happen to me."

- What were your expectations for this season in your life? Were they met? Exceeded? Did they fall short?
- What were your expectations for the Thanksgiving Holiday? Were they met? Exceeded? Did they fall short?
- Considering all of your met or unmet expectations, practice praying Mary's prayer- "I am who you say I am, God. I want what you are saying is possible...to happen in my life. Amen"