



WEEKLY STUDY

Week 4

Pastor Angela shared a beautiful message that connected us deeply to the experience of Mary. We take time this week to consider what she was thinking, feeling, and experiencing in the days leading up to Jesus' birth. In our branch of the Christian church, we don't worship Mary or pray to her as divine, but we certainly should honor and respect this amazing woman who laid down her expectations of her own life and said yes to God. As Angela said in her message, Mary's "yes" was a "yes" for the sake of the whole world. As you read and pray during this final week of Advent, may God prepare your heart to receive the amazing gift of Jesus, Emanuel, God-with-us.

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.

*God-with-us,
Thank you for choosing to come to me.
In many ways I feel as unlikely and unprepared for your arrival as Mary must have felt.
Allow me to trust in your slow work, O God.
Like a child anticipating Christmas morning, I anticipate your return.
Come, Lord Jesus, Come.
Amen.*

DAILY STUDY

MONDAY: LUKE 2.1-7

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

- It's interesting how the narrator (Luke) takes over again so soon after Mary's beautiful song was poured out in chapter 1. Ultimately the story isn't about her or Joseph. Yet their perspective allows the story to be human—which is the whole point of the incarnation! **How did Mary and Joseph feel as they traveled the long road to Bethlehem?** Pregnancy was scary enough in those days, much less a seemingly scandalous pregnancy! Mary and Joseph come across as calm and determined. **Have you ever had a major detour or unplanned trip come up at an already stressful time? Can you relate to the trust displayed by Mary?**
- *Lord, help me to see my place in your story. I long to trust you with every step and through every detour. Amen.*

TUESDAY: EXODUS 14.13-14

¹³ Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."

- God was with Mary in the silence and uncertainty. Here in Exodus, God's people found themselves facing major uncertainty. Things didn't look good as Pharaoh's army was bearing down on them, but God's word through Moses was to be still and trust in God's deliverance. That took monumental trust. In the days leading up to Christmas, Mary learned that God would keep working in the stillness and uncertainty. **Are you able to stand still and trust God in the face of uncertainty?**
- *God of deliverance, I commit to standing still as you fight for me. I long for your victory and my salvation. Amen.*

WEDNESDAY: ROMANS 8.28-30

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

- We may have an idealistic picture of Christmas Eve. That's the benefit of thousands of years of distance! But Mary faced some obstacles to a peaceful delivery of her child. The thing she had going for her was a deep love of God. Based on her love of God, the words of the angel, and the words of the prophets, Mary had a trust that God was working for her good. Paul says it plainly in Romans 8—God is working towards our good. It may not look like it when your accommodations are with the livestock, but when you get a glimpse of Jesus like Mary did, you begin to see the good and slow work of God. **When was the last time you got a glimpse of Jesus?**
- *Jesus, I look to you as I put my trust in God. May I live according to your purpose. Amen.*

THURSDAY: MICAH 5.2

*“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.”*

- These words were already quite old when Mary gave birth to Jesus. Did Mary and Joseph think of these words as they traveled to Bethlehem? Did the shepherds remember them as the angels sang their chorus? There is a comfort and a calling when we witness the fulfillment of prophecy. Micah’s words say something about Jesus that might not have been obvious at the time. Jesus Christ was present in the beginning. The baby born at Christmas was from ancient times! We begin to get a sense of the grand scope of God’s salvation story that became fully visible in Jesus’ birth, life, death and resurrection. **Why is it fitting that Jesus was born in Bethlehem? Does it matter that Jesus’ “origins are from of old”? Why?**
- *God, You have written the best story for your creation. Give me pause to lift my head and see the gift of salvation that you set in motion far in advance. Amen.*

FRIDAY: ISAIAH 11.6

*The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.*

- These words from the prophet Isaiah come in the middle of a grand description of the coming Messiah who will “come up from the stump of Jesse”. The image of animals waiting on and being led by the child-Messiah brings to mind the scene in the manger. The presence of the animals represents the bowing down of all creation to Jesus. Jesus’ arrival disrupts the normal order of things, natural enemies stop attacking each other because they are too busy worshipping. **Did Mary and Joseph sense the magnitude of what was taking place? Do we?**
- *Jesus Christ, Son of God, through you all things have been created, including me. Tune my heart to a heart of peace and of worship. Bring your Kingdom now! Amen.*

SATURDAY: LUKE 2.15-19

When 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."

16 So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

17 When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child;

18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

19 But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

- Mary treasured and pondered the words of the shepherds. God was continuing to send confirmation to Mary about the identity and purpose of her son. **Who has God used to announce the truth of who Jesus is? What practices do you employ to continually ponder this truth?**
- *God, may my heart stay in a state of amazement and wonder at the things you have done for me this Christmas and forever. Amen.*

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Pastor Angela shared that Mary's story encourages us to trust in the slow work of God. That's how her story was able to unfold so beautifully. An early 20th century monk used that phrase in the poem below. As you read, notice the places of tension between our own bent to hurry, and the pace that God often seems to work.

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

*We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new. And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability and that it may take a very long time. And so I think it is with you. your ideas mature gradually – let them grow, let them shape themselves, without undue haste. Don't try to force them on, as though you could be today what time (that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will) will make of you tomorrow. Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. Give Our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete. – Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.
- Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.*

- When have you seen the slow work of God?
- Do you find yourself wanting to skip ahead to the conclusion of God's plan?
- How do you respond to God's pace?