



WEEKLY STUDY

WEEK 1

We are in the season of Advent. In the four weeks leading up to Christmas, we take time to mark the growing anticipation of the coming of Jesus Christ. The word Advent means just that—“coming or arrival.” We light a new candle each of these four Sundays as an invitation to wait with hope and joy for the ultimate sign that God is with us—Jesus, Emmanuel, the Prince of Peace. May you experience the presence and promise of God this week.

Peace of Christ,
Pastor Mark Youngman

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.

DAILY STUDY

MONDAY: LUKE 2.10 (ESV)

I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

- This word from God’s angel is coming to shepherds watching their flock. It indicates that the announcement is for ordinary people living their ordinary lives. When the angel announced Jesus’ birth to the shepherds they said it would bring “great joy for all the people!” In Sunday’s message, we said that God came into the world at Christmas to bring you joy. “All the people” includes you and me. It also includes the whole world. **Who are some of the people in the world (near and far) that need joy today?**
- *God, I pray for those who most desperately need the joy that comes through your gift of Jesus Christ. Surround them with your presence and your mercy. Bring them joy. Amen.*

TUESDAY: LUKE 1.26-33

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary.²⁸ And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.³⁰ And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid,

Mary, for you have found favor with God.³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

- The greeting given to Mary is an echo of similar greetings throughout scripture. In Judges 6.2 these words were spoken to Gideon, “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.” Mary may not have felt much like a warrior as a young, unmarried woman in an out of the way town, but she is favored by God. At the end of this passage the angel gives promises about who this child conceived in Mary’s womb will be for the world. The language of an unending reign is not new. It was anticipated that the Messiah would sit on the throne of David and reign forever. 2 Samuel 7.13-16 speaks of the covenant of David which establishes that the throne upon which Jesus will ultimately sit is an everlasting covenant and kingdom. Mary’s encounter was in line with a story of redemption that God had been preparing. **When have you been most aware that your life is about more than just the here and now?**
- *God, put my life in Kingdom-context. I want my years to make a difference and spread good news of great joy for your people. Amen.*

WEDNESDAY: LUKE 1.34-35

And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

³⁵ And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.

- Mary’s question is understandable and does not necessarily reflect doubt in the announcement. Instead, her question reveals a gap between our ways and God’s ways. Biology would reveal that it is impossible for her to have a child. What she is asking is *how, how will God do this impossible thing?* The scope of the announcement is elevated when put in context of the prophecy that had gone before. Isaiah 7.14 gave us the prophecy that a virgin shall conceive. What was happening in Mary’s time made sense of what had happened hundreds of years earlier. **Have you ever had reason to question what God was doing? Describe what you discovered through the questioning.**
- *God, allow me to know your ways, and give me the faith to keep going when they don’t seem to make sense. Amen.*

THURSDAY: MATTHEW 1.21-23

Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”

- Matthew put this announcement to Joseph in the context of the prophecy mentioned in yesterday’s reading. Isaiah is quoted to explain to Joseph how this is all a part of God’s plan to redeem his people. While the world around him most likely would not understand the circumstances of his fiancée’s pregnancy, Joseph was assured that he would be a part of

proclaiming the name of Jesus upon his birth. **Have you had an opportunity to proclaim Jesus' arrival into a situation in the world around you? If so, how was that message received?**

- *God, use me as you will for your purposes. I want to faithfully follow your work of redemption in the world around me. Amen.*

FRIDAY: LUKE 1.36-38

And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸ And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

- Hidden in this short passage is a foundational belief for those who follow Jesus. Nothing is impossible for God. **What "impossible" thing are you facing today? What "impossible" things have you seen God accomplish in your life?** Mary's statement of faith is beautiful and convicting for the rest of us who are called to live for God: "I am God's servant. Let it be to me according to your word."
- *God, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word. Amen.*

SATURDAY: JOHN 16.20-24

Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. ²¹ When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. ²² So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. ²³ In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. ²⁴ Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

- The message this week was titled, "Surprised by Joy". That could summarize the life of a Jesus follower who is living in this world. We are not conditioned for joy. C.S. Lewis borrowed the phrase "Surprised by Joy" from a poet and he made it the title of his book that primarily seeks to reveal how joy is found in the person of Jesus. **What places do you most often look for joy? Where do you consistently find joy?**
- *Jesus, I look to you for the source of my joy. In this world we feel the birth pains of what is to come and sometimes it feels very uncomfortable. Keep my eyes trained on the good news of great joy. Amen.*

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

C.S. Lewis makes a distinction between joy, happiness, and pleasure.

I call it Joy, which is here a technical term and must be sharply distinguished both from Happiness and Pleasure. Joy (in my sense) has indeed one characteristic, and one only, in common with them; the fact that anyone who has experienced it will want it again... I doubt whether anyone who has tasted it would ever, if both were in his power, exchange it for all the pleasures in the world. But then Joy is never in our power and Pleasure often is." - C.S. Lewis, Surprised by Joy

- Considering the readings from this week, what have you learned about joy that you didn't already know?
- Based on Lewis' quote, what is the difference between joy and pleasure?
- What will you do to seek true joy in Jesus Christ this week?