

## Discussion Notes

*The Hope of Jesus and the Joy that it brings*

November 27, 2016

Leanne McAlister

The angels told the shepherds that Jesus' arrival was "good news of great joy for all people". Why is this such good news? To whom and how far does it reach? This series explores these questions through the lens of Jesus' birth in Luke's Gospel.

### Introduction to Luke

- Luke is aware of the stories circulating concerning Jesus. He assembles his own orderly account of Jesus' life based on reliable witnesses (Luke 1.1-4).
- Luke is a vivid storyteller who gives us details meant to spark our curiosity and engagement in the story of Jesus' life.
- Luke also demonstrates that the coming of Jesus is not a new thing. It is the fulfillment of Jewish expectations, which is distinct considering Luke was a Gentile.
- Luke highlights the extraordinary in-breaking of God's kingdom among *ordinary people*.
- He follows this kingdom in-breaking with an account of Jesus' disciples in Acts.

### Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1.5-25, 39-45, 57-80)

- Zechariah is a priest and Elizabeth is his wife. They are presented as faithful Jews adhering to the commandments of God.
- Elizabeth was barren. This would lead to stigmatization because barrenness was considered a punishment from God.
- Zechariah was chosen by lot to enter the holy of holies—this was literally a once in a lifetime opportunity.
- The angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah and declares that he will have a son who will fulfill the expectation of a prophet like Elijah coming to prepare the way of the Lord.
- Zechariah questions the possibility of this happening and is made mute for nine months.
- He enters a period of *listening* rather than speaking. He is given time to reflect on the direness of the Jewish situation under Rome. Is there any hope?
- Elizabeth meets Mary and the infant John leaps in her womb. This is a signal that something big is happening and we need to pay attention.
- Usually children were named to honor a male family member. When Elizabeth says the name of her child will be John, people are surprised because no one in her family bears that name.
- Elizabeth and Zechariah were faithful to the commandment of God against the prevailing cultural practices.
- Zechariah's silence is broken and the first thing he does is praise.
- His praise is a revelation brought about by the filling of the Holy Spirit.
- His prophetic poem highlights how the promises to David (2 Sam. 1-17) has been fulfilled.

- Israel will be given rest from her enemies! But this is more than just political salvation.

### **Three things to ponder**

1. *These two were ordinary people:*
  - Zechariah and Elizabeth were normal people on the teeter-totter between faith and doubt.
  - Their story demonstrates that we do not need to have it all together to encounter God!
  - What does God look for? People with humble hearts who want to see Him glorified.
2. *They were empowered to participate:*
  - “Filled with the Spirit” is a favorite phrase in Luke’s writing.
  - God had been silent for 400 years. Zechariah and Elizabeth were not just heralds of a new age, they were empowered to participate in this new thing God was doing.
  - We can be filled too!
  - God wants to show up, we should expect it.
  - We hold hope in our hands and are called to share it with those we encounter.
  - We should be voices speaking hope, truth and encouragement. People need Jesus’ hope!
3. *We serve a promise-keeping God:*
  - We may not be under the thumb of a conquering empire like Rome, but this text still applies to us.
  - We all experience longing and the disappointment of longings unfulfilled.
  - Waiting can turn us into hopeless cynics.
  - Jesus wasn’t exactly the warrior messiah many expected. God knows what we need and doesn’t always give us what we want.
  - We have hope that our pasts do not define our futures. God keeps His promises.
  - His solutions to our longings may surprise us. We must be humble enough to accept the fact we don’t always know what we need.
  - We must hold fast to hope!

### **Discussion Questions**

- What are some of your longings right now?
- Have you ever had a significant spiritual experience? Did it lead to any further developments in your life?
- Describe a time God fulfilled your expectations in a way different than you anticipated.
- How does it help us to remember God’s faithfulness in our personal journeys? What rhythms of remembrance can you incorporate into your life?