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Introduction

Christmas is synonymous with gift-giving for many. The only thing better than receiving the perfect gift is giving it. There's something wonderful about that gift that fills the heart of the one you love. Perhaps it was a much-needed gift, or maybe a long-awaited gift. Or maybe much effort and preparation was put into assembling or purchasing the gift. Gifts can be special in many different ways.

Beyond reminding us about gifts in general, Christmas is a time to remember God giving His greatest gift, the Ultimate Christmas Gift: Jesus.

He was a gift that, whether we knew it or not, was desperately needed. God prepared the perfect timing for His entry into human history and this arrival was certainly long-awaited by the people of Israel. Their longing was satisfied when Jesus came on the scene some 2000 years ago, and He fulfills our longings as well. Our longings for purpose, for hope, for joy, and peace are fulfilled as we look at *The Gift* this Christmas season.

We have created this resource to aid you in walking through the Christmas story this year. For each passage we have assembled a few bullet points. Some will have background information, others will have some points on discipleship, and still others might explain some grammar or literary themes. All in all, we wanted to give you a resource to help you see Jesus' first steps – and the ones of faithful people leading up to them – a little more clearly so you can walk in them. We're here to help, but you'll soon find joy in unwrapping the gift of the Scriptures each day. To help on your journey, here's what you'll find for each section:

1. The actual text of the Bible. The translations will change quite often to expose you to the different kinds of translations available to us in English. You're welcome to read the translations we have provided or open your own Bible and read the day's section from Luke's gospel or the Old Testament.
2. "Explorer's Notes" are those notes previously mentioned. These are written by some of the staff on site as well as some of our missionary staff around the world (see their bios in the next section). These notes are meant to be food for thought to help you get a little more out of your Bible reading than you might on your own.
3. Finally, we have some open space for you to journal using the SOAP method. We have directions for how to SOAP starting on page 4.

If you've enjoyed exploring some of the prophecies leading up to Jesus' birth and Luke's detailed account of it, check out our similar, though much larger, resource on the life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke called *STEPS: Following Where Jesus Leads*.

What are these Old Testament passages about?

The bulk of this resource works through the arrival of Jesus as reported in the Gospel of Luke, but the story of Messiah started long before Jesus came on the scene. It was the hope that God gave from the beginning of the Bible (Genesis 3) and then carried throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. The coming Messiah, Jesus, did not come out of the blue; people were waiting, hoping for generations. We want to ponder some of these amazing promises and expectations before we jump into Luke's angle on Jesus' birth.

Bible Translations

The best Bible translation is the one you'll read, but we have selected a variety of them to help you get a taste for some of the options available. You will see abbreviations for these translations throughout the pages to follow, particularly at the top of each entry. Here's their meaning:

ESV	English Standard Version (2016)
NASB	New American Standard Bible (2020)
NIV	New International Version (2011)
NKJV	New King James Version (1982)
NLT	New Living Translation (2015)



Guest Missionary Authors

Lisa Everitt. Along with her husband Dave, the Everitts are based in the Pacific Northwest. Dave is working with NOVO, breaking spiritual ground for a disciple making movement in the Near East. Lisa is focusing her cross-cultural training with the working class American, trying to understand how to be and bring Good News to the people of Portland, Oregon.

Holly Melton. Holly has been in vocational ministry since 1999 with Cru. She is an author, speaker, and ministry coach. She is married to Matt and they have two children, Briella and Carter. You can learn more about their ministry and Holly's books and podcasts at: mattandhollymelton.org.

Tony Rodriguez. Tony is president and co-founder (with his wife Jane) of their ministry, House of Hope. He has been in ministry since 1984, but in 2005 he became a missionary to India, starting House of Hope, which is committed to training pastors, leading missions trips, and supporting an orphanage with 125 children in residence. Over the years, hundreds of thousands have found Christ, hundreds of churches have been planted, and over 120 pastors have been trained. To learn more or to partner with the ministry, Tony can be contacted at (714) 334-3129 or houseofhopeasia@gmail.com.

Jennifer Weaver. Married to Greg, the Weavers were originally sent out as global workers from Neighborhood Church then known as ypress church in 2012. Greg was virtually born at Neighborhood Church and Jennifer came around in middle school. They had served in several capacities before going overseas. They have three children Makayla, Ezekiel, and Zoey. They now live in Portugal and minister to church plants, local businesses, and global missionaries around the world through leadership and team development and organizational health under the umbrella of Be One Together.

Kristie Wiedle. Kristie began attending Neighborhood Church and served as a middle school and high school leader in our youth group while attending UCI. Kristie also met her husband, Greg, at UCI in 1991. In 1993, they joined the staff of Cru (formerly known as Campus Crusade for Christ), married, and moved to Orlando, Florida. Open the QR code below to view their brief greeting for Neighborhood Church and learn more about their ministry.



How to use this resource

We want to explore the wonderful gift of Jesus this Christmas season. We have a few passages from the Old Testament as well as the birth (and childhood) narratives of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke. While we have some Explorer's Notes to help you on this journey, the power for change lies in engaging the Scriptures by the power of the Holy Spirit. Explorer's Notes are intended to be aids to understanding and possibly deeper study, but the greater goal is to help you draw nearer to Jesus through the passages that point to God's great mission of saving humanity through the work of Jesus, which will empower us to live on mission for Him, even amid this busiest of times.

We have found the SOAP method to be exceedingly helpful for meeting God in the Scriptures. Here's how you can get the most out of your SOAP experience. And if you're wondering what "SOAP" even means, it's an acronym that we'll explain shortly. But first, you need to prepare your heart and mind to hear from God. So, before delving into the passage for the day ...

- Find a quiet place. Somewhere you are less likely to be distracted. Ideally, you want to have an unhurried time with the Lord, but you should plan to spend at least 15-30 minutes.
- Pray. Even before you open your devotional, spend some time praying. Praise God in prayer – read some Psalms if you need help (for example, Psalms 104 or 116). Confess any sin you may be holding on to (see 1 John 1:9), and ask God what He wants to show you.

Now to that acronym!

S is for Scripture

After you've found your quiet place and prayed, reflectively read the day's passage. Read it carefully, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what He would like you to learn from the reading. Write down any parts of the text that you think God wants you to focus on. It could be a sentence or two; it could be a word or two. Write it down. The discipline of writing out God's Word is a good habit that helps us remember and consider the meaning of God's Word. Second ...

O is for Observation

What do you think is happening in this passage? What is the basic meaning of the passage? How does it fit with what's gone before? Context is critical. The better our understanding of context, the better we'll grasp what God is trying to say to us. Look for repeated words or themes. What does the passage teach us about God? Humanity? Write down your thoughts. Next ...

A is for Application

Now that we have a grasp of what God is trying to say, we need to wrestle with what He wants us to do with it in our lives. Consider what God is saying to you personally. Since you've been praying as you've been reading, what might God be saying to you? If He has shown another facet of His character to you, what's your proper response? If He challenges you about an attitude or action, how will you now make it so or change it? If God challenged you with building a godly character trait, how can you cooperate with the Holy Spirit to see that trait developed in your life? If God gave you a directive, what is your plan to fulfill what He has asked you to do? And finally ...

P is for Prayer

Talk to God about what He has just led you to discover. Our goal is not some exhausting works-driven relationship. If God has given you a task, He's going to empower you to follow through, but He didn't create you to do it in your own strength. Ask Him for strength to follow up on what He's leading you to do.

If you are unsure what He's asking you to do, ask Him for insight. But don't worry. Not every day ends in a life-changing crossroad. Sometimes it's slowly turning us and shaping us. Our task is to engage Him and keep listening. It's possible you will have a decisive spiritual turning point during one of these devotional times. We hope you do! But for most of us it's going to be a slow process that builds momentum over time. We want to set ourselves before God and see Him work; we'll let Him choose how He does it!

And that's it for the time in the Word, but the beautiful thing about Jesus' birth is that, while it took place more than 2000 years ago, it still speaks to people powerfully today. So, whenever possible, put what you learn into practice and tell a friend. Find out what God is teaching them, too. You'll be amazed how much more we learn and grow when it becomes a group project!

Before we enter into the fascinating account of the anticipation and then fulfillment of Jesus' birth, please take a minute to make sure you have a relationship with Jesus, the true reason for this season, in our next section.



Unwrapping the Gift of Jesus

This resource you are reading has been created to help you experience life with Jesus by looking into His arrival as an infant to our world some 2,000 years ago. His birth was not a historical accident. He came to give us life. Jesus said it this way in John's Gospel: *"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."* – John 10:10b

What a gift! However, this abundant life that God is calling us to isn't how the rest of the world would define abundant because sometimes life is incredibly difficult. At the most fundamental level, it's about being connected to God and experiencing the abundance that comes with being connected to the true vine (see John 15), God Himself.

Jesus, God's Son, came to bring us abundant life, but we won't experience it – at least not God's way – until we choose to respond to God's invitation calling us to Himself. This is called the Gospel, which means "good news." Specifically, it is what God has done for us through Jesus. Accepting His invitation, His free gift brings us from a state of separation from Him to becoming His daughters and sons. It's unwrapping the gift of salvation that brings us into God's forever family. It is the best news ever, but we should ask, "What is this 'good news,' and how do we respond to it?"

Good news is often best contrasted with bad news. So, let's get the bad news first. We are born separated from God as Psalm 51:5 states. Our sin, all the wrong things we think, do and say, separates us from Him. Romans 3:23 makes this painfully clear: *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"* The cost of this sin is separation from God as Romans 6:23 says: *"For the wages of sin is death."* Bad news, indeed. We are all part of a vast crowd separated from God, likely buried in our shame, and living in fear of death. But this isn't the end of the story.

God sent His Son Jesus on a rescue mission to a rebellious humanity as a light into the darkness:

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:11-12).

Jesus took this step so that we might follow Him. Surprisingly, death plays a critical factor in this journey to a different kind of life. The Gospel of Mark verse 10:45 says it beautifully: *"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

We find life with God through Jesus' death. He paid the ransom, the punishment for our sin in our place. It is a gift prepared for us; we have to decide if we'll receive it.

As you work through this resource, you're going to meet with Jesus daily. You'll see who He really is and what that means for your life. We think you'll really like Him. In a moment we'll show you how to start a friendship or relationship with Him, how to become one of His followers.

It's possible that you already know who He is; you've just been putting off starting that relationship, that friendship with Him. It's a big decision. It will change your life, because He isn't just looking to save you for heaven someday, He wants to change your life today. He wants to take you from a state of curiosity to actually becoming convinced that He is the Son of God who died for you and rose again. Beyond that, He wants you committed to Him and His purposes, which means being commissioned to serve others. He wants to set you free from guilt, fear, and shame, and then commission you to set others free in Him as well by sharing this very same good news. What an amazing gift and an amazing honor!

This decision is an act of surrender. You're choosing to give up leading your own life and instead giving leadership to Jesus and following Him. As scary as that might seem, He is completely trustworthy, and He loves you profoundly. Listen to one of the most famous passages in all of the Bible: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* (John 3:16)

Salvation isn't a matter of earning something; it's a matter of trusting Jesus alone for your salvation and then allowing Him to change your life for your good and His glory. When you do, He will infuse your life with hope, power, purpose, and honor. What a gift! If you'd like to take that step of following Jesus, pray this prayer – if you really mean it:

Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner, and I know that this sin stops me from living the way you intended for me to live my life. I recognize this sin holds me back from relating to You. It burdens me with shame and keeps me shackled in fear. I know I need a Savior, and I believe You, Jesus, paid the penalty for my sin to set me free from my fear, shame, and guilt. So, I ask You to forgive my sin, and I accept You as my Lord and Savior. Thank you! Amen!

If that prayer reflects the depths of your heart, welcome to God's family! Be sure to tell someone. You'll likely jump into this study with a passion and a power unlike you've experienced other times you've read the Bible.

For those of you who aren't yet ready to make this commitment, we respect that. This is a big decision. We challenge you to keep reading, and we hope you are open to the wonder of the gift of life offered to us through Jesus.

Why the Gift?



Genesis 3:1-15 (NASB)

Now the serpent was more cunning than any animal of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God really said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"² The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat;³ but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'"⁴ The serpent said to the woman, "You certainly will not die!⁵ For God knows that on the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will become like God, knowing good and evil."⁶ When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took some of its fruit and ate; and she also gave *some* to her husband with her, and he ate.⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves waist coverings.

⁸ Now they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.⁹ Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to

him, "Where are you?"¹⁰ He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself."¹¹ And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?"¹² The man said, "The woman whom You gave *to be* with me, she gave me some of *the fruit of* the tree, and I ate."¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this *that* you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."¹⁴ Then the LORD God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this,
Cursed are you more than all the
livestock,
And more than any animal of the field;
On your belly you shall go,
And dust you shall eat
All the days of your life;
¹⁵ And I will make enemies
Of you and the woman,
And of your offspring and her
Descendant;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise Him on the heel."



Explorer s Notes

- This episode is directly after God created the universe, and it was declared “very good” (see Genesis 1:31). This shows how sin entered the world and ruined everything. It shows us why we need a savior, and we get the first promise of Him.
- How does the serpent’s characterization of God match up with what God actually said in Genesis 2:15-17?
- Notice how sin degrades. God calls Adam to account and Adam blames Eve who, in turn, blames the serpent. Nobody is taking responsibility and relationships are fractured between God and humanity and man and woman.
- This curse is devastating (keep reading in Genesis 3 for the rest of it), but notice how God gives hope even as He is cursing. Genesis 3:15 is what some call the *protoevangelion*, which means “first gospel.” It is the promise of One who will defeat evil: Messiah or Savior.
- We see this promise begin to be fulfilled in Genesis 22:17-18. This descendant who will rescue will come through the line of Abraham, through the people of Israel.

As you read this section, what verse or verses seem to pop out or resonate with you? It could be the Holy Spirit prompting you or giving you an inkling to take a moment and explore what God may be saying to you. Follow the instructions for the S.O.A.P. method on page 4 and interact with the Lord on the verse or verses He drew you to.

Scripture

Observation

Application

Prayer

Promises of the Gift





Isaiah 9:1-7 (NASB)

But there will be no *more* gloom for her who was in anguish. In earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He will make *it* glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

² The people who walk in darkness
Will see a great light;
Those who live in a dark land,
The light will shine on them.

³ You will multiply the nation,
You will increase their joy;
They will rejoice in Your presence
As with the joy of harvest,
As *people* rejoice when they divide the spoils.

⁴ For You will break the yoke of their burden
and the staff on their shoulders,
The rod of their oppressor, as at the battle
of Midian.

⁵ For every boot of the marching warrior in
the roar *of battle*,
And cloak rolled in blood, will be for
burning, fuel for the fire.

⁶ For a Child will be born to us, a Son will
be given to us;
And the government will rest on His
shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful
Counselor, Mighty God,

Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ There will be no end to the increase of *His*
government or of peace

On the throne of David and over his
kingdom,

To establish it and to uphold it with justice
and righteousness

From then on and forevermore.

The zeal of the LORD of armies will
accomplish this.



Explorer's Notes

- The prophet Isaiah is sent to Israel who has been choosing their own way instead of choosing God's way, and have now plunged themselves into darkness and despair. In their attempt to secure themselves apart from their Creator, they are lost, confused, and craving security from everyone and everything except God.

- Israel was first conquered in the towns of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali near Galilee. However, God is surer and stronger than any of Israel's enemies or past failures, thus they are promised joy and triumph in a place where they have only experienced the grief and despair that comes with being a conquered people.
- For the third time in Isaiah, God is promising change associated with the promise of a child (see also Isaiah 7:14 and 8:3). God is going to bring victory out of disaster that will change everything because of this promised Messiah (9:6-7).
- This Messiah is no mere human, but will be the Son of God, coming through the royal line of David (see Matthew 4:14-16). He will turn our darkness into His light, our conflict into His 'peace' (*shalom*), our despair into His joy forever!
- The question then becomes: *Have we prepared room for Him in our hearts? Have we chosen to entrust our desires for security, control, and peace to Him? Have we allowed the Child-King to govern our lives?* Only when we do will we understand how God is truly with us and begin to experience the long-awaited gift of grace found in the God who came to be with us.

As you read this section, what verse or verses seem to pop out or resonate with you? It could be the Holy Spirit prompting you or giving you an inkling to take a moment and explore what God may be saying to you. Follow the instructions for the S.O.A.P. method on page 4 and interact with the Lord on the verse or verses He drew you to.

Scripture

Observation

Application

Prayer

Zephaniah 3:14-17 (NASB)

¹⁴ Shout for joy, daughter of Zion!
Shout *in triumph*, Israel!
Rejoice and triumph with all *your* heart,
Daughter of Jerusalem!
¹⁵ The LORD has taken away *His* judgments
against you,
He has cleared away your enemies.
The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your
midst;
You will no longer fear disaster.
¹⁶ On that day it will be said to Jerusalem:
“Do not be afraid, Zion;
Do not let your hands fall limp.
¹⁷ The LORD your God is in your midst,
A victorious warrior.
He will rejoice over you with joy,
He will be quiet in His love,
He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.



Explorer's Notes

- God's invitation through Zephaniah is that if God's people turn back to Him in trust, they can erupt in joy now anticipating the day when God arrives. His very presence removes all fears that would steal the joy, relief, and salvation of the King Himself.

What fear in your heart is God inviting you to hand over to Him today, for His glory and your good?

- Forgiveness. Justice. Redemption. Protection. Victory. Peace! All of these are cause for singing, shouting, and celebration because all of these come from God. On that day, He will deliver it Himself because He will be with you.
- In the New Testament, another daughter of Zion, Mary, will be reminded of this promise (see Luke 1:28-33). On a very special day, when she will be filled with the presence of God Himself, Mary will experience the fulfillment of Zephaniah's promise by which the mighty Savior will come through her to usher in this day of joy, relief, and the everlasting difference made by the King of Israel!
- The Hebrew word *qereb* "in your midst" (verses 15,17) can be more fully understood as that which comes from the inward part, as inside the body, and can literally be translated, "The King of Israel, the LORD, is 'in your womb.'" Thus, that which was being made in Mary's womb was the promised Mighty One who would save! *Where might God be working in your life, in your midst, even inside you, to deliver His promises, His protection, and His peace?*

As you read this section, what verse or verses seem to pop out or resonate with you? It could be the Holy Spirit prompting you or giving you an inkling to take a moment and explore what God may be saying to you. Follow the instructions for the S.O.A.P. method on page 4 and interact with the Lord on the verse or verses He drew you to.

Scripture

Observation

Application

Prayer

Micah 5:1-5a (NIV)

5 Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops;

siege is laid against us;

with a rod they strike the judge of Israel
on the cheek.

² But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the
clans of Judah,

from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old,
from ancient days.

³ Therefore he shall give them up until the
time

when she who is in labor has given
birth;

then the rest of his brothers shall return
to the people of Israel.

⁴ And he shall stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD
his God.

And they shall dwell secure, for now he
shall be great
to the ends of the earth.

⁵ And he shall be their peace.



Explorer's Notes

- Micah was a prophet who spoke for God before the fall of Samaria at the time King Hezekiah reigned over Judah (the southern kingdom of Israel). Micah also witnessed

the destruction of Israel (the northern kingdom) by the rising Assyrian empire in 722 BC. Micah writes to bring God's charges against His people (3:8).

- Micah 5:1-15 is about a new hope for Israel and for the whole world. This hope comes through a new David whose deeds are praised (verses 1–6). There will also be an influential remnant among the nations (verses 7-9). The chapter concludes with the divine removal of all idolatries (vv. 10–15).
- Like Israel, we face times that seem hopeless. The enemy is encroaching and utter defeat seems sure. Micah reminded God's people that the Messiah is coming. He will righteously rule (verse 2). He will be the Good Shepherd (verses 2-3). He will bring perfect peace (verse 5a).
- Micah 5 points to Jesus as the Messiah in the line of King David who would come from Bethlehem (see Matthew 2:1-6 and John 7:42).
- Bethlehem means "house of bread." Ephrathah is another name for Bethlehem. Ephrathah means "fruitful." From this little town came Jesus, called the "Bread of Life" (John 6:35). True fruitfulness comes from a life of following Jesus (John 15:16).

As you read this section, what verse or verses seem to pop out or resonate with you? It could be the Holy Spirit prompting you or giving you an inkling to take a moment and explore what God may be saying to you. Follow the instructions for the S.O.A.P. method on page 4 and interact with the Lord on the verse or verses He drew you to.

Scripture

Observation

Application

Prayer

A collection of brown cardboard boxes of various sizes scattered on a bright blue background. The boxes are arranged in a non-uniform pattern, with some overlapping and others standing alone. The lighting creates soft shadows, giving the boxes a three-dimensional appearance. The overall composition is clean and modern.

Preparing for the Gift



Luke 1:1-4 (NIV)

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us,² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.³ With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.



Explorer's Notes

- While this opening paragraph to Luke's gospel might not seem terribly exciting, it is laying a foundation that we have already been reflecting upon. First, we see that the Jesus story is not some historical accident, it is a fulfillment of God's promises from the beginning. Luke intends to give a reliable account of the true story of Jesus.
- Luke is traditionally and unanimously considered to be the author of this gospel (a biography of Jesus). He was a physician (Colossians 4:14) and an associate of Paul on some of his missionary journeys in the sequel to this gospel, the Book of Acts. He is also a fellow worker of the Apostle Paul based upon what are called "we" passages, indicating Luke accompanied Paul (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18).
- "Theophilus" means "beloved of God" or "one who loves God." Because of this, some think it is just a name for all believers. However, it was a common name at the time and possibly the patron who sponsored this project. Either way, it applies more broadly to all who are "beloved of God" or "ones who love God" as its purpose was to give an orderly account of the developing Christian faith of the time.¹
- Think about how these promises and purposes help strengthen your faith as you go into your time of journaling.

As you read this section, what verse or verses seem to pop out or resonate with you? It could be the Holy Spirit prompting you or giving you an inkling to take a moment and explore what God may be saying to you. Follow the instructions for the S.O.A.P. method on page 4 and interact with the Lord on the verse or verses He drew you to.

Scripture

Observation

Application

Prayer

¹ Mark L. Strauss, "Luke" in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, pp. 322, 324.

Luke 1:5-25 (NIV)

⁵ In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. ⁶ Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. ⁷ But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

⁸ Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, ⁹ he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. ¹⁶ He will bring back many of the

people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

¹⁸ Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

¹⁹ The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. ²⁰ And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. ²² When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

²³ When his time of service was completed, he returned home. ²⁴ After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. ²⁵ "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

Explorer's Notes

- To have a priestly lineage, one's family must be descended from the tribe of Levi, and specifically from the line of Aaron, the brother of Moses. Priests were responsible for executing the ceremonies and rituals at the Temple in Jerusalem.
- During the time of King David, priests were divided into 24 divisions (see 1 Chron. 24:7-19). These divisions would take turns serving in the Temple for a week at a time, twice a year. The division of Abijah was one of these 24 divisions.
- The priesthood has ended for Jesus followers because He is now our High Priest (see Hebrews 6:20) and intercedes on our behalf to the Father (see Romans 8:34).
- Gabriel is a prominent angel in Scripture. In addition to this announcement, He will also announce the birth of Jesus to Mary. Gabriel is also described as an angel who provides interpretation and understanding of visions to the prophet Daniel in the book of the same name (see Daniel 8:16; 9:21-22).
- Zechariah was challenged to take a step of faith. Is there any area where you sense God calling you to take a step of faith and fully rely on Him?

As you read this section, what verse or verses seem to pop out or resonate with you? It could be the Holy Spirit prompting you or giving you an inkling to take a moment and explore what God may be saying to you. Follow the instructions for the S.O.A.P. method on page 4 and interact with the Lord on the verse or verses He drew you to.

Scripture

Observation

Application

Prayer

Luke 1:26-38 (ESV)

²⁶ 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."

³⁴ 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. ³⁶ 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.



Explorer's Notes

- Mary was called the "favored one" not because she was going to become the mother of the Messiah, but because God was with her. Before Christ, the Holy Spirit would come and go, but now, all believers have God with us through the indwelling Holy Spirit given at the moment of salvation. God has created us. Jesus died for us, and the Holy Spirit enables us to do the impossible like Mary.

- Being favored does not always mean we feel favored. Mary may not have felt favored when she was told she'd be pregnant before marriage, which was a disgrace in her culture. It may have felt more like a curse. She had to trust that God was going to walk through this life-altering situation with her. She had to rest in the fact that her identity was in how God saw her more than anyone else. Is there a time you didn't feel favored by God in your life?
- God wanted to use Mary's life for His purposes, and God wants to use ours, too. For Mary to be used by God, it was going to take trust, surrender, and the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. When we submit our will and lives over to the Holy Spirit, our broken, sin-filled lives can be rebuilt, restored, and renewed to be used for His glory.
- Mary's greatest gift wasn't that she was going to be the mother of the Messiah but that one day her Son would die for her so that she could have a relationship with Him and the Father for all eternity. Her greatest gift is our greatest gift – salvation. How are we to live in response to this gift? No matter our life stage or past, God wants us to experience His favor and love, to be empowered by the Spirit who lives in us, and to see our lives and others' lives around us transformed by the gospel.

As you read this section, what verse or verses seem to pop out or resonate with you? It could be the Holy Spirit prompting you or giving you an inkling to take a moment and explore what God may be saying to you. Follow the instructions for the S.O.A.P. method on page 4 and interact with the Lord on the verse or verses He drew you to.

Scripture

Observation

Application

Prayer

Luke 1:39-45 (ESV)

³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of

your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."



Explorer's Notes

- Mary traveled 90-100 miles from Nazareth to Judah, where Elizabeth lived. She went quickly, with urgency, and all by herself. If she traveled 2.5 mph for 8 hours a day, the journey would have taken 4 days.

- Mary and Elizabeth were cousins (see Luke 1:36). Elizabeth was carrying John the Baptist, who would be born about six months before Jesus (see Luke 1:24-26).
- The “baby” leaped in Elizabeth’s womb. In Greek, “baby” is “Βρέφος” (*brephos*) which means infant or baby. These are God’s words declaring that in Elizabeth’s womb is a child, John, who acknowledges and rejoices that Jesus is God’s Son. Though this is miraculous, it is important to note that both babies in the women were seen as their own personhood apart from their mothers.
- Elizabeth is filled with the Spirit, giving her the spiritual discernment that the baby Mary was carrying was the Lord coming as the Messiah. The Spirit is the one who opens people’s eyes to the truth of who Jesus is. For whom can you pray for that needs the Spirit to unveil their eyes to the reality that Jesus is Lord?
- Elizabeth calls Mary blessed. She is blessed, not just because she is carrying the Lord, but because she believed what was spoken to her and chose to walk by faith. We, too, are blessed when we believe what God says and walk by faith. You can read more about who is blessed in Matthew 5 in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.

As you read this section, what verse or verses seem to pop out or resonate with you? It could be the Holy Spirit prompting you or giving you an inkling to take a moment and explore what God may be saying to you. Follow the instructions for the S.O.A.P. method on page 4 and interact with the Lord on the verse or verses He drew you to.

Scripture

Observation

Application

Prayer

Luke 1:46-56 (ESV)

⁴⁶ And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me,

and holy is his name.

⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the

thoughts of their hearts;

⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones

and exalted those of humble estate;

⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring

forever.”

⁵⁶ And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.



Explorer's Notes

- Mary is responding to the unplanned, inconvenient, high cost of social reputation that would lead her to interpersonal relationships changing forever. Her entire world is being flipped here with little clarity on the future.
- As you read, notice how Mary's heart starts from a place of holding the bigness of God, and out of that place, her heart is compelled to rejoice in not only God, but

GOD HER SAVIOR. She knew that she needed to be rescued and she clung to this hope of who her God is.

- In addition to processing her responsibility to raise Jesus, she also recalls how God has chosen to interact with her and past generations. She clearly is familiar with who God has shown Himself to be and uses that to inform her faith and hope in her God. It is clear that she has a relationship where she feels known, seen, cared for, and loved by her God. Likewise, she knows her God, sees Him, cares about what He cares about, and deeply loves her God. There is a deep relationship here based not on a transaction of doing or responsibilities, but based upon the character of God.
- When you process and respond to the direction that the Lord takes you, what do you use to inform your thoughts and actions? Do you allow yourself to sit in the realities and weight of what is being asked of you? Do you tell yourself to just push hard and “suck it up buttercup?” Or, do you remember who your God is? Do you reflect upon what it is that you are learning about God and His character?

As you read this passage in Luke, what verse or verses seem to pop out or resonate with you? It could be the Holy Spirit prompting you or giving you an inkling to take a moment and explore what God may be saying to you. Follow the instructions for the S.O.A.P. method on p. 4 and interact with the Lord on the verse or verses He brought to your attention.

Scripture

Observation

Application

Prayer

Luke 1:57-66 (NLT)

⁵⁷ When it was time for Elizabeth's baby to be born, she gave birth to a son. ⁵⁸ And when her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her, everyone rejoiced with her.

⁵⁹ When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. ⁶⁰ But Elizabeth said, "No! His name is John!"

⁶¹ "What?" they exclaimed. "There is no one in all your family by that name." ⁶² So they used gestures to ask the baby's father

what he wanted to name him. ⁶³ He motioned for a writing tablet, and to everyone's surprise he wrote, "His name is John." ⁶⁴ Instantly Zechariah could speak again, and he began praising God.

⁶⁵ Awe fell upon the whole neighborhood, and the news of what had happened spread throughout the Judean hills. ⁶⁶ Everyone who heard about it reflected on these events and asked, "What will this child turn out to be?" For the hand of the Lord was surely upon him in a special way.



Explorer's Notes

- What an impact this couple is making! Their age, their faith, their disabilities, and their trust in God is evident to their neighbors who are seeing God's mercy firsthand! The neighborhood is filling with joy, but also confusion: why wouldn't Elizabeth name her son after her husband? Why would they be so committed to God? Perhaps God wants to deliver His mercy to our neighbors through us as well – no matter our past, our brokenness, or state of faith – so that God's good news might spread!

- Genesis 17:9-14 says circumcision should be done on the eighth day after birth as a symbol, a marker of being chosen by God, belonging to Him, and choosing to enter into a covenant relationship with Him. But why wait eight days? The human body needs two blood clotting elements: Vitamin K (fully formed in the newborn between days five and seven). Next, the protein PT is needed, which is fully developed by the eighth day. If Vitamin K is not present when a newborn boy is circumcised, the baby will bleed to death. Nowadays, baby boys can be circumcised much sooner after birth by administering Vitamin K to help with blood clotting. How incredible to see the literal life-saving element of God's commands and our obedience to it!
- The neighborhood was so impacted by these events that it caused them to wonder in awe at who God was, who John was going to be, and what God was up to. Here we see God using Elizabeth's inability to conceive, Zechariah's inability to speak/hear, and the couple's commitment to live God's way to bring a community back to their Creator. May we reflect on all that God has done, is doing, and wishes to do in order that we might experience the joy of being in a relationship with our Creator, Savior, and Sustainer!

As you read this passage in Luke, what resonates with you? It could be the Holy Spirit prompting you or giving you an inkling to take a moment and explore what God may be saying to you. Follow the instructions for the S.O.A.P. method on p. 4 and interact with the Lord on the verse or verses He brought to your attention.

Scripture

Observation

Application

Prayer

Luke 1:67-80 (NLT)

⁶⁷ Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy:

⁶⁸ “Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people.

⁶⁹ He has sent us a mighty Savior from the royal line of his servant David,

⁷⁰ just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago.

⁷¹ Now we will be saved from our enemies and from all who hate us.

⁷² He has been merciful to our ancestors by remembering his sacred covenant—

⁷³ the covenant he swore with an oath to our ancestor Abraham.

⁷⁴ We have been rescued from our enemies so we can serve God without fear,

⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness for as long as we live.

⁷⁶ “And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord.

⁷⁷ You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins.

⁷⁸ Because of God’s tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us,

⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace.”

⁸⁰ John grew up and became strong in spirit. And he lived in the wilderness until he began his public ministry to Israel.



Explorer’s Notes

- This passage is known as Zechariah’s hymn of praise. It is the second of four such hymns in Luke’s account of Jesus’ birth. The others are: Mary’s (1:46-55); the angels’ (2:14); and Simeon’s (2:29-32).

- Zechariah was so “filled with the Holy Spirit” that his praise was mixed with prophecy – those things that God had now started to do, and those things He was about to do! This was a time of deliverance and remembrance and jubilation!
- The words “*He has visited and redeemed his people*” point us back to God’s miraculous rescue of His people from the Egyptians (see Exodus 3:7-10, 17-20). With John heralding Messiah as His forerunner (see Malachi 3:1), a “new exodus” is beginning. It was promised long ago and was long-awaited by God’s people (see Isaiah 40:3-5).
- Where might Messiah Jesus be preparing to lead you out of captivity to walk with and worship Him? What areas of your heart is He wanting to visit and redeem?
- The phrase “*Sent us a mighty Savior*” is literally translated as “*has raised up a horn of salvation for us*” and is an image of battle. This is a common Old Testament metaphor for power. Just as a bull was powerful and strong, so the Son of David is the powerful One who now acts on our behalf as was promised long ago (see Psalms 2, 72, 89, 110, and 132).
- The word “*Rising*” in verse 78 may refer to a *rising heavenly body* (sun) or to a *growing plant* (shoot or branch). The Messiah is called a “shoot” from King David’s line (see Isaiah 11:1-5). The Messiah will also be known as a *light shining on those in darkness* (see Isaiah 9:1-7) and a *rising star from Jacob* (see Numbers 24:17) which is a sign that salvation is rising up for God’s people (see Isaiah 60:1-3).
- God can be trusted to deliver on His promises, in His ways, in His timing. How might the Messiah Jesus want to raise your faith and trust in Him?

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Scripture

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The Gift Delivered



Luke 2:1-7 (NLT)

2 At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. ² (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. ⁴ And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of

Nazareth in Galilee. ⁵ He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. ⁷ She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.



Explorer's Notes

- Though Joseph was born in Nazareth, his ancestral home was Bethlehem because Joseph was in the family line of David (see Matthew 1:1-17). This is important because the Messiah would come from the line of David.
- Bethlehem would be packed with others who had come to register for the census. Mary was ready to give birth, so they were most likely allowed to stay in a stable or cave-type shelter where animals were housed. It was not uncommon to have people stay with the animals. A manger is a feeding trough.
- "Swaddling cloths" are clean wrapping cloths Mary would have had with her as she was close to birth.
- The environment of Jesus' birth reveals His humility, His raw humanity, and that this earth is not His home. Jesus is no ordinary King. He is One who can identify with all humanity.
- An "inn" could be a guest room. There was no place for Mary and Joseph because of the great crowd during the census – no room for Jesus. It's easy to fill our lives full of everything and anything that crowds Jesus out. What would it look like to give Jesus room in our lives?

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Scripture

Observation

Application

Prayer

Luke 2:8-21 (NKJV)

⁸ Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. ¹⁰ Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹ For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace, goodwill toward
men!"

¹⁵ So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. ¹⁷ Now when they had seen *Him*, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. ¹⁸ And all those who heard *it* marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹ But Mary kept all these things and pondered *them* in her heart. ²⁰ Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.



Explorer's Notes

- Notice that the shepherds were doing what they were supposed to be doing when God chose them to receive His Message. What might seem like 'same old, same old' could end up being a night that in verse 17 says, 'they recounted what had happened' for the rest of their lives. God likes to bring the miraculous into the mundane. Do we approach our mundane daily routine with an expectation of God's presence and the miraculous? How would that change our daily lives?
- The shepherds' fear of a supernatural encounter (verse 9) did not stop their faithful obedience to what the angel had told them (verses 15-16). They were so obedient that they *RAN* into the village.
- The encounter began and ended with praise to God (see verses 13-14 and 20).
- Cultural expectations of the Messiah did not limit or hold the shepherds back from receiving the Good News that they heard directly and personally (verse 10).
- The shepherds immediately recounted what had just happened (testified), astonishing everyone they told (verse 17).

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Scripture

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Prayer

Luke 2:22-38 (NKJV)

²² Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present *Him* to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD”), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, “A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

²⁵ And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. ²⁷ So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, ²⁸ he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said:

²⁹ “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,
According to Your word;
³⁰ For my eyes have seen Your salvation

³¹ Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,

³² A light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles,
And the glory of Your people Israel.”

³³ And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him.

³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against ³⁵ (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

³⁶ Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; ³⁷ and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served *God* with fastings and prayers night and day. ³⁸ And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.



Explorer's Notes

- The time for ritual purification would be around forty days after Jesus' birth, but His circumcision would be just eight days after His birth.
- Not much is known about Simeon. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel. "Consolation" is the hope that God would come to rescue and comfort His people. Luke's wording here ties to other messianic prophecies in Isaiah (see 40:1; 49:13; 51:3; 57:18; 61:2). This hope involves salvation (see Luke 2:30), the forgiveness of sins (Luke 1:77), and the saving of the lost (Luke 19:10).
- Simeon learned to wait on God, which means he put his hope in Him (see Isaiah 40:31). As believers we are to do the same.
- The "Holy Spirit was upon him" means Simeon was experiencing a powerful anointing and presence of the Holy Spirit. Simeon also was "in the Spirit," meaning he was under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit. That same Holy Spirit is with all who have come to faith in Jesus. How can you be more "in the Spirit?"
- "Fall" from verse 34 refers to the judgment of the haughty and arrogant and "rising" refers to the salvation of the humble and meek. "A sign that will be spoken against" foretells future opposition to Jesus. "Sword" (verse 35) refers to Mary's future sorrow at Jesus' crucifixion (see John 19:25).

As you read this section, what verse or verses seem to pop out or resonate with you? It could be the Holy Spirit prompting you or giving you an inkling to take a moment and explore what God may be saying to you. Follow the instructions for the S.O.A.P. method on page 4 and interact with the Lord on the verse or verses He drew you to.

Scripture

Observation

Application

Prayer

Luke 2:39-52 (NKJV)

³⁹ So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their *own* city, Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

⁴¹ His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴² And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. ⁴³ When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know *it*; ⁴⁴ but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among *their* relatives and acquaintances. ⁴⁵ So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. ⁴⁶ Now so it was *that* after three days they found Him in the

temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. ⁴⁸ So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously."

⁴⁹ And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them.

⁵¹ Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.



Explorer's Notes

- Jesus returned home to Nazareth in Galilee. This fulfilled what the prophets had said, "He will be called a Nazarene" (see Matthew 2:23; Luke 1:26, 2:51, 4:16).
- Jesus is no ordinary child. He is God in the flesh, Creator of the universe. This twelve-year-old boy, son of simple parents, yet son of God and Himself God is our

Lord. Jesus was, is, and always will be Lord. Be thankful our Lord never changes. He knows us now just as He knew us when He created the heavens and the earth.

- Can you imagine losing your child for a day, let alone an hour? This is torture for any parent. Mary and Joseph realized Jesus was missing by the evening of the first day. Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. What nerve not telling his parents, right!? Haven't we trained our children to tell us where they are?
- If Jesus had a cell phone, do you think he would have taken time to text? I don't think so. Why? He must "be in His Father's house." Wow! Twelve-year-old Jesus gets it! But then again, He has all wisdom. Jesus knew his purpose and calling – and it wasn't to call home. He was to teach, speak the truth, and change lives through His work on the cross. He was to be about his Father's business. His parents would understand later.
- We aren't God, but each of us has a special calling. God created us with a purpose. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are God's masterpiece ... so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." He has created us anew in Jesus so we can do good works. To what has God called you? Can we release our lives and our children's lives to the Lord to do what He's prepared in advance? Let's trust Him and be about our Father's business.

As you read this section, what verse or verses seem to pop out or resonate with you? It could be the Holy Spirit prompting you or giving you an inkling to take a moment and explore what God may be saying to you. Follow the instructions for the S.O.A.P. method on page 4 and interact with the Lord on the verse or verses He drew you to.

Scripture

Observation

Application

Prayer

What's next?

Our prayer is that these Explorer's Notes helped you draw nearer to Jesus during this busy season, but we don't want you to stop spending time in the Word. So here are some ideas to keep you in the Bible.

1. First, you can SOAP with any passage of Scripture. We encourage you to pick another book of the Bible, purchase a journal, and keep going.
2. If the Explorer's Notes are helpful, get the *STEPS: Following Where Jesus Leads* book at church on Sunday. This has the same format as this resource, but picks up in Luke 3 and goes up until Easter Week in Luke's Gospel.
3. If you've already completed *STEPS: Following Where Jesus Leads*, keep your eyes open for our Lent resource that will complete the Gospel of Luke.
4. Finally, one of our missionaries, Kristie Wiedle is involved with a product that is an exciting opportunity to hear the Scriptures. Check out @herbibleaudio on Facebook and Instagram. It is a free audio Bible with voices from women around the world.



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