

***Unwrapping Advent***  
***"Joy – It's what I always wanted!"***  
December 13, 2020

**Overarching theme:** In 2020, FUMC will be a **GO** church!

**Instructions:**

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

**Core Point:**

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

**Luke:**

The Gospel of Luke was written by an unknown Christian who, after reading other accounts of the life of Jesus and after careful study, decided to write another. The same person also wrote the Acts of the Apostles. Ancient tradition says the author of both books is "Luke, the dearly loved physician" (Col 4:14), who was with Paul during parts of his missionary work. Nothing in the Gospel of Luke confirms or refutes this tradition. The Gospel was probably composed between 70 and 100 CE, after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple but before the Roman government began regularly putting Christians to death.

Luke and Acts are both addressed to the "most honorable Theophilus" (Luke 1:3; see Acts 1:1). The name means "God's friend" and could have been an imaginary or ideal audience, a kind of godly reader Luke's author kept in mind as he wrote. But Theophilus was more likely a real person, perhaps a wealthy and influential convert – like Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10); Cornelius (Acts 10); or Crispus (Act 18:8) – who served as Luke's patron, helping him distribute his book. Luke's Gospel presents Jesus as good news for Jews and Gentiles.

Luke seems to have had a copy of the Gospel of Mark, which he expands considerably by adding stories of Jesus' birth and childhood (Luke 1-2);  
-adapted from the CEB study bible, pp 103 (NT)

### **Reflect on these Scriptures:**

Luke 1:39-55 NRSV *In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, <sup>40</sup> where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit <sup>42</sup> and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. <sup>43</sup> And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? <sup>44</sup> For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> And blessed is she who believed that there would be<sup>[a]</sup> a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."<sup>46</sup> And Mary<sup>[b]</sup> said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup> for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; <sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. <sup>50</sup> His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. <sup>52</sup> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; <sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. <sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, <sup>55</sup> according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."*

### **Commentary:**

This biblical story with four oracles opens with elderly Elizabeth, who had miraculously conceived (vv. 13, 24), experiencing her baby (John the Baptist) leaping in the womb at the approach of Mary. Elizabeth has been filled with the Spirit, fulfilling the announcement that "even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 15). The report that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit also serves to alert us that what she says will come as an inspired prophetic utterance, the word of God. Her loud cry, while it may remind one of a birth pang, is the cry of the spirit in song.

The first oracle declares the blessedness of Mary and the child that will be born to her. Luke has given no indication that Elizabeth knew of the angelic announcement

to Mary. The implication is that her knowledge of Mary's pregnancy was given to her by the Spirit. Her oracle did not confer God's blessing on Mary but recognized that she was already blessed. Luke 11:27 will later resonate with Elizabeth's cry, much in the same way that the cry of the disciples at the entry into Jerusalem (19:38) answers the angelic blessing at the birth of Jesus (2:14). Elizabeth's words also evoke the prior blessings pronounced on Jael (Judg 5:24) and Judith (Jdt 13:18; see also 2 Bar 54:10). Whereas Jael and Judith were praised for their heroism in wielding the sword, however, Mary will experience the point of the sword in her own heart (2:35).

The second oracle takes the form of a question but discloses more explicitly the identity of the child in Mary's womb. Her reference to Mary as "the mother of my Lord" is already a Christian confession, signaling that as with the rest of the birth narratives, Luke has told this part of his story in the light of the entire story. To the blessing of the answer to her prayer for a child has now been added the blessing of a visit from the one who would be the mother of the Lord.

The third oracle explains the meaning of the movement of the babe in her womb. It was a leap of joy. The angel had promised Zechariah that he would have joy, and now joy has come to Elizabeth at the visitation of Mary (cf. vv. 14, 44). John has already begun to fulfill his calling as one who would declare the Lord's coming and prepare the way for him. Later, Jesus would rejoice that the Lord of heaven and earth who had hidden things from the wise had revealed them to infants (10:21)!

The fourth oracle is a beatitude on Mary for her faith that the promise to her would be fulfilled. The oracle, therefore, recalls both the annunciation to Mary and her humble response. Blessing always comes from trusting that God's Word will be fulfilled. These oracles from Elizabeth are matched by the song of praise from Mary – the Magnificat.

– adapted from the New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol IX p. 54-55

### **This week – *"Joy – It's what I always wanted!"***

According to the gospel of Luke, a young unwed mother-to-be named Mary makes an arduous journey to see her elderly relative Elizabeth, who is also expecting a miraculous birth (a son to be named John). Mary travels away from a community (Nazareth) that was unlikely to embrace her miracle, to the awaiting arms of Elizabeth. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, unwraps joy for Mary in the midst of her challenging circumstances and difficult journey ahead. She speaks into Mary's life words of blessing and encouragement ("Blessed are you among women") and helps her understand the marvelous things that God is doing in her life. The result is joy for Mary ("My spirit rejoices in God my savior") and for Elizabeth. Might God

be calling his people today to follow Elizabeth's spirit filled example and unwrap joy for those around us?

### **Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:**

As you think about this passage, how can you respond to this Scripture?

1. In this story, we encounter elderly, formerly childless Elizabeth, the first person in Luke-Acts to be described as "filled with the Holy Spirit." Why do you think she was the first? What about her made her particularly open to the Holy Spirit?
2. In the midst of the new thing God was doing in Mary, she seeks out the comfort, support and encouragement of Elizabeth. As you look back on your own journey, have there been people who were there for you in similar ways? Did they speak into your life in ways you can remember? Share.
3. Have you ever 'paid it forward?' Has anyone ever told you that you have made a difference in their journey? How did you feel when you learned that? Share.
4. Is there a person that God might be leading you to "speak into their life" (unwrapping joy) in this season? If you are in a group, close by praying for the Holy Spirit's leading in these future conversations.

### **Activity for the life of a disciple:**

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this Scripture this week: Luke 1:41-47 NRSV  
*When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit <sup>42</sup> and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. <sup>43</sup> And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? <sup>44</sup> For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> And blessed is she who believed that there would be<sup>[a]</sup> a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."<sup>46</sup> And Mary<sup>[b]</sup> said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,<sup>47</sup>and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...*
3. Spend some time this week praying for someone that God might be calling you to help "unwrap joy" for.