

## Today's Reading: Luke 1:39-45 Bonus: Nehemiah 8:10-12

Joy: a feeling of great pleasure and happiness

Nehemiah 8:10b states: "And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Consistently through the Old and New Testament, we receive reason for celebration, happiness and joy from the Lord.

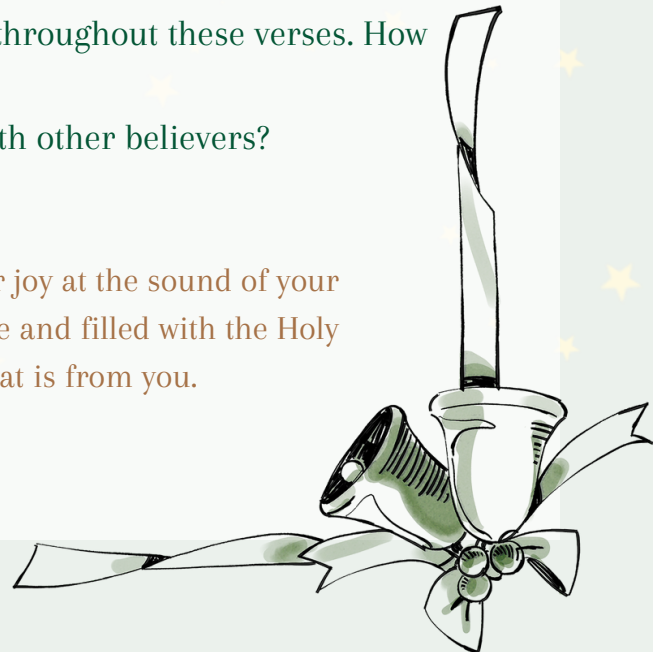
Today's Scripture reading highlights the first encounter between Jesus and John the Baptist. How incredible that the presence of Jesus was known to John even within the womb! And how poignant to also see the Holy Spirit fill Elizabeth with joy. As soon as Mary entered, carrying the Christ in her womb, joy filled the space.

Elizabeth showered Mary with blessings, noting the blessedness of her faith and the privilege she experienced in bearing God's. What a moment of connection, adoration, and affirmation between two women who loved the Lord; a beautiful depiction of JOY shared between believers.

In a culture of ripe with complaint, negativity, and depression, it is a gift to gather and celebrate with joy over one another and what God has done.

- Mary is described as "blessed" several times throughout these verses. How would you identify your life as blessed?
- When did you last share joy and blessings with other believers?

Prayer: Lord, may I be someone who leaps for joy at the sound of your name. Allow me to be tender to your presence and filled with the Holy Spirit. Allow me to recognize joy that is from you.





**Today's Reading: Luke 1:46-56**  
**Bonus: 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Psalm 103**

“The Magnificat: Mary’s Song of Praise”

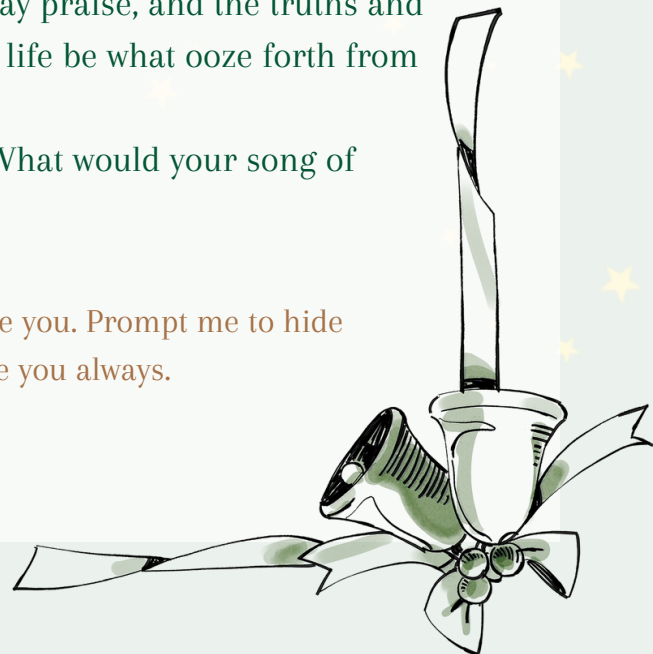
I remember beginning my clinical rotation in graduate school; anticipating my first “real” client. I was so nervous and anxious. I admitted to my professor, “I don’t know what I am doing. What if I mess up? Or what if I am no good?” He looked at me with an abundance of kindness in his eyes and said, “You have prepared for this for a long time. You already know what you need to know. Just show up, and God will lead the way.” This reassurance followed me that day, and many years later as I became an expert in my professional field.

In today’s passage in Luke, we observe Mary engaged in a song of praise overflowing with a deep knowledge of the Lord. Mary participated in hymns, following the Psalms of Thanksgiving, Old Testament allusions and quotations, and reciting the covenant promises of God. Mary was so saturated in the Scriptures and truths of God that her rejoicing oozed out of her in the form of praise.

Just as my professor believed I knew what I needed to know for my job, how much more are we to know and seek understanding from the Word of God? When the circumstances of life squeeze us, may praise, and the truths and promises of God we’ve known throughout our life be what ooze forth from us.

- Do you feel saturated in the Word of God? What would your song of praise sound like today?

Prayer: God, empower me to believe and adore you. Prompt me to hide your Word in my heart and praise you always.





**Today's Reading: Luke 1:57-66**  
**Bonus: Genesis 17:12; Luke 1:13**

I find traditions, cultures, and ceremonies quite interesting! They are often what bind groups of people together and allow for all manner of celebrations.

The culture during early A.D. surrounding the birth of Christ was rich in tradition and ceremony, as we observe from the account of John's birth. It was standard for boys to be named on the day of their circumcision, at 8 days old. Tradition held that boys would be named after their father, or at a minimum, another male relative.

Both Elizabeth and Zechariah were insistent their son be named John. Based on the text in verse 20 and then again in verses 61-63, we know Zechariah was mute. Some speculate he could not hear either. Still, we read that Zechariah wrote the name "John" and immediately regained his speech and offered praise to God! As the Holy Spirit moved, the Lord's presence was evident and known over the baby, later known as John the Baptizer.

Consistently throughout Scripture, we observe God's presence in big-and-powerful manifestations, and in small-and-significant ones, as well. John was given a name that didn't belong to his father or relative, illustrating the beautiful understanding that God's ceremony far outweighs the tradition and ceremony of man.

- Has there ever been a time in your life when you prioritized family or cultural tradition over God?

*Prayer: God, I pray to be strong in my faith, regardless of tradition or ceremony. May I remember that your practices are greater than any of those determined by man.*





## Today's Reading: Luke 1:67-75 Bonus: Ephesians 5:18-20

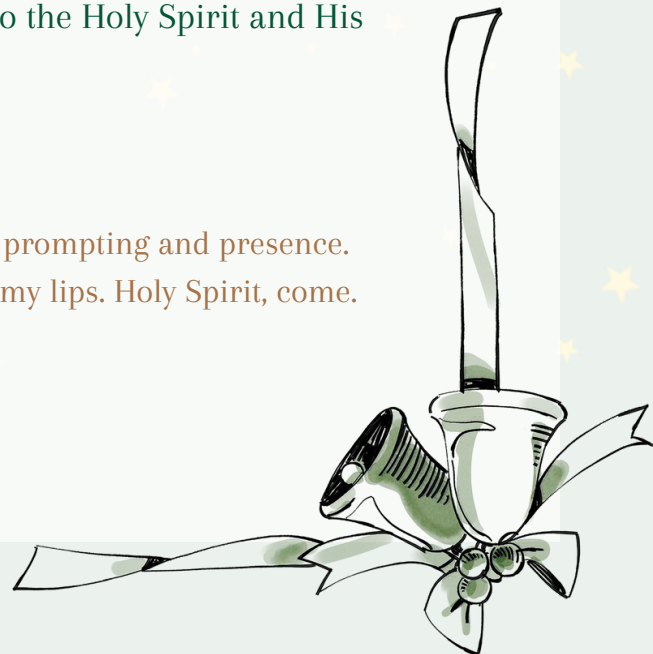
Patrick Mayberry released the song “Holy Spirit Come” in 2021. In the past 5-10 years, there has been a trend toward worship music that speaks about the Holy Spirit and invites the presence and engagement of the Spirit into our midst. Often, we focus on God the Father and God the Son, but the power of the Holy Spirit is equally sovereign, evidenced by the God-head, three in one.

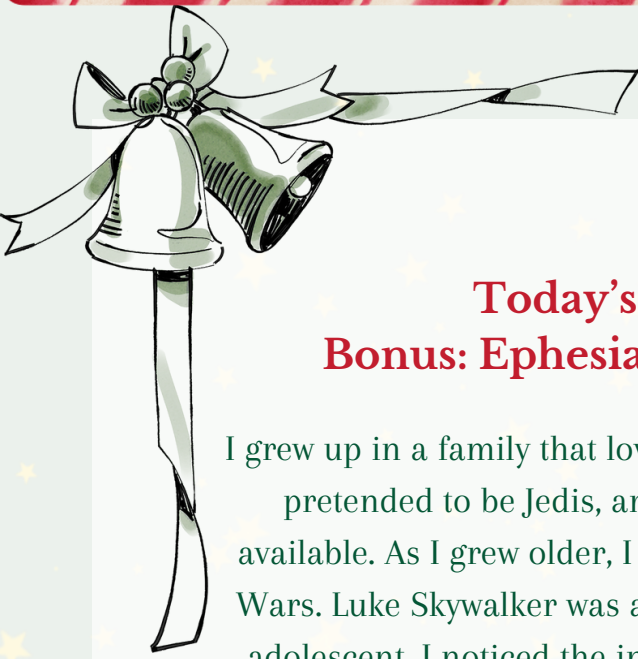
In the Gospel of Luke the Holy Spirit entered and filled Zechariah, foretelling the prophecy regarding John's ministry and the Messiah's coming. It's important to note that every case of the Holy Spirit's engagement resulted in Spirit-directed worship. Zechariah's first words were a joyous cry of praise to God after being granted the return of his voice.

Similar to Mary's song of praise in Luke 1:46-55, we observe Zechariah quoted the Old Testament. He referenced the Abrahamic Covenant and the horn of salvation (v. 69). This language, alluding to strength, was not meant to exalt John the Baptist but rather, the Messiah to come. It served as a reminder to the people of God's promise of salvation, given by grace.

- When have you experienced or felt the Holy Spirit's prompting or speaking? How can you be more attentive to the Holy Spirit and His work?

Prayer: Holy Spirit, make me sensitive to your prompting and presence. When I am filled by you, may praises be on my lips. Holy Spirit, come.





**Today's Reading: Luke 1:76-80**  
**Bonus: Ephesians 1:7; John 1:26-27; Psalm 139**

I grew up in a family that loved the Star Wars franchise. We quoted Star Wars, pretended to be Jedis, and collected all of the action figures and merch available. As I grew older, I began to notice the theme of “destiny” within Star Wars. Luke Skywalker was always encouraged to fulfill his *destiny*. Even as an adolescent, I noticed the intense pressure placed on young Luke Skywalker.

Reading today's text, I wonder if a young John the Baptist ever experienced the pressure of fulfilling his destiny? He was just 8-days old when his father prophesied that he was to prepare the way for the Messiah, Jesus. What an honorable and (let's be honest) terrifying position to be in as John. Before he could even care for himself, God had determined magnificent plans to help prepare a way for the salvation of mankind. We see in verse 80 that he became “strong in the spirit”. We're also told “he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.” The God of John is the same God of you and me today. He has determined a good plan before us, as well.

The timeline described in Luke beautifully aligned for the introduction and birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; a Savior destined to “by the forgiveness of their sins.” (vs. 77) Before Christ was even born, God outlined how the Gospel was going to save and the means by which man would come to know God.

- Have you experienced the pressure of a personal “destiny”? Do you feel your destiny is in God's hands?
- What does it mean to be forgiven of our sins?

Prayer: God, forgive me of my sins. I know your purposeful hand is over all that occurs. You have created me for a good purpose for your glory. Thank You, Lord, for your purposeful placement.





# Week 3

## DIGGING DEEPER

LUKE 1:39-80


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Luke's trustworthy account of the Gospel story begins by explaining that in His mercy, God – who does the impossible – masterfully planned the miraculous birth of the Savior and his forerunner by way of an older priest's wife and a simple virgin. Elizabeth and Mary's roles were one-time miracles, never to be matched in human history. They stood at the zenith of God's plan for salvation.

Even though neither of these quiet, humble women could know precisely what their own futures and those of their sons would bring, each were rewarded with the presence and power of the Spirit of God; a reward for their faith and obedience before Him (Luke 1:41–45).

Young Mary had many unanswered questions and sought out her cousin, Elizabeth, who recognized what God was doing even before Mary could tell her. God ordained they be relatives, which blessed them with mutual comfort and encouragement. Thus, Mary's immediate response was a hymn of joy-filled praise, for she knew God would accomplish what He promised! Her behavior exemplified Christ-centered joy available to all of us as we celebrate the birth of Christ.

When Zechariah, the priest and father of John, could once again speak, he proclaimed prophetic praises to Yahweh before all the people at the temple. His own son would be called “the prophet of the Most High, preparing the way of the Lord” (Luke 1:67–79). He, like Mary, was exuberant to be a part of God's plan in bringing forth the long-awaited Messiah. After 400 years of prophetic silence, God used Zechariah's son, John the Baptizer, to fulfill the prophecy in Malachi 3:1 – to preach repentance and proclaim the entrance of the Light of Truth into this dark, sinful world (Luke 1:76–80). John later publicly gave testimony of Jesus as “God's Chosen One” (John 1:32–34). John proclaimed to two of his own disciples (including Andrew), “Look, the Lamb of God” (John 1:35–36).

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# JOY

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“Oh sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things!... Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises!... for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity” (Psalm 98).

Isaac Watts is a familiar name among prolific composers. He is credited with writing a mind-boggling 800 hymns. Even if you don't know him by name, you probably recognize “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” and “Joy to the World,” based mainly on Psalm 98. Watts was known for crafting hymns that were inspired by the psalms.

What is not commonly known is that this staple Christmas carol was written about Jesus, the *coming* King, not Jesus, the newborn King. Watts's mind was on Christ's return to claim His kingdom. Perhaps this hymn was co-opted for Christmas, but we can't argue it's applicability. Whether newborn King or coming King, Jesus is the Messiah and should cause us to burst into joyful song -

He is our joy!

“Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her King!”

Friends, Jesus has come and is coming back. May He find us worshipping and serving Him joyfully!!

[“Joy to the World” - Francesca Battistelli  
and/or Casting Crowns arrangements]

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