



LEADER'S GUIDE

FROM THE EDITOR

The October–December 2026 installment of Good Faith Bible Studies marks the end of a year in which we have brought you studies from a wider variety of curriculum writers than in the past. Having multiple writers from different regions, backgrounds, and denominational connections certainly comes with its challenges. The lack of consistency in voice can be jarring and make it difficult to get into a rhythm. Some readers may prefer one writer, while others prefer another. One writer may approach a passage from a particular ideological angle, while another approaches a different passage from a completely different worldview.

Even so, the benefits have outweighed the downsides. Scripture came to God's people through a variety of genres, voices, and perspectives. Because of this, expanding the scope of those who teach us the Bible helps us remain true to the spirit of the books that comprise it.

The studies in the current issue come to us from some old friends and a new one. They begin by wrapping up our study of the early chapters of Genesis and end with the first Sunday in the Christmas season. Seven are from the Old Testament, and six are from the New Testament.

We hope this season of study brings you new or renewed awareness of God, God's people, and who we are called to be in the world.

Sincerely,
Craig Nash
Senior Editor

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A Note about the Lectionary

Depending on your church background, you may or may not be familiar with the term lectionary. The word comes from the Latin *lectio*, which means reading. The Latin lectionarium means “book of readings.” Different church traditions utilize different lectionaries, but they all have the same purpose — to provide a broad reading of the Bible over a set period of time. The most common lectionary for Protestant Christians is the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), which runs on a three-year cycle. The RCL was compiled by scholars and representatives from numerous Christian denominations, including the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, American Baptist Churches USA, and the United Methodist Church, just to name a few.

Good Faith Bible Studies stays close to the lectionary during the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter. At other times throughout the year, we seek for our studies to be informed by the lectionary, but not bound by it. The July–September 2026 installment is the one time all year when, instead of using the lectionary, we have taken a theme-based approach. The majority of weeks are spent on the parables of Jesus in Luke, while the last four weeks begin a study of the early chapters of Genesis. We will return to periodic lectionary passages in the October–December 2026 issue.

Genesis 6:9–9:17 Through the Waters

Lesson Written by Tyler Tankersley

Rather than breaking up the story of Noah and the flood, we have decided to include the entire narrative in one Sunday. If this seems overwhelming, you are not alone. Three chapters are a lot to cover. Because of this, it may be helpful to give your group a heads-up a week before this study and ask them to spend more time reading the passage.

This is one of the most famous stories in the Bible, not just among Christians, Jews, and other people of faith, but also among those with only a passing knowledge of religious texts. It would be worth exploring with your class why this may be the case. Is it because of all the other ancient flood stories? Is it because of how we have turned it into a story for children about animals? Or is there something more fascinating about a story that begins in destruction, ends with a promise, and both the destruction and promise are from God?

It is important to remember that, although there is healthy debate about the origins of the early chapters of Genesis, they are mostly isolated stories woven together to form a consistent narrative. As Tyler Tankersley has pointed out throughout this series, the larger narrative moves from integration to disintegration, from wholeness to brokenness. But it is also about all the ways God has built redemption into every part of the story. This is the next-to-last in that collection of stories. It comes after Cain and Abel (with a chapter of genealogy bridging the two stories) and precedes the story of Babel.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Perhaps the most well-known film adaptation of the Bible's flood story is the 2014 movie *Noah*, directed by Darren Aronofsky and starring Russell Crowe. The film was not without controversy. Some believed it unfairly turned the story into a modern tale about the environment. Even so, it is worth a watch (if you have two and a half hours of free time), if only as a tool to spark new and creative thoughts about the story.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think the flood has become one of the Bible's best-known stories, even among people with little familiarity with Scripture?
2. Tyler describes the flood as an act of “de-creation,” in which the ordered world begins returning to chaos. How does this connection to Genesis 1 shape your understanding of the story?
3. What does God's “remembering” of Noah reveal about the biblical meaning of remembrance — and about the character of God?
4. God's covenant includes not only Noah and his descendants but “every living creature.” How might this expansive covenant shape the way people of faith understand their responsibility toward creation?
5. How does interpreting the rainbow as a warrior's bow that God has hung in the clouds change — or deepen — your understanding of the covenant?
6. What would it mean for us to follow God's example by “hanging up the bow”? Where might we be called to choose reconciliation over retaliation or restoration over revenge?

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Genesis 11:1–9**Making a Name (Tower of Babel)**

Lesson Written by Tyler Tankersley

We have finally reached the end of our study of the early chapters of Genesis. What began as creation, the gathering together of all the components of the world, has now concluded with a scattering. It's worth reviewing and asking, "What happened?" At every turn, there was something good that unraveled, something whole that came apart. There was also God creating a mechanism to repair what had been broken. That mechanism, however, doesn't seem to appear in this passage. We will need to get to Abraham to discover the redemptive response to Babel.

The Babel story raises questions similar to those raised by the story of Cain and Abel. Just as we wondered why God would favor Abel's offering over Cain's, we also scratch our heads over why God was concerned about the people of the world working together for a common purpose. Or, as we have noted in the podcast and elsewhere in these studies, is this just another etiology, or explanation for why we have different languages?

For Christians, it is also worth acknowledging the connection between the story of Babel and the story of Pentecost. Many believers over the centuries have viewed Pentecost as a reversal of Babel's scattering. Because of this, it may help to revisit the Pentecost study in Good Faith Bible Studies (May 24, 2026, by Mary Alice Birdwhistell) as you prepare for this lesson.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Consider the following questions to help guide your group through this passage. Pick those you feel will be most helpful for your group:

1. Why do you think God intervened at Babel? Was the problem the people's cooperation, their ambition, their refusal to scatter, or

something else?

2. The builders say, "Let us make a name for ourselves." What are some modern "towers" individuals, churches, institutions, or nations construct to establish their power and significance?
3. How might God's scattering of the people be understood as an act of grace rather than only as punishment?
4. What is the difference between genuine unity and enforced sameness? How can a community remain united while welcoming differences in culture, experience, and perspective?
5. How does the connection between hearing and listening deepen your understanding of Babel? What keeps us from genuinely listening to people who are different from us?
6. At Babel, humanity tries to make its own name great; in the next chapter, God promises to make Abraham's name great. What is the difference between grasping for significance and receiving identity as a gift from God?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The idea that Pentecost "reverses" the scattering of Babel isn't a universally accepted interpretation. For another viewpoint, check out the 2022 commentary from Tyler Mayfield at the Working Preacher website.



Psalm 96**Sing! Sing! Sing!**

Lesson Written by Rev. Dianne Wendt

We have shared before, in the Good Faith Bible Studies curriculum, this leader's guide, and our GFBS podcast, how challenging it can be to "study" the Psalms. Of all the genres of Scripture, it is perhaps the one least intended for study. Psalms are for worship, and their original creators would have found the way we analyze them odd. We live in that tension, though. If you are part of a worshiping community, you hopefully recite, pray, and, yes, sing the Psalms far more than you analyze them. But we also benefit from knowing the background to the Psalms, which is why we like to include a handful of them in our studies throughout the year.

Today's passage, Psalm 96, returns us to the lectionary, albeit in a "sideways" type of manner. The Revised Common Lectionary sometimes gives two "tracks" to choose from, and Psalm 96 is in Track 2 for this year. We will look at another next week that also comes from the same track.

In the study, Rev. Dianne Wendt walks us through some of the mechanics of the psalm, reminding us of devices such as repetition in liturgical literature, as well as how connected the Psalms are to religious worship and festivals. This is a great reminder that the Psalms were originally intended as communal modes of worship. Still, they have also been useful in personal acts of devotion. It may be helpful to discuss how the members of your group most often use psalms such as this one and how they may be stretched to use them in different ways.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How have the Psalms shaped your worship or personal prayer? Do you experience them differently when they are sung, recited aloud, or studied?
2. Psalm 96 repeats the command to "sing to the LORD" three times. What does this repetition communicate, and why might singing be particularly suited to expressing praise?

3. The psalm contrasts the LORD with the "idols" of other peoples. What loyalties — such as wealth, power, status, institutions, or national identity — are most likely to become idols today?
4. What does it mean to proclaim that "the LORD reigns" in a culture where political, economic, and national powers compete for our allegiance?
5. Psalm 96 imagines the heavens, sea, fields, and trees joining in praise. How might this vision affect the way we understand and care for the natural world?
6. The psalm celebrates God's coming judgment because God will judge with righteousness and equity. Why does the psalmist view judgment as good news, and how should that vision shape our pursuit of justice?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For further thoughts on Psalm 96, and ideas on how to approach it in a worship service or small group, check out the 2023 commentary from Scott Hoezee at the Center for Excellence in Preaching.



Psalm 1**The Faithful and the Wicked**

Lesson Written by Rev. Dianne Wendt

This week, we are going backward in the Psalms to the first one. This is an excellent reminder that, although the Psalms are compiled and come to us in five different books, they are not arranged in a simple numerical or chronological order. Benedictine monks, who traditionally pray through the Psalms each week, spread them out in an order that does not follow their biblical arrangement. On one hand, this can frustrate those of us who want to follow an order that goes from 1 to 150. On the other hand, this varied arrangement models the reality that each psalm addresses a different human experience and speaks to various aspects of God. Interestingly, many worship leaders who follow the lectionary speak of how each psalm always seems to appear at just the right time.

Rev. Wendt reminds readers, however, that this psalm likely appeared at the beginning to set the tone for what would come in the Psalter. It lays out two paths that humans can follow — the way of the faithful and the way of the wicked. The faithful are like trees planted near flowing water. The wicked are like chaff, disconnected from the source of life.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

There are several sermons available for this text in [A Sermon for Every Sunday](#) that may be helpful in your preparation. Click the link above or scan with your phone to view.



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Listen to an in-depth discussion of this week's Scriptures with Craig Nash.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Consider the following questions to help guide your group through this passage.

1. Psalm 1 presents two contrasting ways of life. What choices or habits gradually move a person toward one path or the other?
2. What does it mean to “delight” in God’s instruction rather than merely obey it? How might someone meditate on it “day and night” amid everyday responsibilities?
3. The faithful person is compared to a tree planted beside flowing water. What people, practices, or communities help keep you rooted and nourished?
4. Psalm 1 says the faithful “prosper” in all they do. How should we understand this without equating faithfulness with material success or freedom from suffering?
5. The wicked are compared to chaff blown away by the wind. What makes a life — or a community — rootless and easily swayed?
6. If you wrote a psalm describing faithfulness today, what image would you use in place of — or alongside — the deeply rooted tree?



Hebrews 11; 12:1–3

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson written by Rev. Dianne Wendt

For Protestants, All Saints' Day can be a complicated lectionary event. We tend to be leery of elevating people — especially those who are deceased — above others. But sainthood isn't about elevation. It is about recognizing those who have gone before us, those who have not just set an example, but also remained so connected to God that we somehow feel the same connection. Hebrews 12:1–3 — “Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses . . .” — doesn't really allow us to get away from the idea of sainthood.

Who comprises the “great cloud of witnesses?” They are those who have shown us what faith looks like. And part of what faith looks like, as Rev. Dianne Wendt reminded us, often includes not receiving an earthly reward for acts of faith. All Saints' Day would be an excellent time to think of those living saints you know and honor them for what they mean to you. Additionally, it can be helpful to set aside time on this day to light a candle for those who have gone before us, celebrating who they were, who they are, and how they draw us closer to God.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Eric Heen has an excellent commentary on this passage from The Working Preacher. Scan the QR code to access.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How has your understanding of “saints” been shaped by your church tradition? Has that understanding changed over time?
2. Hebrews 11 describes faith as trusting in what is promised but not yet seen. When have you had to act faithfully without knowing what the outcome would be?
3. Many of the people named in Hebrews 11 were flawed, complicated individuals. What does their inclusion teach us about who can become an example of faith?
4. Who are the “living saints” who have shown you what faith looks like? What qualities or actions make them part of your own cloud of witnesses?
5. Hebrews acknowledges that many faithful people did not receive the earthly rewards they expected or deserved. How does this complicate the idea that faithfulness leads to success?
6. What burdens might you need to “lay aside” to run faithfully the path before you? How can the examples of Jesus and those who have gone before you provide encouragement?



Matthew 25:1–13 A Longer Night

Lesson Written by Sean Palmer

Remember our study from this summer of the parables found in the book of Luke? Today's passage, which is from the lectionary, feels a little like returning to that. Interestingly, this apocalyptic parable pairs well with the epistle from the lectionary, 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, which is the passage that leads some Christians to a belief in the rapture. Regardless of what you think about that, both passages speak to readiness. The passage from 1 Thessalonians, however, openly asks readers to approach the coming of the future kingdom with encouragement rather than fear.

It's important to note that the three stories found in Matthew 25 carry forward a theme that begins in Matthew 24, which is an apocalyptic discourse on the coming kingdom.

In today's study, Sean Palmer reminds us that preparation for what is to come is actually part of belief. This "future focus" is something that more progressive Christians can sometimes ignore. We do it because we are seeking justice on this earth for today. But we also must be honest and admit that we do it because we don't want to be associated with those Christians who make faith solely about what is going to happen in the future. We would do well, however, to embrace the future hope that the Bible speaks about and to remind ourselves, as Sean writes in this week's lesson, that this parable is asking us what kind of people we are becoming as we wait.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A sermon manuscript from Winthrop Congregational Church offers an excellent interpretation of this challenging parable.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Both the wise and foolish bridesmaids fall asleep. How does this detail challenge common interpretations of the parable?
- Sean writes, "The wise prepared for a longer night. The foolish prepared for the night they were hoping for." When have you had to sustain faith, hope, or commitment longer than you expected?
- What practices help us develop a faith with "reserves" — one that does not depend on quick results or visible victories?
- How can preparation create rest rather than anxiety? What is the difference between faithful readiness and fear-driven hypervigilance?
- How should we understand the closed door without turning it either into a tool of fear or into something without meaningful consequences?
- What kind of person are you becoming while you wait for God's promises to be fulfilled? Is the waiting making you more loving, patient, courageous, and just?

Matthew 25:14–30**The Parable of the Talents**

Lesson Written by Sean Palmer

Today's passage is a parable sandwiched between two other teachings. Last week was about bridesmaids being prepared for the bridegroom, and next week's will be the famous teaching about the sheep and the goats. All three communicate something slightly different about what the people of God are to do in light of our future hope.

For the risk-averse among us, this parable can cause some anxiety. The first two examples, in which those given talents multiply them for the master, paint a picture of a world in which there is always enough and we will always receive a return on our investment. But what about the world in which that doesn't happen?

In his lesson, Sean Palmer helps us deal with this by exposing the dilemma of the parable: We shouldn't rush to assume that God is the master in this story. Could it be that the third servant is actually the one Jesus was pointing us to emulate? It is unclear, although it would be comforting for those of us who are risk-averse. Regardless, this dilemma opens the parable for us to explore from multiple angles. A great discussion opportunity would be to ask the members of your group, "What if the person we thought was the 'good guy' in the parable isn't?"

3. Why might the third servant's decision to preserve the money be considered prudent or faithful rather than fearful or irresponsible?
4. Sean asks, "Whose 'well done' are we seeking?" When might praise or advancement indicate our complicity with an unjust system rather than our faithfulness to God?
5. The first two servants receive greater responsibility but not freedom. How does their reward complicate the traditional interpretation of the parable?
6. What risks might come with refusing to participate in a harmful system or speaking truth to a powerful person? How can Christian communities support those who take such risks?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

There are so many potential interpretations to this parable. One is from a 2010 blog post at "Godspace."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Consider the following questions to help guide your group through this passage.

1. Before reading this lesson, how did you understand the Parable of the Talents? What assumptions did you make about the master and the three servants?
2. What changes when we consider that the master may not represent God? What details in the story support or challenge that interpretation?



Matthew 25:31–46**The Sheep and the Goats**

Lesson Written by Sean Palmer

For many progressive, justice-minded Christians, this week's passage is the Super Bowl of all Bible passages. It is about taking care of the most vulnerable among us, but it is also about judgment. This passage, in fact, connects the two. In the story of the sheep and the goats, as Sean Palmer notes, judgment isn't tied to belief; it is tied to action. And yet that action, according to Sean, hinges on a simple act we often miss in this passage — noticing. Yes, the story is about what we do, but it is also about those who noticed the people around them who needed food, water, shelter, and companionship.

Notice how the passage fits nicely with today's Old Testament reading from Ezekiel. It also concerns sheep and would be an excellent companion passage to study alongside our selected passage.

It is interesting that today's passage arrives on Christ the King Sunday, which marks the end of the church year. What might this placement say to us about the ultimate role of believers in the world?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why are both the sheep and the goats surprised by the judgment they receive? What does their surprise reveal about faithful service?
2. Sean argues that compassionate action begins with noticing. What habits, distractions, or assumptions keep us from noticing vulnerable people around us?

3. Jesus identifies six concrete acts of care in this passage. Which of these does your congregation practice well, and which might require greater attention?
4. Sean writes, "Our wallets and calendars tell the entire story." What do the ways we spend our time and money reveal about whom we value?
5. How does Ezekiel's condemnation of Israel's unfaithful shepherds deepen our understanding of Jesus as shepherd and king?
6. What does reading this passage on Christ the King Sunday suggest about Christ's reign and the role of Christ's followers in the world?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Americana singer-songwriter Brandi Carlile has a fascinating story of faith that you should read in her memoir *Broken Horses*. The book came out at the same time as her album, *In These Silent Days*. The album includes a song titled "Sinners, Saints, and Fools," which is a commentary on who gets in and who gets out of God's kingdom. Consider playing the song for your group and discussing it in light of the passage.



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Isaiah 64:1–9**Beginning in Darkness**

Lesson Written by Christy Scarborough
Edwards

Happy New Year! On one hand, the church year beginning four weeks before Christmas can be a little disorienting. Most of us are preparing for the end of the year — Christmas shopping, end-of-year giving, wrapping up work obligations before the dark of winter fully sets in. On the other hand, it fits perfectly within God’s world, as it is a reminder that God’s time is not like our time.

As Christy S. Edwards reminds us in this lesson, the church year begins in darkness. If you are part of a church that celebrates Advent, you’ll light just one candle on the first Sunday. By the time Christmas comes around, all four Advent candles will have been lit, and the Christ candle will be lit that day. But we can’t get to the light without going through the darkness.

For the first three Sundays of Advent, we have decided to go with the Old Testament passages from Isaiah. Don’t neglect reading through the Gospel passages, however, which will come from Mark and John. (We will cover the passage from Luke on the last Sunday of Advent.)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

There are two sermons at A Sermon for Every Sunday on this passage and reflecting on Advent.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Consider the following questions to help guide your group through this passage.

1. Isaiah cries, “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.” When have you longed for God to intervene but instead experienced God as hidden or absent?
2. What can Isaiah’s honesty teach us about expressing anger, grief, disappointment, and hope in prayer?
3. Why do churches and individuals sometimes feel pressure to conceal sadness during Advent and Christmas? What harm can forced cheerfulness cause?
4. What is the difference between accompanying someone in grief and trying to fix or cheer up that person?
5. Isaiah describes God as the potter and the people as clay. How might that image speak to people who feel that their lives, or their world, have lost their shape?
6. What practical steps could your congregation or group take to make room for both lament and hope during Advent?



Isaiah 40:1–11

Into the Darkness

Lesson written by Christy Scarborough
Edwards

Today's passage from Isaiah is perhaps most familiar to Christians because its words are echoed by John the Baptist in the lectionary passage from Mark. Alongside the motif of "light and darkness," another Advent theme that helps center our hearts is preparation, to which both Isaiah and John the Baptist speak. (Notice that we also covered that theme toward the end of November with the parables from Matthew 25.)

And yet, while the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist are often connected to ideas of judgment, as Christy Edwards reminds us in today's lesson, this passage doesn't begin with judgment. It begins with comfort. By now, with December ramping up, many people in your group may be feeling the stress of the holiday season and the sadness that can sometimes accompany it. How might you lean into this theme of comfort today?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

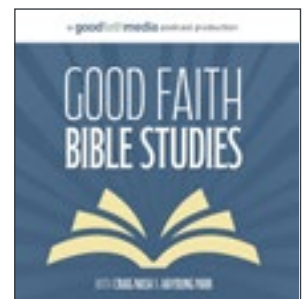
1. What is the difference between offering genuine comfort and trying to make someone's pain or discomfort disappear?
2. Christy writes that her daughter was not afraid of the darkness as much as she was afraid of being alone in it. When has another person's presence helped you endure a difficult season?
3. Isaiah announces that God will come through the wilderness rather than wait for the wilderness to become tamed. How does this challenge the idea that we must prepare ourselves perfectly before God can meet us?
4. What "wilderness" are you, your church, or your community experiencing right now? Where might you recognize signs that God is drawing near?
5. How can suffering and hope coexist without hope minimizing or dismissing a person's grief?
6. Isaiah portrays God as a shepherd who gathers lambs, carries them, and gently leads them. How might we embody that kind of comforting presence for vulnerable people during Advent?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A Sermon for Every Sunday has three sermons on this passage.



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Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11

Good News to the Oppressed

Lesson written by Christy Scarborough
Edwards

Last week's passage from Isaiah pointed Christian readers forward in the Bible to John the Baptist. This week's verses will also sound familiar to astute readers, who will recognize them as part of the text Jesus used for the sermon he gave in the synagogue of his hometown in Luke 4. It's the sermon that got him kicked out of the synagogue and almost thrown off a cliff when he suggested that God's care extended beyond his own community. It would be worthwhile to place that passage side by side with this one and consider how Jesus' commentary on the Isaiah verses could provoke so much anger.

As Christy Edwards shows us, it all hinges on expectations. Do we expect to be the only ones delivered from the darkness, or are we aware that deliverance is for a much broader swath of people than just us? Also, what if we are meant to be the instruments of deliverance?

In many liturgical traditions, the third Sunday of Advent recognizes the theme of "joy." It stands apart from the other Sundays because the third candle on the Advent wreath is often rose rather than purple or blue. With three candles lit and one remaining, the light also begins to overtake the darkness. Why might this be, and how might this reflection help guide your conversation today?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

There are two sermons from A Sermon for Every Sunday that address this text.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What expectations did the people returning from exile bring with them? How might unmet expectations make it difficult to recognize restoration already underway?
2. Isaiah names the poor, brokenhearted, captives, prisoners, and mourners. Who would be included in a similar list of people pushed to the margins today?
3. Christy describes Christian hope as active. What is the difference between waiting for God to bring restoration and participating in God's restorative work?
4. What do you think of Christy's suggestion that restoration may bring "beauty and ashes, mourning and joy, despair and praise," rather than replacing one entirely with the other?
5. Why did Jesus' use of this passage in Luke 4 provoke such anger? How are we tempted to limit God's liberation to people like ourselves?
6. On this third Sunday of Advent, where do you see joy emerging amid unfinished restoration? How can joy coexist with grief, injustice, and disappointment?

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Luke 1:26–38**More Waiting**

Lesson written by Christy Scarborough
Edwards

The final Sunday of Advent brings us to the beloved Christmas story. Today's passage is the announcement of the incarnation to the human who would be responsible for bringing God into the world — Mary. Next Sunday will be the first Sunday in the Christmas season, when our study will move ahead in Luke to Mary and Joseph presenting Jesus at the temple. Also be mindful that, because of the busyness of the upcoming week, this may be one of those “low-attendance Sundays,” as people are preparing for travel, Christmas worship services, and other obligations.

But as you prepare, pay close attention to all the various characters in this story. As Christy Edwards wrote about her young children, find ways to weave them into your “Christmas imagination” this week.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Consider the following questions to help guide your group through this passage.

1. How might we hear “Do not be afraid” as an acknowledgment of Mary’s fear rather than a command to suppress it? How can fear and faith coexist?
2. What does Mary’s story teach us about the difference between receiving God’s favor and receiving comfort, privilege, or protection from suffering?
3. Mary responds to Gabriel with an honest question: “How can this be?” What does her response suggest about the place of questions within a faithful life?

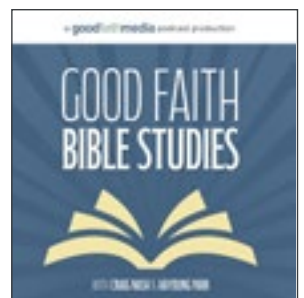
4. Christy asks us to replace “Why Mary?” with “Why not Mary?” How does God’s choice of a young, poor, socially insignificant woman reflect the reversals found throughout Luke?
5. Who is permitted to tell their own story in our churches and communities, and whose voice is too often ignored or spoken over?
6. How can churches teach this story sensitively while remembering people for whom Advent’s emphasis on pregnancy and birth may bring grief rather than uncomplicated joy?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

What better way to celebrate this Sunday’s passage (and next Sunday’s) by watching Linus recite the Christmas story in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*?



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Luke 2:22–40**Beautiful and Terrible Things**

Lesson written by Mary Alice Birdwhistell

Merry Christmas! Although the “Big Day” was two days ago, the beauty of the lectionary is that Christians celebrate Christmas for several more days. We are mindful that today may be sparsely attended if you are using these studies for Sunday school. Mary Alice Birdwhistell’s study is warm, reflective, and perfectly suited for this Sunday, when many of you may be exhausted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Looking back over 2026, what beautiful and terrible things have you experienced? Where have you recognized God’s presence within them?
2. Simeon had spent years waiting for the “consolation of Israel.” What sustained his hope, and what are you still waiting and hoping for?
3. Simeon describes Jesus as both a light and a source of conflict. Why might the good news bring liberation to some people while unsettling others?
4. Anna responds to Jesus by speaking about him to everyone awaiting redemption. What does her example teach us about who is called to proclaim good news?
5. How does Jesus’ birth into a poor and vulnerable family shape your understanding of what it means for God to be with us?
6. Phillips Brooks carried grief, exhaustion, hope, and wonder into his experience of Bethlehem. What “hopes and fears” are you carrying into the Christmas and New Year’s season?

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