



Theme: Walking Towards Christmas – Advent 2022

"Walking Towards Uncertainty"

Weekly Memory Verse:

³⁸ **Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."** – Luke 1:38 (NRSV)

Monday, November 28 – Read [Luke 1:26-27](#) and [John 1:45-46](#). As Luke began his story about Jesus' birth, he told of a divine messenger appearing to Zechariah, an aged priest, in the imposing Temple in Jerusalem, Israel's capital city in [Luke 1:5-11](#). But that was just prologue to the main story. The main story came from Nazareth. Pilgrims came from all over the Mediterranean world to Jerusalem, but Nazareth was not on any pilgrim's wish list. Honestly, it's likely that most citizens of Judea (southern Israel) had never heard of Nazareth.

📖 Scholar Craig Keener wrote the *Cultural Backgrounds Bible Study*, "In contrast to Jerusalem, with its massive building projects, Nazareth was a lowly village." The town where Mary lived was not the kind of place to fill its young people with lofty ambitions. It seems most unlikely that she had any idea we'd be reading about her in the year 2022. Where were you born and brought up? What effect, positive or negative, did the surroundings of your birth and childhood have on your expectations of life?

📖 In the text from the gospel of John, we see that Nathanael didn't think coming from Nazareth said anything promising or good about Jesus. His doubts likely reflected a common opinion in the area. [John 21:2](#) tells us that Nathanael himself was from nearby Cana. Yet we only know about the incident because, after meeting Jesus, Nathanael became one of his followers. When has God used an unexpected person or ministry to uplift or deepen your spiritual life?

Prayer: *Lord, when I sing, "This is my Father's World," that song reminds me that you are at work in all the obscure places of our world as well as in the powerful and famous. And you want to work in me, no matter how obscure or famous I may feel. Amen.*

Tuesday, November 29 – Read [Luke 1:26-27](#) and [Matthew 13:54-55](#). Luke simply told readers that Mary was "engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David's house." We will learn more about Joseph in next week's Meditation Moments from the gospel of Matthew. But we need to know something about Mary's fiancé to grasp her story. She lived in the tiny village of Nazareth,

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but the slender evidence in the gospels, such as [Luke 2:1-4](#), suggests that Bethlehem was Joseph's hometown. If so, it is likely their families arranged the marriage.

- ☛ In Israelite culture, an engagement was as binding as marriage. Mary was pregnant? People, like Joseph at first, “knew” some other man was to blame. In [John 8:39-41](#), some later implied that Jesus' father was unknown. Mary might even have been stoned to death, according to what we read in [Deuteronomy 22:20-24](#) and [John 8:3-5](#). But [Matthew 1:19](#) said, “Joseph her husband was a righteous man.” He wanted Mary safe even if she'd let him down. How have you learned to face distress in a measured way like Joseph's?
- ☛ Some believe “carpenter” may refer to one who builds with wood or stone. Wood is somewhat rare in Palestine, and houses are most frequently constructed with stone. Either way, it's clear Joseph worked with his hands. The scorn in Matthew 13's story hinted they did not value workers like Joseph very highly. Does our culture properly value “workers” who lack prestige or corner offices? What was it about Joseph that made him “great” by Jesus' standards (see [Mark 10:43-45](#))?

Prayer: *Lord God, when you chose Mary, you also chose Joseph. He could have prayed something like the words from John Wesley's covenant prayer, “Let me be full, let me be empty,” as he played his supporting role. Give me his spirit. Amen.*

Wednesday, November 30 – Read [Matthew 1:1-17](#) and [Luke 3:23-38](#). “Oh, no—not genealogies! I don't know who those people were. I can't even pronounce some of those foreign names!” Both Matthew and Luke listed Jesus' ancestors, not as a way of putting their readers to sleep, but as a powerful way to tell the story of God's unfolding history leading up to the promised Messiah. Hebrew genealogies (like Matthew's) generally began with an ancestor and read forward; Greek genealogies (like Luke's) did the reverse, reading backward from the present to the past.

- ☛ It's easy to get confused reading these lists. If you go name-by-name, these two genealogies differ at some points. The main difference is that Matthew, written for a predominantly Jewish audience, uses the legal line. The Jewish patriarchal culture of the first century would have seen Joseph was seen as the “legal” father, regardless of genetics. Luke was written mostly to Greek or Gentile followers of Jesus, but someone who was Roman, so he used the biological line of descent through Mary. How did both genealogies make the crucial point that Jesus fulfilled and completed God's promises to Abraham and David?
- ☛ Luke, by going all the way to Adam as a son of God emphasizes how Jesus is for all people. The genealogy connects the first human with God's Son, who is the Christ. This was one way Luke emphasized the Christian conviction that Jesus was fully human as well as fully divine. In what ways can it matter to you that Jesus entered fully into our human experience?

Prayer: *O God, you have always been willing to work with anyone who is willing to work with you. Thank you for giving me the privilege of joining the long list of people who have served your great redeeming purpose in the world. Amen.*

Thursday, December 1 – Read [Luke 1:26-28](#) and [Daniel 8:15-18](#). Luke reported that God entrusted the angel Gabriel with the crucial message to Mary. Luke first told us about Gabriel in [Luke 1:18-19](#), when he appeared to Zechariah. But who was this divine messenger? Devout Israelites knew. They'd become familiar with his name in the visions of the Old Testament book of

Daniel. There, as “someone who looked like a man,” he brought messages from God to help understand the apocalyptic visions.

What’s your mental image of an “angel”? If it’s a plump infant with short wings, you’re not alone. But that’s from medieval art, not the Bible. [Hebrews 1:14](#) asked, “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” How can you keep your heart and perceptions open to any angel messengers God may send you along your journey?

Daniel said he met Gabriel when he “needed help understanding the vision I saw” and was praying. Mary, as far as Luke reported, seemed to have been just going about her daily business when the angel approached her with the divine message. In what settings have you had the clearest sense of receiving a message from God?

Prayer: *Keep me alert, Lord, so that wherever and however your message comes to me, I will be able to hear, accept and act on it. Amen.*

Friday, December 2 – Read [Luke 1:28-33](#). Living in the obscure town of Nazareth, Mary had no reason to expect to lead a life that was exceptional. When God’s messenger greeted her with the words, “Rejoice, favored one! ..God is honoring you,” Luke said the words confused her. With eyes that saw things human eyes could not, God had chosen her to become the mother who would miraculously bear the Messiah who all Israel had waited for centuries.

The angel said to Mary, ““Rejoice, favored one!” But that didn’t mean tinsel and bright lights, much less luxury and comfort. Mary’s blessing was one of purpose, of new life, of relationship, of participation in what God was doing in the world. Her blessing brought hardship, confusion, and grief, but it was still a blessing. Do you ever wish God’s favor toward you meant not mission, but simply happiness and ease? How did Mary’s life exemplify the sacrifices God’s favor may call for?

Gabriel’s words to Mary evoked [Isaiah 9:2, 6-7](#)’s brilliant promise. It said a descendant of David would bring, “a great light on those living in a pitch-dark land.” He would be called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.” It was not just a promise—it was THE promise at the heart of all God’s promises. Can you imagine Mary’s feelings as it slowly dawned on her that she was the one who would bear the long-promised child?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you were, and are, the dawn from heaven, the light in the darkness that my life needs. Open my eyes to take in and rejoice in the continual dawning of your light. Amen.*

Saturday, December 3 – Read [Luke 1:34-38](#). God’s messenger promised that Mary would have a baby. Since Mary was a virgin, biological reality surely ruled pregnancy out. People in Mary’s day didn’t have all our medical knowledge, but they understood the basics of human reproduction well enough to know a virgin could NOT be pregnant. So, it makes sense Mary struggled to believe the angel’s words—but in the end she did. Young as she was, probably early to mid-teens, Mary knew she served a God who is free to do very unusual things. The angel underscored that with these words, “Nothing is impossible for God.”

Mary didn’t try to hide her puzzled questions in verse 34, but she was open to the angel’s answer. Her final response was an awe-inspiring model for us and is this week’s memory verse: **“I am the Lord’s servant. Let it be with me just as you have said.”** What does it take for you to respond to God’s call as Mary did? Do your life experiences help or hinder you from fully believing and trusting the good news about God’s incredible love for you?

What helps you trust that God is with you and for you through all the ups and downs of life?

Prayer: *Lord God, from darkness to light, anguish, and grief to hope, from death to life—you are always the God for whom nothing is impossible. I praise you for the joy and hope you offer me. Amen.*