

# Perspectives of the Promise

An Advent Study

## **Week 1: PREPARE (John the Baptist and Family)**

### **Read Ahead:**

Luke 1:5-25; 1:36-45; 1:57-66, 80

Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6; Isaiah 40:3; Proverbs 22:6; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 3 John 1:4

### **Icebreaker:**

What has been the biggest undertaking you have ever had that required extensive preparation?

### **Summary:**

Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were righteous before God. Zechariah served as priest while Elizabeth was said to be barren. Childless in their old age, the angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah while performing his priestly duties. For lack of faith, he was struck mute while Elizabeth continued to demonstrate faith and gratitude for the mercy of God and blessing of pregnancy. As instructed by the angel, they named him John which means “God is gracious”. John would serve as the forerunner for Christ, preparing the way for the Lord.

### **Discussion Questions:**

Zechariah was chosen by lot to burn incense before the Lord (Lk 1:9). What is the difference between coincidence and providence?

Why did Zechariah doubt? Have you ever prayed for something that in reality you doubted would or could come to pass? Have you ever paid a penalty for unbelief (Lk 1:13-17, 20)?

Elizabeth’s faith stands in great contrast to the fear and doubt of Zechariah; even in the same household. Have you ever had a similar experience? What is it that drove both faith and doubt?

John’s life most likely challenged the assumptions and expectations of many (wilderness vs. priestly order of Zechariah). How might this have better served him? What unnecessary expectations do we lay on ourselves, our children, or others to fulfill the call of God?

What role do you suppose Zechariah and Elizabeth had in preparing the preparer?

Consider the role John had to play in preparing the way for Jesus. How does his role of preparer add to the authenticity of Jesus’ work and ministry?

**Pray:** *Father in heaven, teach us to trust and believe as Elizabeth did. May we not grow faint of your promises. Strengthen our faith and confidence as you did in the life Zachariah. Redeem our past and give us boldness to speak truth to those around us. Teach us God how to plant and nurture faith in those coming behind us; our children, grandchildren, and others who learn from our influence. May we recognize the calling you have given to us to continue to prepare the way of the Lord as we look forward to your second advent. Amen.*

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## **Week 2: PROCLAIM (Angels)**

### **Read Ahead:**

Luke 1:8-20, 26-38; 2:8-15; Matthew 1:18-25; 2:7-12, 13-15, 19-23

### **Icebreaker:**

Share of a time you were told about something that you could not wait to see for yourself. When you finally saw it, what was your reaction?

### **Summary:**

The Bible is full of stories of angels. This study is not meant to expose every detail about angels however, we can see from these few passages several roles and functions of angels. Gabriel and other angels appeared to Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds. An angel instructed Joseph, gave comfort to Mary, punished Zechariah, brought good news to the shepherds, and possibly warned to wise men. Angels are ministering messengers of God proclaiming His truth over us. In like manner, we also must proclaim to others that which the Lord has made known to us.

### **Discussion Questions:**

How many angelic appearances occur throughout the preparation and birth of Christ? What was the message of each occurrence?

What similarities or differences can you identify in both the message and the response of each angelic visitation?

Consider the different accounts of Gabriel and the angels. What functions did the angels serve? (Ex: Comfort – *fear not*)

Consider the Shepherds. Maybe you haven't been visited by an angel, but you have been visited by others. How will you respond to the message of Christ proclaimed over you? How will you proclaim His message to others?

God often used angels to reveal messages or warnings in dreams, rather than elaborate appearances. In what subtle ways has God spoken to you? Has God given you a dream that you have yet to respond to? Why the hesitation?

**Pray:** *Father in heaven we thank you that you are a God who speaks to us. Whether by angels, family, pastors or friends, we are grateful for all of those who you have put into our lives who have proclaimed your truth over us. May we too comfort and minister to others, proclaiming your truth with boldness and joy. Amen.*

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## **Week 3: PROTEST (Herod)**

**Read Ahead:** Luke 1:3-7; Matthew 2:1-23; 1 John 2:15-17; Proverbs 16:18, Psalm 145:1-13

### **Icebreaker:**

Identify several qualities, attributes, or traits that make for a great king (leader).

### **Summary:**

Matthew's gospel account is uniquely Jewish and emphasizes Jesus as the true *King of the Jews*. King Herod obviously was none too keen on the idea that someone would be welcomed and praised as king to the throne he held. Again, perspective is important to understanding Herod. Called *Herod the Great* for his many architectural accomplishments, there is nothing great about how Herod handled his personal affairs or how he treated others. Fear, jealousy, power, control, insecurity, and much more plagued Herod's life which often wreaked havoc on the lives of many.

### **Discussion Questions:**

What is the significance of Luke and Matthew both recording that Herod was on the throne when both Jesus and John the Baptist came on the scene?

What is it that made Herod so "great"? What eternal significance if any do those accomplishments have?

Herod was zealous for his crown. Discuss the character traits of Herod. To what measures have you gone to maintain power or control in a given situation?

How does following Christ "threaten" how you wish to rule over your own life? How have you "protested" Christ in your own life?

Discuss the tension between being the "king of your own castle" and allowing Jesus to be king of your heart.

What generational lessons can we learn from the Herod dynasty?

**Pray:** *Father in heaven we thank you that you are our King. We praise you God that you are not a tyrant nor do you abdicate your responsibilities toward us. Thank you for your continued faithfulness and provision over our lives. We pray that you would reign first and foremost as the King of our hearts, and that we too would exercise our influence in a way that builds your kingdom first and not our own, to the honor and glory of Christ. Amen.*

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## **Week 4: PURSUE (Shepherds, Wise Men, Simeon & Anna)**

**Read Ahead:** Luke 2:8-18; Matthew 2:1-12; Luke 2:22-38; 2 Sam 7:8; Psalm 23:1; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 23:1-4; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:2; Numbers 24:17; Micah 5:2; Isaiah 9:6;

### **Icebreaker:**

Describe a time when you eagerly went to see someone or something. What was your response as a result?

### **Summary:**

Everyone who has encountered Jesus has a testimony but not all testimonies are alike. The shepherds were visited by angels and ran in haste to see what was told to them. The wise men came worshipping having followed a star by faith. Simeon and Anna waited patiently and faithfully for years and years, until their hope was finally revealed. In every case where Jesus was pursued, there was also a response.

### **Discussion Questions:**

Why did the angel say to the shepherds that Jesus was born in the city of David rather than Bethlehem?

What reasons might God have had in mind for choosing lowly shepherds to proclaim the birth of Christ to first?

What was the response of the shepherds having verified the angelic message and seeing Christ?

Who were the wise men (Magi) and what was their intention in visiting Jesus? How did they hear or come to know about Jesus?

What was the response of the wise men when they saw Jesus? What is the significance of their treasures?

Simeon and Anna both seemed to have “waited” for the Lord’s arrival with expectancy for a very long time. Describe their reactions to seeing Christ.

Notice that many pursue Jesus in a variety of ways and in the midst of a wide array of life circumstances. However, in each case there is always a response. What is your response to having pursued Jesus? What do you anticipate your response to be when you see Him face to face?

**Pray:** *Father in heaven we thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus. We thank you God that you have made Him known to us and ask that by your strength we would never cease in pursuing Jesus. May we respond as so many others did to share the joy that is in us, to speak of Jesus to all, as we long for the day when we too will see you face to face. Amen.*