

The Unexpected Visitor

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Advent 2021 (28th November - 25th December)



HISTORY HAS MEANING

During the period of Advent we're going to follow the unfolding story of the preparation for the birth of Jesus as told by Luke the physician. At the outset of his gospel he makes it plain that the story he will tell is not fictitious but has been verified by eye witnesses. He opens his account of the life of Jesus by introducing us to two contrasting characters: Zechariah the elderly priest and Mary a young teenager preparing for her wedding day in the near future. Both of these characters have an encounter with a visitor, you might say from another dimension, a visit that alters their lives and indeed the whole course of history. Luke introduces us to a narrative that brings Heaven and Earth together. A narrative in which God uses the most unexpected of people to become his agents of change in the world.

Over the next few weeks of Advent we're going to take time to study Luke's text a little closer and see what unexpected insights we will uncover. Moving from conversations of disbelief to belief we will uncover the Jerusalem Praise Sessions and finally we'll discover extracts from Mary's diaries, recalling insights that will shed light on the magic of Christmas that goes beyond mythical imaginings of fairies and Santa Claus. Insights that open us up to a spiritual reality inviting us to literally consider the consequences of Heaven touching Earth. Insights that create mystery and faith introducing us to the God with whom nothing is impossible. Such realities of faith far outstretch our minds beyond the predictable commercialisation of a white Christmas; to consider the enormity of what it truly means to say, "Emmanuel" – God is with us.

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It is our hope that as you use the material this Advent that you will be drawn into the enormity of what Christmas continually points to. A mark in time, a BC and an AD, when everything changed and history took on its real meaning and significance. Luke seeks to direct our thinking this way by rooting all he shares in a time and location verified by eye witnesses. Today we who believe are invited to join that great company of believers who are open to the fresh reality that God is moving among us through the power and presence of his Holy Spirit.

These discussion questions adapt our monthly themes for small Connect Groups or personal Bible study (look up the [The Unexpected Visitor Resource Pack PDF](#) for more information on this month's theme). The questions are divided into 4 parts to correspond with the 4 weeks of the Daily Worship theme. They are offered as a guideline and there is no need to go through all the given questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose, or adapt to what interests you or your group.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Part 1: Conversations of disbelief with an unexpected visitor

This month all of our readings come from the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel as we take time to enter the story of the Nativity anew, eyes open to the interplay between the expected and the unexpected. If you are using this material for personal study or as part of a group you may want to make time to read all of the first two chapters of Luke (perhaps prior to meeting if in a group) before returning to look at particular verses in the questions below.

Read Luke 1: 1-4

Why is it important to Luke that the story of the life of Jesus is rooted in history?

Do you think we would still know about Jesus if there were no Gospel accounts? What do we know about Jesus and Christians outside of the Gospels?

For more information you could start reading this article: uncover.org.uk/questions/whats-the-evidence-outside-the-bible-for-jesus-life-and-teaching

Read Luke 1: 14-17

Who are the children we have been called to care for and prepare for Christ's coming?

Read Luke 1: 19-25

What do you believe about angels? Do they exist? Have you encountered one?

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Part 2: Conversations of belief with an unexpected visitor

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Read Luke 1: 26-27

Six months later...The angel Gabriel...In Nazareth...A girl engaged to be married...Man called Joseph ...descended from King David... the girl called Mary...

What's the point of the seven facts?

Read Luke 1: 28

Eugene Peterson in *The Message* translates the angel having said to Mary "Good morning! You're beautiful with God's beauty".

Who is it that we need to view through angel eyes, helping them see God's beauty in their lives?

Read Luke 1: 34-37

What is the difference between Mary's question to the Angel and Zachariah's question in Luke 1: 18?

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Part 3: The Zach and Mary Praise Sessions — The role of praise and thanksgiving in our lives

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Read Luke 1: 46-49

You might not write a song but how about sharing some of the things God has done for you?

Read Luke 1: 51-52

Where do we see God at work in politicians? What are the dangers in church aligning with politics? How do we give God the glory when good things happen?

Read Luke 1: 67-80

What does it mean for us today to be called to prepare the way? - What does it mean to be a voice crying in the wilderness?

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Part 4: The unexpected visitors turn up again — Extracts from Mary's Diaries

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Read Luke 2: 1-5

Life with Jesus doesn't remove us from stress. Take time to think about stress levels and the strategies we see in scripture to help us manage them.

Read Luke 2: 6-7

Learning to make the most of what you have is a powerful lesson. Mary's manger solution will never be forgotten.

What have been some 'manger solutions' in your life? Can you share them? Times when you've had to improvise on the spot.

Read Luke 2: 8-20

The Shepherds believed and went to Bethlehem. Our lives have our own 'Bethlehem visits' — not literally going to Bethlehem, but moments when God calls us to see something for ourselves. Have you ever had that experience of feeling called by God to go see something?