

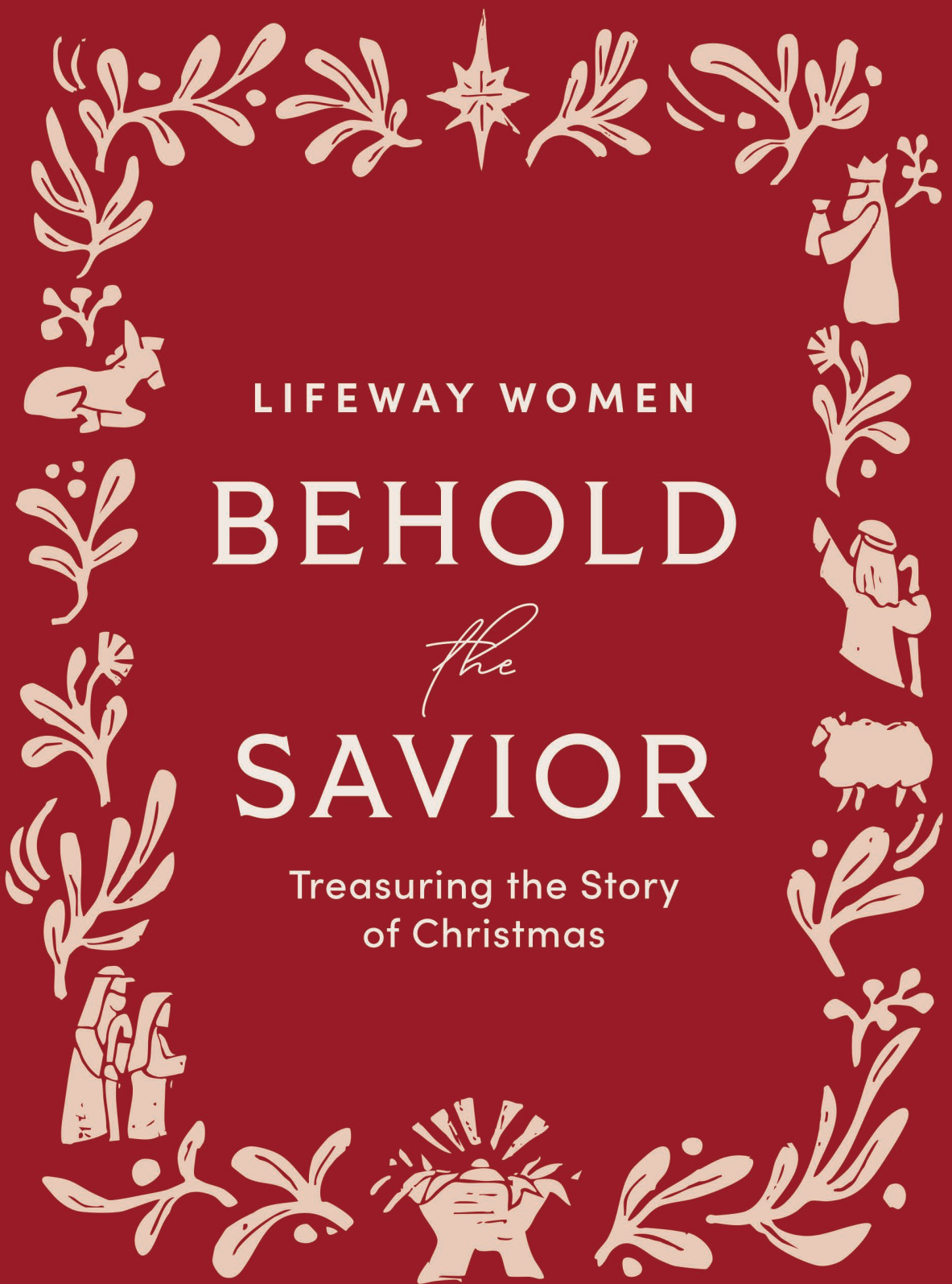
LIFEWAY WOMEN

BEHOLD

the

SAVIOR

Treasuring the Story
of Christmas



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Treasuring the Story
of Christmas

LIFEWAY WOMEN

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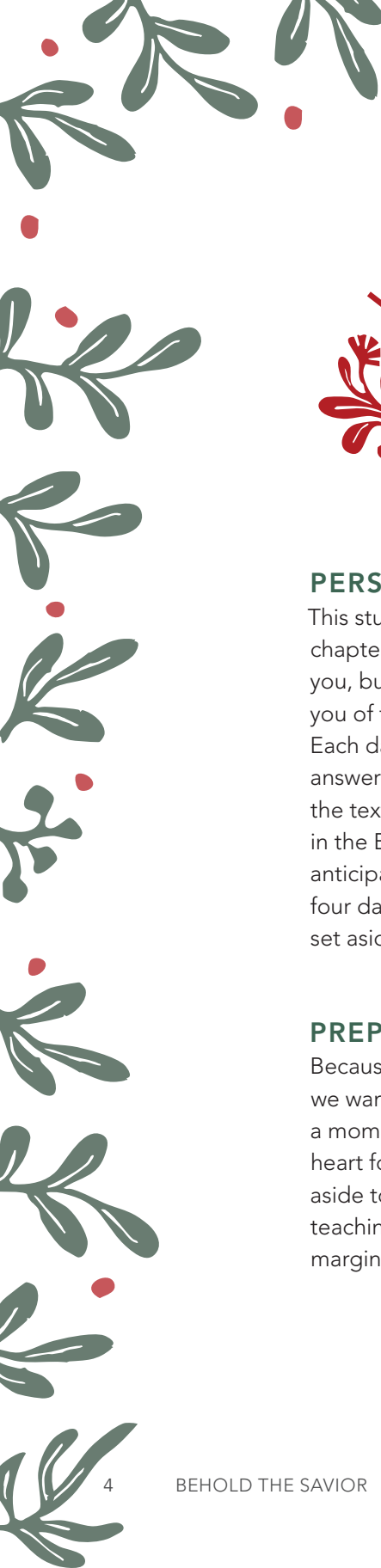
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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

PERSONAL STUDY

This study is meant to be a slow walk through Luke chapters 1 and 2. This may be a very familiar story to you, but we hope this verse-by-verse look will remind you of the wonder and hope of Jesus's first advent. Each day, you'll read a few verses from Luke 1–2 and answer questions to help you interact with and apply the text. You may also read Scripture from other places in the Bible. This will help you get a full picture of the anticipation felt for the arrival of the Savior. There are four days of Bible study per week, along with one day set aside for more reflective journaling time.

PREPARE HIM ROOM

Because this season features so much hustle and bustle, we wanted to provide you with the opportunity to take a moment to prepare room in your schedule and your heart for Jesus. Each week, you'll have one day set aside to reflect, journal, and pray through what God is teaching you in this season. We hope this helps create margin in your week to truly behold Him.

INVITATIONS

Christmas is a season full of family and friends and fun. We want to extend the invitation to behold to those around us. We've provided ideas for you to behold Christ with your community, your church, your friends and family, and by yourself. We're calling these invitations because they are optional, but we hope they will be a fun and meaningful part of your Christmas season.

LEADING A GROUP?

Thank you for leading a group through *Behold the Savior*! We know Advent is a busy season, but we also know beholding and studying is best done together. Consider gathering with your small group, friends, or family members once a week to check in, whether in person or virtually.

Here is a list of tools to help you lead.

LEADER GUIDE to help you structure each group meeting and facilitate small group discussion. In it you'll find discussion questions, prayer prompts, and leader tips.

FREE DOWNLOADS to help you promote the study in your church or neighborhood, including: invitation card, promotional poster, bulletin insert, and PowerPoint® template.

You'll find these and more at lifeway.com/beholdthesavior.

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

We know many of you are gathering with family this time of year. You may have young children yourself or a house full of neighbors or nieces or nephews. We've partnered with the Lifeway NextGen team to provide brief family devotional guides to go along with your study in this book. You can access those at lifeway.com/advent.



Introduction

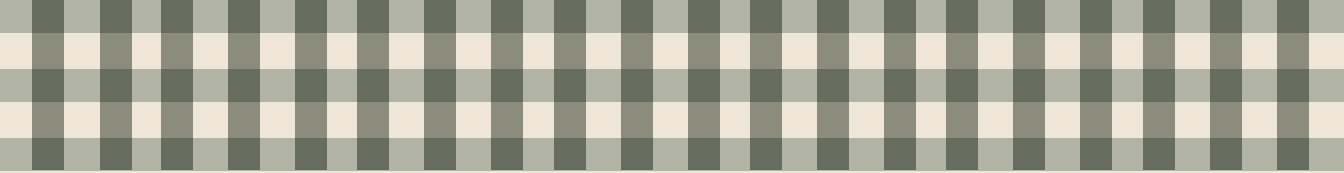
ELIZABETH HYNDMAN

Advent is often a time of looking back. We are surrounded by nostalgia. Think about the Christmas traditions, decorations, and recipes passed down generation to generation, the programs and shows we've watched since our childhoods. Even the smells of Christmas—orange and cinnamon and fir—remind us of years gone by. We sit around and tell "Remember when . . ." stories and "Grandpa always . . ." anecdotes.

Advent is also a season when we look to the future. It comes toward the end of our calendar, Christmas Day only one week from turning the page to a brand new year. Many of us are already thinking of resolutions, goals, and plans for "next year" as we celebrate Christmas.

We have a difficult time being present, especially in the Advent season. As you'll read and study over the next few weeks, the Christmas season also involves a lot of waiting and anticipation. The first Christmas came after a long time of waiting. We are waiting on the second Advent now. Waiting requires being present, too. So, this Advent season, we want to provide you with the time and space to be present. To behold.

There is weight to the word *behold*. Beholding is a very present-tense activity. It requires a pause. *Behold* comes from the Middle English *beholden*, "to hold, keep." Merriam-Webster



includes verbs like “apprehend” and “experience” in its definition of the word. It requires being present.¹

Our hope for this Advent study is for you to behold, to be present in the Advent season. We will walk slowly through the first two chapters in the Gospel of Luke, encountering the men and women who were present for the first Advent. We’ll see the ways they beheld our Savior.

Along with telling the most detailed version of the first Advent, Luke’s Gospel also emphasizes Jesus’s role as Savior of the world. We see this even in the first two chapters. Jesus came for the Jews and the Gentiles, the lonely and the lowly, the righteous and those far off.

This Advent season, we pray we will experience the Savior of the world. As we read together about the first Advent, we pray we’re able to behold the Savior in our current Advent season, all while looking forward with great hope and excitement to the future second Advent when Jesus returns, and we will behold Him for eternity.

**Jesus came for
the Jews and
the Gentiles,
the lonely and
the lowly, the
righteous and
those far off.**

LUKE 1:1-25, 57-66



The Dedication to Theophilus

¹ Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed them down to us. ³ So it also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence, most honorable Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed.

Gabriel Predicts John's Birth

⁵ In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest of Abijah's division named Zechariah. His wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ Both were righteous in God's sight, living without blame according to all the commands and requirements of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no children because Elizabeth could not conceive, and both of them were well along in years.

⁸ When his division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, ⁹ it happened that he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ At the hour of incense the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. ¹¹ An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified and overcome with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. ¹⁴ There will be joy and delight for you, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵ For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and will never drink wine or beer. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb. ¹⁶ He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of

the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people.”

¹⁸ “How can I know this?” Zechariah asked the angel. “For I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years.”

¹⁹ The angel answered him, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and tell you this good news. ²⁰ Now listen. You will become silent and unable to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time.”

²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. ²² When he did come out, he could not speak to them. Then they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was making signs to them and remained speechless. ²³ When the days of his ministry were completed, he went back home.

²⁴ After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived and kept herself in seclusion for five months. She said, ²⁵ “The Lord has done this for me. He has looked with favor in these days to take away my disgrace among the people.”

The Birth and Naming of John

⁵⁷ Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she had a son. ⁵⁸ Then her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her his great mercy, and they rejoiced with her.

⁵⁹ When they came to circumcise the child on the eighth day, they were going to name him Zechariah, after his father.

⁶⁰ But his mother responded, “No. He will be called John.”

⁶¹ Then they said to her, “None of your relatives has that name.” ⁶² So they motioned to his father to find out what he wanted him to be called. ⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they were all amazed.

⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁵ Fear came on all those who lived around them, and all these things were being talked about throughout the hill country of Judea.

⁶⁶ All who heard about him took it to heart, saying, “What then will this child become?” For, indeed, the Lord’s hand was with him.

HERALDS OF CHRIST

Week

1

As we begin our study of Luke 1 and 2, we meet Zechariah and Elizabeth. God interrupts their faithful routine with the best news ever, calling them to obedience and joy as they behold the unexpected.

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Growing up, what was your favorite holiday and why?
2. Why do you want to be a part of this study and this group?
3. What do you hope to gain from this focused time in God's Word during the Christmas season?
4. The title of this study is *Behold the Savior*. What does it mean to behold something? What do you behold most often in your everyday life?

Pray for your hearts and minds during this season, asking God to help you prepare room for and behold Him.

WEEK 1



LUKE 1:1–4

¹ Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed them down to us. ³ So it also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence, most honorable Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed.

Background on Luke

LAURA MAGNESS



LUKE 1:1–4

The Christmas story, like any good story, has become the stuff of lore. It's spread across generations and around the globe. It's worked its way into classical art, lawn decorations, Charlie Brown, some of music and movie's biggest hits, and so much more. Most people, regardless of religious affiliation or personal relationship with Jesus, recognize the figures in a nativity scene. As a story like this one grows in popularity, though, some of the details get hazy and the perspective can be lost.

Over the next four weeks, we're going to take a slow walk through the biblical texts that give us the full picture of Jesus's birth—why He came, what happened when He did, and how our lives are forever changed because of the Baby in a manger. We want to savor this story and better understand it and its place in God's bigger story. The Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John describe different aspects of Jesus's coming. Luke gives us the most detail, so we'll spend a good bit of time in Luke chapters 1 and 2, and that's where we'll begin today.

READ LUKE 1:1-4.

**These verses can be considered the prologue to Luke's Gospel.
Does Luke identify himself?**

You may be surprised to notice that Luke doesn't name himself as the writer of this book of the Bible. In fact, none of the Gospel writers name themselves. So how do we know who wrote them? The early church fathers helped preserve the knowledge that the author was, in fact, Luke.

These were some of the first Bible scholars and commentators, many of whom lived within a century or two of Jesus. We can think of them as secondary sources, with eyewitnesses being the primary sources. One church father, Irenaeus, wrote, “Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him.”¹

If we want to fully appreciate Luke’s account of Jesus’s birth, it’s helpful to know as much as we can about him. Luke is named only three times in Scripture.

Luke, the dearly loved physician, and Demas send you greetings.
COLOSSIANS 4:14

Only Luke is with me. Bring Mark with you, for he is useful to me in the ministry.
2 TIMOTHY 4:11

Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my coworkers.
PHILEMON 1:24

According to Colossians 4:14, what was Luke’s occupation?

**Who is the “me” in 2 Timothy 4 and the “my” in Philemon 1?
Look at 2 Timothy 1:1 and Philemon 1:1 to help with your answer.**

Luke was uniquely positioned to write an account of Jesus’s time on earth that stood out from the other Gospel accounts. His experience as a physician (Col. 4:14) likely gave him an eye to details others might not notice. Because of the language in Luke 1:2, we know that Luke wasn’t an eyewitness to Jesus’s ministry but that he would have learned everything he did from eyewitnesses.² It’s clear from his Gospel and the book of Acts, which Luke also wrote, that Luke was fully convinced that

Jesus is the Son of God (Luke 3:38) who takes away the sins of the world (Luke 2:30-32; 19:10). As we'll see throughout our study, he tells the details of Jesus's birth with both of these facts constantly in view.

Luke describes his and all the Gospels as “a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us” (1:1). What do you think Luke means by this statement? Give your best guess.

Luke's Gospel uses the term *fulfilled* many times, including in Luke 1:1; 4:21; 22:37; and 24:44. Pastor and author Thabiti Anyabwile has some helpful insight on these verses.

Luke is referring to the promises of the Old Testament, the Jewish Scriptures. One simple way of understanding the Bible's organization is to think of the Old Testament as “promises made” and the New Testament as “promises kept.” The Old Testament looks forward to God keeping promises that he made to men like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and King David. The New Testament books, like Luke's Gospel, record for us how God kept or fulfilled those promises. . . . One of the major themes of Luke's Gospel is his emphasis on the plan of God and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.³

COMPARE LUKE 1:1-4 WITH LUKE 24:44-48. What similarities do you see between Luke's words in chapter 1 and Jesus's words in chapter 24? Note all your observations.

These two passages form a bookend to Luke's Gospel, and you may have noticed several similarities.⁴ I hope you caught the repeated mention of the words "fulfilled" and "witnesses." Throughout his entire Gospel, including the account of Jesus's birth, Luke will continually point readers back to the fact that these very real events are the fulfillment of God's promises to redeem His people from sin and restore them to right relationship with Him.

Knowing Luke's emphasis on the fulfillment of God's promises, brainstorm some key things you might expect to see in Luke's version of the Christmas story. List any ideas you have, and then keep that in mind as you move through this study.

**What is one way you've seen God's faithfulness in your own life?
What does this teach you about Him?**

REREAD LUKE 1:3-4.

Write a paraphrase of verse 4, Luke's purpose statement for his Gospel.

Here's what I came up with for a paraphrase of verse 4: *You've heard the stories of Jesus's ministry, His death on the cross, and His resurrection. I want to give you my account too, to add to your assurance that what you've heard is true.* One scholar put it like this: "Luke's stated purpose in writing his Gospel was to provide historical certainty and theological clarity for Theophilus in regard to what he had been taught (instructed) about Jesus."⁵ May our own certainty and clarity in Jesus grow over the coming weeks as we behold our Savior.

Spend a few minutes in quiet reflection thinking about the miracle that is the Bible, God's very Word that you can hold in your hands, a certain and enduring collection of God's promises and faithfulness. Pray that during this season of Advent He will draw you closer to Him and you will see His goodness and love in a fresh light.

WEEK 1



LUKE 1:5-7

⁵ In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest of Abijah's division named Zechariah. His wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ Both were righteous in God's sight, living without blame according to all the commands and requirements of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no children because Elizabeth could not conceive, and both of them were well along in years.

The Forerunner's Family

NATASHA MENIFEE



LUKE 1:5-7

As a former schoolteacher, one of my favorite subjects to teach was Reading. I loved helping children learn to read and comprehend what they read. During my time at the elementary level, we would often use what is known as the five Ws—who, what, when, where, why, and sometimes how (not a “W” but still quite helpful with comprehension)—to guide students through basic level comprehension. Using this method of questioning, students were able to articulate their understanding of what they heard and/or read.

Are there parts of the Christmas narrative that leave you confused or asking more questions? Make note of any questions you may have or points of clarity you seek. Revisit this section at the conclusion of the Advent study to see how those questions were answered or what questions were added for you.

You may be very familiar with the Christmas story, or you may have never read this or any portion of Scripture; either way, I appeal to you to come to the passage with an open heart and mind. Let us adopt the five Ws to examine the Scriptures and better understand the events connected to the birth of Christ.

We learn in John 1 that John the Baptist, also known as the forerunner of Jesus, was sent by God “to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him” (John 1:7). His assignment was clear and had a singular focus—prepare the way for the Messiah. John’s story, however, does not begin in the wilderness. Like Christ, John came into the world as a baby to unsuspecting parents. To properly behold the Savior and appreciate the story of Christmas, we must consider all the players.

READ JOHN 1:23.

**What does this verse show us about John the Baptist’s purpose?
What lessons does his testimony teach us today?**

NOW READ LUKE 1:5.

WHO are the people in this verse?

ZECHARIAH: A descendant of priests from the division of Abijah, in the priestly line of Aaron. His family served in the temple (1 Chron. 24:19).

ELIZABETH: Also a descendant of Aaron, she was known as one of the daughters of Aaron. Therefore, her family line was among the levitical priesthood as well.

WHEN and **WHERE** did the events take place?

“In the days of King Herod of Judea.” Judea, “formerly called Judah, was first given the name following the Babylonian exile.”⁶ This Herod was known as Herod the Great and ruled Judea from 37 to 4 BC. He was appointed king by the Roman government. He was the same Herod who set the decree to have all boys under two murdered in an attempt to kill Christ (Matt. 2:16-18).

How does knowing that the events recorded in Luke happened at a definite time in history to definite people help strengthen your belief in the narrative of Christ?

READ LUKE 1:6.

WHAT is the character of Zechariah and Elizabeth?

Verse 6 tells us that both were righteous in God's sight. While they were sinners, they lived righteously, keeping all the Lord's commandments and requirements. What an awesome testimony to be identified as someone who has lived blamelessly!

Examine the following verses. Rewrite each in your own words.

John 14:15

Romans 12:1

James 1:22-25

How do these verses encourage or challenge you to live blameless and keep the Lord's commands?

READ LUKE 1:7.

WHY would Zechariah and Elizabeth face such a challenge if they were blameless?

Despite living holy and righteous lives before God, Zechariah and Elizabeth were not without struggle. Scripture tells us that they were childless, and Elizabeth was barren. This seems to be a cruel joke. The “reward” for their obedience and faithfulness was no children. Barren women in biblical times would face social stigma; it was looked upon as a curse. A childless family would mean the father had no heir to carry on his name and legacy. If the husband died and only the wife was left, she had no security for the future. If that wasn't bad enough, the Bible tells us that they were older in age. So not only did they not have children, but their age meant it was unlikely they'd ever have children. It seemed impossible. It is here, in the impossible, where God does His greatest work (Matt. 19:26).

Often, we assume that if we live right before the Lord, we won't have any struggles. God's Word actually says the opposite. John 16:33 tells us, “I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world.”

The mindset that dedicated service and faithful obedience guarantees we never have trouble is false thinking and motivation. We live righteously because the One we serve is righteous. We love because He first loved us. And look at the encouragement at the end of verse 33: “Be courageous! I have conquered the world.”

HOW does Luke 1:7 challenge your faith?

Is there a barren situation you may be facing? Is there an obstacle that seems impossible to overcome? Has your circumstance hindered your service to God? Take a moment to write a prayer to God, acknowledging what you feel but submitting those feelings to the One who can handle them.

I encourage you to shift your focus today. Turn your gaze from self to Savior. Behold Him and all the hope, joy, peace, and love He brings.



LUKE 1:13-17

¹³ But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. ¹⁴ There will be joy and delight for you, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵ For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and will never drink wine or beer. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother’s womb. ¹⁶ He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people.”

The Silence Is Broken

ASHLEY VENEMAN



LUKE 1:8-23

Silence.

The most deafening sound in the world when all you really need is an answer. After four hundred years of silence from the God of Israel, this was something His people had come to expect. While He was not absent nor did He cease from working in the lives of His people, there had been no new revelation from God for generations.

The last prophet of Israel who had a message from God was Malachi. Since then, for four centuries, the Levites had come at their appointed time to stand outside the temple to perform their priestly duties. One priest would be chosen by lot to go into the holy place to offer incense for the people before God. Zechariah's name was called, and four hundred years of repetition was about to be interrupted by a heavenly announcement.

**Has there been a time in your life when you felt God was silent?
How do you know He was still with you and working during that time?**

READ LUKE 1:8-9.

When his division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, it happened that he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense.

When we read Luke 1, it's easy to walk right into the temple with Zechariah so we can get to the action, but if we do that, we miss the first beautiful example of God's goodness in this passage.

Only twice a year was a certain levitical division called to their duties at the temple where they served for a week. Each day, the hour of incense fell in the morning and afternoon, and one priest out of the hundreds was chosen by lot. Proverbs 16:33 says, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." Nothing is left to chance with God.

In 1 Chronicles 24, God set up the cycles of the priests' service under King David. This means that around one thousand years before Zechariah was born, God had already set into motion the timing of answering his prayer. We see God's hand throughout history showing us that He fulfills every prophecy He sets forth. What a great and intentional God we serve!

Reflect on God's intentional timing. What does this mean to you as you wait on the Lord in your own life?

READ LUKE 1:10-17.

Once Zechariah entered the holy place, he stood before the altar of incense that sat right in front of the huge, thick curtain that separated the holy of holies. We can imagine as Zechariah entered to light the incense

that he looked at this great tapestry and prayed that somehow God's power would be evident. Many things must have been on his heart.

In his book *Rediscovering Christmas*, John Greco writes,

"It's not difficult to imagine that as the years went by and they were still without a child to hold in their arms, Zechariah and Elizabeth stopped praying for one. At a certain age, they must have taken God's silence as the answer they had dreaded hearing. And so, when Zechariah was chosen to burn incense in the temple, it's unlikely he took the opportunity to pray, once more, for a baby. The prayer Zechariah offered that day wasn't about his family or his personal needs; instead, it was a prayer made in true priestly fashion—on behalf of all Israel. As a priest, he likely prayed for God to remember the promises he made to his people long ago, promises to rescue them from their oppressors and to send the Messiah to bring peace and justice to all the earth . . . God's answer was big enough to satisfy both prayers."

God had heard the prayers and seen the tears of a barren Elizabeth and a helpless Zechariah. He had listened to His people crying out for deliverance and a Savior. Revelation 5:8 tells us that the prayers of the saints are continually before the Lord in golden bowls of incense. Not one is wasted. God hears and treasures them all.

In the middle of Zechariah's prayers, the angel Gabriel appeared and broke four hundred years of silence. Luke 1:13a says, "The angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard.'" Let those words wash over you. *Your prayer has been heard.* These must have been the most beautiful five words ever spoken to Zechariah.

To know that our prayers have been heard changes everything. The waiting and wondering all have a purpose when we know that God hears us.

What are the prayers you keep offering up to the Lord, waiting for Him to answer? Do you trust that God is working in the waiting?

READ LUKE 1:18-23.

Zechariah couldn't believe his ears. He questioned the word of the Lord and there was a consequence. In Luke 1:20a Gabriel said to Zechariah, "Now listen. You will become silent and unable to speak until the day these things take place." Again, we see it: silence.

This consequence might seem like an extreme reaction to a simple question, but it's also an opportunity. Yes, we see silence again, but this time it's not the deafening kind; instead, it's an opportunity to truly meditate on a word given from the Lord. Zechariah walked into the temple with words to speak but walked out with a shout in his heart that only comes from answered prayer and hope.

In this season of Advent, we are waiting for Jesus to come again. In a way, we're just like Zechariah, standing in the holy place at the altar of incense offering prayers to God. Only this time, there is no barrier to His beautiful presence. We are all able to enter in. To draw near. To hear from the One who paid the price for all sin, who fulfilled every promise. Jesus has given us His word, and He is not silent. John 14:3b says, "I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also." No matter what is going on around us, that promise is enough to make our hearts shout with hope.

Take some time to find silence of your own. Quiet your heart and think on His promises. We know we can trust Him with our waiting. He hears and holds every prayer.



WEEK 1



LUKE 1:24–25

²⁴ After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived and kept herself in seclusion for five months. She said, ²⁵ “The Lord has done this for me. He has looked with favor in these days to take away my disgrace among the people.”

Son of Favor

KATHY HOWARD



LUKE 1:24–25, 57–66

What do you want to be when you grow up? I occasionally ask our six grandchildren that question. Although their answers change, I ask because I gain insight about their current interests and priorities.

A few months ago, our preschool-aged granddaughter declared she wanted to grow up to be a cat. She adores the fluffy felines but her home is a cat-free zone. Perhaps she surmised if she couldn't have a cat she would be one. However, now she aspires to be a baker because she loves whipping up sweet treats with mom.

Our seventeen-year-old grandson has settled on counseling as his life's occupation. Jack's chosen path is a calling birthed from loss. Two years ago, Jack's best friend took his own life. He wants to help struggling kids and spare their loved ones the devastating grief suicide brings. Jack longs to guide others into emotional healing.

God called Zechariah's and Elizabeth's son to a unique purpose even before his conception. John would spend his life pointing the children of Israel to their Messiah, the only One who offers ultimate healing and eternal life.

READ LUKE 1:24-25.

When Zechariah returned home from serving in Jerusalem, he had exciting news to share with Elizabeth. Not only had he been chosen to burn incense inside the temple, he'd also been visited by an angel with a life-changing announcement.

Since the angel had silenced his voice, perhaps Zechariah wrote all the details for his wife. Imagine Elizabeth's amazement and joy when her husband excitedly scratched into the waxed-covered board used for writing, "We are going to have a baby, a son! His name must be John."⁸ In its Hebrew form, the name "John" means "God has shown favor" or "God is gracious."⁹ This child's God-given name reflected the impact he would have on his parents and the world.

For many years, this godly, but childless couple (Luke 1:6-7) experienced the grief of unfulfilled longing. A child would bring joy and care for them in their old age. Since the community assumed that Elizabeth's barrenness resulted from sin, a baby would doubly bless her by erasing the social reproach.¹⁰

Compare the definition of "John" ("God has shown favor") to Elizabeth's words below. How does John's name reflect God's work in Elizabeth's life?

The Lord has done this for me. He has looked with favor in these days to take away my disgrace among the people.

LUKE 1:25

What do you learn about God's character from His favor toward Elizabeth?

What great personal desire do you need to bring to God? Express it to Him in prayer and watch expectantly for His answer.

I'd like to know a few things about Elizabeth's story that Scripture doesn't include. For instance, the Bible doesn't say and scholars can only guess why Elizabeth stayed secluded for the first five months of pregnancy. Although Scripture doesn't clarify whether Mary was present for John's birth (Luke 1:56), perhaps Mary stayed to witness the arrival of the one who would announce her son to Israel. Besides, it was a time of great joy!

READ LUKE 1:57-58.

The entire community celebrated the birth of Zechariah and Elizabeth's son. According to Jewish tradition, guests may have filled their home every evening from his birth until his circumcision. Not only did family and neighbors always rejoice at the birth of a boy, but clearly this child was a unique gift of God's favor.¹¹

Compare Luke 1:57-58 to Luke 1:13-14. List the ways Gabriel's words were fulfilled.

How does the truth that God keeps His promises encourage your faith today?

READ LUKE 1:59-66.

Traditionally, parents named their son after his father, grandfather, or other close family members.¹² But like his birth, John's name was unusual. When those present for the rite of circumcision rejected Elizabeth's declaration (v. 60), Zechariah demonstrated his obedience to God's message by confirming John's name in writing. God immediately opened his mouth and John's father broke nine months of silence with praise.

List all the ways Elizabeth's neighbors and relatives responded to John's birth and naming.

In light of the miraculous circumstances surrounding John's birth, everyone in the community wondered what he would be when he grew up. God surely had a unique purpose for John (Luke 1:16-17). In fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy, John was a prophetic voice calling the children of Israel to repentance and preparing their hearts for the Messiah's arrival (Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6).

READ JOHN 1:29-34.

List everything John declared about Jesus.

According to John's own testimony, why did he come? Did John fulfill this purpose?

John's calling is also yours. List three specific things you can do during this Advent season to encourage others to behold Jesus.

1.

2.

3.

John, a gift of God's favor to a childless couple, came to reveal the Savior of the world. We can pursue that same powerful purpose.

There's no better time than now. Who will you share the good news of Jesus with today?

**Behold, the Lamb of God,
who takes away the sin of the world!**



JOHN 1:29B, ESV



WEEK 1



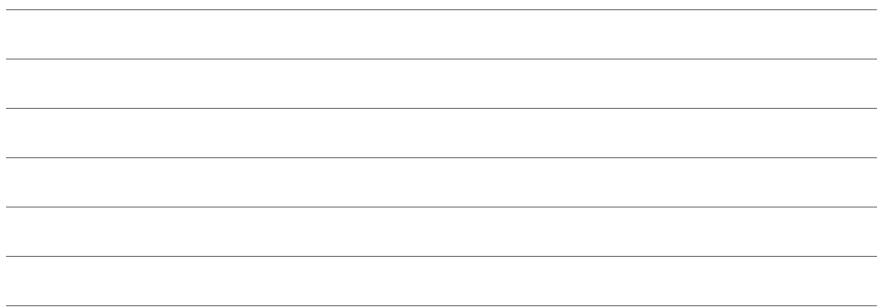
For each Day 5 of the study, we'll spend time preparing room for the Savior in our hearts and minds by reflecting on the week's Scripture and study. Here you will find journaling prompts to guide you as you treasure these things like Mary did so long ago.

Prepare Him Room



How does this week's study encourage you in seasons of waiting?

What about this week's study pointed you to God? What did the study on waiting and Jesus fulfilling all God's promises reveal about the Father's character?

[illegible]

Write out a prayer of thanksgiving to God for His sovereign plan. Thank Him for the hope we have in Jesus. Ask for boldness in declaring the hope of the gospel to others.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

INVITATION
FOR YOUR
Community

HERALDS OF CHRIST

Beholding, as we see in the Christmas story, is so often a group activity. When we're excited to hold, keep, apprehend, and experience something wonderful, we often prompt others to "Look!" We want our experience to be shared.

This Advent study is an invitation to behold, and we hope you'll extend this beholding invite to others. As a way of doing that, each week we'll provide ideas for you to invite those in your community, in your church, in your family and friend groups, and your own heart to behold and ponder what you're learning.

This week, we read about John, the one born to herald the good news of a Messiah to those around him. Like John, we are heralds of Christ to those around us.

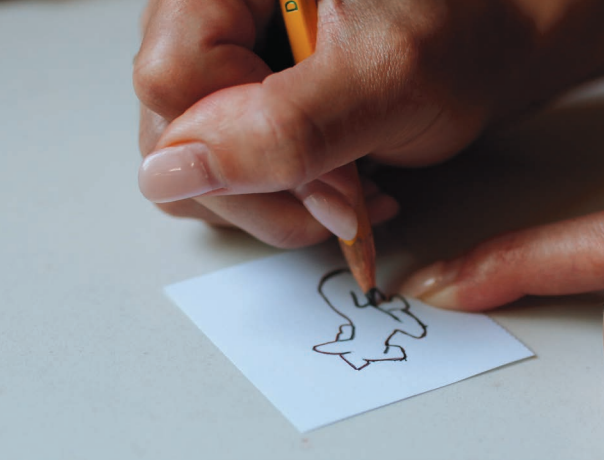


Stamp **MAKING TUTORIAL**



SUPPLIES

- ☐ Template downloaded from lifeway.com/beholdthesavior
- ☐ Light colored craft foam (2 mm thick)
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Stamp ink pad
- ☐ Pencil
- ☐ Ballpoint pen
- ☐ Cardboard
- ☐ Double-sided tape or glue
- ☐ Blank cards/paper



1. Prepare the drawing.

Choose an illustration from the template and cut it out along the dotted line.

Trace directly over all the lines of the illustration using a pencil. If you see any gray areas, shade them in.



2. Transfer the drawing to the foam.

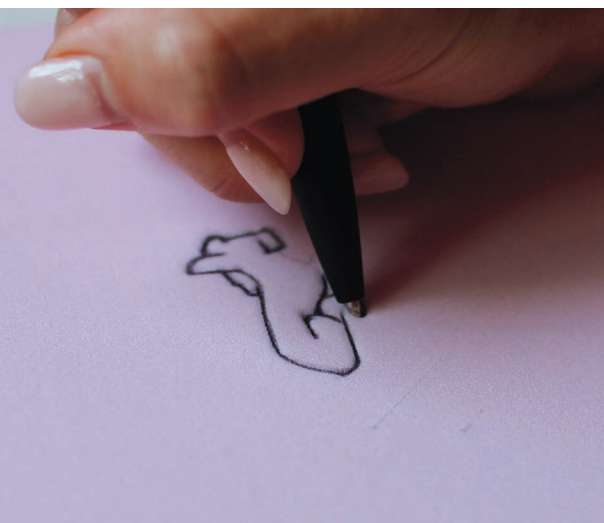
Flip the drawing over, so the image is facing down. Place it onto the foam sheet. If your tracing is too light, you might need to trace over it again so the drawing transfers clearly.

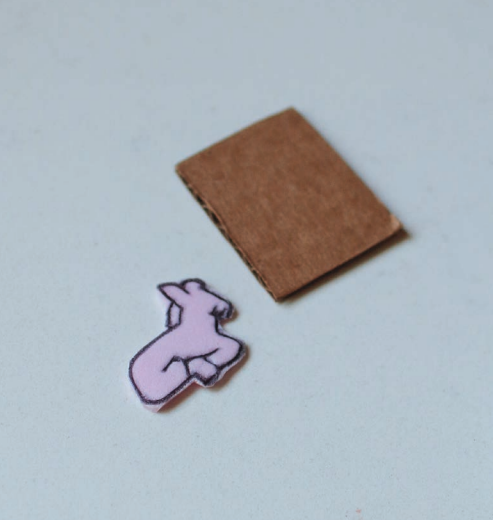


Shade the entire backside of the paper with your pencil to ensure the drawing transfers onto the foam. Press down firmly while shading to help the image transfer better.

3. Carve the image into the foam.

Once the image has transferred, use a ballpoint pen to trace deeply over the lines and shaded areas on the foam. The goal of this step is to make an impression in the foam. You may need to go over the lines several times for a more engraved effect. These areas will become the negative space of your stamp.





4. Cut out the stamp.

Cut out the foam stamp, following the outline of the illustration.

5. Mount and use your stamp.

Cut a piece of cardboard slightly larger than your foam stamp. Use double-sided tape or glue to attach the foam stamp to the cardboard for easier handling.

Ink your stamp by pressing it onto an inkpad, applying even pressure to ensure full coverage. Use it on Christmas cards, notebooks, gift tags, etc.!





CONSIDER ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES TO DO FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

- Use the stamps you made to create cards with a note about the good news of great joy for all people—that Jesus was born for us to have life!
- Place the cards with quarters in a laundry mat to help pay for someone's laundry.
- Hand a card with payment for the person behind you in line at the drive-through.
- Add the card to a “blessing bag” to give to those who are without a house this Advent season. Other items to add to a blessing bag: socks; toothbrush and toothpaste; snacks like peanut butter crackers, granola and protein bars, trail mix, applesauce, jerky, mints, gum; lip balm; first-aid kit; hand sanitizer; bottled water; comb/brush; soap; deodorant; shampoo; sunscreen; lotion; hat and gloves; hand warmers; nail clippers; face/body wipes; tissues. You can also include gift cards to restaurants.
- Turn your Christmas lights viewing into a prayer drive for yourself or your family. As you drive around looking at Christmas lights and decorations pray for the houses you pass. Ask God to make His light known to those who live there.