

## Week 4- Making Room for the Marginalized

### Luke 2:8-14

In this time in history, royal birth announcements were accompanied by a choir that would worship the king of an earthly empire. It was done in the sight of the highest class and was very public. In contrast, the arrival of King Jesus' birth was not announced within the palace courts to the privileged, but incognito in an ordinary field to lowly shepherds.

Shepherds at that time were on the margins of society. It was a profession without honor and considered unclean. They likely felt isolated, rejected, and cut off from the things of God and the people of God.

But God comes down to the shepherds— the ones on the outside looking in. The glory of heaven comes to find them on the outskirts of society in their workplace.

Here we find the lowly shepherds as the recipients of this great announcement about the Messiah's birth. God is making a statement. He is born into the margins and announced to the marginalized. Though he is the King of all kings, there is nowhere so foul he is too proud to go and no person so lowly he is too lofty to embrace.

What better sign of good news for *all* people than how Jesus came? As an infant born among animals, God became completely accessible to the lowliest of all people. The shepherds would not need to clean themselves up or journey to the temple to see him. He removed the religious, cultural, and political barriers so they could behold God in the flesh.

*The contrast is striking. A king arrives in a stable. The holy is birthed into dirt. Heavenly fanfare fills an earthy field. Brilliant glory illuminates the dark night. Lofty angels sing before lowly shepherds. All point to the good news that would be for all people.*

The shepherds show us that we don't prepare to receive the King of heaven the same way we prepare to meet the celebrities of our day, through earthly displays of showiness. In fact, receiving our King requires we do just the opposite: we must empty ourselves of any human glory that gets in the way of receiving a heavenly one. We must instead journey to the margins, because it is there where the veil to heaven becomes thin enough to glimpse the divine.

**Ponder** Who are the marginalized people in your community? What might it look like to position yourself to see God through them?

**Challenge** Find a way to bless someone who can be overlooked or their value be hidden to others, for example bring someone cookies, spend time with someone who is lonely, write a card or make a phone call.

**Journal Challenge** Is there someone you regularly interact with who can be overlooked or their value be hidden to others? Pray for them and write how you can show honor to them in the future.

**Growth Challenge** Get on your knees and thank God for the gift of His son, Jesus Christ, who came for us all!



### Christmas Eve Worship

4 pm Family worship in Family Life Center  
Livestream and in person

6 pm Praise & Worship in Family Life Center  
Livestream and in person

8 pm Traditional Worship in Chapel  
In person only

### Christmas Day Worship

11 am in Chapel  
In person only

### Giving to the Poor

All offerings received during our Christmas services are given to those in need in our local area through Faith Connections and to Fe y Esperanza in Nicaragua. You can use the QR code or go to [www.Redeemer.us](http://www.Redeemer.us). Please mark your giving "For the poor"



### Regular Sunday Worship & Spiritual Growth Opportunities

Worship 10 am in Family Life Center & Chapel  
8:30 am Sunday School for all ages



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## Making Room in Advent

By Bette Dickinson



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## Week 1- Making Room for a Promise

### Luke 1:5-10

In Luke 1:5-10, it is as if Luke wants us to pay close attention to the symmetry happening between Zechariah and Israel. You can feel the tension rising here amid the waiting. The people of Israel are waiting outside for Zechariah to offer the incense. Zechariah has been waiting to have a child. Israel has been waiting for the Messiah. A barren couple and a barren nation. Zechariah and the people of Israel have both been disappointed as they wait for God to fulfill his promise.

The people of Israel have been crying out to God for four hundred years to rescue them from their oppressors, but there has been silence on the other end. And Zechariah's very name means "Jehovah has remembered." But had God forgotten? This barrenness, this waiting, was not Zechariah and Elizabeth's fault. They had done everything right in the sight of God. And Israel too—hadn't they obeyed God's law? Where was their Messiah?

I ache with them here. I know what it feels like to say all the "right prayers" and do all the "right things" but encounter God's silence in the face of my longings. You too?

But what if God's promises need to be gestated over a long time to prepare us to receive them—like a pregnancy? Could it be that God was preparing Israel over four hundred years to make them ready for Christ? Could it be that God was maturing Zechariah and Elizabeth until they were ready to receive John? Could it be that God is still shaping us to receive his kingdom into our world?

There are many promises I am still waiting on God for in my life. But when I remind myself of the necessary preparation for a promise, I shift my focus away from wondering when he will answer my prayers and on to how he is preparing me to receive his answer when the time is ripe.

What can we do in times of waiting, then? We can stay present and allow God to stretch us to make room for what he is maturing inside us and our world. And we can keep watch with expectant hope for what is to come.

**Ponder** How might God be maturing you as you wait for him to answer your prayers?

**Challenge** What is something you are waiting for? How can you be thankful for what you already have and not always be looking for something more? Try fasting (such as food, a meal or social media) asking God what you can be doing while you wait for it? (How is He preparing you to receive His answer when the time is ripe?) Or for the younger kids- When you give something up (maybe a show after school or dessert) share why you are thankful for that particular thing.

**Journal Challenge** What do you hope for this Christmas season?

**Growth Challenge** Make amends with someone-make a phone call, write a letter or meet them in person to demonstrate God's forgiveness and love.



## Week 2- Making Room for Limits

### Luke 1:34-38

In the incarnation, God chooses to breathe himself into dust. He chooses to take on the limits of our humanity. And he invites Mary into partnership by dwelling within her limits.

God has this huge plan to change all of history, but the way he invites Mary to participate in this work is different than what we might have expected.

He doesn't ask her to do miracles. He doesn't ask her to get a theology degree. He doesn't expect her to be strong or smart or famous or able to multitask well. He doesn't ask her to be Superwoman and save the world. He has plans to do that himself. God invites Mary into partnership by asking to dwell within the confines of who she already is.

What a relief that must have been to Mary, given her circumstances. She has nothing truly remarkable about her: no wealth, no familial stature, no great accomplishments, nothing but the vessel God has already given her—her mind, body, and soul.

So what does Mary need in order to host the Messiah? She needs to make herself available—to make room physically, emotionally, and spiritually for him to dwell within her and stretch her into something new. Mary is disturbed and afraid, but she yields herself to the God who formed her with these words: *I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.*

The Spirit of God that hovered over creation and hovered over Mary now hovers over us, waiting for us to yield to allow an eternal God to dwell within our limited human form. He doesn't ask us to rise above our limits. Instead, he comes to us in the midst of them. This is good news for us, since we have all kinds of limitations: limited energy, time, abilities, experiences, and mental and emotional capacity, to name a few.

What if our limits are not an obstacle but an invitation? What if our limits are the very place where heaven touches earth? Because the beautiful mystery of the Annunciation is this: God chooses to dwell within our human limitations.

And when he dwells within our human limits, our souls expand to accommodate his infinite presence in our lives, and he stretches us to look like him.

**Ponder** How can you embrace your limits to make room for God this Advent?

**Challenge** Make a list of the gifts God has given you; choose one and decide how you can make it available for God to use? Take action on what you choose (Hospitality- Invite someone over for dinner or coffee. Kindness- Share a compliment with someone. Serving- Help a neighbor with their housework or yard work (Triple R team-have a list of contacts)

**Bonus Challenge:** Point out someone else's gift and put it on your story (or send a note) tell others about the gifts has God given them and how they share it with others.

**Journal Challenge** What areas in your life do you see your limitations? How could God be using those to grow your faith?



## Week 3- Making Room for Community

### Luke 1:41-45

Whatever trepidations Mary had, they likely melted away when she glimpsed Elizabeth standing before her, ripe with hope. Mary is not alone; Elizabeth also bears a promise in her womb.

Elizabeth makes room for Mary. "Come on in, Mary. There's room for you here." There's room for your fears and big dreams. There's room for your destiny. There's room for your voice at the table. There's room for your gifts.

Elizabeth isn't threatened by Mary. She recognizes that in God's economy, blessing is not a finite resource. The Spirit inside her empowers her to see beyond the young virgin, beyond the lowly servant, beyond the girl from the backroad town of Nazareth, to see the mother of God. In essence she says, "I see you, Mary." "I see the new thing growing on the inside that no one else can see. What God is doing in me testifies to what he is doing in you—and leaps with joy."

Elizabeth prophetically declares the significance of what is happening and responds in worship. A shout of praise bursts from the Spirit and from John leaping within her womb.

As Elizabeth's song rises, it stirs something within. An aria is called forth from the innermost place in Mary and it sweetly dances through her lips: the great "Magnificat."

If you've ever had someone name the stirring within you, you know what this is. It's the moment when an underutilized gift is named by a friend after you have secretly been ruminating about it for months. It's the moment when the dream you can't quite put your finger on is identified by someone who truly sees you. These are holy moments.

I know this because I have experienced the sacredness of them myself. I have felt the stirring in my spirit when an Elizabeth sees the new thing God is doing in me and names it. Sometimes it takes the voices of others to help us find our own. And when an Elizabeth sees something within us and gives it a name, she calls forth who we are becoming. She calls us to arise into the handcrafted masterpiece we were created to be. And when she does, we sing the song we were made to sing.

**Ponder** What is stirring inside you that needs to be named? What do you see in someone else that you can name aloud to them?

**Challenge** Get out in the community and "sock" someone (Get a stocking and fill it with any goodies you wish, include a poem or other representation of the true meaning of Christmas such as the candy cane poem, nail ornament, (examples will be at the Connection Center on December 11), leave the stocking on the person's porch, knock and run away.

**Journal Challenges** Listen to worship music and meditate on what you hear. Write down what you hear the Lord speaking to you through the song's lyrics

**Growth Challenge** Discuss with your family or friends- when have you seen God's promises come to fruition? Share this good news with others.