



SPARK

YOUR

JOY

A 4-WEEK ADVENT
BIBLE STUDY DEVOTIONAL

MARGARET FEINBERG

Dear Friend,

Have you ever been around people who radiate joy?

The sense of delight permeates their being, their expressions, and even their words. Joy sparkles in their eyes. Joy saturates their voice. Glimpses of joy appear in their posture, the way they carry themselves. Joy is a hard emotion to hide. I can't help but think God designed it this way.

The expressions of joy, rejoicing, merriment, and more are found more than 400 times throughout the Bible. As children of God, we're called and created to be joyful.

Our God is a God of joy. God rejoices in creation. From the very beginning, God scanned what he had made and declared its goodness. The Psalms remind us that God's creation enters into the joy of its Creator. The sunrise and the sunset shout for joy. Even the meadows and valleys join in the chorus. The trees of the forest sing for joy while the rivers clap their hands.

If creation celebrates in God's joy, how much more should you and I?

Joy splashes from Luke's Gospel. From a baby leaping in Elizabeth's womb at the sound of Mary's voice to an angel announcing the arrival of the Messiah to some sleepy shepherds, Christ's birth is marked by joy. Luke's Gospel reminds us of the importance of childlike receptivity and that divine rejoicing takes place whenever a human chooses to return to God.

We are meant to radiate joy everywhere we go. As God's children, we have joy not in spite of our circumstances but because of them. We are drenched in the grace and mercies of God. Joy is a facet of the fruit of God's Spirit meant to flourish within us.

Whether you're new to celebrating Advent or you've observed Advent for many years, I hope you rediscover the joy of God anew and that the delight of knowing Christ will radiate everywhere you go.

As you prayerfully consider and reflect on the following devotionals:

- Ask God to open your eyes to Him and His handiwork even more.
- Ask God to reveal more of His truth, character, and presence in your life.
- Prepare to find your joy-meter rising as you become wonderstruck by the work God is doing in and around you during this season of Advent.

Join me from December 1st to December 25th on an *advent*-ure as we spark joy during this holiday season.

Blessings,
Margaret

SPARK YOUR JOY

WEEK 1

*THE ONE THING YOU
CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT*

WEEK 2

*THE WORDS YOU'VE
BEEN WAITING FOR*

WEEK 3

*ONE WORD FROM
GOD CAN CHANGE
EVERYTHING*

WEEK 4

*THIS ONE TRUTH WILL
TURN YOUR WEEK
UPSIDE-DOWN*



*THE ONE
THING YOU
CAN'T LIVE
WITHOUT*

ADVENT | WEEK ONE

Just as chefs vary in their approach to cooking a dish, each of the Gospel writers takes a different approach in telling the story of Jesus Christ. Matthew goes into great depth and detail of what Jesus did and why it relates to Jewish beliefs. Mark is much more brief and precise. He gets in and out and lands the plane. John is my heartthrob. He adds color and hue and vibrancy to the Gospel story.

Then there's Luke, an analytical mind concerned with timelines, accuracy, and the history of Jesus' life. Luke's perspective reflects the mind of a businessman and doctor. This Gospel highlights details about the healings of Jesus, which others omit, and features some of Jesus' finest teachings on finances. If you want to learn about the miracles of Jesus, read Luke.

One of the unusual features of Luke's Gospel is its rich understanding of the setting for Christ's birth. Because of his desire to be accurate and historical, Luke explains that God is working in and through history culminating in the birth of Jesus. The pages of the Old Testament promise the Messiah's birth, and Luke's introduction bridges the gap between the covenant and culmination.

Through the opening pages of Luke's Gospel, we're reminded of the one thing you can't live without:

Hope.

Jesus, the hope of the world, enters into the broken mess of humanity bringing hope. Hope of freedom and future, redemption and restoration.

Luke goes to great lengths to set the scene for Jesus' birth. While the priest Zacharias, who is part of the religious establishment, wrestles with unbelief, a young teenage girl responds to the angel's unexpected announcement with belief. This pattern of Jesus finding acceptance among those considered outsiders but being rejected by the religious insiders such as the priests and scribes continues throughout the gospel.

Join me as we slow to a stroll through Luke's opening chapters detailing the birth of Christ.

The weeks leading up to Christmas are often filled with lists and lines, to-dos and to-don'ts. If we're not careful, a season meant to bring the greatest joy, can steal our joy.

Advent beckons us to slow and prepare for the arrival of a tiny heartbeat.

In this season, we're reminded of the power of waiting.

Advent whispers our need for a Savior.

Reminding us that God's timing is always better than ours.

And it bubbles with the joy of our great God.

Monday, December 1st

Before we dive in, let's take a bird's eye view of this Advent's Bible reading. As you read, circle or underline any joyful expressions, including the words "joy" and "rejoice."

1. Read **Luke 1-2:21**.

2. In the space below, make a list of the miraculous moments found in Luke's opening chapters.

Quotable:

"Theologically, Advent means this: when God announces the divine intention to act decisively in the incarnation of the Word, everything gets turned on its head."

—*Feasting on the Word*

3. Why do you think Luke goes to such great lengths to highlight the miraculous details around Christ's birth?

4. What do the miraculous events surrounding Christ's birth communicate to you about Christ's identity? God's ability to work miracles in your own life?

Bonus Activity: Find this song on Spotify, iTunes, or YouTube this week: "Go Tell It On The Mountain" by Branches. Spend time in worship and reflection.

Father, open my eyes to see the miracles you want to perform in my life and in the lives of those around me. Give me the faith to trust you even in the most difficult seasons and circumstances. In Jesus' name, amen.

Tuesday, December 2nd

The Gospel opens by explaining its purpose, namely, that Luke wants to provide an accurate account of the stories circulating about Jesus.

1. Read **Luke 1:1-4**.

2. What does this prologue tell you about Luke's purpose and methods for writing his Gospel?

Luke addresses the book to Theophilus whose identity is unknown. Scholars believe he was a man of distinction or status in ancient culture since he was addressed as "most excellence." The name means "friend of God," creating a coincidence for the advantage of any reader who is or desires to be a friend of God, too.

3. Use behindthename.com or meaning-of-names.com to look up the meaning of your name. Write it in the space below. In what ways is that definition true to you? How does it not fit?

My name, Margaret, means pearl, one who is shaped by adversity to reflect the glory of God. After facing a heartbreaking diagnosis, I've chosen to share my journey through the book and Bible study, *Fight Back With Joy*. To read more about finding joy amidst heartbreak, visit fightbackwithjoy.com.

Dear God, thank you for providing us your Word, that we may study and know more of your heart. In Jesus' name, amen.

Notable: It is important to remember the difference between Greco-Roman historians and modern historians. As a Greco-Roman historian, Luke emphasizes certain aspects, but also leaves out parts of the story that modern-day historians would view as crucial. This does not mean he is being inaccurate, but just giving an accurate history according to his time period's standards.

Wednesday, December 3rd

1. Read **Luke 1:5-25**.

Elizabeth and Zacharias (or Zechariah, depending on your translation) represent Old Testament tradition and Israel as a whole—a people group waiting for an appointed birth. Just as God frees Elizabeth and Zacharias from barrenness with the birth of John, He is freeing Israel with the birth of Jesus.

2. How would you describe Zacharias? His wife, Elizabeth?

3. Describe a time you took matters into your own hands instead of waiting on God. What was the result?

4. Make a specific list of three things you are waiting for right now. Spend time in prayer handing each item on your list to God.

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Dear Heavenly Father, in the midst of my waiting, reveal yourself to me anew that I may know with full confidence that I do not wait alone. In Jesus' name, amen.

Notable: Zacharias' name means "God remembers," Elizabeth's name means "My God is a vow," and John's name means "God is gracious."

Notable: Jesus' name means "God saves."

Thursday, December 4th

1. Read **Luke 1:26-38**.

2. Put yourself in Mary's shoes. What questions and fears would you have? How does the angel respond to Mary's potential questions and fears?

3. How have you seen God respond to the questions and fears you currently have?

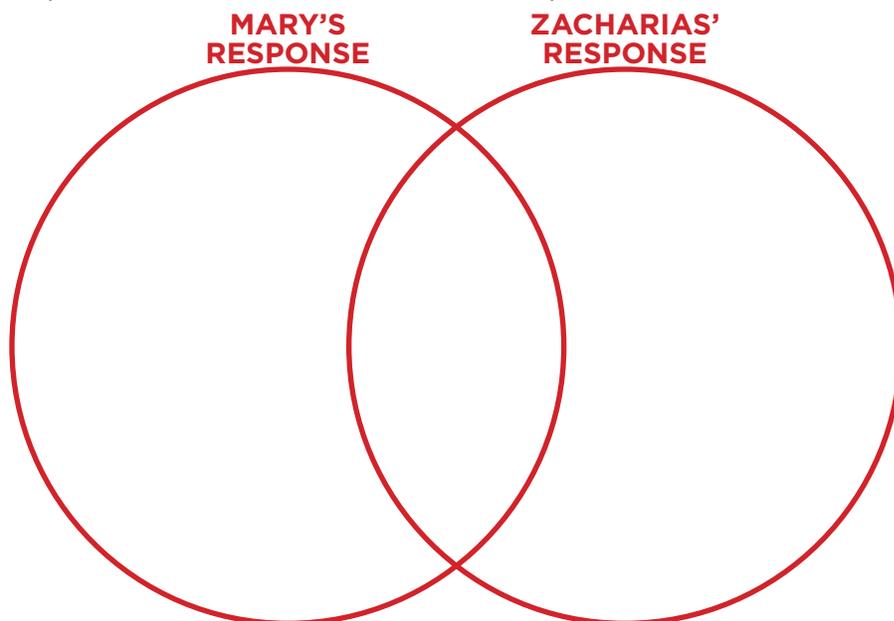
PRAYER: Father, thank you that you use ordinary people to do your extraordinary tasks. May I always be willing to respond in obedience. Amen.

Quotable: "The real trouble came when what the angel announced would happen happened, but in a way she couldn't have dreamed: squatting there in the straw with her thighs wrenched apart, while out of her pain she dropped into the howling world something that looked like nothing so much as raw beefsteak: who was the one the angel had said was to be called Holy, the Son of the Most High: who was the Word itself fleshed with—of all flesh—hers."
—Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*

Friday, December 5th

1. Read **Luke 1:11-20; 26-38**.

2. How does Mary's response toward the angel (verses 26-38) compare and contrast to Zacharias' response (verses 11-20)?



Quotable: “Hope is not a granted wish or a favor performed; no, it is far greater than that. It is a zany, unpredictable dependence on a God who loves to surprise us out of our socks and be there in the flesh to see our reaction.”

—Max Lucado, *God Came Near*

3. What is something that God has specifically called you to in the past 18 months?

4. Was your response more like Mary’s or Zacharias’? Explain.

Father, may we be people who leap with joy at the opportunity to be your hands and feet in the world. In Jesus’ name, amen.



*THE
WORDS
YOU'VE
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FOR*

ADVENT | WEEK TWO

The season of Advent calls us to wait.

Most of us are familiar with the waiting rooms of life. We wait for graduation. A spouse. A child. A job. A diploma. A prodigal to return. A cure. A retirement celebration. Another round of chemotherapy. Relief from chronic pain. Freedom from debt.

Just as the prophets waited to hear a word from God. Just as humanity waited for a Savior.

God's people waited for the highly-anticipated Messiah's arrival. Some waited with baited breath. Others had stopped holding their breath altogether.

Life is filled with seasons of waiting that become the breeding ground for insecurities and self-doubts as we anticipate what's next. Yet joy comes with Jesus' arrival.

In this fortunate turn of events, an angel speaks the words the world had been waiting for:

Love is coming in the flesh. Emmanuel, God with us, is moving into the neighborhood.

No matter what you're waiting for, you don't wait alone. God is ever-present in our waiting. The Hebrew word for wait, *yachal*, means to "wait expectantly." Waiting invites us to grasp for God.

The wonder of Advent is that though you wait, we wait, all of humanity waits—we do not wait alone. God hasn't forgotten you. He hears your prayers.

God is with you.

Monday, December 8th

1. Read **Luke 1:39-56**.

Mary travels to see her relative Elizabeth, and on her arrival the baby in Elizabeth's womb jumps in a way reminiscent of the Old Testament story of Rebekah who felt Esau struggling in her womb (Genesis 25:21-23). The detail in both stories remind us of God's sovereign work even when children are unborn. For Rebekah, the jostling signified that the elder would serve the younger. In other words, the younger child was the blessed child—a principle that is also demonstrated in the relationship between John and Jesus. John, the elder born, takes on a lesser position to Jesus.

Bonus Activity: Find this song on Spotify, iTunes, or YouTube this week: "O Come All Ye Faithful" by Kings Kaleidoscope. Spend time in worship and reflection.

2. What kind of support and encouragement were Elizabeth and Mary able to offer each other during this season of their lives?

3. Who in your life has been a source of joy? What impact did the person have on your life?

Bonus Activity: Send a text, email, or letter to a person who has had a profound impact on your life. Thank them for being the hands and feet of Jesus to you.

Father, thank you for placing people in my life to encourage me. May I be a blessing to those around me and reach out to those who need extra helpings of love. Amen.

Tuesday, December 9th

1. Read **Luke 1:39-45**.

Elizabeth calls Mary blessed. Throughout the New Testament, the Greek word *makarios* is often used to describe a person who is “happy” or “blessed.” This is the word translated blessed throughout the Beatitudes. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (**Matthew 5:3**, NIV) can be understood as “happy” are the poor in spirit. Jesus promised the *makarios* life when He said, “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (**John 13:17**, KJV).

2. What three blessings does Elizabeth exclaim upon seeing Mary?

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-
-

3. List three blessings in your life right now.

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-
-

God, thank you that you are a joy-filled God. May we learn how to celebrate the work you're doing in the lives of those around us. In Jesus' name, amen.

Wednesday, December 10th

1. Read **Luke 1:46-49**.

Often we disqualify ourselves from ministry or serving others because of labels placed upon us. The great adversities we've experienced come with unwanted labels: Divorced. Anorexic. Broken. Single. Lonely. Diseased. Overweight. Undereducated. Bossy. Unqualified. Home wrecker. Elderly. Broke.

2. What is one label that's been thrust on you that you never wanted? Spend time in prayer today asking God to remind you of who you are in His eyes.

3. God chose Mary, an unwed teenage girl in the Middle East to carry the savior of the world. What strikes you the most about God's unusual choice?

Bonus Activity: Some people tend to overemphasize or underemphasize Mary's unique role as the mother of Jesus. Reflect on **Luke 1-2**. Then read **Matthew 1:18-25, Matthew 2:13-23, John 2:1-5, Mark 3:31-35, John 19:26-27, and Acts 1:14** to develop your own Biblical understanding of Mary's role.

Father, give me the courage to step out in faith to do what you are calling me to. May my first response to your goodness and grace be praise. Amen.

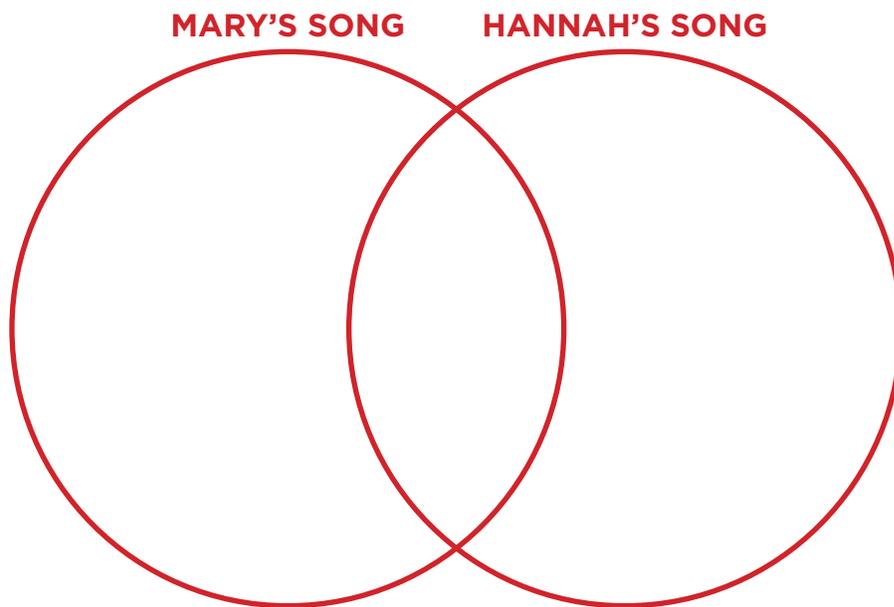
Thursday, December 11th

Upon sharing the news with Elizabeth, Mary bursts out in song. Throughout the Old Testament, people often sing when confronted with God's redeeming power.

1. Read **Luke 1:50-56**. As you read, notice how Mary doesn't draw attention to herself in her song. She doesn't boast that God chose her for this mission or ask Elizabeth to worship her. Instead, she lifts and praises the One deserving of all praise.

Mary's response of praise, known as The Magnificat, is filled with many Old Testament phrases and references. The joyful song is believed to be modeled after the prayer Hannah, a woman who struggled with barrenness, offered after she dedicated her own son, Samuel, to the Lord.

2. Compare and contrast **Luke 1:46-55** to **1 Samuel 2:1-10** in the circles below. What parallels do you see between Mary's joyful song and Hannah's joyful song?



Not only are Mary's and Hannah's songs similar, but Mary's song also contains references to a variety of Old Testament passages and Psalms. This is important because it shows Mary's knowledge of the Scripture and love for God. It is here that Luke takes his gospel from more than just history, but includes an important pause in the story—inviting readers to join the celebration.

Notable: In Mary's ballad, we're reminded of God's record of salvation up until this point, the bursting forth of Christ to save the world.

3. Look up each of the following passages in the chart below. What parallels do you see between Mary’s song and these Scriptures?

PASSAGE IN LUKE	OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCE	PARALLELS
LUKE 1:46-49	HABAKKUK 3:18 ISAIAH 61:10	
LUKE 1:50-52	PSALM 103:17 PSALM 89:13	
LUKE 1:53-55	PSALM 107:9 ISAIAH 41:8-9	

Notable: Luke refers to the Holy Spirit more than any other of the Gospel writers. He paid special attention to the work of the third person of the Trinity while telling the story of Jesus. Read back through **Luke 1** and underline or circle any mentions of the Spirit at work.

4. How does Mary’s concept of God compare to your own concept of God?

Heavenly Father, continue to reveal your majesty and greatness to me. You are worthy of all honor and glory and praise. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Friday, December 12th

Mary's song contains four main sections—thanks for what God has done, celebration of the attributes of God, recognition of God's protection and provision, and acknowledgement of God's faithfulness.

1. Write your own song of joyful praise to God in the space below:

What God has done:

Celebration of the attributes of God:

Recognition of God's protection and wisdom:

Acknowledgement of God's faithfulness:

Sing or speak your song of praise as a prayer to God.

Bonus Activity: Need ideas on how to write your song of praise? Turn to **Psalm 92, 107,** or **148** for inspiration.



*ONE WORD
FROM
GOD CAN
CHANGE
EVERY-
THING*

ADVENT | WEEK THREE

For 400 years, God's people heard nothing from the heavens.

Nada. Zilch. Silence.

Until an angel speaks reminding us that one word from God can change everything. God breaks the silence with a triumphant proclamation to a wrinkly man in the temple: Your wife will give birth to a son. His name will be John. He will proclaim the long-awaited Messiah.

That forerunner of Christ tends to make brief, odd appearances.

John the Baptist wore the kind of clothes Goodwill rejects for donations. He survived on an ancient, minimalist version of the South Beach diet. Some protein. A few carbs. Small portions. And the nasty aftertaste of those honey-covered locusts.

Yet John burned with a fiery passion for God. Sparks flew in his preaching. He described a kingdom coming that would leave everyone in shock and awe.

As he preached he said, "The real action comes next: The star in this drama, to whom I'm a mere stagehand, will change your life. I'm baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. His baptism—a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit—will change you from the inside out." (Mark 1:7-8, MSG)

Then one day something startling happened.

Jesus showed up. John's feisty preaching cools in humble acknowledgement that the Promised One is here.

Maybe you've found yourself in the middle of a crisis.

A broken marriage. Bankruptcy. An empty nest. A painful diagnosis. The loss of a loved one. Unemployment. A shattered family.

You know what you need most in the midst of what you're facing?

To hear the words your Heavenly Father has to speak to you.

Words of hope. Words of freedom. Words of love. Words of grace. Words of peace.

One word from God can change everything. This Advent, let's celebrate that the Word put on flesh to dive into the muck and mire of the world. Indeed, joy enters the world. The weary and heavy-laden rejoice.

Monday, December 15th

Those who are watching the events surrounding the birth of John have spontaneous reactions to the development and news.

1. Fill in the chart below noting people's responses to John's birth.

SCRIPTURE	WHO RESPONDED	HOW THEY RESPONDED
LUKE 1:58		
LUKE 1:65-66		
LUKE 1:67		

2. When you hear that God is on the move in your community how do you tend to respond?

Bonus Activity:

Throughout Scripture, many people respond to God in awe and wonder.

God is busting at the seams to display His glory, power, and might in your life, too. Pick up a copy of *Wonderstruck* by Margaret Feinberg to begin uncovering moments of wonder in your life. Visit margaretfeinberg.com/wonderstruck to preview a chapter.

3. God loves to use ordinary people for extraordinary purposes. How are you seeing God's purpose intersect your life?

God, when I encounter incredible stories of your salvation and redemption, may my response be praise and wonder. Thank you that you continue to reveal yourself in my life and in the lives around me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Tuesday, December 16th

1. Read **Luke 1:57-63**.

2. How did tradition ascribe names according to verse 59? What was the divine instruction of naming their son (verse 13)? Who wins out?

3. Only seven people in Scripture were named before their birth. Fill in the chart below to discover who. What significance do you see in God naming these men?

SCRIPTURE	WHO WAS NAMED
GENESIS 16:11	
GENESIS 17:19	
1 CHRONICLES 22:9	
1 KINGS 13:2	
LUKE 1:13	
LUKE 1:31	

Bonus Activity: Find this song on Spotify, iTunes, or YouTube this week: “Every Bell On Earth Will Ring” by The Oh Hellos. Spend time in worship and reflection.

Father, you knew us before we were born. We are your craftsmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works. May we respond in obedience to all you call us to do. Amen.

Wednesday, December 17th

1. Read **Luke 1:64-66**.

When Zacharias' lips are loosed, he responds in praise. Although he doubted God, Zacharias was someone willing to respond in obedience, despite his unbelief.

2. Describe a time when God has done something miraculous in the lives of you or someone you know.

3. On the continuum below, do you tend to respond to God-moments with doubt or delight?



Father God, I praise you for the works you have done, are doing, and will do in my life. May my first response always be rejoicing. Amen.

Thursday, December 18th

Much like Mary, Zacharias' response to God's work in his life is one of praise. After spending many months in silence, Zacharias rejoices, not only in the long-awaited Messiah, but also that his son gets to play an important role in God's Kingdom.

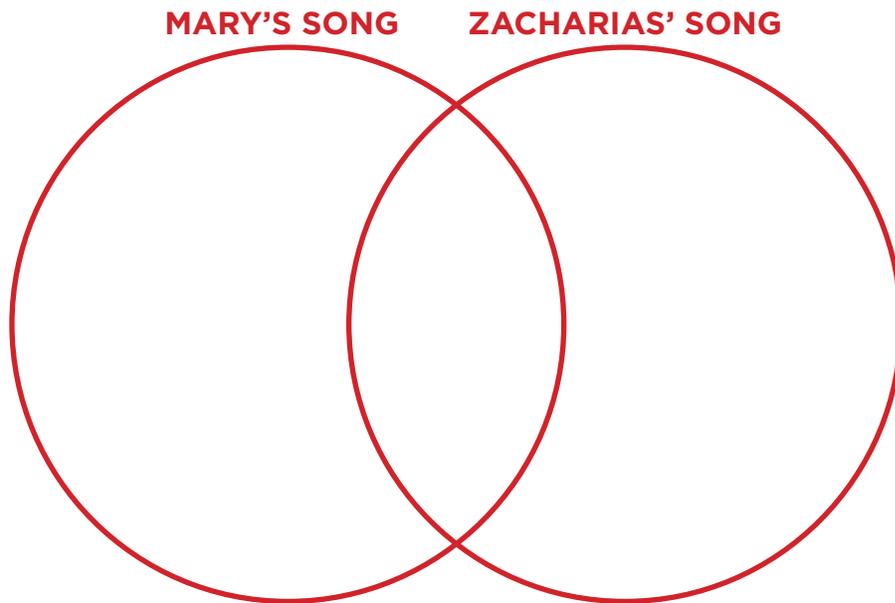
1. Read **Luke 1:67-75**.

2. "...and to enable us to serve him without fear." (**Luke 1:74**, NIV). How have you seen fear limit your ability to serve God?

Bonus Activity: One way to fight back with joy today is to begin a joy journal. Record three gifts God gives you every day. Begin to practice responding to God's gifts with praise. Soon, your eyes will open to all the surprises and delights that come with being a child of God. *Fight Back With Joy DVD Bible Study* contains a 25-day Joy Bomb Journal for you and your small group. Visit fightbackwithjoy.com to preview a sample.

Notable: Luke records that both Zacharias and Elizabeth were faithful and righteous people, yet they still didn't conceive a child. In ancient Jewish culture, children were considered a blessing from God. Imagine their delight when God answers their prayers in the form of a long-awaited prophet.

3. What similarities and differences do you see between Zacharias' song and Mary's song?



God, may we go forth boldly proclaiming your name and declaring power in our lives without fear. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Friday, December 19th

Zacharias continues his song by offering a blessing over his long-awaited son. Patriarchal blessings were held in extreme regard in Jewish culture.

1. Read **Luke 1:76-80**.
2. What was John the Baptist's role according to Zacharias' prophesy?
3. Write a blessing over your (current or future) children, grandchildren, nieces, or nephew.

Spend time in prayer for the children you love dearly.

Quotable: Fear may show up on your doorstep but it doesn't have to rule your life.
#fightbackwithjoy

Notable: John the Baptist's job was almost identical to that of an Old Testament prophet: to call people to repentance.



*THIS ONE
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DOWN*

ADVENT | WEEK FOUR

In the second chapter of Luke, the author continues setting the scene of Christ's birth by explaining a somewhat ironic political situation. At the time Caesar Augustus, the adopted son of Julius Caesar, was at the height of power. Under his leadership, Rome had become an empire famed for its opulence and power. Some people even referred to Augustus as "Savior" and as king he was known as "Lord."

During his reign, Augustus decreed the Pax Romana which commanded an end of wars and a creation of order throughout the Roman Empire. While peace was mandated by Caesar, many sects awaited a revolution—including the Jews. The Jews waited for the Messiah to come as a military and political leader to establish Israel's throne in Jerusalem. Against this powerful, wealthy backdrop, an infant is born to two peasants in a humble barnyard stable.

Compared to Caesar Augustus the rex, pontifex, maximus, infant Jesus was powerless, helpless, weak.

The one truth that will turn your week upside-down is:

Caesar reigned from a throne; Jesus reigned from hay.

The irony lies in the God of peace entering the world through Jesus—offering divine peace by the one true King. Caesar attempted to mandate peace. All the while, the Prince of Peace was on his way.

Instead of whispering messages from the throne room of heaven, Jesus dives into the muck and mire of the world. He heals, thirsts, stoops, protects, provides, teaches, holds, weeps, feels, hurts, hungers, suffers, raises, and leaves us wonderstruck again and again.

Christ's birth is a holy exclamation point that the King of kings is with us in a real and tangible way. And that gives us reason for great joy.

Monday, December 22nd

1. Read **Luke 2:1-4**.

Though it appears that Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem because of a political decree by Caesar Augustus, Luke reveals that the ruling is actually a fulfillment of a divine directive.

2. Read **Micah 5:2**. How is the trip to Bethlehem a fulfillment of prophecy?

Warning: Do not let your familiarity with this story keep you from the living and breathing gift of our Savior.

3. When in the last year did God use an unexpected series of circumstances to dislodge you and move you forward?

Emotionally . . .

Spiritually . . .

Physically. . .

Heavenly Father, dislodge me from my comfort zone and move me closer to your heart and your will. Guide me along the way. Amen.

Tuesday, December 23rd

1. Read **Luke 2:5-7**.

2. What shocks you the most about the simplicity of Jesus' birth?

3. In the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season, the awe of Christ's advent can be lost. What are you going to do today to recapture holy wonder and joy of this season?

Father, give me greater wisdom and grace for all that You have called me to. Amen.

Notable: In ancient culture, a census was taken for two primary reasons: to calculate a nation's military strength and to update records for taxes.

Notable: A woman was deemed ceremonially unclean by Jewish law after giving birth. On the eighth day, male children were circumcised (**Genesis 17:12**) and an offering was made. Only those who were poor offered two turtledoves or pigeons (**Leviticus 12:1-8**). The mother was then considered unclean for 33 more days if she had a male child and 66 days if the child was female.

Wednesday, December 24th

1. Read **Luke 2:8-20**.

Shepherds were often marginalized and looked down upon in ancient culture. Not only did they smell unpleasant from spending time with animals, but because their work required them to move around they were often deemed untrustworthy. Within a family or community, those assigned to take care of the sheep were primarily children, elderly, and women—people who couldn't fulfill more important communal tasks. That's one reason it's so startling that God would send angels to the lowly shepherds to announce Jesus' birth.

2. How does the original response of the shepherds to the angel's news compare to their response after they've seen the child? (Hint: **Luke 2:9, 20**)

3. When in the last three months have you been hesitant or fearful to respond to God but afterward discovered the joy of obedience?

4. If Luke were alive today, who would he identify as the "shepherds" through whom the good news is revealed?

Father, give me eyes to see the marginalized as your beloved children. Help me to love and serve without hesitation. In Jesus' name, amen.

Notable: Some scholars believe that these shepherds may have been raising up lambs for temple sacrifice and the forgiveness of sins—a foreshadowing to the role of Christ.

Bonus Activity: Find this song on Spotify, iTunes, or YouTube this week: "Away In A Manger" by Drew Holcomb and The Neighbors. Spend time in worship and reflection.

Thursday, December 25th

The story of Jesus' birth is one of the first confrontations of the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world.

1. Rewrite the 3 titles of Jesus given in **Luke 2:11**. How has God been each of these in your own life?

Today, in the town of David, a _____

has been born to you; he is the _____,

the _____.

Bonus Activity: Does your family have fun Christmas traditions? I'd love to hear.

Share your ideas at facebook.com/margaretfeinberg.

2. What images and descriptions come to mind when you think of a king? How do those descriptions compare and contrast with Jesus's birth?

3. How have you found that following Jesus involves the unexpected? What joys have you experienced in following Jesus?

Notable: No one knows the actual birthday of Christ. December 25th traces back to the fourth century.

God, use me. Teach me. Guide me. Lead me. May I be a beacon of your love and radiate your joy to those around me. In Jesus' name, amen.

*A LETTER
FROM
MARGARET*

Sweet Friend,

There's so much more joy to discover along the pages of Scripture. My hope and prayer is that this 4-week Advent devotional has helped jumpstart your love for God's Word and spark the joy that comes with being a beloved child of God.

You see, when it comes to doling out happiness and joy, *God is anything but stingy.*

Over the last several years of researching this virtue, I've discovered that joy is a spectrum of emotions, actions, and responses. Joy isn't just what you feel, it's what you do.

Through *Fight Back With Joy* DVD Bible study, workbook, and book, you'll be equipped with more than two dozen tactics to begin to fight back with joy no matter what battleground you find yourself on.

With teaching sessions of 20-25 minutes in length, there's plenty of time to explore:

- Session 1 – Secrets of Joyful People
- Session 2 – The Hidden Treasure of Joy
- Session 3 – Poke Holes in the Darkness
- Session 4 – A Side of Joy No One Talks About
- Session 5 – The Holy Mess of Joy
- Session 6 – What to Do When Those You Love Are Hurting

This Bible study takes you one step further. We all know people who are facing difficult situations. Yet we feel unsure and unprepared of how to respond. *Fight Back With Joy* book and Bible study will equip you and your group to know exactly what to say and do.

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