

Mind

One Heck of a Baby Announcement

Luke 1:68-79 | Session 7.50

Before the Session

Facilitator: In advance of the session

- Review today's scripture text and the session activities to help better facilitate the discussion.
- Have the Bible Background Video ready to view.
- Encourage your group to listen to the Faithelement podcast ahead of the next session (Share the link via email or social media).
- Take a few moments to familiarize yourself with the story of Zechariah and John the Baptist's birth in Luke 1.

Context

Tell the group that today is the second Sunday of Advent, in which we traditionally observe the theme of Peace. Ask:

- What does the word "peace" mean to you and why?
- How might others define it differently from you?
- In the recent restlessness of our world, at what point have you seen or heard of someone (personally or in the media) who has remained peaceful, or who is leading others to peace?
- What's the difference between "peace," in the best sense of the word, and the kind that is merely the absence of conflict?

Content

Take a few moments as a group to discuss the story of Zechariah in the first part of Luke 1, then read [Luke 1:68–79](#) and watch the Bible background video.

Remind the group that this story begins in a time when there were very few supernatural signs of God's presence. The Jewish people were being oppressed and harassed by their Roman occupiers, and Zechariah and Elizabeth thought they would never be able to have children. Ask questions like these:

- In the midst of such difficult circumstances, what does John's miraculous birth signify?
- Based on our focal passages, what kind of hopes and expectations does Zechariah have for this baby?
- Knowing John's later story, how does he fulfill this role?
- Zechariah speaks of their current time as "darkness" and "shadow." Why is this an appropriate image for their time and how does that compare to the times in which we now live?
- What do you think the term "path of peace," as used here, really means?

Closure

Have someone read aloud Luke 12:49–53, then John 16:33 and ask:

- In tumultuous times, Jesus' ministry seemed to actually cause more conflict than calm! Yet he promised to give us peace... what kind of peace is he talking about?
- How does Jesus himself model this kind of peace for us?
- Who do you know who has remained peaceful in spirit, despite difficult or chaotic circumstances?
- How do you think these people "achieve" such peace?
- In what way does displaying this kind of peace affect others?

- How can we, by our words and actions, be “peacemakers” in our troubled world?

Close with prayer, asking God to “guide our feet into the path of peace.”

Writer: Jon Parks

Current

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Before the Session

Facilitator: In advance of the session

- Review today's scripture text and the session activities to help better facilitate the discussion.
- Have the Bible Background Video ready to view.
- Have any selected video or music clips ready to show.
- Encourage your group to listen to the Faithelement podcast ahead of the next session (Share the link via email or social media).

Context

Share the [images](#) of the landmarks lit in red, white, and blue and ask questions like:

- Much of the Advent season is built around candles. In what ways does the image of a candle lit in darkness offer hope, peace, or comfort in tragic situations?
- How do you feel when you see these images?
- What claims do you think are being made when light is used in this way?
- In what ways do words like “wonder” and “hope” affect you in this season, particularly when headlines in the news seem to hold so much darkness?
- How do you feel about such terms when gathered with other believers and why?

Content

Read [Luke 1:68-79](#), then watch the Bible Background Video.

Ask questions like these:

- In what ways does this passage express emotions like “wonder” and “hope” to you?
- What is the “way of peace” mentioned in verse 79?
- In what ways is “the way of peace” a specific act or point in time, and in what ways might it be something larger?
- How is this story shaped by the element of surprise?
- What roles do surprise or expectation play in our approach to this season, and in what ways does this reflect our relationship with God during the rest of the year?

Closure

Continue by reminding everyone that the Bible Background Video said that “God is always breaking into our dark nights with the light of Christ.” Large scale shows of light make large statements, but sometimes, light is shown in smaller ways. Share the story of the [older man helping the young man with his tie](#) and ask questions like:

- What do you think the young man on the train was feeling he tried to fix his tie?
- If you were on this train, what would part of this scene would most stand out to you and why?
- What did the older man offer the younger man through his actions?
- What kind of power is expressed in small acts of kindness?
- In what small ways could you interact with people to offer an “in-breaking” of peace?

Pray: Pray together to end the session, using the words from [Luke 1:78-79](#) as a prayer: *“May the tender mercy of our God, may the dawn from on high break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”*

Writer: Erin Robinson Hall

Mystic

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Before the Session

- Review today's scripture text and the session activities to help better facilitate the discussion.
- Have the Bible Background Video ready to view.
- Encourage your group to listen to the Faithelement podcast ahead of the next session (Share the link via email or social media).
- **Preparation:** Place several pillar candles and votives in the center of the room. Also have available an unlit taper candle. Light three of the pillar candles. Arrange chairs in a circle around the candles.

Content

Read [Luke 1:68-79](#), then watch the Bible Background Video.

An Audio/Visual Reflection on Darkness and Light

Turn off the lights in the room and close blinds or shades so that the only illumination is from the candles.

Invite people to enter into a reflection time. Ask them to ponder the following questions silently for five minutes:

- What is your greatest sorrow currently?
- Where is there a “darkness” in your life?

Play Morten Lauridsen’s [“Lux Aeterna”](#) in its entirety, and invite people to listen in each other and God’s presence. This is about 30 minutes of music set to texts that speak in the context of death — of the eternal light of God, the coming of God’s Spirit, the birth of a savior, and the Lamb of God. A full translation [can be found here](#).

At the end of the music, invite people to light votives and the remaining unlit pillar candles with the taper as a symbolic gesture of waiting for and drawing near to God’s light.

Spend a few more moments in silence after all the candles are lit. Have one person read the Luke text again slowly out loud. Close by simply saying, “Amen.”

Writer: Joy Yee

Media

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Before the Session

- Have the Bible Background Video ready to view.
- Review today's scripture text and the session activities to help better facilitate the discussion.
- Encourage your group to listen to the Faithelement podcast ahead of the next session (Share the link via email or social media).
- Read Luke 1:57–79 for a background for today's passage (You may want to consider having all those verses read, instead of just the focal passage)

Context

Play the [Peace and Quiet](#) and/or the [Ultron](#) movie clips and ask:

- What is peace?
- What kinds of "peace" are people looking for in this movie clip and in what ways does that compare to the kind of things we have in mind when we say "peace?" (If your group is full of "superhero" fans, you may wish to continue the conversation with the plot lines of many of the Marvel movies about balancing strength, truth, and a desire for peace)
- How does your congregation typically celebrate peace and why?
- In what ways might you observe or practice peace differently from others within your congregation and why?

Content

Read [Luke 1:68–79](#), (or the [longer passage](#), if desired) then watch the Bible Background Video.

Ask questions like these:

- Why is it significant that Zechariah speaks and speaks so powerfully about his son, John the Baptist?
- In what ways did this child bring peace for Elizabeth and Zechariah?
- In what ways did this baby shine light into the darkness?
- How do we embrace the peace of God when we view reports of violent acts every day in our news?
- Why do some people seem to feel that violence is needed to achieve peace and how do you feel about that?
- How can we be peace when so many poor views of peace exist?

Closure

Play the [Dear Santa Sign video clip](#) and ask:

- In what ways does the birth of every child give us a glimpse into true peace?
- What are ways you can show the path to peace in your everyday life?
- In what ways is this misplaced sign a deterrent to peace?
- How do we guard the peace of both the young and old?
- How can followers of Jesus bring peace to a world that seems to fight over everything?

Invite volunteers to name a situation for which we need peace, then close with a prayer.

Writer: Jon Self

Youth

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Before the Session

Facilitator: In advance of the session

- Review today's scripture text and the session activities to help better facilitate the discussion.
- Have the Bible Background Video ready to view.
- Listen to the FaithElement podcast for this session.
- Use the social media prompts on this session's webpage to help youth begin engaging the session them ahead of their gathering.
- Prepare a group of concealed items that can be used for your "Context." (see below).
- Provide some paper and writing implements for each participant.

Intro

Play the [Star Wars trailer](#) and ask questions like:

- Not that I'm inviting, but how do you feel about going to see this movie and why??
- If you've been following the pre-release information on this film, you know that the character of Rey is obviously going to be related to one of the main characters from the original films. What do you think is going to be her story?
- How do you think she starts this saga by thinking of herself as "nobody?"
- In what ways do you think that movie character plot-lines reflect our own?

Context

Have an item covered by a bowl, towel, or some other means in front of everyone and invite a volunteer to come up and look at the item in a way that only they can see what it is. Tell the volunteer that, while they cannot show the item, she or he can either tell the truth about its identity or they can make something up about it. Either way, they should try to get the group to believe them. After they identify the item to the group, take a vote to determine who believes him or her. Have several items and invite multiple volunteers to identify them as time allows, then ask questions like:

- How did you decide what was the truth and what was not?
- What made someone a good liar, or at least appear trustworthy?
- Who do you trust in your life and how do you know you can trust them?
- Why do people have a hard time trusting God when they are in the dark places of their lives?
- In what ways does your relationship with God bring a light to such dark places?

Content

Read [Luke 1:68-79](#), then watch the Bible Background Video.

Ask your group:

- From what you've heard, how did your family respond to your birth?
- How do you think the birth of a first child should be celebrated and why?
- Why does Zechariah praise God in this way?
- What expectations do you think Zechariah is setting up for his son?
- What expectations do you think people have had for you since you were born and how do you feel about them?

Closure

Give everyone a sheet of paper and something with which to write and encourage them to draw a line across the page that represents their life journey up to this point. This line should go up for exciting and meaningful points in their lives and low for difficult and/or tragic points in their lives. After they have finished, invite volunteers to share their line graph and the points represented, then ask:

- Most of your graphs probably were not planned that way from your birth. What would it be like if your life was a constant high point and why?
- Why do you think God allows us to go through some of these low points in our lives?
- in what ways do our hard times make it easier or harder to trust in God?
- This is a time of year where many Christians celebrate Christ's birth through focusing on some of the things signified by his coming. For instance, this is "peace week" for several congregations. How do you see peace, or the lack thereof, affecting the progress of your life and why?
- How do you define peace and in what ways does peace affect your relationships?
- How might we help others have fewer, or less "low," low points in their lives by bringing peace to them?

Close this session in prayer for the future and for peace.

Writer: Don Breeden

Mix

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Context (From the Current Session Page)

Share the [images](#) of the landmarks lit in red, white, and blue and ask questions like:

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- How do you feel when you see these images?
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- In what ways do words like “wonder” and “hope” affect you in this season, particularly when headlines in the news seem to hold so much darkness?
- How do you feel about such terms when gathered with other believers and why?

Content (From the Mind Session Page)

Take a few moments as a group to discuss the story of Zechariah in the first part of Luke 1, then read [Luke 1:68-79](#) and watch the Bible background video.

Remind the group that this story begins in a time when there were very few supernatural signs of God's presence. The Jewish people were being oppressed and harassed by their Roman occupiers, and Zechariah and Elizabeth thought they would never be able to have children. Ask questions like these:

- In the midst of such difficult circumstances, what does John's miraculous birth signify?
- Based on our focal passages, what kind of hopes and expectations does Zechariah have for this baby?
- Knowing John's later story, how does he fulfill this role?
- Zechariah speaks of their current time as "darkness" and "shadow." Why is this an appropriate image for their time and how does that compare to the times in which we now live?
- What do you think the term "path of peace," as used here, really means?

Closure (from the Media Session page)

Play the [Dear Santa Sign video clip](#) and ask:

- In what ways does the birth of every child give us a glimpse into true peace?
- What are ways you can show the path to peace in your everyday life?
- In what ways is this misplaced sign a deterrent to peace?
- How do we guard the peace of both the young and old?
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Invite volunteers to name a situation for which we need peace, then close with a prayer.