



Hark  
THE Glad  
Sound



★  
AN ADVENT BIBLE STUDY  
IN 4 SESSIONS  
Leader's Guide

Creative  
Communications  
Sample



An Advent Bible Study  
in 4 Sessions

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## Introduction

Music has always been a part of the Advent and Christmas seasons, but you may be surprised to learn that that tradition goes all the way back thousands of years before Christ was even born. The people of God were singing the praises of God long before Christ came on the scene. The Children of Israel sang when they had safely crossed the Red Sea on dry land, escaping the approaching Egyptians. King David sang songs that would become part of the Book of Psalms. But in the time right before the birth the Christ, the number of melodies increased as the chosen participants involved in the coming of Christ prepared for his arrival.

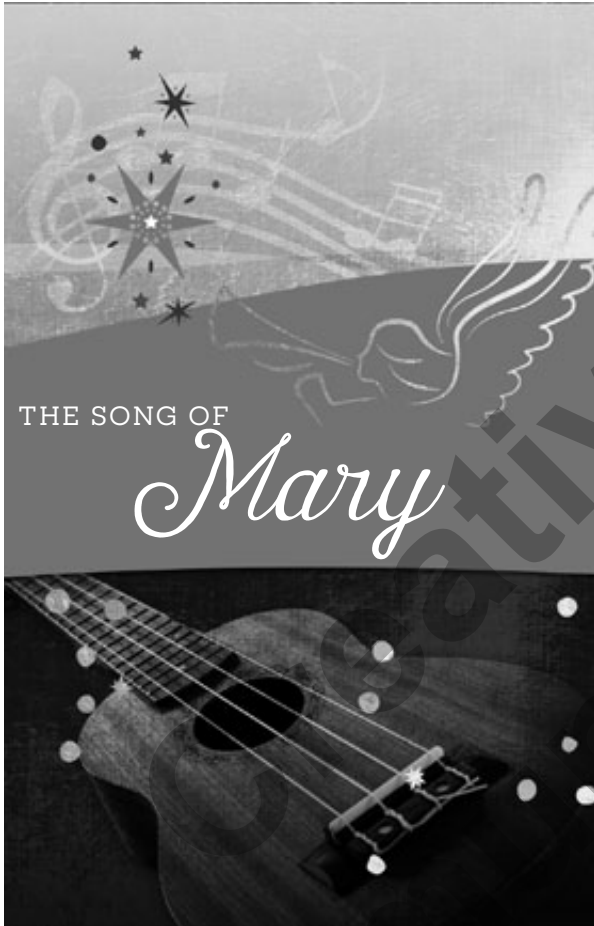
During these seasons of Advent and Christmas, you will have the opportunity to “hark the glad sound” with Zechariah, Mary, the angels and the Church and join with them in singing the praises of God who sent his Son to earth to save us, echoing their melodies of repentance, remembrance, rejoicing and reconciliation. Won’t you sing along?

## Tips For Using This Study Guide

1. Always begin each session with a prayer. One is included for each session. You are encouraged to expand each of them with prayer concerns from the group.
2. Feel free to follow the format of each session as presented here or rearrange and adapt the material to meet the needs of your group.
3. You will need Bibles to look up the verses listed in each session.
4. As you work through the material in this study guide, be sure to write down in the margins any questions that come to mind or any thoughts that arise in the course of the discussion and your contemplation of each session's Scripture verses.
5. Throughout each session, think about specific ways you can apply the themes of the study to your life this Advent season.
6. If you are using this guide in a group setting, consider assigning the Bible verses to various people in the class to read aloud at the appropriate time. This will move the session along more efficiently.

Note that some of the questions ask for facts. Typically, the answers to these questions will come from the Scripture verses just read. Other questions are more subjective, asking for your opinion or an example from your own experience. Since your life experiences are different from anyone else's, answers to these questions are neither right nor wrong. A Leader's Guide that accompanies this material is available from Creative Communications for the Parish.

SESSION 2  
The Song of Mary  
*A Melody of Remembrance*



Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, by your Spirit you moved Mary to pour out from her heart a song of great faith glorifying you. Open our hearts this day to hear again how you continually keep your promises to us. In your Son's name we pray. Amen.

Leader's Guide  
For Session 2

**BEFORE CLASS:** Before class read through the session. Examine and become acquainted with the Bible readings.

**PRAY:** Ask someone to read the Opening Prayer or pray it aloud together.

READ: Have someone (or several different people) read the "Setting the Scene" section.

## Setting the Scene

Our story continues this week about six months after the appearance of the angel Gabriel to Zechariah: Luke 1:26-38.

Mary is a young woman (probably in her teens) living in the rather obscure town of Nazareth, about forty miles north of Jerusalem. She was betrothed to Joseph, an older man. Both were descendents of David. Betrothal then was a much stronger legal relationship than the engagement of today. It usually lasted at least nine months to prove that the bride was not pregnant. The couple, in this first stage of marriage, could be referred to as "husband and wife" but did not live together or have sexual relations. This binding contract could be broken only by a formal divorce.

Gabriel (the same angel who appeared to Zechariah) appears to Mary, saying "Greetings, O favored one! The Lord is with you!"

Mary's initial reaction was the same as Zechariah's—startled and troubled. What does he mean "favored one"? The angel reassures her: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High."

Her reaction quickly shifts to uncertainty. "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" Again Gabriel is reassuring: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will *overshadow you* (suggesting the same manner in which the presence of God came into the tabernacle); therefore, the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God."

Now her reaction is markedly different from Zechariah's skepticism. "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." Gabriel leaves Mary.

Matthew's account (1:19-25) fills in what happens next. Hearing of Mary's pregnancy, Joseph contemplates quietly starting the legal proceeding to void the betrothal. But an angel appears to him and likewise reassures him that this is God's doing. Like Mary his reaction is humble obedience.

## Discussion Question

1. What do you think explains the different reaction of Mary and Joseph to the angel's announcement? Why their humble obedience in contrast to Zechariah's skepticism?

## Back to our Story ...

Mary, of course, cannot share her remarkable news with any friends and neighbors. So she travels the forty miles to her relative Elizabeth who also is living with wonderful news. It is a Spirit-filled encounter! At the sound of Mary's voice, both Elizabeth and the child within her recognize Mary and the Seed which she carries as a fulfillment of the promise to God's people, made to Abraham.

## Discussion Questions

1. Read Genesis 12:1-3, especially 3b (15:5, 17:6,7; 22:17-18 express similar promises) and Galatians 3:23-29. Because of our baptism, how does that promise to Abraham apply to us?

## Time for a Song

Overwhelmed by the response of Elizabeth and the unborn John, Mary pours forth in song.

Read Luke 1:46-55.

If possible, *sing* the words of the *Magnificat* (this title is taken from the song's first word, "magnify" in Latin) or a hymn in your congregation's hymnal based on these verses.

Some common titles include:

"My Soul Proclaims the Greatness of the Lord"

"Tell Out, My Soul, the Greatness of the Lord"

"My Soul Rejoices"

"Canticle of Mary"

"Canticle of the Turning"

DISCUSS: Facilitate discussion of this question among the group. Allow time for any general comments about anything that was just read in this section.

1. Answers will vary.

Back to our Story ...

READ: Ask someone to read this paragraph.

DISCUSS: Facilitate discussion of this question among the group. Allow time for any general comments about anything that was just read in this section.

1. It applies to us because we know that baptism has made us children of Abraham, and thus inheritors of the promise of salvation and the blessing of God.

Time for a Song

READ: Read the opening sentence, ask someone to read Luke 1:46-55 and then have someone read the paragraphs about the reading.



## A Closer Look at the Lyric

READ: Ask someone (or several different people) to read the paragraphs in this section, stopping to read Scripture and answer questions as indicated along the way. Then, allow time at the end of this section for any general comments about what was just read.

Have someone read 1 Samuel 2:1-10. It is similar to the Magnificat in its expression of God's dominion in the earth and his ability to lift up what is low. It is different in its stronger emphasis on battle and enemies of the Lord.

1. Hannah begins her song: "My heart exults in the Lord." Mary is echoing David and Isaiah in that she uses the words "soul," "bless," "magnify" "holy" and "name" in praise of the Lord.

"My Soul Does Magnify the Lord"

"My Soul Now Magnifies the Lord"

## A Closer Look at the Lyric

Sometimes in a musical a character will break out in a song. The time and action of the narrative pause as they (and we) are moved to savor the moment or an unexpected turn of events. And so it is here. What a savoring this is! So much is packed into Mary's song!

The song is both brand new (for the Lord is doing a new thing) and old. Mary had been taught well the Word of God. Almost every phrase of the Magnificat is found in Old Testament writings of the psalmists, the prophets, and especially Hannah, who sang when her young son, Samuel, was dedicated to the service of the Lord. (Read 1 Samuel 2:1-10. What similarities do you see to Mary's song? What differences?)

But there's much more here than simply a recasting of Hannah's song.

As with Zechariah's song, there are two parts. The first section is more personal with an emphasis on "my soul," "my spirit," "my Savior," "me."

1. **"My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."** Note that Mary rejoices not in the gifts she has received but rather in the Giver of those gifts. "Soul" and "spirit" imply feelings welling up in her inmost being. More than surface happiness, this is a genuine, deeply felt joy. "Magnify" and "rejoice" parallel each other, also suggesting a great exulting. This is the first time "Savior" is used in the New Testament. It suggests delivery from dangers both physical and spiritual, such as sin, evil, and death. Read 1 Samuel 2:1. How does Hannah begin her song? Read Psalms 34:1-3 and 103:1 and Isaiah 61:10a. How is Mary echoing David and the prophet?

The preposition “for” introduces each of the reasons for Mary’s exulting—

2. **“for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.”** The Greek verb suggests looking on someone with great affection and “humble estate” is much more than Mary’s virtue of humility; it embraces her station in life. Read Psalm 138:6 for a similar thought. Her servanthood also prefigures that of her son, Jesus, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. Read Isaiah 42:1; 52:13.
3. **“For ... all generations will call me blessed;”** Here Mary hearkens back to the promises that the Lord made to the patriarch Abraham. (She will come back to Abraham at the end of her song.) Read Genesis 12:3 and 22:18. All nations are being blessed through Mary’s giving birth to the Promised One. And her prediction—more of a deduction made in faith than a prophecy—is still fulfilled each day as millions of Christians recall in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creed, “born of the virgin Mary.” It happened during Jesus’ ministry, as he was teaching as well when a woman in the crowd called out, “Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.” What was Jesus’ response? Read Luke 11:28.
4. **“for he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name.”** What does Zephaniah 3:17 tell us about the Mighty One? Or Psalm 71:19 about these great things? How does Hannah refer to the Lord in 1 Samuel 2:2? How about David in Psalm 22:3 and 71:22b? Have we perhaps today lost some of the awe, reverence, and mystery surrounding God as the Holy One, the Most High God?

In the second part of her song, Mary changes the focus from herself to Israel and all of God’s people.

5. **“His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.”** “Fear” as it is used here is in the sense of “to revere” or “to hold in awe.” Read Psalm 103:17-18. How is the quality of God’s mercy different from the things of this world?

2. Have someone read Psalm 138:6 and Isaiah 42:1; 52:13.
3. “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” indicating all who keep the Word are equally blessed by God.
4. The Mighty One will save us, rejoice over us, sing over us and quiet us with love. The psalmist says no one else does the great things of God. Hannah refers to the Lord as a rock. David calls the Lord holy and enthroned on the praises of Israel.
5. His mercy will last forever.

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