

The background is a deep blue night sky filled with numerous small, bright stars. A single, larger star with a prominent four-pointed starburst effect is positioned in the upper center. Below the sky, the silhouettes of several palm trees are visible against the horizon. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of three camels and their riders are shown walking across a dark, undulating landscape.

The
Word
and the
Wonder

An Advent Bible Study
in 4 Sessions

**Creative
Communications
Sample**

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Introduction

Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, Simeon and Anna—each of these faithful saints received the Word, and each regarded the Word with joy and wonder. Although at first he doubted, Zechariah responded to the Lord’s faithfulness in joyful words of prophecy. Mary and Joseph, astonished and overwhelmed at the roles they were to play in God’s plan of salvation, responded at first with quite understandable concern. But hearing words of comfort and guidance from the Lord through his messengers, they responded to the Word in humble obedience. Simeon and Anna had waited for many long years to see—and hold—the Word. When they finally saw the infant Savior, the Word made flesh, Simeon and Anna gave thanks and praise to God and told others just who had come into his temple that day.

During these seasons of Advent and Christmas, you will have many opportunities to hear the good news of our salvation in Christ Jesus. Especially during Advent we remember that our Lord is coming again. Now—and on that great day yet to come—how will you receive the Word?

Tips For Using This Study Guide

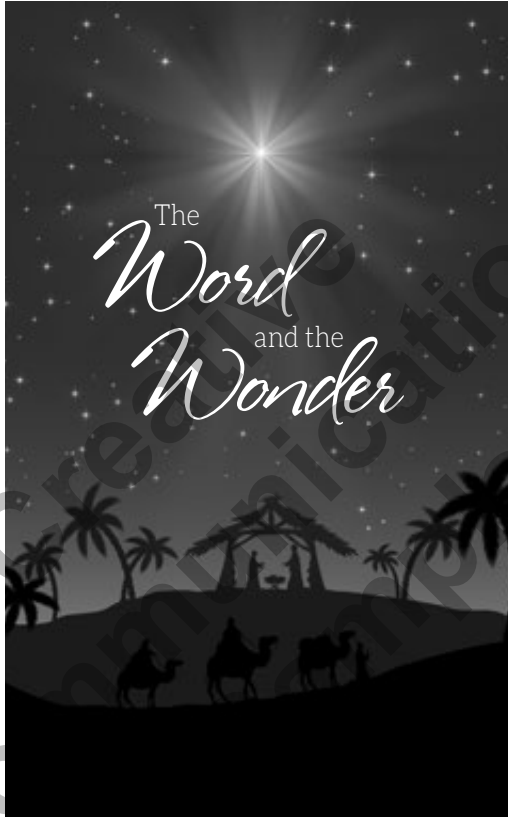
1. Always begin each session with a prayer. One is included for each session. You are encouraged to expand each of them with prayer concerns from the group.
2. Feel free to follow the format of each session as presented here or rearrange and adapt the material to meet the needs of your group.
3. You 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 Word for Mary

For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly. Psalm 138:6



Opening Prayer

Almighty God, upon hearing the news that she would be the mother of your Son, Mary responded in faith, "Let it be to me according to your word." Help us by your Spirit to receive your Word in humility as she did. Hear our prayer in the name of Jesus, the son of Mary, your exalted Son and our Lord. Amen.

Responsive Reading..... Psalm 78:51-54, 70-72

L *The Lord struck down every firstborn in Egypt, the first fruits of their strength in the tents of Ham.*

C **Then he led out his people like sheep and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.**

L *He led them in safety, so that they were not afraid, but the sea overwhelmed their enemies.*

C **And he brought them to his holy land, to the mountain which his right hand had won.**

L *He chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds;*

C **From following the nursing ewes he brought him to shepherd Jacob his people, Israel his inheritance.**

L *With upright heart he shepherded them*

C **And guided them with his skillful hand.**

Discussion

Think of Christmas hymns or carols that speak of Mary. What words are usually used to describe her in those songs?

Introduction

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed” (Luke 1:46- 48). Down through the centuries her words of prophecy have proved to be true, but why have generations of believers called her blessed? Mary knew that it was not because of anything she had done. She went on to explain, “For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name” (Luke 1:49). The holy and mighty God of Israel did great things for Mary—and he has done great things for us through her son, the Messiah of Israel, the Son of God. As Mary said, the Lord exalts those of “humble estate” (Luke 1:52). In his mercy he “regards the lowly” (Psalm 138:6). God sent his Son, born of Mary,

born in lowly circumstances with a manger for a bed and a cross for a throne. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we are lifted up to reign with him, blessed with the gift of salvation in his name.

The Word of Promise

1. Read 2 Samuel 7:8-17. David had hoped to build a house for the Lord, but instead the Lord would build the house of David. What promise does God make concerning David's offspring and his throne?
2. What discipline would David's descendant endure? Read Acts 2:23-24. During his sermon on Pentecost, what does Peter say that echoes this prophecy?
3. Read 2 Samuel 7:13 and John 2:13-22. Who would finally build the house for the Lord's name?
4. Read 2 Samuel 7:18-29. After David hears the promises of God, how does he respond? What does David say about himself? Why would God's name be magnified?
5. Read John 10:11-14. God took David from shepherding the flocks and made him a shepherd of Israel. How would David's descendant describe himself? In 2 Samuel 7:23-24, what events in Israel's history does David recall?
6. Read Psalm 22:1-18 and Psalm 16:8-11. What had David prophesied concerning his descendant? Read Acts 2:29-36. What does Peter say about David and about his descendant?

The Word for the Lowly

1. Read Psalm 138:4-8. How does the Lord regard the “lowly” and the “haughty” differently? What promise is given concerning the lives of those who belong to the Lord?
2. Read Luke 1:26-38. What is Mary’s first reaction to the angel’s message? What words in Gabriel’s announcement echo the words of God’s promise to David? Mary rightly wonders how this can happen to her. How does the angel answer her? What is Mary’s final response to the word?
3. Read Luke 1:39-56. How were the promises to Mary and Elizabeth confirmed when the two women greet each other? In her words of praise, what does Mary say about people of humble estate and about the proud and mighty?
4. What words of Mary’s praise are similar to those spoken by Zechariah after the birth of John (Luke 1:67-79)? How can we, like David and Mary, magnify the Lord’s name?
5. Read James 1:9-11. What words of wisdom does James have for the lowly and for the rich? What can we learn from these verses about our attitudes toward wealth and material possessions?
6. Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. How might these words of the apostle Paul remind us of Mary, her circumstances and her words of praise?
7. Read 1 Peter 5:5-10. What should define our attitude toward one another? Why is this often so difficult for us to do?
8. What does it mean to humble yourself under the hand of God? Why can we be patient in suffering?

The Exalted Word

1. Read Luke 4:16-21. In the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus read the words of prophecy from Isaiah 61. He tells the people that those words have been fulfilled in their hearing. What words of his reading from Isaiah are similar to Mary's words of praise in Luke 1?
2. Read Philippians 2:5-11. What are all the different ways described here in which Jesus humbled himself?
3. How has God exalted Jesus? How do these verses in Philippians 2 describe the fulfillment of the prophecy to David concerning his descendant and his throne?
4. "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." How might life be different in your family, workplace or congregation if you were to look not only to your own interests, "but also to the interests of others"?

Hymn

(Tune: Nun Komm, Der Heiden Heiland 77 77)

Let the earth now praise the Lord,
Who has truly kept his word
And at last to us did send
Christ, the sinner's help and friend.

What the fathers most desired,
What the prophets' heart inspired,
What they longed for many a year,
Stands fulfilled in glory here.

Abram's promised great reward,
Zion's helper, Jacob's Lord—
Him of two-fold race behold—
Truly came, as long foretold.

As your coming was in peace,
Quiet, full of gentleness,
Let the same mind dwell in me
Which is yours eternally.

Closing Prayer

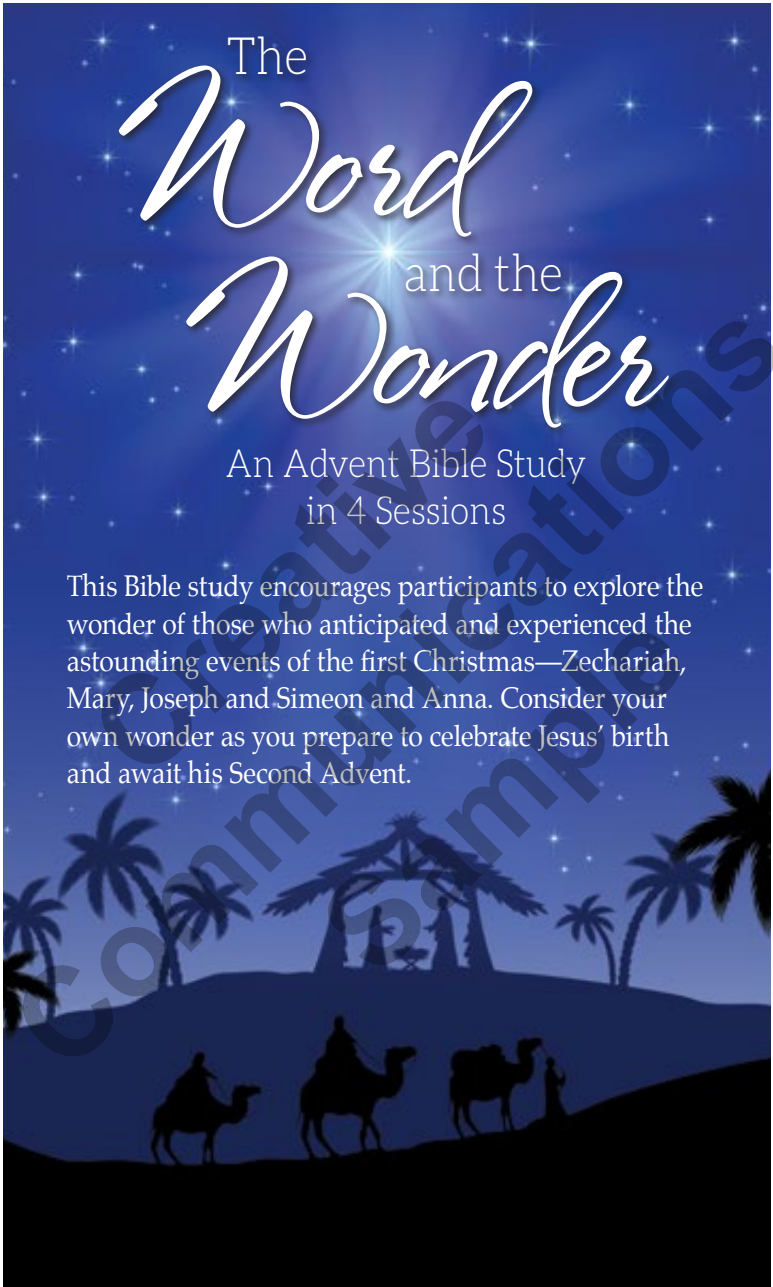
Lord Jesus, Son of God and Mary's son, you were obedient to your Father, humbling yourself to the point of death on the cross for the sake of our salvation. Risen and exalted Lord, your name, the name of Jesus, is the name above every name. As we prepare to celebrate your lowly birth in Bethlehem, teach us to follow you in humility and to live in love and service to others. Amen.

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As You Celebrate

What might you do during this Advent season to help those who are “lowly” in the eyes of the world? Perhaps you might donate food or clothing (especially baby clothing, remembering the Christ Child!) to a shelter for those in need, or work with your family or congregation to send cards and small gifts to nursing home residents. Share the love of Jesus with those “of humble estate” (Luke 1:52).

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This Bible study encourages participants to explore the wonder of those who anticipated and experienced the astounding events of the first Christmas—Zechariah, Mary, Joseph and Simeon and Anna. Consider your own wonder as you prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth and await his Second Advent.