

Season of Advent—Week 1  
28 November–4 December

Introducing the theme...



The Birth of Jesus by Sophia Plate (Aus. & NZ One Voice Project)

Each of the four gospels tells the story of Jesus a bit differently. They have different communities in mind and write at different times in history. Year C in the Revised Common Lectionary (suggested scripture readings for the church) focuses primarily on the Gospel according to Luke, so we will hear the birth narrative from Luke's perspective this year.

Luke is written to a disciple named Theophilus which means 'friend of God' in Greek. We might imagine ourselves as Theophilus—those who seek to befriend God and others in the way of Jesus.

Throughout the weeks of Advent, we will encounter characters from the birth narrative including Zechariah, Mary, Elizabeth and John. Each will reveal what it means to be a friend of God and a bearer of Christ in our time and place.

**Reflection 1**

Luke 1:5–7

In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

The Season of Advent is one of longing and anticipation. We begin the church year by getting in touch with our desire—for ourselves, those we love and for the world. The Gospel of Luke starts with a childless couple who are getting on in years. This seems like a disheartening if not hopeless situation. Yet into this longing space, God moves and is at work.

(Cont.)

Place your hands open on your lap and contemplate life at this point in time. Allow responses to the questions below to come freely into your heart and mind. Resist the temptation to edit or problem solve what arises. Simply accept what comes. Alternatively, you might share responses with a companion.

- What do you desire for yourself?
- What do you desire for those you love? for the world?

When you are ready...

Source of Wonders:  
Receive the desires of my heart  
and help me to rest  
with anticipation  
in your love.  
Amen

## Reflection 2

Luke 1:8–11

Once when Zechariah was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense.

Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

Priests were called upon to serve in the temple for one week at a time, two times a year. Entering the sanctuary where the Ark of the Covenant was kept was both a privilege and a fearful duty. One could never be sure what might happen in God's presence!

In her book *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Annie Dillard finds the casual non-expectant attitude of most Christians astounding. During her time on the banks of Tinker Creek, Dillard came awake to the presence of God everywhere writing:

The world is fairly studded and strewn with pennies cast broadside by a generous hand. But—and this is the point—who gets excited by a mere penny? But if you cultivate a healthy poverty and simplicity, so that finding a penny will literally make your day, then, since the world is in fact planted in pennies, you have with your poverty bought a lifetime of days.

Be on the lookout for God's 'pennies' strewn throughout your day. You might go for a walk or sit quietly for a time in nature. Make it your intention to pay greater attention to the little glimmers of beauty and grace. How might you nurture the 'healthy poverty and simplicity' that will enable you to recognise and cherish these moments? Alternatively, share with a companion the 'pennies' you discovered this day.

Glorious Creator:  
awaken me to your mystery,  
those glimmers and shy manifestations  
of your beautiful presence  
everywhere.  
Amen

### Reflection 3

Luke 1:12–17

When Zechariah saw the angel, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord.

He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

‘Do not be afraid,’ is an assurance we often hear in scripture when people encounter the holy. It seems we may yearn for signs and words that bring good news and direction but are often terrified when they come to us in whatever form. In part, this may be because we are comfortable with the way things are even as we long for something more. Also, we may be wary of what may be asked of us in terms of participation.

Recall a desire you have for yourself, those you love or the world. Hold it gently in your heart before God. Invite the Spirit to have a conversation with you about this desire. Alternatively, share your responses with a companion.

- Where do you sense you are being invited to act at this time?
- What fears or realities might be holding you back?

When you are ready, repeat the words *Fear not* as a form of mantra. What do you notice?

Keeper of Life:  
Take away my fear  
and give me courage  
as I am drawn out by your Spirit  
to be love in this world.  
Amen

### Reflection 4

Luke 1:18–20

Zechariah said to the angel, “How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.” The angel replied, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.

“But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.”

It is tempting to conclude that Zechariah is being punished for his questions and doubt. But another way of looking at this story is to see the silence that has entered Zechariah’s world as a gift. What will it be like for Zechariah to hold back for a time on sharing his experience with the angel?

(Cont.)

In her article “Zechariah and Holy Silence,” Marina Berzins McCoy observes, “Sometimes our words, like Zechariah’s, manifest our own limits. Silence makes room for the fullness of God. God’s presence and activity exceeds our own ability to name, to capture, or to control... In entering into silence, we enter more deeply in God’s mystery.”

Carve out space in these days to ponder silently.

- What treasures have you received recently?
- When did something in nature capture your attention?
- What new insight or revelation has come to you?

Alternatively, spend several moments in silence with a companion. When you are ready:

Gracious One:  
I give thanks for evidence  
of your presence in my life,  
for times of surprise and wonder.  
I hold them in my heart  
and treasure them as gifts.  
Amen