

Study Guide for December 17, 2017
Third Week of Advent

Theme: Waiting with Mary

Readings: Luke 1:46-55; Isaiah 61:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; Psalm 126

This week we wait for the Christ child sitting by the side of Mary, the expecting mother of God incarnate. Typical of God at work in our world, the women who have been silenced for so long are now finding their voice, standing up to injustice and demanding change (#MeToo). Like John the Baptist, these women are preparing the way for a radical new way to operate in the world. And who better to lead that charge than Mary, the blessed mother. Forced to live with a divine secret, she would endure shame, ridicule, and judgment.

Out of all the other women in the world God chose Mary and trusted her so completely to carry the fragile cargo. In fact, God trusted her to love and care for this vulnerable child from his birth to his death. Mary also accepted the call and trusted God to see her through the trials and judgments she would have to endure.

When I think of Mary, I imagine a young teenage girl who only recently came of age to be married. I imagine Joseph not much older. We often portray him as someone who was much older than he probably was. That's because the church thought it might protect the "virgin" image. The idea of an older man having sex with a younger girl was not common and more often than not, it was frowned upon. Therefore an older Joseph was seen more as a "caregiver" or "father figure" than a husband.

It's hard for me to personally speak to her plight. I do not know what it means to be pregnant, give birth, or have to bury a child; much less watch him die. But that's exactly what Mary had to do. As you read the poetic words of the "Song of Mary (the Magnificat)" in Luke's gospel, keep in mind the pain she had to endure both at the beginning and at the end of Christ's life.

God has called us all to be something greater than our self. When you think of the plans that God has for you, and you think about running away, put on Mary's shoes for a moment. Sit in her silence as she waits, or sit in your heart as she grieves. Do as she did, and lean on God for strength as you work to build up the faith of Jesus Christ.

My utter fealty to prove,
Thou tiny Jesu, Light of Light!
Thy cradle so dear
Draws angels anear.
O Child-God! now
Trembling before that humble crib I bow.
- **St. Therese of Lisieux**

Prayer: Come to me this day, O Christ child, and place your heart against mine so together we may beat as one heartbeat, to the glory of God Almighty. Amen.

Read: Luke 1:46-55; 1 Samuel 2:1-10

The similarities between the stories of two women are reflected in the words of their two songs. The women are Hannah and Mary. From the miraculous conception of each woman's son to each woman's faithful response of praise, we see God's purpose and plan for the world revealed. There are numerous parallels between these two women themselves and the way in which each responded to God's call.

Q: How has the Lord done mighty and great things for you?

Q: What's God doing right now to make you want to be more faithful?

Take the time to really read these passages and try name the different ways you might relate to the scriptures.

Q: What parallels do you draw from these two readings? How might they be relevant to you today?

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Mary's Song is a song of praise to God. Paul, in writing to the churches in Thessalonica, offers us a blueprint on how we can praise God in our daily lives.

Q: Where do you succeed and where do you fail in each of these verses (i.e. rejoicing, praying, etc.)?

Read each verse separately, and write down a list of things that come to mind about how you are lacking or achieving in you're responding to God's call on your life.

Q: Are you able to rejoice in difficult times? If so, how? If not, then why?

Think about Mary, and all that she went through being pregnant out of wedlock. Think about the shame she might have brought to her family, and the guilt that she must have felt as she did. Think about how she rose above it all, and kept her focus on God in order to do his will and not her own.

Q: Think about our Advent message then ask yourself what does it mean to you today?

Slow Read: Psalm 126. Think about this particular verse, "The Lord has done great things for us." Remember to quiet your mind by focusing on your breath. In your prayers ask for the Spirit of God to reveal to you the gifts and the light that come from above. Don't forget to be open to receive them.

Prayer: Blessed Father, Mother, Creator, with your Holy Spirit and goodness help me to always be available for you, ready to fulfill your purpose for me so that in all I do in my life I will do to bring glory to the name of the One you sent to redeem the world. Amen.