

Study questions/Living it out:

Zechariah's Song is one of praise and thanksgiving. The Bible is full of songs. Some of them, like this one, overflow with rejoicing and praise. Others cry out to God in pain, frustration, and anger, longing that God would act. Others contain elements of both.

Read these songs: Psalm 13 Psalm 117 Luke 1:67-79 Rev. 15:3-4

- Which of these (or another) chimes most with your present experiences?
- If you were expressing 'Your Song', what would be included in it? What would be the *tone*?
- In Zechariah's Song, verses 68-75 follow the pattern of the Jewish blessing prayer, the *berakah*. An initial statement of praise is followed by the reasons for the praise. If you were writing a song of praise what would be the reasons?

Additional/Alternative Study questions

- Read Romans 12:15. As individuals, and as a group, are you in a time of 'rejoicing' or 'weeping'. How might you rejoice or weep *together*?
- Read Phil. 3:1-5. From the first day that we meet with Jesus, he is working to fulfill a 'good work' within us. How are you aware of God *working* in your life? How might this *work* be completed?
- Read Gen 22:17-18. In what ways are these promised fulfilled within Zechariah's Song?

Prayer suggestion:

Spend some time reflecting and meditating on Luke 1:78-79. Pray for each other, that you might know God's tender mercy and light. Pray that you would know God's peace.

Joining a group and other resources:

We encourage everyone to join a group if possible. We have daytime or evening groups and youth cells. If you would like to know more, please visit our website, or contact Guy on 01423 504160. There are many great resources to help you pray and enjoy the Scriptures on a daily basis.

www.pray-as-you-go.org A 12 minute guided prayer and meditation to listen to.

<https://www.wordlive.org> Many excellent daily reading approaches, available as an app.

<http://www.sacredspace.ie/> A short guided prayer and meditation to read.

Or download the app from Soul Survivor, with short daily videos: <http://bible.soulsurvivor.com/>

www.smcn.org.uk

ADVENT INSPIRE

Everywhere...in everything

Weekly discipleship and spiritual growth resources for all ages, groups and individuals.
Follow up material on Sunday's teaching for groups and individuals.

Week beginning: 6th December 2015.

GROWING AT HOME

Three suggested discipleship activities suitable for all ages to help you grow, based on up - to God; in - to each other; out - to mission

Up

Read together the genealogy (list of ancestors) of Jesus in Matthew ch 1 or Luke ch 1. Who do you recognise? Are there any people in those lists who are famous for doing something not-so-good? God is gracious - He uses all sorts of people to accomplish his plans, even people like you and me!

In

How much do you know about your family tree? Sit down with a pen and paper, talk together about your grandparents and ancestors, and see how far back you can go!

Out

Make one change to your room or your home this week, enabling Jesus' light to shine out more brightly from where you are.

DAILY READINGS AND PRAYERS.

As we prepare throughout advent for the coming of Jesus, each week we will give a short format for worship with an advent wreath at home, and suggested readings for each day.

The Lighting of the Second Candle: Waiting for Forgiveness

By lighting one candle each week of Advent, we help ourselves to get ready for the birth of Jesus. Last week we lit a candle that signified our waiting for God our Shepherd. Today we focus on the coming of Christ who brings forgiveness from our sins.

Prayer for God's Help

Dear God, thank you for this season of Advent that helps us to prepare for the coming of Christ at Christmas. As we read the Bible and light a candle, may excitement for Christ's coming burn in our hearts. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 130:1-8

In this psalm, we join the psalmist in crying out for God's forgiveness.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

God promises to make a new covenant with us, in which our sins will be forgiven and forgotten.

Luke 1:68-79

When an angel appears to Zechariah in the temple and tells him that his wife will give birth to a son, the old man doesn't believe the angel. As a result, Zechariah is unable to speak for many months, until immediately after the birth of his son John (the Baptist). Right after the birth, Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit and speaks the prophecy that we will read.

Lighting of the Candle

We light this candle because, like God's people centuries ago, we also need a Saviour who will forgive our sins. The purple colour reminds us of the seriousness of our sin and our great need for God's forgiveness.

Prayer of Hope

Dear God, as we light this candle, we recognize our sin and our need for a saviour. We wait for your forgiveness in Christ. We long to be purified so that we might present ourselves to you in righteousness. Come, Our Saviour! Amen!

Weekly readings:

Monday. Zechariah. 6:12-13

Tuesday. Micah. 5:2-4

Wednesday. Malachi. 3:1-6

Thursday. John 1:1-8

Friday. John 1:9-18

Saturday. Mark 1:1-3



SUNDAY'S TEACHING: RESOURCES FOR GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS

First thoughts:

What's your favourite song and why? (What does it express?)

This week's teaching in a nutshell:

God will always come through. Luke 1:67-79; Philipians 1:3-6

Advent is a season of anticipation, as we wait prayerfully for the new thing that God will fulfil. As we wait expectantly we are also called to look back and remember the ways in which God has been faithful to his people, and to look ahead to the day when Jesus Christ will return in glory. The perfect judge will deliver his perfect judgment, and rule as King in a new heaven and a new earth.

It's easy to be overwhelmed by our present situation, to feel as though God has abandoned us. Advent is a call to lift our eyes above the single focus of the here and now, with its consuming demands, difficulties, and disappointments, and to remember that God will make good on his promises - God will always come through.

The reading from Luke is Zechariah's Song (Benedictus). Zechariah is a person who has known deep disappointment and has been longing that God would bring his hope and salvation. Zechariah was a priest, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife, Elizabeth, was a descendant of Aaron. They were unable to have children, which meant that the priestly family line (which was hereditary) would be broken. What's more, they were living under Roman occupation – their enemies were ruling over them. Their future looked bleak, and it must have been difficult to keep the faith.

Zechariah and Elizabeth remain obedient to God - they cling to the hope that they have as they remember the promises of God to their ancestor Abraham. Yet, Zechariah cannot hide his utter surprise and skepticism at the news (delivered by an angel, no less!) that his wife, in her ripe old age, was to bear a son who would 'make ready a people prepared for the Lord' (Lk. 1:17). It seemed impossible, but God was fulfilling his promise. It's no wonder, on the day that his son was named (on the day of his circumcision), that Zechariah overflows with praise and thanksgiving. That which they had so longed for, that which seemed so impossible and far off, was now dawning before their eyes. Not only had a son been born to them, but this son would prepare the way for God's ultimate promises of hope & salvation to be fulfilled – through Jesus.

As we hear Zechariah's Song – his testimony – we remember the faithfulness of God. God will always come through.