

CONVERSATIONS

Advent: Isaiah

Isaiah 9:1-7 (NIV)

¹ Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honour Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan – ² The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

³ You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.

⁴ For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

⁵ Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.



Background

Zebulun and Naphtali were the first areas to be taken by the Assyrians, as they marched down to Judah and Jerusalem. These were places of darkness, where at this time God was not honoured - so judgement had come to them... BUT see **Matthew 4:12-15**:

¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee.

¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali – ¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵ "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – ¹⁶ the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."

CONVERSATIONS

Advent: Isaiah

Midian's defeat refers to Judges 6-8 where we read of Gideon in **Judges 6:12-15**:

¹² When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." ¹³ "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, 'Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian." ¹⁴ The Lord turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" ¹⁵ "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

Questions

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| 1 | What jumps off the page at you? | 3s / FB |
| 2 | List the people, nations and places which are mentioned or described in this passage. | FGP |
| 3 | Explain, as you seek to understand, what the positive images and the negative images are in this passage. | 3s / FB |
| 4 | What relevance do these images have for us as we approach another Christmas time? | 3s / FB |
| 5 | This is a favourite passage for Christmas as it is taken to speak of the coming Messiah. What do you think has already been accomplished and what do we, as the Church, need to do to see the whole prophecy fulfilled? | FGP |
| 6 | Spend sometime talking about how this passage could influence your prayer life for the future, and then write a prayer based on this passage and based within the society we find ourselves living in at the moment. | FGP |

Study Key

3s / FB	Groups of 3 with feedback to whole group
FGP	Full Group
GPS	Larger groups of 6 (if desired)

CONVERSATIONS

Advent: Mark Part 1

Mark 1:1-8 (NIVUK)

¹ The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, ² as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way’ – ³ ‘a voice of one calling in the wilderness, “Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.”’

⁴ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the River Jordan. ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And this was his message: ‘After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.’

Questions

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| 1 | What jumps off the page at you? | 3s / FB |
| 2 | What do you think
a) are the characteristics of John the Baptist’s ministry?
b) the role of the prophet is in Scripture? | 3s / FB |
| 3 | What does this particular passage tell us about Jesus? | 3s / FB |
| 4 | How might you recognise a modern day John the Baptist and where might you recognise a prophetic word being spoken today? | FGP |
| 5 | Where or how would you hear the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking today? | 3s / FB |
| 6 | How might our reflection help us to prepare for a more meaningful celebration of Christ's coming this year? | FGP |

Study Key

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CONVERSATIONS

Advent: Luke Part 1

Luke 1:26-38 (NIVUK)

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.'

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end.'

³⁴ 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?'

³⁵ The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail.'

³⁸ 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled.' Then the angel left her.

Questions

- 1** What jumps off the page at you? 3s / FB
- 2** What does this particular passage tell us about Jesus? FGP
- 3** Name all the relationships you discern in this passage. FGP
- 4** Reflect on the importance of relationships in your own life and how these relationships have developed and then discuss how God has worked through those relationships. 3s / FB
- 5** Describe the emotions of Mary as seen in this passage. 3s / FB
- 6** What kind of emotions would you expect if God were to speak to you in such a direct way? What would you do as a result of experiencing those emotions? 3s / FB
- 7** What difference will this passage make for our approach to this festive season? FGP

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Advent: Luke Part 1

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CONVERSATIONS

Advent: Matthew Part 1

Matthew 1:18 - 25 (NIVUK)

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: his mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'

²² All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means 'God with us').

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Questions

- 1** What jumps off the page at you? 3s / FB
- 2** What does the passage tell us about Mary, Joseph and their relationship with each other and their relationship with God? 3s / FB
- 3** How do you think Joseph and Mary regarded the "law and the prophets" and is our attitude any different? If so, how is it? 3s / FB
- 4** What might the message "God with us" have meant in practical terms for Joseph and family? FGP
- 5** What might the message "God be with us" mean for us today:
 - a) emotionally? 3s / FB
 - b) practically?
- 6** How will you welcome the Christ Child? FGP

Study Key

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Luke 1:39-56 (NIVUK)

³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³ But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!'

⁴⁶ And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, ⁴⁸ for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name. ⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. ⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. ⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful ⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants for ever, just as he promised our ancestors.'

⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

Questions

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| 1 | What jumps off the page at you? | 3s / FB |
| 2 | Go back through the text carefully and identify: | |
| | a) all the characters in the passage; | 3s / FB |
| | b) how they are described; | |
| | c) who all get blessed. | |
| 3 | How is Mary's song a true reflection (or not) on what God is doing in our society today? | 3s / FB |
| 4 | What encouragements and challenges do you see in Mary's song for the work of the church in your community? | FGP |
| 5 | What might you personally take out of this reflection as you continue to make your Christian journey through the season of Advent? | 3s / FB |

CONVERSATIONS

Advent: Luke Part 2

Study Key

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CONVERSATIONS

Advent: Luke Part 3

Luke 2:22- 40 (NIVUK)

²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord'), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: 'a pair of doves or two young pigeons'.

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ 'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace ³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.'

³³ The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

CONVERSATIONS

Advent: Luke Part 3

Questions

- 1 What jumps off the page at you? 3s / FB
- 2 List the people in the passage and how they have been described. FGP
- 3 Describe the different ways God speaks to people from this passage. 3s / FB
- 4 What should we do to make sure we can hear God clearly speak to us, as did to Simeon, Anna and Joseph and Mary? 3s / FB
- 5 Simeon and Anna were elderly. What place do older people have within our community and what does this passage tell us about older people? 3s / FB
- 6 What difference will this passage make to the way we welcome the Christ child this Advent? FGP

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CONVERSATIONS

Advent: Matthew Part 2

Matthew 2:13-23 (NIVUK)

¹³ When they (the Magi) had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.'

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'

¹⁶ When Herod realised that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

¹⁸ 'A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.'

¹⁹ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰ and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead.'

²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³ and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

CONVERSATIONS

Advent: Matthew Part 2

Questions

- 1 What jumps off the page at you? 3s / FB
- 2 List the people and places mentioned in the passage. FGP
- 3 Matthew was writing mainly to a Jewish audience. Explain why you would keep (or exclude) this passage from your gospel account to make it relevant to your community. 3s / FB
- 4 How does the presence of Jesus within your community bring both peace and division? 3s / FB
- 5 What signs of hope or promise can you see in this passage, and how can you apply this to your life or the life of your friends, colleagues or neighbours? 3s / FB
- 6 What difference will this passage make to the way we welcome the Christ child this Advent? FGP

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