

**Lesson Plans that Work**  
**Year C - Fourth Sunday of Advent**  
**Gospel Lesson for Adults**

**Scripture: Luke 1:39-45**

**(Luke 1:26-38 reflection is offered in addition to this as a way to go deeper into the story)**

**Background: Advent** extends an invitation. The invitation: don't just do something – stand, watch, prepare. *Stand*. Choose to believe that ours is a safe universe – a universe God chose to enter as an infant. *Watch*. Look for a coming that has already come and will come again. *Prepare*. Snatch moments from our busyness. Watching for wisps of awe and wonder to show up. Rediscover that God has chosen to dwell in us and we are invited to dwell in God.

What if – just what if – Jesus is already right here, standing silently with us, walking ahead of us, showing us we don't have to do it all? Could it be that we are called to be still, notice, listen – and then follow?

**Advent Theme: Christ will come again: We watch, we prepare, we get ready.**

**A Notation for this week's Gospel:** Mary has simply accepted the message the angel gave her. Now she goes to the one other woman on the planet with whom she can talk: her elderly cousin, Elizabeth, who is expecting a baby whose name will be John. Blessed is she who believes. But what does Mary make of the baby in Elizabeth's womb "leaping" at the sound of Mary's voice? Who is the baby John? Who is this baby Mary carries?

**Theme: Who is this child?**

**Before Class:** Make sure you have enough bibles for each participant, or you can make copies of today's reading (found at the end of the lesson). You might consider gathering copies of the Hymnal (1982) and concluding with either singing – or simply reading the words – of Hymn 60 "Creator of the stars of night."

**Beginning:** If the moments of silence at the beginning of the class have been useful to your group, begin today with silence. You could enter into it with these words from Mary's song: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." If you are using an Advent Wreath, light all four candles and read one of the opening sentences for Advent on page 75 of *The Book of Common Prayer*.

**Opening Prayer:** God our Savior, we are here as your servants. Let our lives be like Mary's and let it be with us according to your word. Amen.

**Luke 1:26-38 Option:** If time permits, read Luke 1:26-38, before today's appointed reading. Ask one person to read the part of the narrator, one the part of the angel, and the third the part of Mary.

**Reflection Questions:**

- Notice what Mary hears from the angel and her response to what she hears – particularly the things she does NOT say.
- Verse 28: The angel's greeting, and Mary's response.
- Verse 30-33: The angel's description of what is to happen and who this baby is, and Mary's response in verse 34.
- Verse 35-37: The information the angel adds, and Mary's response in verse 38.
- Notice some of the things Mary does NOT say: "Who me?" "I think you have made a mistake." "I am not worthy." "This is going to be too hard, I can't do it."
- I wonder what we would say if this happened to us.

**The Scripture: Luke 1: 39-45** There are two with speaking parts, the narrator and Elizabeth, so invite two people to read this passage.

Invite the members of the class to find a time in their lives, not necessarily to share with anyone else, when they have found themselves in a place out of the norm. Perhaps it was comparable to Elizabeth's situation of having a dream come true – but so late in life some might scoff. Or Mary, hearing of a commission she has no idea how she will manage to fulfill. And if they cannot find such a place in their own lives, have they watched someone close to them go through something remotely comparable.

**Reflection Questions:**

- Holding onto what surfaced for each person, paraphrase what Mary and Elizabeth express in these few verses:
- Mary: She immediately set off to see her cousin. Why? To help Elizabeth get ready? Someone older and wiser to talk to? Someone who might help her fathom what she has heard?
- Elizabeth: Perhaps people had laughed at the sight of such an old woman pregnant. Perhaps she was lonely (her husband had lost the use of his voice: Luke 1: 20) Perhaps she now, as her baby leaped inside her womb, senses that her baby, also, has a commission from God.

**Getting Closure:** If there are any announcements regarding worship services for Christmas, share them with the group. Announce whether you will meet as a class over Christmas Break.

Then, you pass out copies of the Hymnal, turn to Hymn # 60 ("Creator of the stars of night") and choose to sing it together, read the verses together, or invite a different person to read each verse.

**Closing Prayer:** Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. (Luke 1: 68)

## **Luke 1: 26-38 (optional)**

### **The Birth of Jesus Foretold**

**Narrator:** In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said,

**Angel:** 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.'

**Narrator:** But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her,

**Angel:** 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

**Mary:** 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'

**Angel:** 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.'

**Mary:** 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.'

**Narrator:** Then the angel departed from her.

## **Luke 1:39-45**

### **Mary Visits Elizabeth**

**Narrator:** In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry,

**Elizabeth:** 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

*Published by the Office for Formation and Vocation Ministries of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.*

*© 2015 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. All rights reserved.*