

# POINTING *to the* PROMISE

AN ADVENT STUDY GUIDE



*“For unto you is born this day in  
the city of David a Savior, who is  
Christ the Lord.”*

LUKE 2:11



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AN ADVENT STUDY GUIDE

Written by: Kayla Ferris

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*We must exchange  
whispers with God  
before shouts  
with the world.*

LYSA TERKEURST

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# Introduction

Over 2,000 years ago, a star appeared in the night sky. It made a group of sages wonder. It was unlike any star they had seen. In a culture steeped in astrology, their first question was “*What does it mean?*” That search for meaning led them on a life-changing quest to a town in Judea called Bethlehem, and to a little boy named Jesus.

Amazing, isn't it?! These “wise men” from the Christmas story were foreigners. Yet God met them exactly where they were. He utilized their interest in stars by creating one that would catch their attention. He planted in their ears Jewish stories and prophecies. He steered their attention toward Judea. He led them to a palace for more information. And then He allowed the star He created to physically navigate them to a small house where a young boy lived. Not just any boy. God's own Son.

*Oh, how God delights in pointing us to His Son.*

That is what you will see in this study. God pointing to His Son. It began thousands of years before Jesus was even born. God gave prophecies to His prophets and promises to His people. A Messiah was coming! A Savior would be born for you! Look for Him! Watch for Him! Such anticipation.

As the moment came closer, heaven started stirring. Angels began making appearances

— to an old man in the temple, to a virgin woman in the middle of nowhere, to a heartbroken bachelor who was about to call off his engagement. Something was happening. Everything was pointing to the embryo that grew inside Mary. This Miracle caused an unborn baby to leap and a young woman to sing! The Word was becoming flesh.

And then the day came! Our Savior was born! As He was bundled up and laid in a manger, God sent His entire heavenly host to sing about it in a field full of shepherds who were ... get this ... caring for lambs awaiting a Passover slaughter. Even in His birth announcement, God points us to His plan: His Son, this precious baby, would grow up so He could become the ultimate Passover lamb. He was born, so He could die, that we might live.

Yes, God delights in pointing to His Son. And through this study, He longs to do the same. To help us fix our gaze in this busy time. To guide our hearts back toward their first love. To transform us by the renewing of our minds. To put our focus exactly where it belongs ... on His Son.

Today, and every day, God whispers to each heart, “Hello my child. Guess what? *A Savior has been born to you.* I can't wait to show Him to you! Will you come and see?”



# *What is Advent?*

Maybe “advent” is a word you have heard once before, or maybe it is a custom you practice every year. Either way, there is much we can learn by exploring the meaning and traditions that surround this simple word.

*Advent is defined as “the arrival of a notable person, thing or event.”*

It comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means “coming.” Every year, Christians around the world use the days leading up to Christmas to celebrate the advent of Jesus. It is an expectant waiting and preparing for our Savior. It reminds us of the many years the Jews spent longing for the Messiah. Praise God that day came, and Jesus was born! It also reminds us of the waiting and preparing we do today, as we await the Second Coming of Jesus. Our Savior came first as a tiny baby in a humble manger. He will come again as a mighty warrior and King! But there is also another “coming” that we should remember as well. It is the arrival of Christ in our hearts as we accept His gift of salvation.

So, the meaning of Christmas advent is simple. **It is a celebration and anticipation of Jesus’ arrival.** But the many traditions that have journeyed along with it are as diverse and beautiful as the people who make up the Church.

In A.D. 567, a group of monks fasted every day in December leading up to Christmas. This is thought to be the first official advent celebrated. Throughout history, evidence of advent at Christmas is found in writings and documents. Today, Western Christianity celebrates what we traditionally think of as advent, usually beginning four Sundays before Christmas. Meanwhile, Eastern Christianity celebrates the Nativity Fast, a 40-day fast leading up to Christmas.

Some old advent traditions have come and gone. At one time in England, they created an advent image, a box with two dolls inside, one for Mary and one for Jesus. They would walk house to house with the image and one would pay a halfpenny to see it. It was considered bad luck not to see the box before Christmas Eve. There was also an Italian tradition that the shepherds came to see Jesus while playing pipes, so every year, Italians would march into Rome being led by bagpipes.

In Germany, they would create wreaths and hang from them boxes or candles counting down to Christmas. It was from this tradition that many churches and homes have advent wreaths to this day.

Maybe you have seen advent calendars at the store. While modern culture now uses these to count down toward a day of family, food and yes, presents, the advent calendar was originally created to help us count down and anticipate the birth of Jesus. Advent calendars can be a fun and meaningful way to prepare our hearts and minds by anticipating the baby in a manger and why He came.

A common tradition in Christian churches today is the use of advent candles. An advent wreath will hold four candles around the outside and one candle in the middle. Of the outside candles, three will be purple (or royal blue in some cases, signifying seriousness and royalty) and one will be pink (signifying joy). Each Sunday, an outside candle is lit, with the pink candle specifically being lit on the third Sunday. The final candle in the middle is white and is lit on Christmas. There are as many different interpretations on the meaning and symbolism of the candles as there are churches! One of my favorites is a candle for faithfulness, hope, joy and love.

Maybe you have your own traditions. Maybe you have special ornaments you hang on a tree, or maybe you listen to advent songs like “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” and “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus.” Whether you light candles, open a calendar, fast, pray, study or (why not?) — play bagpipes — let’s use this time and season to focus our hearts and minds on the Coming. Our Savior arrived as a baby in the manger. He arrived in our hearts when we received Him. And He will arrive again one day soon. Celebrate that anticipation this season!



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# Where The Story Is Found



To learn about Jesus' time here on earth, we turn to the Gospels. The "Gospels" refer to the first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). These four books are accounts of Jesus' life written by four different men, giving us four distinct perspectives. Many of the stories are repeated between books. However, each book offers its own unique view.

The story of Jesus' birth is found in the books of Matthew and Luke. It is not mentioned in Mark or John. Mark begins his Gospel account with Jesus' baptism.

John mostly does as well, yet before he goes into the baptism, he opens with a beautiful introduction to Jesus. We will look at John 1:1-14 to start off our study (more on that in Day 1).

On the next page, we have provided a reading guide for you to use as you follow along on this journey. As you can see, we will jump between Matthew and Luke quite a bit to get a full view of Jesus' birth story. Having both accounts gives us an excellent insight into the complete story.



# *Let's look behind the scenes into the books we will be studying.*

## **Matthew**

Matthew, son of Alphaeus, was a Jewish tax collector. Fellow Jewish neighbors and relatives despised tax collectors because of their collaboration with the Roman government. Collectors also had a foul reputation for taking more money than required. In Matthew 9:9, Jesus passes Matthew's tax booth and says "*Follow me.*" Matthew walked away from his booth to become one of the 12 disciples of Jesus. Matthew had a unique eye-witness account of the life and ministry of Jesus.

Scholars believe Matthew recorded his Gospel account around late A.D. 50 to early A.D. 60. It is believed to have been written to the church in Antioch of Syria, which had both Jewish and gentile Christians. Matthew's Gospel account was widely and rapidly circulated from there.

One important theme to notice from Matthew's book is the emphasis on Jesus as royal. Many times throughout Matthew, Jesus is referred to as "Son of David," both to indicate Jesus' royal lineage and to remind people of God's promise to establish David's throne forever. (2 Samuel 7:12-13) Matthew wanted his readers to know that Jesus Christ was the long-awaited King and Messiah.

## **Luke**

Luke, on the other hand, led a very different life than Matthew. Luke was a physician by trade and a gentile by birth (gentile simply means "not Jewish"). Luke was also a friend

and ministry colleague with Paul.

(Colossians 4:14) While Luke's book is not a personal eye-witness account, it is seen as a reliable source partly because he traveled frequently with Paul.

Scholars believe Luke was written around A.D. 62. It was written to "Theophilus," an unknown man who undoubtedly had wealth and social standing. (Luke 1:3) It was also written with other gentile Christians like Theophilus in mind.

Many people had been taught about Jesus. But how could they know who this Jesus was for sure? Who could they believe? Luke gathered eye-witness testimonies, studied all accounts for some time and compiled an orderly description for one reason. (Luke 1:1-4) He wanted everyone to know, with certainty, who Jesus was and why He came.

## **John**

Because we will spend Day 1 in John, let's take a quick look at what makes his Gospel account unique. John, son of Zebedee, was a fisherman when Jesus called him. (Matthew 4:21) This apostle of Jesus was also referred to as "the [disciple] whom Jesus loved" (John 20:2). The Gospel of John was probably the last of the gospel accounts to be written. Scholars estimate it was around A.D. 70. One very early Church theologian, Clement of Alexandria, called the book of John a "spiritual gospel." John's account clearly shows Jesus as both the Messiah and Son of God. He also emphasizes belief in Jesus to receive eternal life. (John 3:16)

# Reading Guide & Major Moments

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## WEEK 1 - PROMISES

- Day 1 – John 1:1-14 – The Word (Jesus) was with God, was God, and became flesh.  
Day 2 – Matthew 1:1-17 – Matthew recorded the genealogy of Jesus Christ, focusing on the line of Judah.  
Day 3 – Luke 3:23-38 – Luke recorded the genealogy of Jesus, going back to Adam.  
Day 4 – Luke 1:5-17 – An angel foretold the birth of John to his father, Zechariah.  
Day 5 – Luke 1:18-25 – Zechariah doubted the angel Gabriel’s message and was reprimanded.

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## WEEK 2 - RESPONSE

- Day 6 – Luke 1:26-38 – Gabriel told the virgin Mary that she would miraculously conceive the Son of God.  
Day 7 – Matthew 1:18-21 – An angel informed Joseph that Mary’s conception was from the Holy Spirit.  
Day 8 – Matthew 1:22-25 – The virgin birth of Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy of Immanuel.  
Day 9 – Luke 1:39-41 – The unborn John leapt when Mary visited Elizabeth.  
Day 10 – Luke 1:41-45 – Through the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth blessed Mary and the baby inside her.

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## WEEK 3 - FAITHFULNESS

- Day 11 – Luke 1:46-49 – Mary’s Song of Praise magnified God and demonstrated her humility.  
Day 12 – Luke 1:50-53 – Mary’s Song of Praise stated that God exalts the humble and scatters the proud.  
Day 13 – Luke 1:54-56 – Mary’s Song of Praise confirmed that God is faithful to His promises.  
Day 14 – Luke 1:57-66 – Elizabeth and Zechariah had a baby and named him John.  
Day 15 – Luke 1:67-80 – Zechariah prophesied that John would point to the One who saves.

# Reading Guide & Major Moments

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## WEEK 4 - HOPE

- Day 16 – Luke 2:1-5 – Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem for a Roman government registration.  
Day 17 – Luke 2:6-7 – Jesus Christ was born and laid in a manger.  
Day 18 – Luke 2:8-14 – An angel announced Jesus’ birth to nearby shepherds.  
Day 19 – Luke 2:15-20 – The shepherds visited Jesus and spread the good news.  
Day 20 – Luke 2:21 – He was given the name Jesus.

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## WEEK 5 - JOY

- Day 21 – Luke 2:22-35 – Simeon recognized the infant Jesus as the Christ and gave a blessing.  
Day 22 – Luke 2:36-39 – With Jesus in the temple, Anna gave thanks and prophesied.  
Day 23 – Matthew 2:1-2 – The wise men came looking for the king of the Jews.  
Day 24 – Matthew 2:3-8 – King Herod felt threatened by news of the born Messiah.  
Day 25 – Matthew 2:9-10 – The star guided the wise men to Jesus.

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## WEEK 6 - LOVE

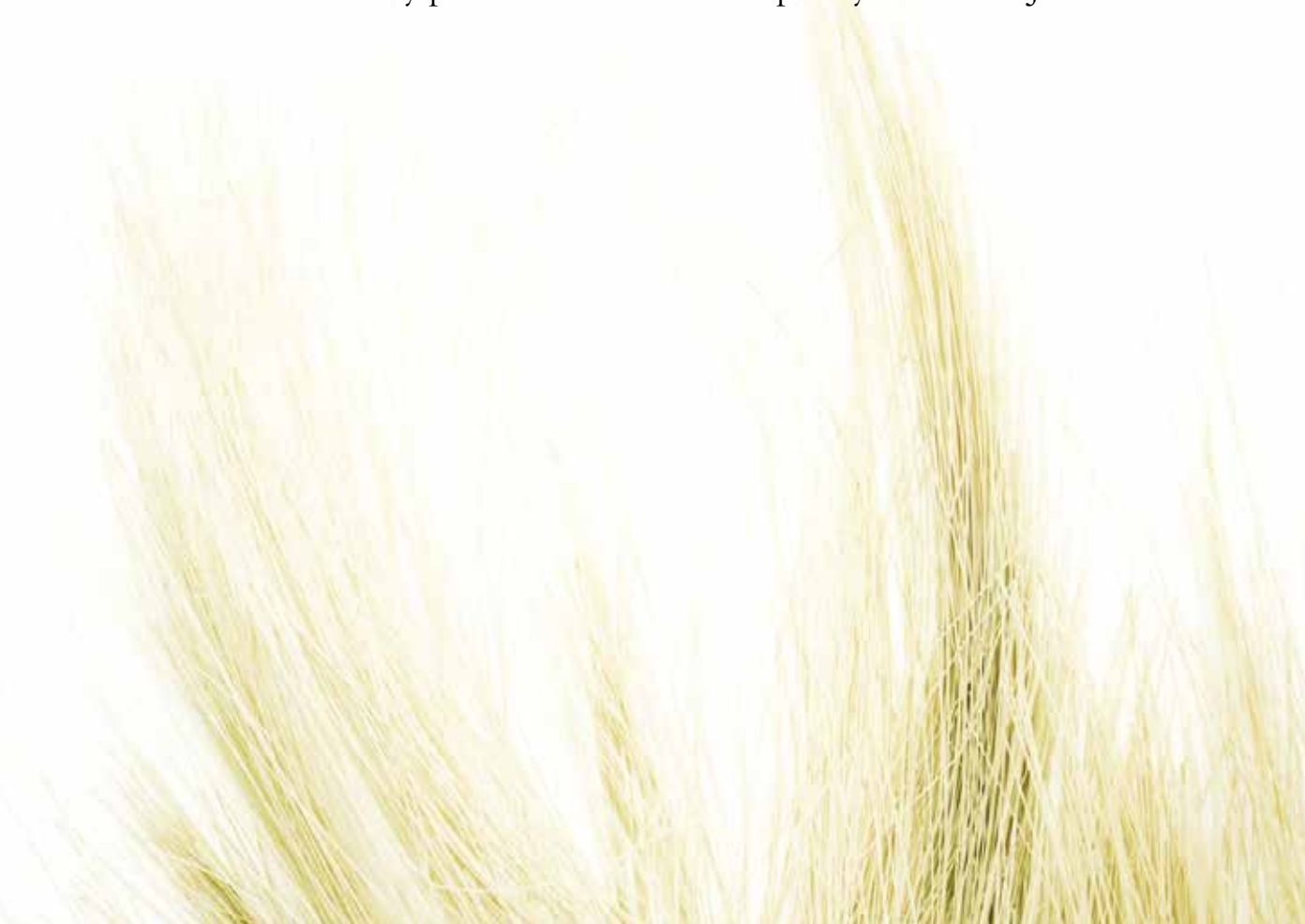
- Day 26 – Matthew 2:11-12 – The wise men worshipped Jesus and brought Him gifts.  
Day 27 – Matthew 2:13-15 – Jesus’ family fled to Egypt, and like Israel’s past, there would be a new exodus.  
Day 28 – Matthew 2:16-18 – Herod killed children in Bethlehem, and like Israel’s past, mothers wept for their children.  
Day 29 – Matthew 2:19-23 – Jesus’ family returned to Nazareth, and like Israel’s prophets of the past, He would be rejected.  
Day 30 – Luke 2:40 – Jesus grew up and had the grace of God upon Him.

*week one*

# Promises

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Every promise of God was completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ.



# Day One

JOHN 1:1-14

major moment:

The Word (Jesus) was with God, was God, and became flesh.

Our study starts with the three words: “*In the beginning ...*” (John 1:1). This was an intentional echo of the words in Genesis 1:1, which says “*In the beginning, God created ...*”

According to John 1:1-2, who was with God in the beginning? To understand who this is, look at verse 14. There we learn that He was “*the only \_\_\_\_\_ from the Father, full of grace and truth.*” To find another name to whom this is referring, see who brought grace and truth in John 1:17.

Use John 1:1 to fill in the blanks for important attributes of Jesus.

“\_\_\_\_\_ was the Word, and the Word \_\_\_\_\_, and the Word \_\_\_\_\_.” Describe what you think each of these might mean.

John 1:4 talks about “*life*.” This specific word signifies both physical **and** spiritual life. How is Jesus the author of both physical and spiritual life?

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Read John 1:4-5. “*Light*” was often used as a metaphor for **salvation**. What might “*darkness*” represent? How does John’s use of “*life*” and “*light*” look like the Christmas story?

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John 1:14 says “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us ...*” This one statement is one of the greatest and most astonishing mysteries of the Bible. We could not reach God, so God came down to us. Without ceasing to be God, **He became human.**

The phrase “dwelt among us” literally translates as “pitched his tent” or “tabernacled.”

Read Exodus 40:34–35. What was Moses’ reaction to the tabernacle and why?

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This reaction was consistent for anyone in the Old Testament who even came close to the glory of God.

Yet what does John 1:14 say that John and others have seen?

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Because of Jesus’ birth, we, too, can come close to the Father. In fact, John 1:12 says that if we receive Jesus and believe in His name, we can become what? Write a short prayer thanking God for the gift of His presence.

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“And the Word  
became flesh and  
dwelt among us...”

John 1:14

# Day Two

MATTHEW 1:1-17

**major moment:**

Matthew recorded the genealogy of Jesus Christ,  
focusing on the line of Judah.

Right from the beginning, Matthew established the purpose of writing his account.

What word comes after Jesus in Matthew 1:1 (and is also used in verses 16 and 17)?

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This is not a last name. The Greek word "*Christos*" comes from a Hebrew word *msh* meaning "anointed one." (John 1:41) This is where the term "Messiah" comes from.

By repeating this word three times, what does Matthew want to make clear?

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Let's first unpack the genealogy in Matthew by structure. Matthew points out his specific structure in Matthew 1:17 by mentioning three groups of 14. Hebrews practiced a system called *gematria* where numerical values were assigned to letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The name "David" in Hebrew (a three-letter word, because there are no vowels in ancient Hebrew) equaled the number 14 when added together.

When you count the number of generations in Matthew 1:2-6, what number is David listed?

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David was an important part of the promised Messiah. Read 2 Samuel 7:12-13.  
What promise did God make to David?

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Next, let's take a look at the inferred meaning of Matthew's account. It is important to know that not every descendant of the family line is listed. This means those that are listed are significant. In this time period, a genealogy served as a résumé. Like a résumé, it was presumed a person would leave off the less desirable aspects. Yet Matthew seems to do the opposite!

Women were almost never listed in ancient genealogy. How many are listed here?  
(Matthew 1:3, 5, 6, 16)

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Also astonishing, in a culture that viewed outsiders as "unclean people," four of the women listed are not Jewish. Why might Matthew have included people of different ethnicities? (John 3:16)

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Let's look even deeper into some of these names.

- Genesis 38:13-18 tells us **Judah** and **Tamar** committed incest.
- Joshua 6:25 tells us **Rahab** was a prostitute.
- 2 Samuel 12:9 tells us **David** was an adulterer and a murderer.
- 2 Chronicles 12:14 says that **Rehoboam** did evil in the sight of God, a phrase that will describe most of the kings listed in Matthew 1:7-11.

The point Matthew makes is clear: Jesus Christ came into this world from an extremely dysfunctional family. In his commentary *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, David Platt says, “Jesus came not because of Israel’s righteousness, but in spite of Israel’s sinfulness ... Praise be to God that He delights in saving sinful, immoral outcasts!”

How does the dysfunction of Christ’s genealogy remind us of Christ’s mission on earth?

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In his book *Hidden Christmas*, Tim Keller says, “Christmas is not simply about a birth but about a coming.” God promised Abraham He would bless all nations. God promised David a forever kingdom. Yet it took **thousands of years** for God’s promise to come about.

What does this tell you about God’s timing?

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What does Habakkuk 2:3 and 2 Peter 3:9 remind us?

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# Day Three

LUKE 3:23-38

**major moment:**

Luke recorded the genealogy of Jesus, going back to Adam.

Yesterday we looked at Matthew's account of Jesus' genealogy, and today we will look at Luke's account. You will notice some major differences between the two accounts. What is going on here? Let's take a look.

The focus of Matthew's account is on Jesus' royal lineage. He wanted to emphasize Jesus as King. Matthew's account is also abbreviated.

Luke's account focuses on the physical line. This is a very traditional Jewish genealogy. His focus was to provide a public, legal record for the lineage of Jesus.

The two accounts help us to see exactly what each writer wanted to emphasize in his recording. Let's start by looking at what is the same. Both accounts bring the line of Jesus through two major people.

Who is the last name listed in Luke 3:31?

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Who is the third name listed in Luke 3:34?

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These names are also mentioned in Matthew's account. No matter how it was traced, Jesus Christ is the absolute fulfillment of the lineage requirements for the promised Messiah.

Now let's look at the difference between the two writers, Matthew and Luke. Look back at the "Where The Story Is Found" section of our guide.

What ethnicity was Matthew? With whom did Matthew begin Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1:2?

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What ethnicity was Luke?

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Abraham is considered the father of the Jewish nation, which was Matthew's focus. However, Luke, a gentile, takes the family line of Jesus to Adam. Adam is considered the father of humanity.

What might Luke be telling his audience of gentiles by relating Jesus to Adam?  
(For a hint, look up 1 John 2:2.)

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Circle the last three words of Luke 3:38. Luke has taken us all the way back to the beginning of creation.

Remember on Day 1 when we studied John 1:1-4? Who was there at the beginning and created all things?

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Now circle the first word of Luke 3:23.

Knowing what we know from John, who is at the beginning and end of this genealogy in Luke?

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What does this remind us about both the beginning and end of all history and time, present and future? (Revelation 22:13)

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# Day Four

LUKE 1:5-17

major moment:

An angel foretold the birth of John to his father, Zechariah.

In Luke 1:5, we are given the impressive religious pedigree of Zechariah and Elizabeth. However, even more impressive is verse 6.

What do we learn from this verse?

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This phrase does not mean that Zechariah and Elizabeth were sinless. Even under the Old Testament law, we are told *“there is no one who does not sin”* (2 Chronicles 6:36). Instead, what this phrase means is that Zechariah and Elizabeth did their best to keep the laws of the Torah and the prophets. They were “good” people. And good things always happen to good people, right? Of course, we know that is not the case in life.

Matthew 1:7 begins with a painful statement. *“But they had no child ...”* The absence of children was seen as a reproach, as a sign of sin, in ancient Judaism. Even though they were “good people,” Zechariah and Elizabeth had been dealt disgrace and shame from being barren. (Luke 1:25) The text also tells us they were *“advanced in years”* (Luke 1:7), so this is something they had endured for a lifetime. In his commentary *Exalting Jesus in Luke*, Thabiti Anyabwile says, “... the striking thing is that they handled a lifelong disappointment and social shame with righteousness and blamelessness before God. They served God even though they did not have what they wanted.” What a beautiful example this couple lived.



In examining your own life, can you say you have remained faithful even through life's disappointments?

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The angel appears to Zechariah and tells him he will have a son, to be named John. John was to be "*great before the Lord*" (Luke 1:15). He would be set apart.

According to Luke 1:15, what would John be filled with? When would he be filled? Meditate on that for a moment.

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The last words the Jewish people had heard from God were written in Malachi 400 years prior to this moment. This means for 400 years, God had been silent.

What were the words written in Malachi 4:5-6?

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Who fulfills this in Luke 1:13-17?

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Underline the last part of Luke 1:17. What was John's great purpose?

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# Day Five

LUKE 1:18-25

major moment:

Zechariah doubted the angel Gabriel's message and was reprimanded.

After hearing the amazing promise given by the angel in Luke 1:13-17, Zechariah says to the angel “*How shall I know this?*” (Luke 1:18) What Zechariah was asking, or rather demanding, is a sign from God. Yet Zechariah already had two signs! He was given a direct visit (not a dream or a vision) from an angel, one that he could both see and hear. (Luke 1:12-13) What a sign! In addition to the angel, Zechariah also had the Scriptures to back the angel's words. He knew the story of Abraham in Genesis 17:17.

What had God already done through Abraham?

But even a visit from an angel that was backed up by Scripture wasn't enough for Zechariah. He wanted more. He wanted proof. Unbelief can sneak in to even the most “*righteous*” and “*blameless*” of believers. (Luke 1:6)

What is the definition of faith? (Hebrews 11:1)

One of the struggles for Zechariah was his focus on his problem or limitation.

What problem was Zechariah focused on? (Luke 1:18)

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Thabiti Anyabwile uses an excellent word picture. He writes: “Did you know you can block out the noonday sun with a quarter? All you have to do is bring the quarter right up to your eye. We sometimes hold our problems and limitations to our eyes in that way, bringing them so close to our eyes we cannot see the great, glowing sun of God’s promises and God’s power.”

In what ways, past or present, have you held your problems so close they blocked out God?

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The unbelief of Zechariah led him to receive a sign, just like he had asked.

What did the angel say would happen to him in Luke 1:20?

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In a figurative way, how does sneaky unbelief do the same thing to us?

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## *weekend reflections + prayer*

This week, we have talked about promises. In the beginning, God (and the Word) created the world. He created us in perfect relationship with Him. But sin messed up that relationship. There was no way for us as humans to find our way back to God. So, God promised Abraham He would send someone, a descendant, to bless the whole world. God promised David He would send someone, a descendant, to be a forever perfect King. And God did send someone. He sent Himself.

God, the Son, became flesh. He came down to be close to us once again, to restore the relationship that sin ruined.

*Christmas reminds us that every promise of God was completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ.*

God's promises are for you and me specifically. He promises fullness, forgiveness and fellowship with Him. He promises love, life and light that the darkness cannot overcome. And just like Zechariah, we all have a choice. Will we choose to believe and

accept the promise God makes to us? Jesus is all the proof we need that God will always keep His promise.

**prayer:**

*Dear God, thank You for Your promise to come back and save us. We couldn't do it ourselves, and we are lost without You. Thank You for the promises You made throughout history, and for allowing us to see them fulfilled in Jesus. You are true to Your Word. Strengthen my faith, that I might not forget Your faithfulness. In Jesus' name, amen.*