

Christmas Is a Season of Hope, Peace, Joy, Light, and Love

Luke 1:1-17

Thesis: Whether you see Christmas as a happy time, a painful season, or stressful period, I want to remind us that the coming of Jesus is a season of hope, peace, joy, light, and love.

Text: Luke 1:1-79

Christmas is one of my favorite times of the year. I love this season that is wrapped up in the love of God for us in Jesus Christ. I love getting together with family and loved ones. I enjoy celebrating with friends.

I am so grateful that God the Father has left a clear witness to Jesus in our culture at this time of year. I am amazed at how the Holy Spirit testifies to Jesus through the music, lights, and beauty of the season. And, I appreciate how people give generously of their time, energy, and treasure to serve and bless others at Christmastime.

And, I am grateful that people in our culture still think of going to church during the Christmas season. Since people are thinking about going to church during Christmas, this season affords each of us the opportunity to reach out, to invite, and to bring friends, family, and neighbors to come worship the Lord with us.

I am also aware that for some people, Christmas is a difficult or unpleasant time of year. For some, it is reminder of loss. For some, it comes with painful memories. For others, it is a reminder of brokenness: a broken world, broken promises, and broken and dysfunctional families.

Whether you see Christmas as a happy time, a painful season, or stressful period, I want to remind us that the coming of Jesus is a season of hope, peace, joy, light, and love.

Let's look at Chapter One of the Gospel of Luke together. This book was probably written by Luke, one of Paul's companions, sometime in the 60s or 70s AD.

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. 3 Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1-4).

Luke tells us that he writes his gospel based on investigation and research. His purpose in writing Theophilus, who is either a real person or anyone who is a lover of God, is so that his audience can know the reliability of what they have been taught.

5 In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. 6 Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. 7 But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years. 8 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, 9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

Luke begins his gospel with the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth. This couple is devout and they are just going about their everyday life (verses 1-10). In the midst of going about his ordinary life, Zechariah has an encounter with God through an angel.

11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. 13 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. 14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. 16 Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous--to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." 18 Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years." 19 The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. 20 And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time." 21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. 22 When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak. 23 When his time of service was completed, he returned home. 24 After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. 25 "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people" (Luke 1:5-25).

Gabriel announces to this couple, who are past the childbearing years, “that their son to be born will fulfil the biblical promises that had spoken of God sending someone to prepare Israel for the coming divine visitation. The scriptures had foretold that the prophet Elijah would return one day to get the people ready for God's arrival. Gabriel tells Zechariah that this will be John's task.... The story is about much more than Zechariah's joy at having a son at last, or Elizabeth's exultation in being freed from the scorn of the mothers in the village [because of her barrenness]. It is about the great fulfilment of God's promises and purposes. But the needs, hopes and fears of ordinary people are not forgotten in this larger story, precisely because of who Israel's God is—the God of lavish, self-giving love, as Luke will tell us in so many ways throughout his gospel. When this God acts on the large scale, he takes care of smaller human concerns as well. The drama which now takes centre stage is truly the story of God, the world, and every ordinary human being who has ever lived in it. That's how Luke intends it to be” (*New Testament for Everyone-- Luke for Everyone*, NT Wright).

26 In the sixth month, 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 favored! 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 favor with God. 31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name 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 the house of Jacob forever; 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 upon 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 barren is in her sixth month. 37 For nothing is impossible with God." 38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her (Luke 1:26-38).

When Zechariah had the encounter with the angel sent from the presence of God, he didn't believe what he heard about becoming a parent.

Zachariah said to the angel, "Do you expect me to believe this? I'm an old man and my wife is an old woman" (Luke 1:18 MSG).

How does Mary respond to this angelic announcement in the midst of her ordinary life? She too asks a question. “How will this be since I am a virgin?” But, Mary's question is probing for information, not expressing unbelief like Zechariah. The presence of the Holy Spirit and the overshadowing presence and power of God Most High will cause the

conception of the Son of God. God becoming flesh—that is the incarnation. God is fulfilling his promises and purposes from long ago.

Put all this together—the conception of a baby, the power of God, and the challenge to all human empires—and we can see why the story is so explosive” (*New Testament for Everyone-- Luke for Everyone*, NT Wright).

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 favored, 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 what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!" 46 And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 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 forever, even as he said to our fathers." 56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home (Luke 1:39-56).

Why did Mary launch into a song like this? What has the news of her son got to do with God's strong power overthrowing the power structures of the world, demolishing the mighty and exalting the humble? Mary and Elizabeth shared a dream. It was the ancient dream of Israel: the dream that one day all that the prophets had said would come true. One day Israel's God would do what he had said to Israel's earliest ancestors: all nations would be blessed through Abraham's family. But for that to happen, the powers that kept the world in slavery had to be toppled. Nobody would normally thank God for blessing if they were poor, hungry, enslaved and miserable. God would have to win a victory over the bullies, the power-brokers, the forces of evil which people like Mary and Elizabeth knew all too well, living as they did in the dark days of Herod the Great, whose casual brutality was backed up with the threat of Rome. Mary and Elizabeth, like so many Jews of their time, searched the scriptures, soaked themselves in the psalms and prophetic writings which spoke of mercy, hope, fulfilment, reversal, revolution, victory over evil, and of God coming to the rescue at last (*New Testament for Everyone-- Luke for Everyone*, NT Wright).

57 When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. 58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy. 59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, 60 but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to

be called John." 61 They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name." 62 Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. 63 He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God. 65 The neighbors were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. 66 Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him. 67 His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: 68 "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. 69 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David 70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), 71 salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us-- 72 to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham: 74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. 76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, 77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, 78 because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven 79 to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace" (Luke 1:57-79).

Luke's long first chapter holds together what we often find easier to keep separate. At point after point he has linked his story to the ancient biblical record of Israel, to the patriarchs, kings, prophets and psalms. He is writing of the moment when the centuries-old story was going to come round a corner at last, out of darkness into sudden light. He never forgets this larger perspective; everything that he will tell us about Jesus makes sense as the fulfillment of God's ancient promises, the hope of Israel come to fruition at last. But Luke's story vibrates equally with the personal hopes and fears of ordinary people. Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary stand out as real people, hesitating between faith and doubt, called to trust God at a new moment in history. It's a mark not only of Luke's skill as a writer but also of the nature of the God he is writing about that both the big picture and the smaller human stories matter totally. This is, after all, as Zechariah had glimpsed, the story of how the creator God came to rescue his people. It is the story, as Luke will now tell, of how God himself was born as a baby (*New Testament for Everyone-- Luke for Everyone*, NT Wright).

Whether you see Christmas as a happy time, a painful season, or stressful period, I want to remind us that the coming of Jesus is a season of hope, peace, joy, light, and love.

This is what Zechariah sang and what the Scriptures declare about this season:

1. **Hope:** We have hope in God because he is trustworthy. The Lord gives his word and he keeps his word. The God in whom we hope will fulfill his plans, purposes, promises, and prophetic words for the whole world and for us as individuals (Luke 1:67-75).

2. **Peace:** The Lord leads us in the path of peace—Shalom, wholeness, well-being, human flourishing (Luke 1:79).
3. **Joy:** Like Zechariah, we can be full of praise and joy, celebrating the Lord and what he had done, was doing, and was going to do (Luke 1:64).
4. **Light:** *Through the heartfelt mercies of our God, God's Sunrise will break in upon us, 79 Shining on those in the darkness, those sitting in the shadow of death, Then showing us the way, one foot at a time, down the path of peace (Luke 1:78-79 MSG). (See also Isaiah 9:2-7.)*
5. **Love:** *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).*

Call to action

1. **Reflect:** I invite you to reflect on the coming of Jesus, both in his first coming and second coming, as a season of hope, peace, joy, light, and love.
2. **Invite:** Since people are thinking about going to church during Christmas, this season affords each of us the opportunity to reach out, to invite, and to bring friends, family, and neighbors to come worship the Lord with us.
3. **Pray:** In this season, I want to encourage you to make time to pray into what the Lord is saying and doing. In my sermon online, I have included [a link to a prayer guide](#) to help us pray. Or, another way to pray is to read through Luke 1 and 2, praying these passages back to the Lord as a part of your devotional.

Ministry Time

UBA Prays Together
[Prayer Guide](#)
Dian Kidd

PRAYING WITH HOPE

During the first week of Advent, we light the first candle representing HOPE. “They that wait upon the Lord will renew their strength; they will mount up on wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:31, KJV) Pray that those who have experienced sorrow, sickness, pain, or loss will find their HOPE in knowing that God loves them and gives them strength.

“Now may the God of HOPE fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in HOPE by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13, NAS) Pray that friends and neighbors in your community who do not know the love of Christ will hear the message of HOPE this season.

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the HOPE that is in you.” (1 Peter 3:15, NIV) Pray that you will be sensitive to an opportunity to share the HOPE that you have found in Christ.

During this Advent season, we give thanks for the HOPE that we have in Christ. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living HOPE through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” (1 Peter 1:3, NIV).

PRAYING FOR PEACE

During the second week of Advent, we light the second candle representing PEACE. Give thanks to God, our source of PEACE in the midst of turmoil. “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 Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, PRINCE OF PEACE.” (Isaiah 9:6, NIV).

Pray for PEACE between those who have differences and disagreements whether of a political, cultural, social or religious nature. “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to PEACE and to mutual edification.” (Romans 14:19, NIV)

During this Advent season, we give thanks for the PEACE that we have in Christ. “PEACE I leave with you; my PEACE I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:27, NIV)

Pray for those who are worried, anxious, troubled or fearful about situations over which they have no control. "Now may the Lord of PEACE himself give you PEACE at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you." (2 Thessalonians 3:16, NIV)

PRAYING IN LOVE

During the third week of Advent, we light the third candle representing LOVE. "Give thanks to the God of heaven. His LOVE endures forever." (Psalm 136:26, NIV)

Pray that as followers of Christ, our words and actions will demonstrate our LOVE for one another and that those who observe us will be pointed to Jesus. "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you LOVE one another." (John 13:35, NIV)

During the Advent season, we celebrate the most precious gift of all. "For God so LOVED the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16, NIV)

Put LOVE in action as UBA churches feed the hungry, provide warm clothes for those who are cold, visit those in prison and care for the sick. "This is how we know what LOVE is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the LOVE of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not LOVE with words or speech but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:16-18, NIV)

PRAYING WITH JOY

During this fourth and final week of Advent, we light the candle representing JOY. We give thanks for the JOY in Christ that can not be diminished by temporary circumstance. "I have told you this so that my JOY may be in you and that your JOY may be complete." (John 15:11, NIV)

Give thanks that our JOY is not grounded in what we see, feel, or touch but in Christ who can not fail us. "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with JOY that is inexpressible and filled with glory." (1 Peter 1:8, ESV)

Pray that those who do not know the love of Christ will experience the JOY of his presence during this season and know the wonder of life in Christ. "You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with JOY in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." (Psalm 16:11, NIV)

Pray that those who are helpless, powerless or defenseless will find God to be their protector and defender. "But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for JOY. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you." (Psalm 5:11, NIV)

JESUS AS OUR HOPE, PEACE, LOVE, & JOY

On December 25, Christmas Day, we light the Christ candle in the center of our Advent wreath and celebrate with all who know the HOPE, PEACE, LOVE and JOY that come from living life within the grace of Christ. "But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.'" (Luke 2:10-11, NIV)