

A Study Guide for Advent
on
Three Amazing Women of
Faith, Perseverance, Prayer, Hope and Joy
(Qualities of Discipleship)



Mary, Elizabeth and Anna

Synopsis

Discipleship is not only about how we are to live as Christians, but also how we are to fulfill God's mission and His plan for our lives. Mary, Elizabeth and Anna were three ordinary women who made a significant impact on the world. Each, in her unique way, each waited for the Messiah.

1. **Mary** was just a young girl, but God had a huge plan for her life. He knew her heart and that she was fit to be the mother of God's own Son.
2. **Elizabeth**, ashamed of her inability to bear children. She thought God would never answer her prayer of longing for a child. He did, but in His own time.
3. **Anna** who became a widow early in her married life. She went to serve in the temple where she waited for the Messiah.

Week 1 - Let every heart prepare Him room
Sunday, December 02, 2018

Bible Reading: Luke 1 : 5 - 18; 19 - 25

We begin with **Elizabeth**. Anticipation builds up. Do we know what is coming? What can we expect?

Elizabeth's infertility was the problem. She was marked as "barren".

Had Elizabeth failed?

Throughout all her disappointment and quiet suffering, Elizabeth held on to God's promises and clung to the fact that she was God's daughter. Faith is believing what isn't seen, what isn't apparent. Elizabeth left the door open for a miracle. She trusted her future to God's capable hands. God had not forgotten Elizabeth. God had a reason for tarrying in answering Elizabeth's prayer. He chose Elizabeth in order to display His power, His might and His authority. To honour her faithfulness, God blessed her with her son, John.

1. How has God shown that His power is made perfect in our weakness?
2. In what ways might Elizabeth's story inspire, challenge and encourage you, as a disciple to change the way you serve God and others?
3. How has the words of John 14:27 "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you!*" encouraged you as you serve others?
4. What is your response to Zechariah's silence in Luke 1:20? As a disciple, how important is silence to your spiritual life?

Week 2 – The Virgin Mother
Sunday, December 09, 2018

Bible Readings: Luke 1 : 26-38 (The birth of Jesus foretold)
and Luke 1 : 39 - 56 (Mary visits Elizabeth)

Mary, her name is synonymous with innocence, purity, devotion. Her calling was like no other woman - she gave birth to the Saviour of the world. We met the Angel Gabriel earlier when He visited Elizabeth and Zechariah. Now this messenger of God (Angel Gabriel) is headed to Nazareth to this young maiden, Mary. Luke 1 : 26 onwards tells us that God chose Mary because of her tender heart, her trusting nature, her abiding faith, her humble spirit. Gabriel delivered the happy news to Mary that, He who formed her in her mother's womb, would soon form His Son in her womb..

1. God had no plan A, or B or C. Mary was *The Plan*. God takes us as we are, and uses us according to His plan. Mary was the perfect disciple because she listened and took action. Why should Mary's story give us hope?
2. Mary said "yes", but what risk was she prepared to take? What did her obedience to God cost her? As a disciple, what would it take for you to say "I live to do God's will"
3. Mary and Elizabeth gave each other huge support. How do we strengthen and support each other spiritually?
4. In the end, it is the Holy Spirit who takes centre stage.
 - What role does the Holy Spirit plays in our own lives.
 - When and where have we sensed God's Spirit teaching us and flowing through us?

Week 3 – With Heart and Soul and Voice
Sunday, December 16, 2018

Bible Reading: Luke 1: 57- 80 (The birth of John the Baptist)

It was almost time for Elizabeth to have her baby. Despite the fact that Mary might have wanted to stay with Elizabeth beyond the three months, she herself (Mary) had started to show signs of pregnancy. Joseph deserved to know the truth. Following God's lead, Mary, with a child in her womb and a song on her heart, began the journey home to Nazareth. Let's return to Elizabeth for a moment. We now observe that Elizabeth had given birth to her son. Zechariah's voice had also returned. This is how God works: a blessing for one is a blessing for all. Elizabeth could not have known a happier moment. When we experience God's grace, we are compelled to tell others. But let's "catch up" with Mary. She left Elizabeth's house when she was three months pregnant heading for Nazareth. She had to tell Joseph. God had His plan. An angel of the Lord visited Joseph in a dream.

1. In your own life, are you more likely to *talk* about God or be *obedient* to His commands?
2. Reflect on a time that God asked you to step out in faithful obedience. How would you describe your response and experience.
3. What is it about the faith of these two women (Elizabeth and Mary) that encourages you the most ?
4. For reflection: "*It takes an open heart and a willing spirit to follow God no matter what people might say*"

Week 4 - And our eyes at last shall see Him
which brings Joy to every longing heart
Sunday, December 23, 2018

Bible Readings: Luke 2 : 1 - 20 (The birth of Jesus)
and Luke 2 : 21 - 40 (Jesus presented in the Temple)

It was time. *He was on His way.* But Mary had to face the same journey she had traveled months before to see Elizabeth. This time, even farther, to a town 5 or 6 miles south of Jerusalem - to Bethlehem, the town of David. We are reminded why Jesus is called the Son of David. Joseph was in that lineage.

Mary also had to face the discomfort of riding on the back of a donkey. As she came to the "end of her time", *"she gave birth to her firstborn, a son ... in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them"*. The important take away is "the prophecies had come true. God became flesh. The Saviour of the world rested in Mary's embrace. This is the true meaning of Christmas - a Wondrous Gift is given. Let's take the story a little further. On the eighth day, the young child was named Jesus - the name given to Him before He was conceived. When the time came for purification, Jesus was taken to the Temple to be consecrated to the Lord. It is here that Mary and Joseph met Anna. As a prophet, Anna worshipped day and night. She never left the Temple. *"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"*. (Luke 2:38)

1. Mary and Joseph, were visited by angels. They were both entrusted with raising the Messiah who resided in Mary's womb. Learning to be patient, especially be patient with

each other must have been a strong point for both Mary and Joseph. How would you describe your level of patience and trust in God as you undertake your mission?

2. When Jesus was ready to enter this world, there was no room for Him. We were not prepared for Him, yet He is preparing a place for us. How do you feel about Jesus' preparations to receive us? What is your role in all of this? How ready are you to enjoy His hospitality?
3. How has Anna's faithfulness of spending time in the Temple "alone with God" - fasting and praying impacted you? Do you feel that, like Anna you too could turn your loneliness into "aloneness with God"? What are some of the challenges that would prevent you from going deeper with God? In what ways might God be asking you to enter into such an experience?
4. Elizabeth, Mary and Anna were ordinary women, blessed by God and used by God to accomplish extraordinary things. How do you plan on reaching out to others this Holy Season so you can share at least one of these stories. Then, take a moment to **write a note to yourself** about each of the women (**Elizabeth, Mary and Anna**)

Identify yourself with Elizabeth, Mary and Anna, then complete...
I am most like because

I have learnt the most from because

I would like to be more like because
