



SENDTHEFIRE.CA

**theme:** Jumping in the Womb (Luke 1:39-56)

**materials:** Bibles, news story

## welcome

Imagine and discuss what our society would look like if it were flipped on its head; ie., if all the things we took as normal or inevitable (the rich have power, the poor do not, celebrities are all beautiful, sex sells, etc...) were reversed?

*Bring in a news item about your neighbourhood, city, country or world that you can discuss with the cell. Where do you see God in this story? Ask other members of cell to bring in stories to discuss in subsequent weeks.*

## worship

This week is the beginning of the season of Advent. The word *Advent* means "Coming", and it comes from the Greek word *parousia*, which refers to the Second Coming of Christ. This is a time when Christians prepare for the coming of the Messiah, both in remembrance of how he came to earth as a baby, and in expectation of how he will come to us again. The readings during the next four weeks in the *Worship* section will focus on hope, expectation, and patient joy as we look forward to the coming of our Lord. As you have different people read the Scriptures, have someone light one candle. After you are done reading, spend time in silence contemplating what you have heard, and then sing a Christmas carol together.

OT reading: *1 Samuel 2:1-10*; NT reading: *1 Thessalonians 5:1-11*

## word

Read Luke 1:39-56.

Why did Elizabeth's baby jump for joy in her womb?

How did baby John the Baptist know that Mary was pregnant with Jesus?

What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

Why is the baby in Mary's womb called "Lord" by Elizabeth? What did she mean by that?

Why Mary's song (The *Magnificat*) so similar to the song sung by Hannah in *1 Samuel 2:1-10*?

Why would Luke be trying to draw the reader's attention to the Old Testament character of Samuel throughout this entire story? Who is Samuel? What did he do? Why does he matter to the story of John the Baptist and Jesus?

What does Mary's song say that the Lord has done for her and for Israel through the gift of Jesus?

Why is the coming of Jesus connected with the "scattering of his enemies" and "bringing down princes" and "sending the rich away empty-handed"?

Can you imagine the joy Mary and Elizabeth felt upon realising that the Lord was bringing salvation to Israel, and that he was doing it through the child in Mary's womb? How did you express your joy when you received salvation?

If you have not received God's salvation, can you see why Mary and Elizabeth and even John were so joyful?

Can you see why those who have received Jesus as Saviour around you are joyful about it?



## witness

Continue reading through the entire books of Luke and Acts with one other person. If the other person is a fellow believer, read them through in a public place, like a café (not yelling it out or anything, just reading it to one another). Make a regular time to come in and read together, and more likely than not someone will eventually ask you what you are reading and why.

If the other person is not a fellow-believer, perhaps choose a less public place to read, but again set regular times, daily if possible, to get together and read the Gospel. You don't have to read it all at once. Read two to three chapters at a time, and then meet another day to read some more.

## action points

Mary's song declares what the Lord has done for her and for her people. It is an impressive list, and one can imagine being inspired to praise and obedience as a result of remembering such a good and merciful God. What has the Lord done for you and your people? Write out a list this week, or if you can, a song or poem, that lists out what the Lord has done for you. Keep it somewhere you will see it daily, to remind yourself of who God is, and the mighty acts he has done.

The Salvation Army sponsors children around the world who are living in circumstances of poverty and oppression. Any offerings given at cell meetings go towards covering the costs of these sponsorships. Please challenge your cell to bring loose offerings each week, and bring a container to collect any such offerings that are given.

## leader's guide

Following the announcement that Mary would be bearing the Messiah, Luke tells us that she leaves to go and visit her cousin Elizabeth, also with child, who is staying in the hills of Judea. Even before Elizabeth can respond to her cousin's greeting, her unborn baby (who the angel announced would be filled by the Spirit of God even from the womb) has realised who it is that Mary is carrying. Elizabeth is then inspired by the Holy Spirit to also recognise what has happened to her cousin Mary, even though she has not been told about the situation. Prior to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, it was not considered a common thing to be filled by God's Spirit (his breath, or presence). That was a unique event, a special case of God's intervention and inspiration. Later in Acts 2:17-18 (also written by Luke) we are reminded of the prophecy from Joel 2:28 which indicates that the Spirit of the Lord will be poured out on all people, and that they will know and speak the message of the Lord. In this case, Elizabeth is inspired to know that Mary is pregnant with her "Lord". This word could be seen to mean "God", though it is possible that Elizabeth had not totally understood that yet. Elizabeth has understood, however, that Mary's child will be unique, greater even than her own special child, and worthy of such a lofty title.

Baby John the Baptist jumping in the womb is the beginning of John's witness to Jesus. And it is a witness infused with joy, as is Mary's song. The birth of the Messiah is seen as the culmination of God's action and purpose within Israel. Mary's song is not just thanking the Lord for his mercy towards her, but towards all of Israel. This act is the promised deliverance and redemption for the people of God, the long-awaited vindication of the poor and needy, and the judgment on the rich, proud oppressors.



Mary's song echoes the song of Hannah from 1 Samuel 2:1-10 so clearly that it cannot be a coincidence. This is a song Mary would have known as a Hebrew, and perhaps it was just on her mind as an appropriate summary of her situation. More likely, though, Luke is intentionally drawing the reader's attention towards the story of the prophet Samuel (1 Sam 1-25). As we have already seen, Samuel's mother Hannah prayed for a son though she was barren, and the Lord gave her Samuel in a miraculous circumstance, (not unlike the announcements of John and Jesus' births). Hannah dedicated Samuel to the service of God in the Temple, and he grew up to be a great Prophet and Judge, the one whom God used to announce judgment upon Israel and the family of Saul, and to anoint David as King. It is not difficult to see the connection between the story of Samuel and that of John the Baptist, and it is important to remember this as we read through the rest of Luke. Luke is presenting Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy, as the decisive moment in God's work of salvation, and this salvation was foreshadowed throughout the history of Israel.

In Mary's song she praises the Lord and declares that he is Saviour; that he took notice of her even though she was a lowly servant; that the Lord, the Mighty One, is holy in the things he has done for her; that he has shown mercy to generations; that he has filled the hungry and sent the rich away, exalted the humble and scattered the proud, essentially overturning humanity's disordering of creation; and that he has been merciful to Israel, remembering his promises to her. The power of God as judge of his enemies, of those who have disobeyed and gained power off the backs of the poor and innocent, is invoked in this song as well. Israel's salvation was always pictured in terms of release from slavery or return from exile – that is, the overthrow of those powers that were crushing her. The implication is that the same God who brought about the Exodus has also brought about the baby in Mary's womb. Luke shows a special concern in his gospel for the poor and the oppressed, and is pointing out here that the coming of God's salvation through Jesus will and should result in a different way of being with one another, in particular giving a new hope to the poor.