Greetings friends,

I ask that as we begin our spiritual journey together we begin to take some time daily (if you are not already) to read the Scripture and pray. I thought it would be beneficial for us to focus on the same passage of Scripture for the week. This week, we will focus on Sunday's texts (See below). If you were not present in worship on Sunday and have not yet watched it, I encourage you to do so. The Scripture used on Sunday was **Luke 1:18-38,** with references to the further story found in **vv.39- 56**. It is the story of Mary's annunciation, when the angel, Gabriel, announced to Mary that she would bear God's Son, in spite of being a virgin, and that she was to name him "Jesus." When the angel left, Mary immediately went to see Elizabeth, whom the angel had said was six months pregnant in her old age, in spite of being barren. In vv. 39-56, Elizabeth speaks about how she was "filled with the Holy Spirit" and the baby she is carrying "leaped in her womb," she heard Mary's greeting. This is the passage where those in the Roman Catholic tradition received the lines for the rosary prayer, "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." Though Matthew focuses on the details of the male perspective with the story of Joseph and his lineage, Luke focuses on the details of the female perspective, with Mary and Elizabeth. This is a pattern for Luke, especially as a Gentile, to focus on women and others who were not usually regarded- Gentiles, Samaritans, tax collectors, people who were sick, women, etc. highlighting the invitation for the entire world into Jesus' saving grace. It is believed that Mary is one of the eyewitnesses that Luke interviewed for the writing of his Gospel.

Format-this is a repeat from every week, and will be consistently present for anyone new and as a reminder for all. It is listed at the bottom for review and for anyone who is new to this exercise. Please remember that it is a suggestion. There is no pressure to do it in the format suggested, to do everything on the days that are listed, or to even to answer all the questions. Allow the Holy Spirit to lead you. If one question takes up the time because you are moved in your spirit, then stay with it. The idea of this it to spend some intentional time with the Scriptures, in the presence of God, and in prayer and reflection- in whatever way that works for you!

Scripture: Luke 1:26-38 (NRSV)

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, **27** to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. **28** And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." **29** But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. **30** The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. **31** And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. **32** 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. **33** He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." **34** Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" **35** The angel said to her, "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. **36** 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. **37** For nothing will be impossible with God." **38** Then Mary said, "Here am I, the

servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Other Scriptures referenced:

Nehemiah 8:10

The joy of the Lord is my strength.

Luke 1:39- 56

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be[e] a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

46 And Mary[f] said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
50 His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
51 He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
53 he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
54 He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."
56 And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

John 1:45-46

45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." 46 Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

DAILY QUIET TIME WITH GOD:

Monday: v.26 "In the sixth month (of Elizabeth's pregnancy)"- from last week we learned that Elizabeth was Mary's cousin. She was married to Zechariah, was old and not able to conceive, and yet Elizabeth would now bear a son who would become John the Baptist. In v.24 we read that she stayed in seclusion for five months, and now one month later would be visited by Mary. In v.56 we read that "Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months," so Mary was there for the birth of John, and then returned home. V.26 "the angel Gabriel was sent by God"- as an angel, Gabriel is a supernatural messenger of God. Gabriel is the same angel that visited Zechariah in vv. 11-20, and is also in Daniel 8-9. "God sent," meaning that God was active and mindful of Mary and all of the human circumstances. God is mindful of us and our circumstances too. Though God may not send us an angel (though he also could!), God did send us the Holy Spirit. How does it make you feel, knowing that God is knowing and mindful of all of history, all circumstances? Why does it make you feel that way? How does it make you feel, knowing that God is knowing and mindful of you personally? Why? Take a moment for prayer, thanking God for knowing and loving you, and also asking God to break through into your circumstances. V.26 "to a town in Galilee called Nazareth"- as Nathanael made known in his remark in John 1:46, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"- Nazareth was regarded poorly, even with contempt, by others. This is a huge contrast to Gabriel's last appearance, in Jerusalem in the Temple, to Zechariah who was a priest. Nazareth was instead a tiny town, where everyone likely knew one another, and not the typical place to expect to encounter God's supernatural involvement. And yet, that's the point- that we should be open, and expect to encounter God no matter where we are and what is going on in our life. God is not limited by any preconceived ideas and boundaries- God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-present (omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent). No matter where you are, where you come from, what your past or present circumstances are, God knows you and wants you to know him too. Take some time getting to know God today- worship, pray, watch, and listen. If time permits, journal what God reveals to you.

Tuesday: V.27 "to a virgin"- the Greek word *parthenos* is more than just a young woman (as some trying to discount the miraculous suggest) but an unmarried chaste woman, someone who had not yet had any sexual relations. The point is made three times in this passage. This is important, as it is part of the Christian doctrine, as stated in the Apostle's Creed and Nicene Creed. God will be doing a miracle, and this is the way that Jesus is not only fully human, but also fully divine (hypostatic union). What that means for us is that our God is a God of miracles! Do you have difficulty believing the miracles of the Bible, and any stories of miracles that occur today? Why or why not? It is also amazing, wonderful, that in a patriarchal society, where women were expected to be seen, but not heard, that Mary takes the center stage in Luke's Gospel narrative of Jesus' birth story. Reflect upon how God sees and hears everyone, not just those that society deems should be seen. For those in society today who are typically not seen or heard, lift them up in prayer, and pray for spiritual eyes and ears to see and hear them more. God sees and hears you too, and you too are a part of God's plan. Take a moment and give thanks, also praying that God would take away any fears, hesitancies, or any ideas that you are not enough. Discover just how loved, how important, how valued by God you are!

Wednesday: v.27 “Engaged to a man” or “pledged to be married”- or “betrothed”- which was much like engagement nowadays, but much more intense. It was legally binding, usually with a parental arrangement, and lasted for a year, with an obligation for faithfulness. Unlike breaking off an engagement, breaking off a betrothal would require divorce, even though they were not yet married. Any sexual relations during this time (or before!) was strictly forbidden. Typically, marriage occurred when people were young, soon after puberty, and scholars estimate that Mary was between 12-16 years old. Though this may seem crazy to us, it was a different world, with different cultural expectations, and people were raised understanding and preparing for this. It was important for Mary to have been betrothed but not married, to ensure she was a virgin for the miraculous, as well as preparing for Jesus to have a family. V.27 “a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David”- prophecies said that the Messiah had to be from the lineage of David, a king and a “man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22), and later the term used for Jesus “Son of David” is a Messianic title. Some prophecies: 2 Samuel 7:12-16, Isaiah 11:1, Jeremiah 23:5-6. Notes of fulfillment: Matthew 1:1, Luke 1:32-33, Acts 15:15-16, Hebrews 1:5 (there are many more of both). In Matthew, Jesus’ genealogy traces Joseph’s line back to David (and back to Abraham), and in society Jesus would have been regarded as Joseph’s son and part of that lineage, even if it was not biological. In Luke 3:23-38, Luke traces Jesus’ lineage through Mary, not only back to David, but back to Adam and then God! What this means for us is that God had a plan from the beginning, that God had it set upon his heart that Christ would come, and how he would come, and throughout history God’s plan for the redemption of the world was in motion. Why? Because God loves humanity- you, and me, and the world. How does that make you feel? V.27b-28 “The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, favored one!” or “you who are highly favored!”- “Greetings,” or “hail”- the original Greek is *chairó* and it’s a salutation that also means to rejoice, be glad- literally, to experience God’s grace, be conscious (glad) for his grace (biblehub.com). Why do you think the angel greeted Mary in this way? “Highly favored,” also translated as “full of grace”- grace is the unmerited, undeserved, abundant love of God that is experienced not only through salvation, but as care, compassion, kindness, power, God working through us and on our behalf, God’s gifts, blessings, and more. God is so good! Imagine God saying to you, “Rejoice, as YOU are full of my grace! YOU are blessed!” How does that make you feel? How have you experienced God’s grace in your life? Reflect upon God’s grace for you, and give thanks.

Thursday: v.28 “The Lord is with you”- not only does the angel exclaim how Mary received grace (was full of grace, abundantly blessed!) but the angel also shared that the Lord was with her. This is true for us as well. The Lord is always with us, in good times and bad. As Jesus said in Matthew 28:20. “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” What does it make you think of when you reflect upon God being with you? How does that make you feel? Is there strength, comfort, perhaps expectation, or something else? Although we are told that God is always with us, sometimes we can feel as if God is distant and we are alone. Think about any of those times- what was going on? How and when did you experience that God really was with you all along? There is a book written by Brother Lawrence, a 17th century Carmelite friar, called The Practice of the Presence of God. Truly, although God is always with us, continually recognizing and responding to God’s presence takes not only awareness, it takes practice. Take a

moment and pray, thanking God for always being with you, but also to reveal his presence to you powerfully, that you might experience God in every moment. Practice being aware and attentive to God being with you always. V.29 “But Mary was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be”- It indicates that Mary was not disturbed by the actual presence of the angel, which is interesting, and I wonder if it implies anything about Mary’s faith life. What do you think? Yet Mary was disturbed by the message she received. Why do you think that Mary would be pondering, perplexed, troubled, by the angel telling her that she was full of grace and that the Lord was with her? Have you ever experienced that kind of response, a questioning when God’s truth about who you are and your relationship with God- dearly beloved, co-heir with Christ- one who is full of grace and with God- is pointed directly to you? If so, why do you believe you had that response? That Mary was troubled could also mean that she recognized that the greeting came with an expectation. What are your thoughts on this? What do you understand as God’s expectations of us in response to God’s grace and indwelling presence? Take a moment to pray, asking God to once again reveal to you God’s truth, to set your heart upon whatever expectations God may have for you, and to give you the strength, power, ability, and desire, to live into it as you are led.

Friday: V.30 “But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” It was suggested in the sermon that “Do not be afraid” was directed toward preparing Mary for what was coming next, as opposed to responding to a fear from the angel’s presence (as with Zechariah). What are your thoughts on this? Have you ever experienced fear about God in some way? If so, what prompted the fear? What does it say about Gabriel, and about God, that Mary is told to not be afraid? How does having fear, as in being afraid, differ from fearing the Lord, as in having respect and awe, and what do they have in common? Refer to Mary’s Song, the famous Magnificat, specifically 1:50. “You have found favor with God”- a reminder of what was just said, that Mary is full of grace, but this time the word “with” is not simply “with” (*meta*- in the company of) as used earlier (v.28), but here the original Greek uses the term *para*, which means alongside of, or close beside. Why do you think the different term was used, and what is the impact, not only upon Mary, but upon you? V.31 “And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus”- Jesus, which means “YAHWEH (the Lord) is Salvation,” the Greek form of the Hebrew version, Joshua. Every time Mary would call her son by name she would be reminded of God’s promise being fulfilled. She would have also recognized and understood this relating to the prophecy from Isaiah 7:14, “the virgin shall conceive and bear a son.” V.32-33 “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 forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end”- all of this points to the prophesied Messiah! What words would you use to describe the role and character of each of these descriptions? Can you imagine how Mary felt about this- how would you describe what you think she felt? Compare it to your own personal understanding of who Jesus- the Son of the Most High, our Savior- is to you. Does this description change or have any impact on how you

relate to God? How would this description of Jesus have an impact on your circumstances and your life? Take a moment and offer a prayer of thanks, praise, and honor!

Saturday: v.34 “How can this be” (or “How will this be,” NIV) Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” It was suggested in the sermon that this was not a question of doubt (like Zechariah), but a question of clarification, indicating her willingness to step into the role that God was leading her into, but wanting more information. How do you feel about this reading- do you agree or disagree, and why? Have you ever wanted further clarification from God? If so, what was your experience with it? V.35 “The angel said to her, “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 the Son of God”- as in, God is going to do it all, so have faith and trust. Because this is a miracle, with the Holy Spirit being involved, Jesus is regarded as “the holy one,” and the “Son of God.” “Power” is *dynamis* in the original Greek, where we get the word “dynamite” from and refers to miraculous power. “Overshadow” is *episkiazó* -“to cover with a cloud,” like the cloud of transfiguration (Matthew 17:5, Mark 9:7, Luke 9:34), and the cloud of Shekinah glory (Exodus 16:10, 19:9, 24:16, 34:5, 40:34). This word is even used in a story of Peter’s healing ministry (Acts 5:15). It is a Godly expression that points to Mary experiencing the glory and presence of God in a powerful way. v.36 “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”- a sign of God’s miraculous power and plan unfolding! V.37 “For nothing will be impossible with God”- God’s plan, God’s promise, God’s power- nothing is impossible! Sometimes it’s difficult to wrap our minds around nothing being impossible with God. But as Jesus taught many times and in many ways, if we are praying God’s will and obediently following, we can experience miracle living. God, the Creator of the universe, is able! Yet I have sometimes prayed for and expected a miracle and something different and not what I had wanted happened. Have you ever experienced that? If so, what kind of impact did it have on your faith and your witness? How hard is it for you to have faith and trust for God’s miracle action in your life? For anything in your life, invite God into the situation, circumstance, issue, etc. and discover God’s miracle power. It may not be what you wanted or hoped for (though it might very well be!), but God’s presence is always with us, available, good, and powerful, and God does work miracles. V.38 “Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word”- wow! In spite of knowing that what was being asked of her would be difficult, and the very real possibility that Joseph would no longer marry her, that she would be the object of scorn and shame, and she could even be stoned to death, Mary humbly offered herself completely to God. Mary was open, available, willing, with a humble servant’s heart, trusting God, and having faith in God’s presence and promises. It’s a model for us, and our response to God. Take a moment to reflect on all of these elements- are there areas where God is leading you to grow? Are there experiences of this for you to proclaim? Pray, and ask God for revelation and to experience his presence. If you are ready, offer yourself completely, humbly, and then listen to where God is leading. Give thanks to God!

Other items:

Advent Candle Reading
Mary's Song, "The Magnificat" vv. 46-55 (above) and:
With expectation, we light the first candle of Hope, and the SECOND candle of JOY. The light of joy breaks through the darkness, rejoicing in God who is merciful and good. As the coming of Jesus our Savior draws nearer, our joy builds with anticipation. May the joyful promise of your presence, O God, make us rejoice in our hope of salvation. O Come, O come, Emmanuel!

Responsive Reading (adapted from Isaiah 12:2-6)
L: Surely Lord, You are our salvation;
P: We will trust, and will not be afraid,
L: For You are our strength and our might;
P: You have become our salvation.
L: With joy we draw water from the wells of salvation.
P: We give thanks to You Lord,
L: We call on Your name;
P: Make known Your deeds among the nations;
L: Proclaim that Your name is exalted.
P: Sing praises to You Lord, for You have done gloriously;
L: Let this be known in all the earth.
P: Shout aloud and sing for joy,
All: for great is the Holy One of Israel among us.

Unison Prayer

Lord, we joyfully praise You
for the fulfillment of Your promise of a Savior
and what that means in our lives.
Thank You for the gift of salvation
through your Son, Jesus Christ.
Create us anew as we wait,
and help us to see Your glory
as You fill our lives with Your Spirit. Amen

Song Lyrics:

Joy to the World #246

1. Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing,

and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing.

2. Joy to the world, the Savior reigns!
Let all their songs employ;
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy.

3. No more let sins and sorrows grow,
nor thorns infest the ground;
he comes to make his blessings flow
far as the curse is found,
far as the curse is found,
far as the curse is found.

4. He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love.

<u>My Soul Magnifies the Lord</u> by Chris Tomlin

Good news of great joy
For every woman every man
This will be a sign to you
A baby born in Bethlehem
Come and worship do not be afraid

A company of angels
Glory in the highest
And on the earth a peace among
Those on whom His favor rests
Come and worship do not be afraid

My soul my, soul magnifies the Lord
My soul magnifies the Lord
He has done great things for me
Great things for me

Unto you a child is born
Unto us a Son is given
Let every heart prepare His throne
Let every nation under Heaven
Come and worship do not be afraid

My soul my, soul magnifies the Lord
My soul magnifies the Lord
He has done great things for me
Great things for me

Of His government there will be no end
He'll establish it with His righteousness
And He shall reign on David's throne
And His name shall be from this day on

Wonderful Counselor
Everlasting Father
Wonderful Counselor
Everlasting Father

My soul my, soul magnifies the Lord
My soul magnifies the Lord
He has done great things for me
Great things for me

My soul my, soul magnifies the Lord
My soul magnifies the Lord
He has done great things for me
Great things for me

Good Christian Friends Rejoice #224 v.2, 3

Good Christian friends, rejoice
With heart and soul and voice
Now ye hear of endless bliss:
News, News! Jesus Christ was born for this!
He hath opened heaven's door,
And ye are blest forevermore
Christ was born for this, Christ was born for this!

Good Christian friends, rejoice
With heart and soul and voice
Now ye need not fear the grave:
News, news! Jesus Christ was born to save!
Calls you one and calls you all
To gain his everlasting hall.

Christ was born to save, Christ was born to save!

Format (this is a repeat from last week, and will be consistently present for anyone new and as a reminder for all):
Find a quiet place and time to focus on the Word, and to hear from God through it. It doesn't have to be long, for some it will be longer than others. I encourage you, if possible, to do this practice in the morning. You will then find that God brings it to your mind throughout your day.

For greater impact I encourage you to get some paper and a pen and journal daily what thoughts and impressions God brings to mind. Write out also your own thoughts and your own prayers, making sure to leave space within your time for God's response. Listen intently, and notice what rises up within you- what you are thinking, feeling, memories that arise and ideas that spring up. It may be something God would want you to address within yourself and/or with others. It may be something God is inspiring you to begin or end. God's possibilities are infinite! After time, it is often beneficial to go back and read what you have written, and notice how God has been moving in your life (and praise God for it!).

Begin with prayer, quieting yourself within and opening up to hearing what God would like to reveal to you. Praise God for who he is, for loving you, being with you, and more. Then ask God to speak to you; to open your heart and mind to hear his message. (if you are journaling, you could write out the prayer)

Read the Scripture passage over twice; once as a read through, and the second time slowly, meditatively. Notice what God illuminates for you. Notice what words or ideas are "jumping off the page at you," impacting you from the Scripture. Ask God why that is being highlighted for you. What is God saying to you? What is God asking you to say, do, change, pray about, etc.? What is the application for my life today? **Most importantly- what am I going to do about it? (If you are journaling you could write it all out, which reinforces it in a greater way)

I have put together some daily questions based upon the Scripture. You may use those, but also feel free to deviate away from it if God is leading you there. They are simply offered to prompt contemplation with God. There is much more in this passage, feel free to delve in more!

At the end of your time pray again. I recommend praying throughout, but the ending prayer would include praise, thanking God for revelation, and asking for the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal, bringing to mind God's will. Ask God for the courage, empowerment, and opportunity to do what you have determined God is asking you to do.