

***GOD'S BOUNDLESS INVITATION:  
SATURDAY AFTERNOON BIBLE STUDY***

LUKE 1: 26-55 (CEV)

**Teaching**

Leader 1: Today we will deeply root ourselves in God's Word by exploring how our spiritual preferences influence how we read scripture. When we pay attention to the diverse ways in which people encounter God's Word, we enrich our understanding of God's story for us and the world.

Leader 2: This method of Bible study invites you to consider four preferences people often have as they read scripture. Think of these as onramps, like cloverleafs on a freeway. They are ways in which you enter the road to God's story. There is no right or wrong entrance. And you might use different entrances at different times. What is helpful is to know that you have a preference, but there are other ways to enter God's story. As leaders and learners, if we tend to always access God's story using a particular onramp, we might not only put up roadblocks for others but we might miss out on the richness of God's story for ourselves.

Leader 1: The four preferences we will experience today are adapted from the book, "[Discover Your Spiritual Type](#)"<sup>1</sup> by Corinne Ware, published by the Alban Institute in 1995. The four types are:

**Head/Intellectual**

People who prefer this onramp enjoy analyzing scripture. They compare translations, study the meaning of words, and look at the text with a critical eye to understand what God is saying to them.

**Heart/Feeler**

People who prefer this onramp look at scripture through their feelings. They might wonder how the characters feel, imagine themselves in the story and how they would respond to God's story. This is similar to the "Boundless Forgiveness" Bible study that practiced exploring the biblical characters in the story and how we related to them.

**Mystery/Mystic**

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<sup>1</sup> Ware, Corinne. (1995). *Discover Your Spiritual Type*. The Alban Institute.

People who prefer this onramp enjoy sitting with scripture with a sense of wonder and awe. They might light a candle or use art or faith practices to ponder how little we know, how big God is, and what that means for us. This is similar to the “Boundless Love” Bible study that practiced Dwelling in the Word.

### **Action/Activist**

People who prefer this onramp see scripture as a call to action. They might hear the voice of the oppressed, God’s restorative justice, and where God is calling us to act today.

Leader 2: For this Bible study, we will be giving you the opportunity to experience one or more of these onramps. For some of you, this might challenge you to explore scripture in a new way. We encourage you to give yourself permission to move beyond your comfort zone! Our prayer is that through these different onramps, you will experience how our understanding of God’s Word is enriched when we read scripture in community and listen to all the different ways people hear and enter into God’s story.

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| <b>Encounter Scripture</b> |
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Leader 1: We invite you to quiet your hearts and minds as we enter a space to be deeply rooted in God’s Word.

Leader 2: You are invited into this space and this time with a daring vision to experience God’s boundless invitation, which comes at the most unexpected times to the most unexpected of people.

Leader 1: Let us pray. God of invitation, we give you thanks for gathering us together, unique individuals called together into your story. Guide our conversation and inspire a sense of wonder at the many ways you invite each of us into your story. We bring before you our unique selves, our imaginations, thoughts and dreams, in hope that you will continue to reveal to us the boundlessness of your love and invitation in our openness to each other’s experiences and encounters of your Word. Amen.

Leader 2: This afternoon we will explore the story of Mary being visited by the angel Gabriel in Luke 1: 26-55. After the scripture is read, those joining us online will be put into breakout rooms with a facilitator who will guide your experience. Those here at Cragun’s will be given further instructions.

Leader 1: The story of Mary, found in Luke 1: 26-55 (CEV):  
One month later God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth in Galilee with a message for a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to Joseph from the family of King David. The angel greeted Mary and said, "You are truly blessed! The Lord is with you." Mary was confused by the angel's words and wondered what they meant. Then the angel told Mary, "Don't be afraid! God is pleased with you, and you will have a son. His name will be Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of God Most High. The Lord God will make him king, as his ancestor David was. He will rule the people of Israel forever, and his kingdom will never end." Mary asked the angel, "How can this happen? I am not married!" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come down to you, and God's power will come over you. So your child will be called the holy Son of God. Your relative Elizabeth is also going to have a son, even though she is old. No one thought she could ever have a baby, but in three months she will have a son. Nothing is impossible for God!" Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant! Let it happen as you have said." And the angel left her.

Leader 2: You will be given 15 minutes for this activity. Those on Zoom will now be put into breakout rooms and led by a facilitator. Those in person, divide your table group into two groups. You should have at least 3 people per group. Feel free to quickly move to another table if needed. Choose the person whose first name comes last in the alphabet to be the facilitator. This person will choose one of the envelopes on the table, open it and read the instructions for the group.

Take the time you need with the onramp experience in the envelope you choose. But if you should finish your discussion or experience before time is called, please select another envelope and experience a second onramp. We will call you back to your tables when time is up.

*A Note for Leading on Zoom: At the NE MN Synod Assembly we invited facilitators to lead the sessions on Zoom and gave them the Facilitator Handouts. Participants were invited to download the Participant Handout and come ready with the recommended supplies. If time allows, we encourage groups to experience all four onramps.*

*A Note for Leading in Person: At the NE MN Synod Assembly we had 4 sealed envelopes with the Facilitator Handout of one of the onramps in each with any supplies needed. If you have more time, we encourage you to have the entire table do each of the four onramps, then debrief their experience at the end.*

**Onramp Bible Study Experiences (See facilitator scripts at bottom of Bible Study)**  
 Head/Intellectual:  
 Comparison of scripture  
 Heart/Feeler:  
 Imaginative  
 Meditation  
 Mystery/Mystic:  
 Light candle, draw, reflect on images, breath prayer  
 Action/Activist:  
 Where will you bear and birth good news in world?

Leader 1:     *(With two minutes left)*: We will gather back in two minutes. Please use this time to finish this current experience.

Leader 1:     At your table groups or in your Zoom breakout rooms, take 4-5 minutes to reflect on your experience with these onramps. What did you like? What did you dislike? How did you see the benefit of having different onramps for different people? How might you create different onramps to God's story in your congregational life?

**Wrap Up**

Leader 2:     There are many onramps to hear God's story. When we provide different onramps for people to hear and experience God's story, we all experience the fullness of who God is and how God is inviting us into God' story for ourselves and the world.

Leader 1:     Let us pray. God of invitation, we give you thanks for the time we have spent here together today. We're grateful for the many ways in which you provide onramps for us to hear and experience your boundless invitation to join in your work for and with the world. Continue to deeply root us in your Word, connect us to one another, and send us out to share your boundless love in the world. May your power at work in us do far more than we even dare to imagine. Amen.

Leader 2:     We invite you join us in our closing ritual. Respond to the leader's prompt by saying together, "Boundless" and doing the action shown on the screen.

Leader 2:     GOD's love is...

Leader 1:     *(place hand over heart)* BOUNDLESS

Leader 2:     God's Creation is...

Leader 1:     *(open arms wide)* BOUNDLESS

Leader 2:     God's Forgiveness is...

Leader 1:     *(cross wrists)* BOUNDLESS



Leader 2: God's invitation is...  
Leader 1: *(uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched)* BOUNDLESS

Leader 2: God's Promise is...  
Leader 1: *(sign of the cross on another's forehead or hand)* BOUNDLESS

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*These resources were developed for the 2022 Northeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly by Pastor Shivon Miller (Trinity Lutheran Church, Duluth, MN), Leader 1 Anderson (Synod Minister, NE MN Synod, ELCA) and Pastor Leader 2 Nilsen (Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Baxter, MN). They are based on the [2022 NE MN Synod Journey Resources](#) and [2022 ELCA Youth Gathering Getting Ready Materials](#). You are welcome to adapt this text to meet the needs of your context. For more resources, visit [www.nemnsynod.org/Curriculum](http://www.nemnsynod.org/Curriculum).*

## ONRAMP EXPERIENCE: HEAD/INTELLECTUAL

**Facilitators:** *Thank you for serving as a facilitator for your group! Your job is to read the script below as instructed. Words in italics are instructions. Invite responses from all your group members, knowing that it is ok to pass or to have silence as participants consider their responses. If you get stuck, don't be afraid to ask your group for help!*

**Introductions:** Let's begin by introducing ourselves sharing your name, church, city and which onramp you prefer to enter God's story. For example,

I am (your name) from (your church and city), and I am most likely to enter God's story via the \_\_\_\_\_ on ramp.

*Go around the group until everyone has shared.*

**Instructions:** For this experience we will compare two different translations of scripture.

**Read:** *(You might invite another group member to read.)*

This is from Luke 1:26-28 of the CEV translation:

26One month later God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth in Galilee  
27with a message for a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to Joseph from the family of King David. 28The angel greeted Mary and said, "You are truly blessed! The Lord is with you." 29Mary was confused by the angel's words and wondered what they meant.

**Read:** *(You might invite another group member to read.)*

This is from Luke 1:26-28 of the NRSV translation:

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup>But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

**Ask:** What differences do you see between translations?

*For example, the CEV says, "You are truly blessed!" And the NRSV says, "Greetings, favored one!"*

**Share:** Let's ponder like Mary:

**Ask:** What does it mean to be favored or blessed?

Where do we see other examples of the use of these words in scripture?

Invite: Use your smartphone or iPad to go to [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) and search for other scripture references that use “favored” or “blessing” (or favor/bless). Read several examples. How do these references expand or change your understanding of favored/blessed?

**Closing Prayer:** Inviting God, may we each say, “Here am I, send me” in response to God’s boundless invitation. Amen.

*Facilitator: If your group has finished this experience and time still remains, choose another envelope and begin that onramp experience until time has been called.*

## ONRAMP EXPERIENCE: HEART/FEELER

**Facilitators:** *Thank you for serving as a facilitator for your group! Your job is to read the script below as instructed. Words in italics are instructions. Invite responses from all your group members, knowing that it is ok to pass or to have silence as participants consider their responses. If you get stuck, don't be afraid to ask your group for help!*

**Introductions:** Let's begin by introducing ourselves sharing your name, church, city and which onramp you prefer to enter God's story. For example,

I am (your name) from (your church and city), and I am most likely to enter God's story via the \_\_\_\_\_ on ramp.

*Go around the group until everyone has shared.*

**Read:** *Read this slowly, pausing between questions and directions to give participants an opportunity to imagine their response to the prompts you give them.*

I am going to read an imaginative meditation. As I read, I will suggest a series of events. Let your minds focus on the story and imagine yourself in the story through my suggestions. I will be asking questions to guide your thoughts. Silently imagine how you might respond.

I invite you to close your eyes. Take a few moments to clear your thoughts. Take a deep breath. Exhale. Take another deep breath. Exhale.

You are in a room. Imagine your surroundings. What do you smell, hear, and see? How is the room decorated? What furniture is around you? Are you sitting or standing? What are you doing? What are you most likely thinking about? What feelings are you aware of?

Slowly you become aware that you are not alone. The room becomes brighter. You turn around to see where the light is coming from. Without changing your setting, you realize you are seeing an angel. What is your reaction? How does this presence make you feel?

The angel looks into your eyes and says, "You are truly blessed! The Lord is with you." What is your reaction? How do these words make you feel?

The angel tells you to not be afraid. "God is pleased with you, and you will have a son. His name will be Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of God Most High. The Lord God will make him king, as his ancestor David was. He will rule the people of Israel forever, and his kingdom will never end." What is your reaction? How do these words make you feel?

You wonder what this means and how this can be since you're not yet married.  
How do you respond to the angel?

The angel responds by saying that "Nothing is impossible for God." What is your reaction? How do these words make you feel? How do you respond to the angel? What would you say to God?

Slowly you realize the angel has left and you are alone in your room once again. What is going through your mind? What are you now feeling? Notice again your surroundings. What do you see, hear, smell?

When you are ready, I invite you to take a couple of deep breaths in and out, and slowly open your eyes.

**Ask:** As you are comfortable, share your response, experience, or feelings from this meditation with the group.

What was it like to experience the story in this way?

How did you hear God's invitation in new ways?

**Closing Prayer:** Inviting God, may we each say, "Here am I, send me" in response to God's boundless invitation. Amen.

*Facilitator: If your group has finished this experience and time still remains, choose another envelope and begin that onramp experience until time has been called.*

*For more Imaginative Meditations, we suggest the book, ["Imaginative Prayer for Youth Ministry: A Guide to Transforming Your Students' Spiritual Lives into Journey, Adventure, and Encounter"](#) by Jeannie Oestreicher and Larry Warner.*

## ONRAMP EXPERIENCE: MYSTERY/MYSTIC

**Facilitators:** *Thank you for serving as a facilitator for your group! Your job is to read the script below as instructed. Words in italics are instructions. Invite responses from all your group members, knowing that it is ok to pass or to have silence as participants consider their responses. If you get stuck, don't be afraid to ask your group for help!*

**Introductions:** Let's begin by introducing ourselves sharing your name, church, city and which onramp you prefer to enter God's story. For example,

I am (your name) from (your church and city), and I am most likely to enter God's story via the \_\_\_\_\_ on ramp.

*Go around the group until everyone has shared.*

**Instructions:** *Light (turn on) the candle.*

**Read:** Focusing on the flame, listen to the reading:

<sup>30</sup>The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>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. <sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." <sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup>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. <sup>36</sup>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. <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God." <sup>38</sup>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.

**Say:** Mary's response was first, "How can this be?" What was taking place seemed impossible.

While the angel responds with an answer, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you..." we still might ask, "How can this be?" What does that even mean? Mary is left standing in the mystery of God and responds, "Here am I...let it be according to your word."

**Reflect:** When/Where/Why do you find yourself saying to God, "How can this be?"

**Activity:** Using the art supplies (markers, crayons, paper), draw what it means to you to dwell in this mystery of God, and daring to respond, “Here am I...let it be according to your word.”

**Or** reflect on the images. How do these speak into the mystery of God and call you to respond to God’s invitation?

**Closing Prayer:** For our ending prayer, I invite you to join me in a breath prayer. As we breathe in, silently pray the words, “How can this be?” As you breathe out, silently pray, “Here I am.” Repeat 3-4 times.

Inhale: “How can this be?”

Exhale: “Here I am.”

*Facilitator: If your group has finished this experience and time still remains, choose another envelope and begin that onramp experience until time has been called.*

## ONRAMP EXPERIENCE: ACTION/ACTIVIST

**Facilitators:** *Thank you for serving as a facilitator for your group! Your job is to read the script below as instructed. Words in italics are instructions. Invite responses from all your group members, knowing that it is ok to pass or to have silence as participants consider their responses. If you get stuck, don't be afraid to ask your group for help!*

**Introductions:** Let's begin by introducing ourselves sharing your name, church, city and which onramp you prefer to enter God's story. For example,

I am (your name) from (your church and city), and I am most likely to enter God's story via the \_\_\_\_\_ on ramp.

*Go around the group until everyone has shared.*

**Read:** Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant! Let it happen as you have said."

In Luke 2 Mary goes onto say:

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

**Say:** Mary proclaims that God has:

- Looked with favor on the lowly
- scattered the proud
- brought down the powerful
- lifted up the lowly
- filled the hungry
- sent the rich away
- helped his servant Israel
- remembered mercy

**Ask:** In our world now, who are the lowly? The scattered and proud? The powerful?  
The hungry? The rich?

- Who are they in your community? In your church?

**Ask:** Where have you seen evidence of this (looking with favor on the lowly, scattering the proud, bringing down the powerful, etc.) happening in the past or now?

**Say:** Mary literally bears and will birth this good news coming into the world.

**Ask:** How are we to bear and birth this good news?  
How, where and to whom do you feel most called to bear this good news?

**Closing Prayer:** Inviting God, may we each say, “Here am I, send me” in response to God’s boundless invitation. Amen.

*Facilitator: If your group has finished this experience and time still remains, choose another envelope and begin that onramp experience until time has been called.*