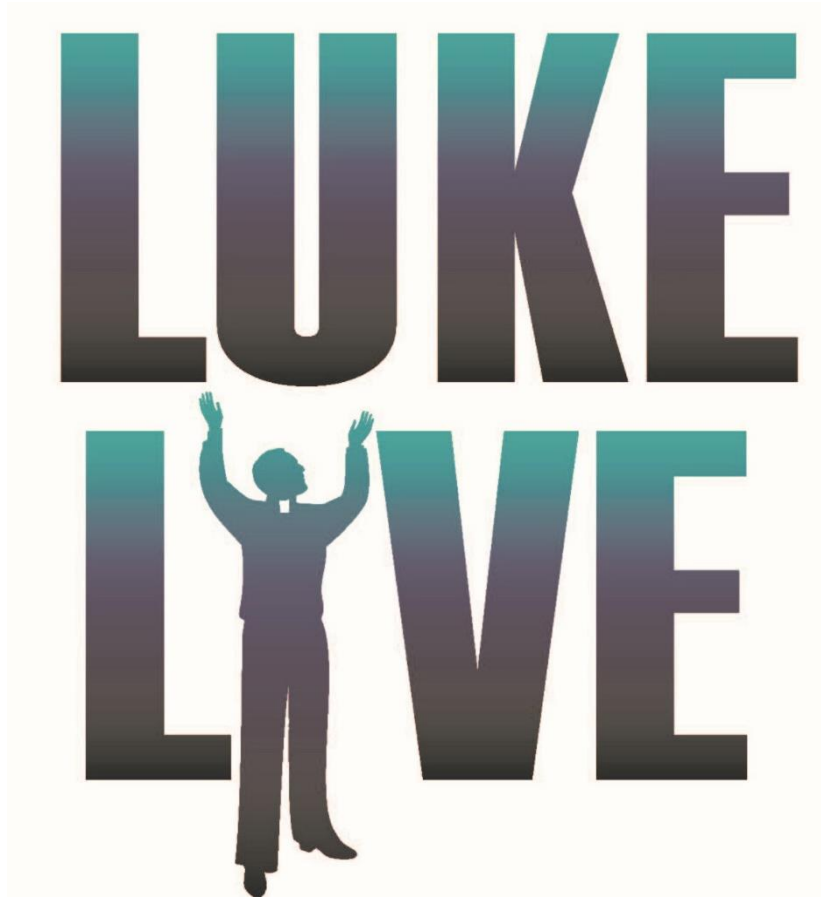


*The Gospel of Luke in Word  
and Song as presented in*



**Advent & Christmas  
CD Set Volumes 1 & 2**

- Disc 1
1. Introduction
  2. Importance of Music
  3. Introduction to *Simple Song*
  4. *Simple Song*
  5. Luke's Gospel 1: 1-25
  6. Tools for Multi-Faith Dialogue
  7. Commentary on Luke 1:1
  8. Commentary on Luke 1:2-25
  9. Commentary on Luke 1:2-25 Part 2
  10. Intro to *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*
  11. *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* vs 1-4
  12. Luke 1:26-56
  13. Reflections on *The Magnificat*
  14. Introducing "TANAKH"
  15. Intro to Schubert's *Ave Maria*
  16. *Ave Maria*
  17. Discussion Questions on *Ave Maria*
  18. Commentary on Luke 1:26-56

- Disc 2
1. Miracle & Mystery
  2. The Incarnation
  3. Luke 1:57-80
  4. Commentary on *The Benedictus*
  5. Intro to *O Come, Emmanuel* vs. 5-7
  6. *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* vs 1-4
  7. Reflections on *O Come, Emmanuel*
  8. Luke 2:1-7 and *Night of Silence/Silent Night*
  9. Reflection on *Night of Silence/Silent Night*
  10. Luke 2:8-20
  11. Commentary on Luke 2 Part 1
  12. Commentary on Luke 2 Part 2
  13. Meditation on Luke 2:8-20
  14. *Angels We Have Heard on High*
  15. Reflection on *Angels We Have Heard on High*
  16. Additional Commentary on *The Christmas Story*
  17. Introduction to Luke 2:21-52
  18. Luke 2:21-52
  19. Commentary on *Ritual*
  20. Reflection on *Jesus' Adolescence*

## **LUKE LIVE! —*The Gospel of Luke in Word and Song* CD VOLUME 1**

A guide for Christians interested in cultivating dialogue about Faith and Values with people of different faiths and philosophies using the Gospel of Luke as a springboard.

### **CD VOLUME 1: TRACK ONE: WELCOME / Introduction**

Welcome to this opportunity to enjoy, explore and share the Gospel of Luke more fully. My name is Fr. James DiLuzio, I am a member of the Paulist Fathers, a religious community of Catholic priests, founded in the United States, dedicated to advance the conversation of the Christian faith with American culture and with an ecumenical and multi-faith sensitivity. This recording is a documentation of my Paulist missionary work as I have proclaimed the Gospel of Luke from memory in parishes throughout the United States for the past 10 years. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO READ THE TEXT OF THIS AUDIO RECORDING AS YOU LISTEN, YOU'LL FIND IT ON THE [LukeLive.com](http://LukeLive.com) website under the heading CD TEXT

My presentation is fairly simple: you will hear a segment of the Gospel of Luke, followed by a combination of either questions for discussion, educational tools or some meditations of my own that feature

commentaries inspired by Catholic, Ecumenical Protestant, Jewish and secular scholars. I offer these because, more than ever, our families and extended families comprise members of different denominations and faiths. And, of course, there are those among us who have adopted a variety of spiritual sensibilities and/or prefer more specifically secular or scientific approaches to life. An openness to other perspectives (while still appreciating our own) is essential to maintaining integrity and intimacy in all our relationships. This includes our relationship with our own faith communities and our relationship with God. After all, quality in relationship is meant to be a hallmark of all faiths and philosophies, especially those that embrace THE GOLDEN RULE: treat others as you would like to be treated.<sup>1</sup> What's more, the challenges of dialogue with others beyond our family and faith traditions have become more complex. People are now articulating "The Platinum Rule," i.e., treat

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<sup>1</sup> See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden\\_Rule](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Rule) And <http://www.religioustolerance.org/reciproc2.htm>  
A great reference for all multi-faith dialogue: <http://www.religioustolerance.org/>  
Another is: <http://paulist.org/unity/> and an excellent collection of Multi-Faith stories found in Aaron Zevah, THE SOUL'S ALMANAC (New York, NY: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam/Penugin Putnam, Inc. 1998).

others in the ways they would like to be treated. In other words, “ASK FIRST” what gestures and actions another would appreciate BEFORE we interact with them. Inquire and be willing to learn and understand what they consider the best ways to approach a sensitive topic would be before we invite them to a discussion of faith and values.<sup>2</sup>

As we develop greater understanding of other faith’s distinctiveness, we cultivate humility in ourselves and deepen our humanity through active listening, learning and reflection. Ironically, understanding differences makes it easier for us to highlight commonalities among faiths and within cultures. Of all the Christian Scriptures, the Gospel of Luke offers innumerable opportunities to expand upon humility and sense of service--universal values that bring us greater clarity as to who we are and how we want to lead our lives.<sup>3</sup>

Now, to facilitate open dialogue, *Luke Live!* will offer tools to help you identify “common ground” -- an essential overture to any discussion

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<sup>2</sup> An almost exhaustive discussion of the Golden Rule and problems with it can be found at [https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Golden\\_Rule#/Responses\\_to\\_criticisms](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Golden_Rule#/Responses_to_criticisms)

<sup>3</sup> See Luke 22: 26 (Jesus) said to them, “let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant” and Matthew 20: “the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve.”

about faith and values in mixed company. I will help you establish what I call “the points of intersection” where beliefs and concepts of differing faiths and philosophies agree. Identifying these “points of intersection” will free you to speak about religion and ethics in all kinds of situations more congenially, comfortably and without rancor.

With the same ecumenical and multi-faith spirit goal in mind, this program includes songs, both sacred and secular that I perform, to help you identify and savor universal experiences and ideas—thoughts and feelings evoked by Luke’s Gospel and other scripture passages. Oftentimes people have similar spiritual and/or emotional experiences, but because their points of reference and religious vocabulary differ, they find themselves feeling distanced from others rather than connected on a deeply human level. MUSIC, however, is the universal language. It can help us make vital connections between thought, feeling and experience that all people share. I hope my performance will help you savor feelings evoked by the bible passages and empower you to share your feelings more readily with others. At the very least, they can help you clarify your

feelings for yourself—feelings related to your life, to God and to the ways you understand God.

## **CD VOLUME 1: TRACK TWO: THE IMPORTANCE OF MUSIC**

Now you probably may already know that ancient Jewish and early Christian prayer gatherings included hymns and inspired songs. These are evidenced in the Books of Psalms and many citations in the biblical Literature such as in the books of Wisdom and in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16.<sup>4</sup> Truly, music evokes feelings more readily than words and it enables us to savor a moment, to be present to it, to literally live in the moments of thought and feeling. Many believers associate these moments as experiences of God. For that reason, I will be sharing a variety of sacred and secular songs with you. Before I do, I'd like you to get in touch with some of your significant musical experiences. This will help you bring aspects of your own life story into conversation with the

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<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 5:19: “<sup>19</sup>addressing one another [in] psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts.” Colossians 3:16 “<sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

Gospel. You will find a Print-Out version of the following Meditation on the LukeLive.com website under the heading CD Text.

1. Name at least one hymn, spiritual or secular song (folk / pop / classical or aria) that is important to you and / or that you recall more readily than others. Explore the spiritual dimensions the song evokes, if any. By “spiritual dimensions,” I mean feelings of hope, comfort, condolence, empathy, vindication, triumph, regret, joy or sadness—essentially, any strong human emotion that helps you identify and name a significant aspect of you in the present or in your past.
2. Share those thoughts, feelings and / or ideas the song or hymn evokes within you. This is a great way for you to get to know one another in your group and become more comfortable with faith sharing.
3. What associations do you make with the song? Here are some examples of the kind of associations I invite you to identify:
  - a. Family and friends gathered around a piano or singing and playing musical instruments;



- b. Times spent at home listening to recordings; Important “private time;”
- c. Watching a musical variety show on television or in a concert hall with or without others;
- d. Your experience of singing in a choir or as part of a worshiping assembly;
- e. Your experience of performing in public; couples dancing (private or public event) or as a member of a dance troupe.
- f. An event in your life or one that is tied to the life or death of someone close to you.
- g. A song that reminds you of any relationship you’ve had or reminds you of a particular person or group.

4. Now Describe the experience more fully by answering these two questions:

- a. What do you remember feeling at that time you first encountered the song or at any important time you heard

it? Were you feeling peaceful, un-nerved, inspired, tearful or something else?

b. How do you relate to that song or hymn in the here and now?

After each song featured on these CDs, you may wish to pause and identify your feelings and corresponding thoughts. You may then discuss together how the song helps you relate to the passage or not.

Furthermore (if you decide to pause for this exercise), feel free to name a song you know that may add to enhance the reflection on the biblical passage. If you have downloaded these tracks on to your computer or MP3 player, add or substitute your preferred songs for mine. Or you could honor your insights and feelings by playing and/or singing your song before going on to the next track.

## **DISCUSSION ON MUSIC IN YOUR LIFE PRINT OUT**

1. Name at least one hymn, spiritual or secular song (folk / pop / classical or aria) that is important to you and / or that you recall more readily than others. Explore the spiritual dimensions the song evokes, if any. By “spiritual dimensions,” I mean feelings of hope, comfort, condolence, empathy, vindication, triumph, regret, joy or sadness—essentially, any strong human emotion that helps you identify and name a significant aspect of you in the present or in your past.
2. Share those thoughts, feelings and / or ideas the song or hymn evokes within you. This is a great way for you to get to know one another in your group and become more comfortable with faith sharing.
3. What associations do you make with the song? Here are some examples of the kind of associations I invite you to identify:
4. Family and friends gathered around a piano or singing and playing musical instruments;
  - a. Times spent at home listening to recordings; Important “private time;”
  - b. Watching a musical variety show on television or in a concert hall with or without others;
  - c. Your experience of singing in a choir or as part of a worshipping assembly;
  - d. Your experience of performing in public; couples dancing (private or public event) or as a member of a dance troupe.
  - e. An event in your life or one that is tied to the life or death of someone close to you.
  - f. A song that reminds you of any relationship you’ve had or reminds you of a particular person or group.
4. Now Describe the experience more fully by answering these two questions:
  - a. What do you remember feeling at that time you first encountered the song or at any important time you heard it?
  - b. Were you feeling peaceful, un-nerved, inspired, tearful or something else? How do you relate to that song or hymn in the here and now?

## CD VOLUME 1: TRACK THREE: Intro to SIMPLE SONG

For my first song meditation, I chose Leonard Bernstein's SIMPLE SONG because so much in Luke's portrait of Jesus invites us to live simply. By highlighting Jesus' humility, Luke reminds us that the more we are in touch with our common humanity, the more we may experience God. Moreover, by emphasizing 'simplicity," the song insists on God's immanence—i.e. how near God is to us, especially when we remove the illusions and common distractions of daily life. "Simple" also connotes God's pure, profound nature.

As I will note repeatedly throughout this recording, one essence of Christianity is the belief that God comes down to earth to be one with us in and through the humanity of Jesus which in turn, unites us to God. When we, too, "come down to earth," and embrace a world view that all of us are brothers and sisters, grace abounds. Music is the universal language that invites us to this kind of solidarity, and hopefully, so do the Gospels, especially when we dialogue the Gospels with other religious traditions and philosophies, working together to explore those points of

intersection—where we find the SAME TRUTHS articulated in one another's faiths, traditions and philosophies and enjoy exploring them together. Ultimately, this is what LUKE LIVE is about. I do hope and trust you will find this experience worthwhile.

After listening to SIMPLE SONG, you may wish to pause and share the feelings and thoughts it evokes in you, or continue to the next track containing Luke's Gospel Chapter 1. Do your best to try and register whatever feelings come upon you as you listen. This will help you engage in the faith sharing tools that will follow. Here now is SIMPLE SONG from Leonard Bernstein's MASS with music by Leonard Bernstein and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz.

#### **CD VOLUME 1: TRACK FOUR: SIMPLE SONG**

Sing God a simple song, Lauda Laude  
Make it up as you go along, Lauda Laude  
Sing like you like to sing; God loves all simple things.  
For God is the simplest of all.  
For God is the simplest of all.

I will sing the Lord a new song, to praise him, to bless him, to bless the Lord.  
I will sing his praises while I live all of my days.  
Blessed is the man who loves the Lord.  
Blessed is the man who praises Him.

Lauda, Lauda, Laude  
And walks in His ways.

I will lift up my eyes to the hills from whence comes my help.  
I will lift up my voice to the Lord  
Singing Lauda Laude

For the Lord is my shade. Is the shade upon my right hand  
And the sun shall not smite me by day  
Nor the moon by night  
Blessed is the man who loves the Lord  
Lauda, Lauda, Laude  
And Walks in His Ways.

Lauda, Lauda, Laude--all of my days. <sup>5</sup>

## CD VOLUME 1: TRACK FIVE: GOSPEL OF LUKE CHAPTER 1: 1-25

**The Gospel According to Luke Chapter 1: 1-25**      **Time: 4:22**

1 Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, 3 I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent

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5 **Simple Song** Music by Leonard Bernstein with Lyrics by Leonard Bernstein & Stephen Schwartz © 1971 Bernstein/& Schwarz; Boosey & Hawkes Publishers

Theophilus, 4 so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received.

5 In the days of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah of the priestly division of Abijah; his wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 Both were righteous in the eyes of God, observing all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren and both were advanced in years. 8 Once when he was serving as priest in his division's turn before God, 9 according to the practice of the priestly service, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to burn incense. 10 Then, when the whole assembly of the people was praying outside at the hour of the incense offering, 11 the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense. 12 Zechariah was troubled by what he saw, and fear came upon him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has

been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of [the] Lord. He will drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the holy Spirit even from his mother's womb, 16 and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of fathers toward children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people fit for the Lord." 18 Then Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." 19 And the angel said to him in reply, "I am Gabriel, who stand before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news. 20 But now you will be speechless and unable to talk until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time."



21 Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and were amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. 22 But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was gesturing to them but remained mute. 23 Then, when his days of ministry were completed, he went home .24 After this time his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she went into seclusion for five months, saying, 25 “So has the Lord done for me at a time when he has seen fit to take away my disgrace before others.” <sup>6</sup>

### **CD VOLUME 1: TRACK SIX: TOOLS FOR DIALOGUE (How to Respond to the Gospel in a multi-faith setting)**

After each Gospel segment (like the one you just heard) I invite you to engage in an exercise I’ve created that will help you gauge the impact of

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<sup>6</sup> Note: This and all subsequent biblical texts are taken from the New American Bible with Revised New Testament © 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, DC. And are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

For New American Bible FOOTNOTES for this section of Luke’s Gospel go to:

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/luke/1>

the scripture on your heart and mind. These tools will foster self-understanding and promote respectful DIALOGUE with others, offering you insights about faith and values that the scriptures elicit. Moreover, the exercises will empower you to apply your conversations with the scriptures to your life, life choices and daily activities. The Exercise can be found in written form on the website. Feel free to print out copies for your group.

1. Observe a moment of Silence. Collect your feeling responses to the passage. For example, you may feel peaceful, sad, intrigued or uneasy. If you need help identifying your feelings, CONSULT the FEELING CHARTS AVAILABLE ON THE WEBSITE.  
(See pages 21-23 ) Place no judgment on your feelings. Simply let yourself “be.”
2. Have each participant in your group share one or more genuine FEELING WORDS. (NO insights or

discussion at this juncture.)<sup>7</sup> Afterwards—after each person has shared a feeling word or two-- observe another moment of silence.

3. What aspects of your own life do you associate with the biblical story and the feelings that it evoked? After you clarify that for yourself, invite each person in your group to share his / her associations.

4. After you share your associations, you are now ready to ask “What does this scripture passage mean to you?” OR “What do you think it is supposed to mean, if anything?”

5. What insights or questions about the passage have not yet been addressed? Invite everyone to offer

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<sup>7</sup> To gauge whether you are claiming a “feeling” in opposed to “a thought,” place your word or words in the phrase “I think” instead of “I feel.” If your word make sense in this context, it is not a genuine “feeling” word. For example, your initial response to a passage may be “I feel this is nonsense.” You actually are making a judgment, not expressing a feeling because your word (“nonsense”) makes more sense in the phrase “I think this is nonsense.” The appropriate “feeling” words in this instance could be “uncomfortable,” “alienated,” “put off.” In that case, try to translate the religious language or context of the scripture in secular terms or find a secular equivalent and share that with your group. For example, “Miracles” becomes “Unexplainable coincidences.” Then share how you feel about “unexplainable coincidences” with words such as “grateful,” “puzzled,” “dismayed,” etc.

their thoughts or questions. (NOTE: Some questions may be answered in my Commentary Segments, i.e. Track Seven. If not, assign a group member to consult footnotes in his /her bible, other Commentaries and websites. You will find a Bibliography in the Appendix on the website.)

6. What stories or events in other faith traditions, literature or world events are similar or in contrast to this segment of Luke's Gospel?

Discuss. Conclude by emphasizing the similarities.

7. Is there something from the passage or the discussion you can incorporate into your daily life right now? Has the passage inspired a new or renewed goal? OR do you need to continue to think, pray and process all that you've heard and the feelings evoked? Each person should follow up as needed.

## TOOLS FOR DIALOGUE PRINTOUT (page 1 of 2)

1. Observe a moment of Silence. Collect your feeling responses to the passage. For example, you may feel peaceful, sad, intrigued or uneasy. If you need help identifying your feelings, CONSULT the FEELING CHARTS AVAILABLE ON THE WEBSITE. (See pages 17 -19) Place no judgment on your feelings. Simply let yourself “be.”

2. Have each participant in your group share one or more genuine FEELING WORDS. (NO insights or discussion at this juncture.)<sup>8</sup> Afterwards—after each person has shared a feeling word or two--observe another moment of silence.

3. What aspects of your own life do you associate with the biblical story and the feelings that it evoked? After you clarify that for yourself, invite each person in your group to share his / her associations.

4. After you share your associations, you are now ready to ask “What does this scripture passage mean to you?” OR “What do you think it is supposed to mean, if anything?”

5. What insights or questions about the passage have not yet been addressed? Invite everyone to offer their thoughts or questions. (NOTE: Some questions may be answered in my Commentary Segments, i.e. Track Seven. If not, assign a group member to consult footnotes in his /her bible, other Commentaries and websites. You will find a Bibliography in the Appendix on the website.)

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<sup>8</sup> To gauge whether you are claiming a “feeling” in opposed to “a thought,” place your word or words in the phrase “I think” instead of “I feel.” If your word make sense in this context, it is not a genuine “feeling” word. For example, your initial response to a passage may be “I feel this is nonsense.” You actually are making a judgment, not expressing a feeling because your word (“nonsense”) makes more sense in the phrase “I think this is nonsense.” The appropriate “feeling” words in this instance could be “uncomfortable,” “alienated,” “put off.” In that case, try to translate the religious language or context of the scripture in secular terms or find a secular equivalent and share that with your group. For example, “Miracles” becomes “Unexplainable coincidences.” Then share how you feel about “unexplainable coincidences” with words such as “grateful,” “puzzled,” “dismayed,” etc.

## **TOOLS FOR DIALOGUE PRINTOUT (page 2 of 2)**

6. What stories or events in other faith traditions, literature or world events are similar or in contrast to this segment of Luke's Gospel? Discuss. Conclude by emphasizing the similarities.

7. Is there something from the passage or the discussion you can incorporate into your daily life right now? Has the passage inspired a new or renewed goal? OR do you need to continue to think, pray and process all that you've heard and the feelings evoked? Each person should follow up as needed.



Intensity of Feelings	HAPPY	SAD	ANGRY	AFRAID	ASHAMED
HIGH	Elated Excited Overjoyed Thrilled Exuberant Ecstatic Fired up Passionate	Depressed Agonized Alone Hurt Dejected Hopeless Sorrowful Miserable	Furious Enraged Outraged Boiling Irate Seething Loathsome Betrayed	Terrified Horried Scared stiff Petrified Fearful Panicky Frantic Shocked	Sorrowful Remorseful Defamed Worthless Disgraced Dishonored Mortified Admonished
MEDIUM	Cheerful Gratified Good Relieved Satisfied Glowing	Heartbroken Somber Lost Distressed Let down Melancholy	Upset Mad Defended Frustrated Agitated Disgusted	Apprehensive Frightened Threatened Insecure Uneasy Intimidated	Apologetic Unworthy Sneaky Guilty Embarrassed Secretive
LOW	Glad Contented Pleasant Tender Pleased Mellow	Unhappy Moody Blue Upset Disappointed Dissatisfied	Perturbed Annoyed Uptight Resistant Irritated Touchy	Cautious Nervous Worried Timid Unsure Anxious	Bashful Ridiculous Regretful Uncomfortable Pitied Silly

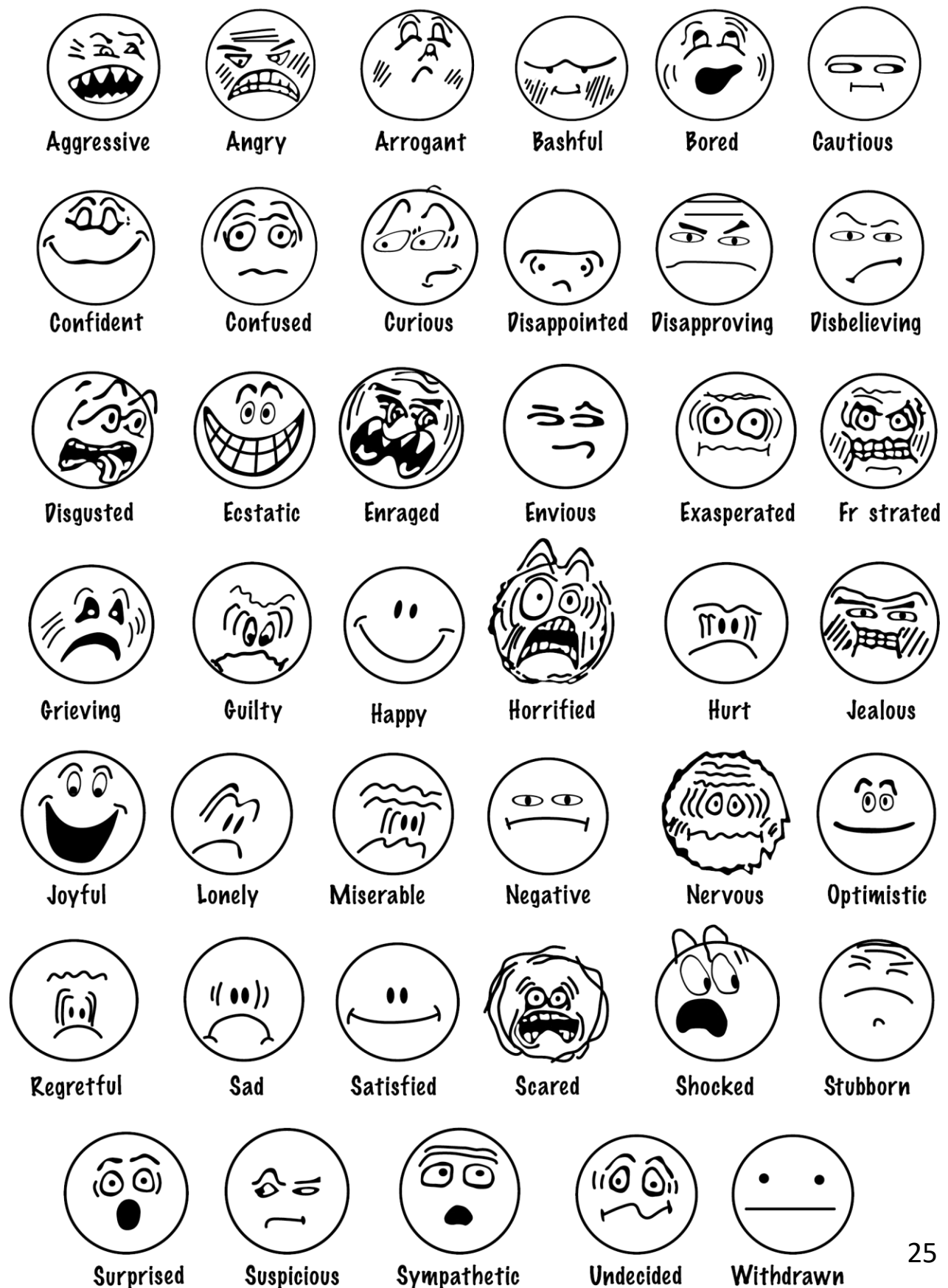
The five core emotions run left to right across the top of the table. Manifestations of each emotion based upon the intensity felt are described down each of the columns in the table.

## FEELINGS WORD GUIDE

SAD	HAPPY	HURT	HELPED	INSECURE	CONFIDENT	TIRED	ENERGIZED
Depressed	Hopeful	Abused	Cherished	Weak	Strong	Indifferent	Determined
Lonely	Supported	Forgotten	Befriended	Hopeless	Brave	Bored	Inspired
Disgusted	Charmed	Ignored	Appreciated	Doubtful	Certain	Drained	Creative
Angry	Grateful	Judged	Understood	Scared	Assured	Sick	Healthy
Frustrated	Calm	Offended	Commended	Anxious	Prepared	Exhausted	Renewed
Annoyed	Amused	Victimized	Empowered	Defeated	Successful	Dull	Vibrant
Discouraged	Optimistic	Rejected	Accepted	Worthless	Valuable	Weary	Alert
Upset	Content	Cursed	Blessed	Guilty	Forgiven	Paralyzed	Enlivened
Despairing	Joyful	Destroyed	Healed	Ugly	Beautiful	Powerless	Strengthened
Uninterested	Enthusiastic	Hated	Loved	Pressured	At ease	Dejected	Motivated
Disappointed	Thrilled	Despised	Esteemed	Forced	Encouraged	Listless	Focused
Hateful	Loving	Mistreated	Taken care of	Stressed	Peaceful	Burned out	Rejuvenated
Bitter	Kind	Crushed	Reassured	Nervous	Relaxed	Fatigued	Invigorated
Sorrowful	Celebratory	Injured	Made whole	Worried	Secure	Blah	Animated
Mournful	Overjoyed	Tortured	Saved	Embarrassed	Comforted	Stale	Refreshed



# Feelings Vocabulary Chart



## TRACK SEVEN: Commentary on Luke 1: 1

I am going to begin my commentary by repeating the important first sentence of Luke's Gospel. Here it is:

"Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning, and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received."

Notice that the Gospel writer does not identify himself as Luke but he does tell us how and why he came to write this Gospel. His introduction to the story of Jesus provides us with very important information. He has taken the stories about Jesus from both the oral tradition (the "eyewitnesses" he speaks of) and also from written documents (as he wrote "many have undertaken to compile" narratives of Jesus' story). And he was now going to hand his version over to Theophilus.

Scripture scholars tell us Theophilus was likely a person of great education and influence who would have opened his home to the followers of Jesus. These early Christians would gather at Theophilus'

home for Eucharists, prayer, further reflection and discussion about how they believed Jesus fulfilled prophecies found in the Covenant with Israel.<sup>9</sup> Therefore Luke's intended audience was not only Theophilus but a community of second, third and fourth generation Christians comprising Jews who formed the early Christian movement and an increasing number of Gentiles who joined them. In fact, scholars discerned that this Gospel's writer was himself a Gentile, probably a convert through the Christian community in Syrian Antioch who wanted to emphasize the universality of Jesus' message beyond the confines of Judaism. Moreover, Luke is considered the only Gentile contributor to the Bible as we now have it. You may also find it helpful to note that these same communities who heard Luke's Gospel at Theophilus' home to hear Luke's Gospel would

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<sup>9</sup> I want to emphasize the Hebrew word TANAKH in sensitivity to our Jewish friends. What Christians call "The Old Testament" is actually the writings of The First Covenant, i.e. God's covenant with Israel—the descendants of Jacob aka Israel. The Covenant through Jesus for Christians is truly a Second Covenant. The Jews call their books TANAKH and so we respect them by using this title rather than "Old Testament." Contemporary Christians affirm the validity of God's Covenant with Israel grounded in Paul's Letter to the Romans 11: 29 and in the Catholic Ecumenical Council known as Vatican II (1963-65) in the document **NOSTRA AETATE** ("*In Our Time*") See [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html) In truth the people of Christian History have been disrespectful of Judaism and contributed to anti-Semitism and violence against the Jewish people. Yet, Judaism constitutes the very foundation of Jesus and therefore Christianity. In that way our ancestors neglected to observe the Fourth Commandment (Catholics) aka Fifth Commandment (Orthodox Christians and Protestants): Honor your Father and your Mother.

have had access to copies of the letters of Saint Paul that were circulating throughout the early Christian communities for almost thirty years before Luke's Gospel was written.<sup>10</sup>

## **TRACK EIGHT Commentary on Luke 1: 2-25**

NOW THAT you have explored feelings, associations and insights evoked by the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, I would like to further contextualize Luke's writing. Although they represent different time periods— John's conception and birth circa 4 B.C.E. and Luke writing several generations later around 85 C.E., the context is the same: OPPRESSION—oppression of peoples subsumed into the Roman Empire. Although Rome granted religious freedom to the Jewish people, pagans had to transfer their allegiances to the Roman gods and goddesses. Whatever the faith or ethnic group, however, Rome had conquered, crushed people's autonomy and threatened their sense of identity.

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<sup>10</sup> The name Theophilus may also may be translated from the Greek as simply one who is a "friend of God"— either an individual or a group of people—Gentiles who were drawn to the God of Israel but were unwilling to convert due to the requirements of circumcision and all the dietary laws. Jews of the time also called this group of people "God fearers" whom they welcomed into their synagogues. Now most scholars identify Theophilus as an individual but seeing this gospel addressed to a group of people helps us to understand the context in which Luke's Gospel was written.

Moreover, so very few people were granted Roman citizenship.<sup>11</sup> Rome only granted that privilege to wealthy landowners and people of stature. Citizenship to the general male population (forget women and children) was not extended to all free persons (that is non-slave inhabitants of the empire) until 212 C.E. Ironically this occurred during the reign of the notorious and violent Emperor Caracalla.

Not having citizenship, the average person had no recourse for injuries incurred nor had any say over unjust laws. Should people try to address wrongdoing, they risked the local procurators disdain, dismissal, or worse--they received beatings at the hands of the judges' servants. That is, if, in fact, the procurator took the time to hear their complaints at all. Whether Jew or pagan, most were mere plebeians who had to form

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<sup>11</sup> "The Romans first used citizenship as a device to distinguish the residents of the city of Rome from those peoples whose territories Rome had conquered and incorporated. As their empire continued to grow, the Romans granted citizenship to their allies throughout Italy proper and then to peoples in other Roman provinces." Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica. Also: Citizenship was open to "Freeborn adult males" (not to women, slaves, men in occupied territories)—"the systems was weighted so that the votes of richer men carried the most influence." Source: The World of the Romans (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Caracalla's reign was also notable for the [\*Constitutio Antoniniana\*](#) (also called the Edict of Caracalla or the Antonine Constitution), granting [Roman citizenship](#) to all freemen throughout the [Roman Empire](#), which according to historian [Cassius Dio](#), was done for the purposes of raising tax revenue. Source: <http://www.wikiwand.com/en/Caracalla>

their own sense of dignity and worth. Government gave them no support. The Jews, at least, could turn to their religious authorities who were so well established that Rome dared not dissolve them. Nevertheless, Rome certainly treated them with disdain. What's more, many of the Jewish people themselves reserved contempt for their own leaders because of the many ways they cooperated with Rome to keep themselves in power. Indeed, the Gospels reflect much of the disdain Jesus' circle of fellow Jews reserved for the Temple leadership particularly the Council, or "Sanhedrin" that included Elders of the chief families and clans, high priests and scribes who were members of the Pharisees.<sup>12</sup> For all this, it is important for us to recognize the intense oppression that pervaded the daily consciousness of the people.

Now scholars tell us most of the people hearing Luke's Gospel were not Jews but Gentiles—people of Ancient Middle East and European ancestries. Most were poor, and, as noted, oppressed, but many were fascinated with Judaism and its articulation of the One, True God.

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<sup>12</sup> John L. McKenzie, S.J. "Council," *DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc. 1965)

Perhaps these Gentiles were intrigued most by the Jewish peoples' insistence that God desired to free them from their suffering. Imagine the comfort they must have felt to learn that when Jesus began his public ministry he quoted the Jewish prophet ISAIAH: "God had anointed me ... to let the oppressed go free." Zechariah will emphasize this theme in his celebratory prayer at the birth of his son, John the Baptist (Luke 1: 67-79) which we soon will explore. So, you see, the context of oppression is a significant "point of entry" for us as we discuss the Gospel together.

If you would like to pause and discuss this issue, here are some Questions for you and your group. The questions will focus on experiences of oppression. Let me first explore "Oppression" and it's meaning with you.

Explanation: To feel oppressed is to feel "put upon," to be denied a say in what impacts you. It can mean feeling taken for granted in ways that evoke a sense of helplessness and loss of basic human dignity. It can mean living in fear, under the threat of violence, imprisonment or death. One may be oppressed by the economy, social

mores, unjust laws, or oppressed by people in authority—an unreasonable boss, an overbearing teacher or team leader—or even feel oppressed, taken for granted, by family members and friends. Knowing as we do that marriage in today’s Church and in modern societies is understood as a true partnership of equals—male and female, still, how often we hear one spouse say to another, “Why is it we always have to do things YOUR way . . . DEAR?” So now, focus your group on these three questions.

1. What do you imagine it would be like to live in an occupied country, or to live in your own country with lack of citizenship? Explain.
2. In what ways might you feel “oppressed” in your current life situation?”
3. What may be some of the most productive ways you and others can address your feelings of oppression? Some resources such as “Non-Violent Communication Skills” are featured below in the footnote.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/aboutnvc/4partprocess.htm>  
<https://www.cnvc.org/Training/10-steps-peace> <http://www.theccnv.org/>  
<http://www.wikihow.com/Practice-Nonviolent-Communication>



## TRACK NINE: COMMENTARY Luke 1 v 2-25 part 2 CHILDLESSNESS AS OPPRESSION IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Because the Gospel begins with Zechariah and Elizabeth--an elderly couple without children, we need to recognize how childlessness was an oppression all its own in the ancient world, including biblical Judaism. To be childless was to be disgraced and subject to ridicule if not pity. It also was an occasion for fear of loneliness and feelings of abandonment in one's old age. Moreover, there was more than a strong residue of ancient religious sensibilities that to be childless was to have incurred God's punishment for sins or seen as a sign of having lost God's favor. Thankfully, most religions today would not frame childlessness in that moral or judgmental way, but the experience of being judged and ridiculed as they were, is a perennial human experience to which we can relate. Connecting your own experiences of oppression to the characters in Luke's Gospel will help you find more insight and relevance in these opening episodes and throughout the Gospel as a whole. It will also help

you connect more openly and honestly with one another. So, once again,  
I offer you this question:

1. “In what ways might you feel “oppressed” in your current life situation?”

Here are some additional questions for your group:

2. Does naming your personal oppressions enhance or detract from your ability to enter into this part of the Gospel and other stories like it? Please explain.
3. Does naming your personal oppressions enhance or detract from your ability to empathize with other oppressed people?
4. Also explore the topic of Religious Freedom. How important is “religious freedom” to you? What about religious expression? For example, what is your opinion regarding displaying personal, religious symbols in public? And, what feelings are evoked within you as you discuss this topic? It would be best to start with how you “feel,” before you go into the topic.

## 5. To what extent is a person entitled to freedom of religious

expression in the workplace? What is your opinion? What ethical principle grounds your opinion? For example, you could say, “The Golden Rule,” or “The Platinum Rule,” or “The US Bill of Rights.”

Or perhaps you ground your opinion in a political philosophy, or a passage from the Bible, whether it is TANAKH<sup>14</sup> (the formal name for the Jewish Bible) or the Christian Bible, Koran, other religious source, or, perhaps, some combination thereof.

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<sup>14</sup> I want to emphasize the Hebrew word TANAKH in sensitivity to our Jewish friends. What Christians call “The Old Testament” is actually the writings of The First Covenant, i.e. God’s covenant with Israel—the descendants of Jacob aka Israel. The Covenant through Jesus for Christians is truly a Second Covenant. The Jews call their books TANAKH and so we respect them by using this title rather than “Old Testament.” Contemporary Christians affirm the validity of God’s Covenant with Israel grounded in Paul’s Letter to the Romans 11: 29 and in the Catholic Ecumenical Council known as Vatican II (1963-65) in the document **NOSTRA AETATE** (“*In Our Time*”) See [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html) In truth the people of Christian History have been disrespectful of Judaism and contributed to anti-Semitism and violence against the Jewish people. Yet, Judaism constitutes the very foundation of Jesus and therefore Christianity. In that way our ancestors neglected to observe the Fourth Commandment (Catholics) aka Fifth Commandment (Orthodox Christians and Protestants): Honor your Father and your Mother. For more details, see pages 47-49.

## DIALOGUE ON OPPRESSION PRINT OUT

1. “In what ways might you feel “oppressed” in your current life situation?”
2. Does naming your personal oppressions enhance or detract from your ability to enter into this part of the Gospel and other stories like it? Please explain.
3. Does naming your personal oppressions enhance or detract from your ability to empathize with other oppressed people?
4. Also explore the topic of Religious Freedom. How important is “religious freedom” to you? What about religious expression? For example, what is your opinion regarding displaying personal, religious symbols in public? And, what feelings are evoked within you as you discuss this topic? It would be best to start with how you “feel,” before you go into the topic.
5. To what extent is a person entitled to freedom of religious expression in the workplace? What is your opinion? What ethical principle grounds your opinion? For example, you could say, “The Golden Rule,” or “The Platinum Rule,” or “The US Bill of Rights.” Or perhaps you ground your opinion in a political philosophy, or a passage from the Bible, whether it is TANAKH (the formal name for the Jewish Bible) or the Christian Bible, Koran, other religious source, or, perhaps, some combination thereof.

## TRACK TEN: INTRODUCTION TO “O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL”

Now let's take your feelings, experiences and ideas about oppression and bring them front and center. Hold them in your hearts and minds as we pause for a song meditation on the next track. You're about to hear the ancient Christian hymn “O Come, O Come Emmanuel,” verses 1 through 4. For Christians, this song is about hope for the Messiah, an echo of the anticipation held by most Jews in ancient times (and in some branches of traditional Judaism today) that God would designate someone to arrive on the world scene to put an end to oppression, war and human conflict. Christians, believing Jesus is our Messiah, also sing this hymn (and many like it) to convey our longing for Jesus Christ's presence in our daily lives. We believe Jesus and his story confront the all-too human desire to achieve success and comfort for one group at the expense of the basic human needs of others.

Attentive to Christ as both God and Human, Christians gain confidence that Christ will work with us to satisfy the deeper, primordial desires for peace in our hearts and to help us strive toward achievements

that benefit the many, rather than the few. Christ's spirit motivates us to persevere in cultivating peace and equanimity in our homes, communities and our world. Happily, we can find solidarity in embracing these goal with many others – those who follow Judaism, Islam and other world religions.

You will notice that the lyrics of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” allude to the Great Day of Judgment at the end of time. You may know that some branches of Judaism also anticipate a Great Day of Judgment and Reckoning (expressed in biblical books of Daniel, Malachi and others) just as followers of Islam and other religions articulate a belief in a Final Judgment at world's end as well. Ultimately, what is this “Great Day of Judgement” but a vision that the very basic human desire that good will triumph over evil will be fulfilled?

As you listen and / or sing along, try your best to personalize these familiar lyrics. If your faith or tradition make you uncomfortable doing so with this hymn, I invite you, after listening, to share songs from your own experience that explore longing—particularly longings in the context of

delayed fulfillment or songs that address an ultimate, long awaited deliverance from oppression, fear and violence—longings for a time when goodness will triumph over evil and all is set right. Be sure to share as many songs as you can with your group.

### TRACK ELEVEN: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, verses 1 through 4

Music: T. Helmore, 1811-1890 adapted from a 1st Mode Responsory in a 15th cent. French *Processional*; Text: *Veni, Veni Emmanuel*, a para. of Latin 12th-13th cent. "Great O Antiphons" in *Psalterium Cantionum Catholicarum*, 1770; Translators: John Neale, 1818-1866, et al

<i>Original Latin Verse</i>	<i>English Translation</i>
Veni veni, Emmanuel Captivum solve Israel, Qui gemit in exilio, Privatus Dei Filio.	O Come, O come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here Until the Son of God appear.
<i>Refrain:</i> Gaude! Gaude! Emmanuel, Nascetur pro te Israel!	<i>Refrain:</i> Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel!
Veni, O Sapientia, Quae hic disponis omnia, Veni, viam prudentiae Ut doceas et gloriae.	O come, Thou Wisdom, from on high, And cheer us by thy drawing nigh; To us the path of knowledge show, And teach us in her ways to go.
<i>Refrain</i>	<i>Refrain</i>
Veni, veni, Adonai, Qui populo in Sinai Legem dedisti vertice In maiestate gloriae.	O come, o come, Great Lord of might, Who to your tribes on Sinai's height In ancient times didst give the law, In cloud, and majesty, and awe.
<i>Refrain</i>	<i>Refrain</i>

Veni, O lesse virgula, Ex hostis tuos ungula, De spectu tuos tartari Educ et antro barathri.	O come, Thou Root of Jesse's stem, From ev'ry foe deliver them That trust Thy mighty power to save, And give us vict'ry o'er the grave.
<i>Refrain</i>	<i>Refrain</i>

## TRACK TWELVE: Luke's Gospel 1: 26 to 56

*Announcement of the Birth of Jesus.* 26 In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30 Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, 33 and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34 But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" 35 And the angel



said to her in reply, “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 called holy, the Son of God. 36 And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; 37f or nothing will be impossible for God.” 38 Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

*Mary Visits Elizabeth.* 39 During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, 42 cried out in a loud voice and said, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in

my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”

*The Cantic of Mary.* 46 And Mary said:\*

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;

47 my spirit rejoices in God my savior.

48 For he has looked upon his handmaid’s lowliness;

behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.

49 The Mighty One has done great things for me,

and holy is his name.

50 His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him.

51 He has shown might with his arm,

dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.

52 He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones

but lifted up the lowly.

53 The hungry he has filled with good things;

the rich he has sent away empty.

54 He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy,

55 according to his promise to our fathers,

to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

56 Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

### **TRACK THIRTEEN: Magnificat**

Now let’s take a closer look at the words of Mary’s prayer that you have just heard. Tradition identifies this prayer as “The MAGNIFICAT.”

“Magnificat” is a Latin word. Its English equivalent is the word

“magnifies.” The Christian tradition translated Luke’s original Greek into

Latin and from Latin into English with the phrase “My soul magnifies the

Lord.” Scholars who created the New American Bible translation chose

the word “proclaims” in this context. Thus you heard Mary say in this

translation, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.” Other

translators coined these phrases: “My heart praises the Lord” (Good News

translation), “My soul glorifies the Lord” (NIV), “My soul exalts the Lord”

(New English Bible). The Revised Standard Version (RSV) and the New

Revised Standard Versions (NRSV) returned to the more classic English

translation “My soul magnifies the Lord” as do all of the King James versions.

To magnify is to enlarge—i.e., to make God’s greatness more evident. The words “praise” and “proclaim” accomplish the same purpose. The more we praise God, the more opportunity for people to ponder God and God’s greatness. Both Christians and Muslims see Mary’s willingness to conceive and give birth to Jesus as a perfect witness to God’s greatness. Her willingness to trust God in this miraculous conception also emphasizes the importance of surrendering to God’s will. And even though Mary is not part of the Hebrew Scriptures, her cooperation with God, which we call GRACE in this moment, concretizes her Jewish sensibilities inherent in the words of Psalm 79, verse 13: “We, your people, will give thanks to you forever; through all ages we will declare your praise.” Also Psalm 111: 3: “Majestic and glorious is God’s work, God’s righteousness endures forever.” Thus Mary can rightfully say, “from now on will all ages call me blessed,” and “God’s mercy is from age to age.” Remember, Grace has an uncontainable quality that extends

far beyond any one individual or group or place or time. Indeed, many faiths and philosophies uphold that “goodness begets goodness,” “truth strengthens truth,” and that “love knows no boundaries.”

In Mary’s prayer we also find affirmation of the great reversal promised in the Hebrew Scriptures—traditionally called TANAKH: “the poor will be exalted, the exalted humbled.” Most notably there is the Song of Hannah in the book of 1 Samuel 2: which contains phrases such as “My heart exults in the Lord,

my strength is exalted in my God.

Speak boastfully no longer nor let arrogance issue from your mouths.

The well-fed hire themselves out for bread,

while the hungry batten on spoil.

The Lord makes poor and makes rich. He humbles, he also exults.

He raises the needy from the dust;

from the ash heap he lifts up the poor, to seat them with nobles and make a glorious throne their heritage.”

Clearly the Divine Action is to reconcile peoples to their proper state of living: a celebration of our common humanity—everyone standing before God as equals. This is a “great reversal,” indeed, for so much of human history progressed—just as our world continues to progress—at other people’s expense. God’s reversal through prophets and through Jesus insists that we implement checks and balances on progress for everyone’s mutual benefit. Indeed, the biblical vision obliterates the importance of status and heritage because they distract us from the common vision that we are all one. Ultimately, social rankings are illusions. At the end of each and every day, everyone needs air, water, food, clothing shelter, sleep and, yes, toilet facilities. We must not take any aspect of our humanity for granted. The Book of Ecclesiastes puts it this way: “As they came forth from their mother’s womb, so again shall they return, naked as they came, having nothing from their toil to bring with them.” (Ecclesiastes 5:14)

When all social divisions cease, every person is as important as another. This is humanity’s one, unifying vision: Every individual is an

instrument of Providence. Believers are invited to live daily in awe and wonder that we are able to experience life and love because of God and through God. The Catholic liturgy proclaims God as the one “In whom we live and move and have our being.” (This is a direct quote from the Book of Acts 17: 28.) In secular terms, gratitude for life itself breeds humility which, in turn, brings people together.

For additional Scriptural texts and others that echo God’s desire for a great reversal and show how Mary’s words build on her strong Jewish faith, see the Appendixes on the website.

#### **TRACK FOURTEEN “TANAKH”:**

Before I go any further, I would like to clarify for my listeners what I’ve featured in footnotes on the corresponding website. I will be using the Hebrew word **TANAKH** instead of the traditional phrase OLD TESTAMENT when referring to the first half of the Bible because I want to cultivate in us a greater sensitivity to our Jewish friends. TANAKH is an acronym of the first Hebrew letters for each sections of the Jewish Bible: [Torah](#) ("Teaching", also known as the Five Books of Moses), [Nevi'im](#)

("Prophets") and [Ketuvim](#) ("Writings")—hence **TaNaKh**. It comprises the same writings found in what Christians traditionally have called "The Old Testament," a term that suggests the "New Testament" supersedes God's covenant with the Jews, which, of course, it does not. TANAKH represents "The First Covenant," i.e. God's covenant with Israel—the descendants of Jacob whom God named "Israel" (Genesis 32:29). Today, nearly all contemporary Christians affirm the validity of the Covenant with Israel. See Paul's Letter to the Romans 11: 29 which states that in regard to the Covenant with Israel "the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable." You may also wish to consult the Vatican document ***NOSTRA AETATE ("In Our Time")***<sup>15</sup> that was promulgated at the Catholic Ecumenical Council known as Vatican II (1963-65). You will also find many conciliatory statements made by subsequent Popes from Pope Paul to Pope Francis and by many Protestant Churches as well. In truth the people of Christian History have been disrespectful of Judaism

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<sup>15</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html)



and contributed to anti-Semitism and violence against the Jewish people. Yet, Judaism constitutes the very foundation of Jesus and therefore of Christianity. In that way our ancestors neglected to observe the Fourth Commandment (as numbered in the Catholic tradition) aka Fifth Commandment (in the Orthodox Christians and Protestant Traditions): Honor your Father and your Mother.<sup>16</sup> For indeed, Israel is in fact “our father and mother.” Therefore I will use the term TANAKH and also “First Covenant” when referring to the Hebrew Scriptures. Our “New Testament” is best understood then as the “Christian Covenant,” God’s imitation to know God in and through Jesus. Now, let us continue with Luke’s Gospel.

## **TRACK FIFTEEN: INTRODUCTION TO AVE MARIA**

Now I invite you to collect your feelings and thoughts about THE GREAT REVERSAL, AND THE ANNUNCIATION AND VISITATIONS

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<sup>16</sup> For explanation of the variations, see <http://www.10commandmentslist.com/> and also <http://undergod.procon.org/view.resource.php?resourceID=000824> (This listing is not quite accurate but it is worthwhile for it offers comparable commandments from the Koran.) For greater detail, consult [https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Ten\\_Commandments](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Ten_Commandments)

PASSAGES through my song meditation, Schubert's AVE MARIA. The words are Latin but they comprise Luke 1, verses 28 and 42. Verse 28 recalls the Angel Gabriel's greeting to Mary that preceded the Visitation passage you just heard. Gabriel calls out to Mary: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you." The next line of the prayer and lyric echoes Elizabeth's words to Mary: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." For Christians these words are an affirmation of our belief in the "Incarnation," God entering into human history as a human being. We'll explore that further in subsequent tracks. I invite listeners from other faiths to meditate on the ways your religions affirm God's presence in the world through people of good will in all times and places.

The song's second verse addresses Mary as Mother of God, that is, of Jesus. Christians believe Jesus to be both fully God and fully human—the complete manifestation of God to the material world. Both aspects of Jesus are inseparable, therefore Mary is the mother of the ONE who is both God and human. That is followed by a prayer of petition that Mary

will pray for us now and at the hour of our death so that we may be with God for all eternity. These themes also have secular counterparts that can be part of your discussion with relatives and friends who hold other faiths or maintain more secular perspectives.

“Full of grace” is to be blessed, to be congratulated, to be filled with good news, good thoughts--to be caught up in a life-affirming enterprise. Prayer, which comprises the second part of Hail Mary, for example, is an active expressions of HOPE in eternal life. Its secular counterpart is the concept of horizon—a reality that can be seen or envisioned but not fully grasped because, like the horizon itself, it beckons only to recede further into space and time. Recede though it may, the impact of horizon—magnificent sunrises and sunsets--lingers and we are able to grasp some of its energy and inspiration in the here and now. Here then is Schubert’s AVE MARIA. Additional commentary with questions for discussion will follow.

## **TRACK SIXTEEN: Song Meditation: Schubert’s AVE MARIA**

*Latin Catholic prayer version*

*Literal English Translation*

Ave Maria, gratia plena,  
Maria, gratia plena,  
Maria, gratia plena,  
Ave, Ave, Dominus,  
Dominus tecum.  
Benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus,  
Et benedictus fructus ventris (tui),  
Ventris tui, Jesus.  
Ave Maria!

Hail Mary, full of grace,  
Mary, full of grace,  
Mary, full of grace,  
Hail, Hail, the Lord  
The Lord is with thee.  
Blessed art thou among women, and blessed,  
Blessed is the fruit of thy womb,  
Thy womb, Jesus.  
Hail Mary!

Sancta Maria, Mater Dei,  
Ora pro nobis peccatoribus,  
Ora, ora pro nobis;  
Ora, ora pro nobis peccatoribus,  
Nunc et in hora mortis,  
In hora mortis nostrae.  
In hora, hora mortis nostrae,  
In hora mortis nostrae.  
Ave Maria!

Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
Pray for us sinners,  
Pray, pray for us;  
Pray for us sinners,  
Now, and at the hour of our death,  
The hour of our death.  
The hour, the hour of our death,  
The hour of our death.  
Hail Mary!

For more on Schubert's AVE MARIA, see:

[https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Ave Maria \(Schubert\)](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Ave_Maria_(Schubert))

## **TRACK SEVENTEEN: Questions on AVE MARIA      PRINT OUT**

**It is time to pause this CD again and address the following:**

- 1. What feelings are evoked in listening to Schubert's AVE MARIA today?**
- 2. What thoughts and ideas do you associate with the experience of listening to the song--now and at other times in your life?**
- 3. Does the song help you identify with the Annunciation and Visitation events that you just heard from the Gospel of Luke? Why or why not?**
- 4. What other songs, be they sacred or secular, help you savor experiences of fulfillment, of hope giving way to joyful realities?**

Pause and share your answers to these questions now, then proceed to the next track for commentary on these passages and more in-depth questions for discussion.

## **TRACK EIGHTEEN volume ONE Commentary on Luke 1: 26 to 56**

The Annunciation and Visitation segments of Luke's Gospel highlight a number of universal human experiences beyond the specifics of the Incarnation—God as the person of Jesus. Foremost is the announcement of conception—that moment when women share the news that they have a child to bring into the world. Echoing many wonderful moments in the

Jewish scriptures TANAKH<sup>17</sup> (which Christians call the “First Testament”), this moment shared between Mary and Elizabeth known as “The Visitation,” engages listeners in a timeless celebration of life and hope. At the same time, it acknowledges human vulnerability. For amidst the joy there is also trepidation as Elizabeth is pregnant in old age and Mary is pregnant out of wedlock. Because Elizabeth is so advanced in years, she has to “go into seclusion” to care for and nurture her baby in utero. That little phrase “go into seclusion” is a powerful reminder that even though God may answer our prayers, we must do our part to honor the blessings we receive. Mary, too, will have to take responsibility for the gift of a child because of her youth and unwed status. Indeed, both women would have been subject to public scrutiny, judgments and condemnations just as goodness, beauty, even life itself often become objects of ridicule and

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<sup>17</sup> For convenience, I’ll reiterate here what I offered on pages 49-51: TANKAH is an acronym of the first Hebrew letters for each sections of the Jewish Bible: [Torah](#) (“Teaching”, also known as the Five Books of Moses), [Nevi'im](#) (“Prophets”) and [Ketuvim](#) (“Writings”)—hence **TaNaKh**. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanakh>. It comprises the same writings in most of what Christians call “The Old Testament.” Use of TANKAH is more multi-faith sensitive than “Old Testament” as is “First Covenant” and “First Testament.” See footnote 12 on page 67-68.

derision for those rooted in resentments or caught in webs of despair, chains of anxiety, fear or suffering.

Another spiritual message: God enters into human history. These Gospel events and many like them affirm that human life has a purpose beyond mere survival. God enters into history by endowing each and every individual with the gift of free will: the awesome capability to discern good and to choose good over evil, life over death. The stories of Jesus and his disciples, beginning with Mary, Elizabeth and Zechariah—and all stories like them—offer the blessed assurance that God is with us “from age to age,” accompanying us, supporting us on our earthly journey so that we may cooperate with grace, to choose every possible manifestation of life and what is life-giving. A secular parallel to these events and themes includes the many ways the stories of our ancestors (i.e., ancestors from our individual family trees and from our larger ethnic and national collectives) can inspire us toward the good in the here and now. Indeed, history itself offers us innumerable opportunities to keep learning from the past—correcting its mistakes and fostering its virtues

for the good of all. Believers call this “Grace;” secularists might simply call it “the nobility inherent in every man, woman and child.”

HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. A. Explore the myriad of thoughts and feelings women in your group experienced when they first knew or learned they have conceived?

Invite them to relate these to the thoughts and feelings Mary and Elizabeth expressed in the Gospel.

B. Ask women and men who have not had children, their emotional responses to other people’s pregnancies, particularly those of their siblings or close friends or the conceptions of a favored niece, nephew or Godchild.

2. Refer to birth announcements in the Jewish Bible called **TANAHK** and in the Koran and other faith traditions as well. You will find some helpful Jewish Bible references in the APPENDIX section of the website LABELED “HOPE MANIFESTED IN AND THROUGH CHILDREN.” Now ask yourself, “How do these add to your discussion of your experiences of pregnancy and sharing the “Good News?”



3. Can you embrace the concept that whenever two people share the news of a pregnancy with joy (or GOOD NEWS of any kind), they are caught up in the same spiritual and emotional realities of the Annunciation and Visitation and other faith events? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever made a conscious connection with your own experiences and the biblical ones? If you have, what has that experience been like? In doing so now enliven your faith? If you are a secularist, how might these and other birth stories affirm your own humanity?
5. Explore sharing “Good News” of any kind with significant people in your life. Include such “Annunciation and Visitation Moments” as opening your first college acceptance letter, or Marriage Proposal, Engagement Announcement, job promotions or the beginning of any new enterprise. I am sure you will discover a lot of common ground here as the parallels are endless.

Now here’s my rationale for these questions: Moments of “GOOD NEWS” have a universal, mystical quality about them as if we are

“suspended outside of time and place.” When, as people of faith, we allow ourselves to be caught up in these moments, we believe we are experiencing God. This is one of our many opportunities to see Scriptures as our autobiographies. We will explore this idea further in subsequent tracks and in the APPENDIX. For those more skeptical about owning moments as “experiences of God,” how might you describe these kind of events and experiences of sharing “Good News?”

## Track 18 QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

## PRINT OUT

1. A. Explore the myriad of thoughts and feelings women in your group experienced when they first knew or learned they have conceived? Invite them to relate these to the thoughts and feelings Mary and Elizabeth expressed in the Gospel.  
  
B. Ask women and men who have not had children, their emotional responses to other people's pregnancies, particularly those of their siblings or close friends or the conceptions of a favored niece, nephew or Godchild.
2. Refer to birth announcements in the Jewish Bible called **TANAKH**<sup>18</sup> and in the Koran and other faith traditions as well. You will find some helpful Jewish Bible references in the APPENDIX section of the website LABELED "HOPE MANIFESTED IN AND THROUGH CHILDREN." Now ask yourself, "How do these add to your discussion of your experiences of pregnancy and sharing the "Good News?"

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<sup>18</sup> For convenience, I'll reiterate here what I offered on pages 49-51: TANKAH is an acronym of the first Hebrew letters for each sections of the Jewish Bible: [Torah](#) ("Teaching", also known as the Five Books of Moses), [Nevi'im](#) ("Prophets") and [Ketuvim](#) ("Writings")—hence **TaNaKh**. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanakh> It comprises the same writings in most of what Christians call "The Old Testament." Use of TANKAH is more multi-faith sensitive than "Old Testament" as is "First Covenant" and "First Testament." "The New Testament" is best referred to as "The Christian Testament."

3. Can you embrace the concept that whenever two people share the news of a pregnancy with joy (or GOOD NEWS of any kind), they are caught up in the same spiritual and emotional realities of the Annunciation and Visitation and other faith events? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever made a conscious connection with your own experiences and the biblical ones? If you have, what has that experience been like? In doing so now enliven your faith? If you are a secularist, how might these and other birth stories affirm your own humanity?
5. Explore sharing “Good News” of any kind with significant people in your life. Include such “Annunciation and Visitation Moments” as opening your first college acceptance letter, or Marriage Proposal, Engagement Announcement, job promotions or the beginning of any new enterprise. I am sure you will discover a lot of common ground here as the parallels are endless.

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## **LUKE LIVE! — *The Gospel of Luke in Word and Song* CD VOLUME 2**

A guide for Christians interested in cultivating dialogue about Faith and Values especially with people of different faiths and philosophies using the Gospel of Luke as springboard

### **CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK ONE: MIRACLES & MYSTERY**

We now return to the Annunciation and Visitation episodes which echo many miraculous events depicted throughout the bible. So let's explore the concept of MIRACLE. To believers, I pose these two important questions:

1. To what extent do you trust that God remains vitally active in the world?
2. Is your faith, no matter our religion, based solely on creeds, dogmas and precepts? OR is it open to the infinite, boundless, unfathomable dimensions of the power and grandeur of God?

Agnostics and Atheists might ask themselves these two questions:

1. Do you process news or information of unexplainable, unimaginable, unfathomable events as matters of intrigue worthy of your consideration and /or study? Why or why not?

2. To what extent are you open to new realms of discovery, to possibilities beyond contemporary human knowledge?

Close your discussion with this question remains for everyone: How comfortable are you with “Mystery?” Pause this CD and entertain these questions now. (As always, the questions are printed on the website for your convenience)

### **PRINT VERSION of QUESTIONS for CD VOLUME 2: TRACKS TWO**

1. To what extent do we trust that God remains vitally active in the world?
2. Is our faith, no matter our religion, based solely on creeds, dogmas and precepts or is it open to the infinite, boundless, unfathomable dimensions of the power and grandeur of God?
3. Do you process news or information of unexplainable, unimaginable, unfathomable events as matters of intrigue worthy of your consideration and /or study?
4. Are you open to new realms of discover, to possibilities beyond contemporary human knowledge?

### **CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK TWO: INCARNATION**

Hopefully your discussion brought you to explore one of Christianity’s most essential MIRACLES: the INCARNATION –that GOD humbled himself in, through and AS Jesus of Nazareth so that people could experience God fully in human terms. This Christian belief brings us

into the realm of controversy as people who follow other religions or none at all find this a very difficult concept to understand and many feel compelled to refute it, and even condemn it. In fairness, the Incarnation does seem on the surface to go against the Jewish and Islamic belief in monotheism—that there is only One, Supreme God. However, Christians understand the Incarnation as one aspect of the Holy Trinity whose unity is so perfect and beyond complete human comprehension that it upholds belief in One Supreme God, the same Supreme Being honored, worshiped and served by Jews and Muslims throughout the ages.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, that One God is comprised of a Trinity of Persons while still remaining as ONE, is a unique and distinctively Christian belief. We Christians must humbly acknowledge and respect the dictates of other religion and the primacy of God-given free-will and the importance of people’s life experiences. Still, there can be some “point of Intersection” regarding a reality CLOSELY RELATED to the Christian belief in the Incarnation, and that is the concept

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<sup>19</sup> To explore Catholic Christianity’s expressions and explanations of the Trinity, see <http://ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/catechism/index.html> pp. 54 ff

that God can and does accomplish God's will, and can be present to the world, in and through people.

Let's take some time now to identify these and other points of agreement. Share how and why you may agree or disagree with the statements that follow. Invite those who cannot agree on a given point, to listen and try to understand those who do. Be careful to emphasize that understanding DOES NOT IMPLY AGREEMENT. And, please, make every effort not to debate which statements may be more or less right or more logical than others. The goal of discussing each statement is to reach the point of each person able to say, "I understand what you are saying, and now that I have a better understanding I can agree or disagree with the statement with greater insight." Also respect that a person's faith may make them uncomfortable discussing a particular point, so be sure that everyone in your group feels at ease abstaining at any point in your conversation. And now, share whether or not you can agree with the following statements (which are also available in Print-Out form on the website):



1. God remains active in human history –now and in the future. (Non-believers may refer to “Destiny,” or “Fate,” or “Higher Power’s activity” or choose to abstain.)
2. God can and does accomplish God’s will, and can be present to the world, in and through people.
3. Although our religions teach us a great deal about God and how we may understand God, we can never fully, completely understand God on human terms.
4. In ways parallel to the Mystery of God, “Science” and “Evolution” continue to pose unanswered questions and require a kind of “faith,” that some answers will be revealed only in time and some, not at all.
5. The Theory of Evolution expresses a dynamic found in many faiths—that the world is in an ongoing process of “becoming,” i.e., life-giving, dying, rising, renewing. Compare this statement with this definition of “Providence” from the Catholic Catechism: Providence is “the dispositions by which God guides His Creation” in a “state of journeying toward perfection.”<sup>20</sup> After you compare these two statements, bring in statements from other faith’s texts that may support or refute this concept.
6. Every religion expresses God’s kinship with humanity in different ways. Most reveal a profound intimacy available to us through prayer, meditation with and/ or without sacred texts, and personal experiences alone and with others.
7. Christian belief in the Incarnation also invites consideration regarding the belief in a “divine spark” of the “human soul” in every human

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<sup>20</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church (Multiple Publishers, including New York: Doubleday, 1994, revised 2003)

being. Many believe as Christians do that this is an immortal soul, infused in every human being at the moment of our conception.

**Consider and discuss these passages from the Bible and other Spiritual Books:**

God created humankind in his image;  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female God created them.

Genesis 1: 27

Let a man always consider himself as if the Holy One dwells within him.

Judaism. Talmud, Ta'anit 11b

Just as God dwells in the innermost precincts [of the Temple], so also the soul dwells in the innermost part of the body.

Judaism. Talmud, Berakot 10a

I have breathed into man My spirit.

Islam. Qur'an 15.29

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?... For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are.

Christian Bible: The First Letter of Paul  
to the Corinthians 3.16-17

The shining Self dwells hidden in the heart.  
Everything in the cosmos, great and small,  
Lives in the Self. He is the source of life,  
Truth beyond the transience of this world.  
He is the goal of life. Attain this goal!

Hinduism. Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.1-2

You'll find additional passages and references for many religious texts on the website: <http://www.unification.net/ws/theme020.htm>

For those who wish to explore the specific details of the Christian belief in the Incarnation for clarification purposes, see the Appendix on the website titled "INCARNATION." We will resume with Luke's Gospel on the next track.

### **CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK THREE: LUKE 1: 57-80**

*The Birth of John.* 57 When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child she gave birth to a son.<sup>58</sup> Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her. 59 When they came on the eighth day to circumcise the child, they were going to call him Zechariah after his father,<sup>60</sup> but his mother said in reply, "No. He will be called John." 61 But they answered her, "There is no one among your relatives who has this name."<sup>62</sup> So they made signs, asking his father what he wished him to be called.<sup>63</sup> He asked for a tablet and wrote, "John is his name," and all were amazed.<sup>64</sup> Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God. 65 Then fear came upon all their neighbors, and all these matters were discussed throughout the hill country of Judea. 66 All who heard

these things took them to heart, saying, “What, then, will this child be?” For surely the hand of the Lord was with him.

*The Canticle of Zechariah.*<sup>67</sup> Then Zechariah his father, filled with the holy Spirit, prophesied, saying:

68 “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,  
for he has visited and brought redemption to his people.

69 He has raised up a horn for our salvation  
within the house of David his servant,

70 even as he promised through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old:

71 salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us,

72 to show mercy to our fathers

and to be mindful of his holy covenant

73 and of the oath he swore to Abraham our father,

and to grant us that,

74 rescued from the hand of enemies,

without fear we might worship him

75 in holiness and righteousness

before him all our days.

76 And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High,

for you will go before the Lord--to prepare his ways,

77 to give his people knowledge of salvation

through the forgiveness of their sins,

78 because of the tender mercy of our God

by which the daybreak from on high will visit us

79 to shine on those who sit in darkness and death's shadow,

to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

80 The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the desert until

the day of his manifestation to Israel.

#### **CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK FOUR: COMMENTARY and QUESTION ON ZECHARIAH'S CANTICLE “BENEDICITS”**

I remind you now, after hearing this and all other segments of Luke's Gospel, to pause for a moment of silence and apply the tools I offered you on CD Volume ONE (Tools that may be printed out). Whether you choose to do that or not, what follows is my Commentary on Luke 1: vs. 57-58.

I am often asked why Luke was inspired to include the story of Zechariah, Elizabeth and John the Baptist's birth in relating Jesus's story to his primarily Gentile audience. Luke had to make evident to them that Jesus were rooted in Judaism which alone, among all other religions at

that time, had identified one, true God. Furthermore, Luke's listeners had to understand that God willed Jesus to manifest Israel's prophetic teachings: the importance of an honest, reverent relationship with God over and beyond the temple cult, the insistence that we improve the quality of our relationships with others especially those who suffer from society's neglect, disrespect or prejudice, those who lack opportunities for work and livelihood, and those who suffer from being sick and/ or disabled. Also Luke's Gospel will affirm the central Christian witness that God intended Jesus to inaugurate the Pharisaic belief in resurrection from the dead. The Jewish sensibility that the Messiah required a forerunner was an essential link to all of this. TO EXPLORE THE NEED FOR A FORERUNNER IN GREATER DETAIL See APPENDIX on the website. You'll also find there a reflection on ways to interpret Zechariah's silence during Elizabeth's pregnancy.

Here 's my commentary on Zechariah's Canticle "Blessed be, the Lord," also known as "The Benedictus" (Latin for 'Blessed'). The same insights gleaned from Mary's Magnificat apply here. Moreover,

Zechariah's Canticle highlights even more dramatically how the vision of prophets such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Malachi and others was about to be realized in a way.

Since the Exodus, Israel professed God as the great Liberator, the One who frees people from oppression. Ever after, faithful Jews insisted that what God had done for their ancestors, God would continue to do for them and for all who seek God with a sincere heart. Zechariah embodies this belief as he rejoices that his people will now be "free from the hands of enemies" and "free to worship God without fear" i.e., without interference from worldly powers. When Jesus began his public ministry in Nazareth, he, too, embodies this truth by quoting the prophet Isaiah: "God has anointed me ... to let the oppressed go free."

Continuing with the Canticle, Zechariah makes clear that FREEDOM FROM OPPRESSION IS part of a progressive movement in which ultimately the entire world will accept God's invitation to treat all people as equals--all peoples as children of God. Each in their own way, the Hebrew prophets insisted that God had invited Israel to become the world's

leader in this progression that would ultimately achieve harmony and peace for peoples everywhere. Through Judaism, and, for Christians, through Jesus, God invites humanity to return to the glory of Eden--the world as God intended it before free will turned much of humanity against God and God's ways. As Zechariah's canticle continues, this concept becomes clearer.

“Filled with the Holy Spirit,” Zechariah looks upon his son John and declares that this forerunner to Messiah will “give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins because of the tender mercy of our God.” This statement puts all peoples, all nations and all religions on equal footing. Indeed, one common denominator for humanity is that “everyone needs forgiveness.” Life and Hope cannot be sustained without it. It is this honest and humble recognition that will move the world out of its tribal sensibilities (the “us” against “them” mentality) toward a universal brotherhood and sisterhood working out conflicts with equanimity.



Of course, to forgive and receive forgiveness presents many challenges for us today as then. The choices as to the degree of accountability that each act of forgiveness must include wreak havoc with our souls. After all, it is not easy to decide how much, how little to exact from those who have harmed us or harmed others. Indeed, there are times when making demands on offenders is fitting, just and right. For example, there are times to insist that money lent to a relative or friend be paid back in full. Such accountability empowers the relative or friend to mature, to take responsibility for his or her actions. Other times, however, it may be best to wipe the slate clean and grant complete clemency. In the case of abusive relationships, it is right and just to abandon the relationship altogether—especially when the abusive party makes no attempt to change or proves incapable of improving. Forgiveness, like all human values, requires faith, dialogue and discernment with others.

Taking all of this into account, we need to note that the Bible offers a progression in its examples of how and when forgiveness is offered.

One of the oldest biblical writings, for example, comes from Leviticus 24: 20 in which we find justice expressed as “an eye for an eye” which began to put limits on exacting justice. Genesis, however, (stories and events documented generations after the older “legal texts” of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy<sup>21</sup>) offers us “the mark of Cain”—evidence of an even greater mercy. You will remember God does not kill Cain for murdering his brother Abel. Moreover, God’s mark on Cain forbids others to take revenge upon him (Genesis 4:8—16). These sensibilities deepen over time throughout TANAKH and Jesus builds on these as evidenced in Matthew’s Gospel’s Sermon on the Mount (MT: 38—42) and Luke’s Sermon on the Plain (Lk 6: 27—42). These prescriptions reach their ultimate manifestation through Jesus himself when he cries out on the Cross “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” Note that there is no exemption clause here—every one and all are forgiven. Ultimately, when we take the Bible as a whole, it insists that

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<sup>21</sup> Genesis: Introduction by Jon D. Levenson in *The Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 11  
Other sources include [http://www.wikiwand.com/en/Book\\_of\\_Genesis](http://www.wikiwand.com/en/Book_of_Genesis): composed “just before or during the [Babylonian exile](#) of the 6th century, and the Priestly final edition was made late in the Exilic period or soon after.” FYI, scholars consider the OLDEST book of the Bible, the first to be recorded in writing is JOB.

accountability always leaves hope for the offending party, even as it grants us some satisfaction in terms of justice. Hope is embodied in the opportunities it offers offenders to change, to make amends so that he or she can reclaim their inherent, basic, common human dignity. Humanity's survival is dependent on a universal commitment to forgiveness for genuine love to manifest itself and grow in the world.

For Discussion:

1. What biblical stories exemplify the importance of Zechariah's pronouncement of the necessity for forgiveness of sins? Consult the ways all world religions, world literature, drama, films, television stories offer catharsis through forgiveness. How do you relate to these stories? How do they impact your understanding of [forbearance](#), patience with yourself and others, mercy and forgiveness of yourself and others in your life?
2. Recall your childhood experiences of forgiveness and accountability. Was there a proper balance? How have these experiences informed your adult sensibilities?

3. What are your personal experiences of forgiving and being forgiven as an adult? How do you balance forgiveness and accountability in your life now? What criteria do you use? To what extent do the Golden Rule and Platinum Rule apply?
4. In what ways might you be struggling with forgiveness and accountability today? (Apply this to yourself as well as toward others.)
5. What historical and contemporary world events challenge your faith tradition or alter your convictions about forgiveness and the balance of mercy and justice?

There are abundant resources that help us engage in the process of forgiveness—forgiving yourself, forgiving others. See the corresponding page on the website for some suggestions:

There are abundant resources to explore forgiveness in your life. Here are just a few: Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, Matthew Linn: **DON'T FORGIVE TOO SOON** (New York: Paulist Press, 1997)

<http://www.paulistpress.com/Products/3704-6/dont-forgive-too-soon.aspx>

**HEALING LIFE'S HURTS: Healing Memories Through Five Stages of Forgiveness** (New York: Paulist Press, 1988) <http://www.paulistpress.com/Products/2059-3/healing-lifes-hurts.aspx>

Paulist Father Frank Desiderio's Forgiveness Retreats: <http://www.forgivenessretreats.org/>

Psychology Today:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/do-the-right-thing/201403/forgiveness-4-helpful-strategies-do-it-better>

The Center for Non-Violent Communication: <https://www.cnvc.org/>

## CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK FIVE: SONG INTRODUCTION TO O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL VS. 5 TO 7 20131025

For our song meditation on this segment, here are verses 5 through 7 of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” Take notice: these verses are a reiteration of Zechariah’s canticle. The website offers you a Comparison Chart featuring BOTH THE Scripture and Lyrics. Or you may wish to consult LUKE 1: 68 to 79 in your bibles as you listen and/or sing along.

After the song, observe silence and either follow the Meditation Tools already offered or attend to the questions I offer immediately following the hymn.

## CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK SIX SONG MEDITATION: O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL VS. 5 TO 7

<p><b>The Canticle of Zechariah parallel lines:</b></p> <p><sup>69</sup> [t]He has raised up a horn for <b>our</b>  <b>salvation within the house of David his</b>  <b>servant,</b> <sup>70</sup> even as he promised through  the mouth of his holy prophets from of  old: <b><sup>71</sup> salvation from our enemies and</b>  <b>from the hand of all who hate us,</b>  <sup>72</sup> to show mercy to our fathers  and to be mindful of his holy covenant  <sup>73</sup> and of the oath he swore to Abraham  our father, and to grant us  that, <sup>74</sup> rescued from the hand of  enemies, without fear we might worship  him <sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness  before him all our days.  <sup>76</sup> And you, child, will be called prophet of  the Most High,  for <b>you will go before the Lord to</b>  <b>prepare his ways,</b>  <sup>77</sup> to give his people knowledge of  salvation through the forgiveness of their</p>	<p><b>O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL VS. 5 TO 7</b></p> <p>Verse 5:</p> <p>O come, thou <b>Key of David,</b> come,  and open wide our heavenly home;  make safe the way that leads on high,  and <b>close the path to misery.</b> <i>Refrain</i></p> <p>(Verse 4 has this line: “O come, O Rod of Jesse’s  stem (i.e. David), from every foe deliver them.”</p>
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sins, <sup>78</sup> because of the tender mercy of  
our God

by which the daybreak from on high  
will visit us

<sup>79</sup> to shine on those who sit in darkness  
and death's shadow,

to guide our feet into the path of  
peace."

Verse 6:

O come, O Day-Spring from on high

And cheer us by thy drawing nigh

Disperse the gloomy clouds of night

And death's dark shadow put to flight. *Refrain*

Verse 7:

O come, Desire of nations, bind

in one the hearts of all humankind;

O bid our sad divisions cease,

And be for us our King of Peace. *Refrain*

## CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK SEVEN: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON Zechariah's BENEDICTUS (Part 2)

Now you have heard O Come, O Come, Emmanuel in its entirety. Use these questions for discussion:

1. What feelings are evoked by listening to this portion of the hymn?
2. You've noticed that the hymn makes reference to the importance of Davidic descent in ancient Judaism and this concept of a "royal family" exists in many times and cultures. From ancient times up to the late middle ages, the world valued ancestral blood lines in leadership and revered them. Of what benefit is that to us today? Can we translate the importance of an ancestral line to a modern mindset? If so, how? If not, why?
3. Invite discussion on the many ways religious and spiritual leaders build on their predecessors' lives and actions. What can we learn from this dynamic?

Having answered these questions, let's continue with Luke's Gospel.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON Zechariah's BENEDICTUS (Part 2)

### PRINT-OUT

1. What feelings are evoked by listening to this portion of the hymn  
*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*?
2. You've noticed that the hymn makes reference to the importance of Davidic descent in ancient Judaism and this concept of a "royal family" exists in many times and cultures. From ancient times up to the late middle ages, the world valued ancestral blood lines in leadership and revered them. Of what benefit is that to us today? Can we translate the importance of an ancestral line to a modern mindset? If so, how? If not, why?
3. Invite discussion on the many ways religious and spiritual leaders build on their predecessors' lives and actions. What can we learn from this dynamic?

## CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK EIGHT: LUKE CHAPTER 2: 1 – 7 accompanied with the Song Meditation: NIGHT OF SILENCE / SILENT NIGHT

**The Birth of Jesus.** <sup>1</sup> <sup>[a]</sup> In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus<sup>[b]</sup> that the whole world should be enrolled. <sup>2</sup> This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup> So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. <sup>4</sup> And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, <sup>5</sup> to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, <sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn son. <sup>[c]</sup> She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

### Night of Silence / Silent Night Counterpoint:

Kantor, Daniel © 1984 by GIA Publication, Inc. 7404 S., Mason Ave.

Chicago, IL 60638; <http://www.ocp.org/compositions/30161>

This arrangement by Paulo J. Almeida <http://www.pauloalmeida.com/>

Piano: Laurence Rosania <http://www.ocp.org/artists/1268>

Violin: Christiana Liberis <http://www.christianaliberis.com/>

Cello: E. Zoe Hassman

Flute: Matthew Wright <http://facebook.com/matthewalanwright>

Oboe: James Mobley <https://www.facebook.com/jmdesignstudio>

Glockenspiel / Bells: Paulo J. Almeida <http://www.pauloalmeida.com/>

## Night of Silence / Silent Night Counterpoint

Cold are the people—winter of life  
We tremble in shadow this cold winter night  
Frozen in the snow lie roses sleeping.  
Will they ever echo the sunrise?  
Fire of hope you're are only warmth—  
Weary! You're flame may be dying soon.

Silent Night, Holy Night,  
All is calm, all is bright  
'Round young virgin, mother and child,  
Holy infant so tender and mild—  
Sleep in heavenly peace! Sleep in heavenly peace!

Voice in the distance calls through the night  
On wind you enfold us, you speak of a light!  
Gentle on the ear you whisper softly  
Echoes of a dawn so embracing!  
Breathless love awaits darkened souls  
Soon we will know of the morning!

Spirit among us, shine like a star!  
Your light that guides shepherds and kings from afar.  
Shimmer in the sky so empty, lonely  
Rising in the warmth of your son's Love!  
Star unknowing of night or day  
Spirit, we wait for you loving son!

## **CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK NINE Commentary and Questions on LUKE CHAPTER 2: 1 – 7**

You have just heard part of the traditional Christmas proclamation including Daniel Kantor's Night of Silence with Franz Gruber's Silent Night in counterpoint.

1. What feelings are evoked?
2. I love the fact that Kanter's NIGHT OF SILENCE was composed as a counterpoint to SILENT NIGHT. If you like, repeat the track, with your group singing verses of Silent Night to my singing NIGHT OF SILENCE. That experience, or just knowing about the song's complementarity, offers a visceral understanding that unity and diversity can and must co-exist in our world for Peace to be realized.

Let's return now to the Christmas story:

## **CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK TEN: LUKE CHAPTER 2: 8 – 20**

Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. 9 The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. 10 The angel said to them, "Do not be

afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord.12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.”13 And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: 14“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

#### *The Visit of the Shepherds.*

15When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”16 So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger.17 When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child.18 All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds.19 And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.20 Then the shepherds

returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

## **CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK ELEVEN : Meditation LUKE CHAPTER 2: 8 – 20**

**The Best of Times. The Worst of Times.** This famous couplet from Charles Dickens' TALE OF TWO CITIES certainly applies to the first millennium of the Common Era, the time of Jesus' birth. It was "The best of times," because the pagan world of the Roman Empire was experiencing relative peace --"the Pax Romanus." Yet this was a fragile, tentative peace. Many resented Rome's oppressive rule and uprisings continued to occur. The Christian Testament and secular documents reference "the Zealots" — groups of Jewish rebels amassing weapons determined to overthrow Rome and establish Israel's autonomy among nations through force. And they were not the only such group. For that reason and others, it was the "worst of times." Furthermore, although Rome is not at war with any nation or peoples at this time, this "Pax Romanus" had really nothing to do with the innate peace and serenity that the prophets spoke about: a peace that involved a deep internal

experience of comfort and assurance of the Lord's spirit active in the world--a spirit that would bring all peoples into genuine and true communion.

In the Christian story, Caesar Augustus decreed "an enrollment," (often translated as "census" or "tax registration") compelling Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem along with countless others "each to his own town." In this case, just as Mary is about to deliver the foretold Messiah. Imagine how Mary and Joseph's hopes were dashed, their expectations crushed. How could they have anticipated the peril of their journey or the disappointment of there being "no room in the inn?" Instead of joy and celebration, their context is one of loneliness and alienation. A stable or cave became their only option for shelter for this most imminent birth. With no relatives or midwife to aid Mary in childbearing, we are left to question Joseph's role. Did he hold steadfast to the tradition that men would become unclean if associated with the blood of childbirth? Or did he stay and assist Mary bring Jesus into the world?

And, of course, we need to pay attention to this detail: that Mary and Joseph's only companions were stable animals; their only visitors—Shepherds, considered the lowest of the low in the hierarchy of social strata. Poor and “living in the fields” the shepherds must have reeked of unseemly odors as did the sheep which they would have had to bring along with them. By rights Mary and Joseph could have raised their fists to the heavens and voiced their protests to God—an act of honesty and intimacy that is a sign of faith as can be heard in Psalm 13: “How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?” and Psalm 22: “Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?”

Interestingly Mary and Joseph do not voice these complaints, but they could have and still be revered as “the Holy Family” as Christians identify them. Their implicit acceptance, however, prefigures that wonderful “Down to Earth,” motif evident throughout Luke's Gospel “BLESSED ARE THOSE WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE POOR.” In the stable we find the freedom that comes from true humility that keeps us grounded in



our common humanity. Everyone is vulnerable at birth; shepherds and kings, factory workers and presidents, teachers, nurses, priests, actors and sports figures. And, because the events of Jesus' birth take place in a stable, listeners are also reminded of the many attributes we hold in common with the animal world and the earth from which we all came. Once again, an invitation to humility.

### **CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK TWELVE MEDITATION ON LUKE 2:8-20**

I invite you now to pause and personalize the story—an important aspect of engaging the scriptures fully. **What are your feeling responses to the story of Jesus' birth?** Start with the story itself, and then expand the conversation to associated experiences of the times the story was told to you or by you, or times when the story was celebrated, prayed over, overheard, ignored or rejected. Stay with the overriding feelings without judgment or intellectual critique.

**Next, recall the stories surrounding your own births:** who was there? Who was absent? What was going on in your family at the time? What was going on in the world? Was it “The best of times” or “the worst

of times”? If you do not know your own birth story, contact a friend or relative who may have some information. If that is not possible, imagine right now what you think it would have been like. Was your father able to be present with your mother or did work or military service, travel or war, divorce or separation make that impossible? Was the context of your birth—the best or worst of times? Did you enter the world amidst joyful expectation or worries and anxieties? Was your wider family in harmony or experiencing discord and strife—mother-in-law not speaking to daughter-in-law, ruptures in relationships between fathers and sons, siblings, aunts and uncles? Was your mother’s life in danger in bringing you into the world? Was yours? Was your mother’s life lost? Or were you born in a context of desperation of another kind? Perhaps you were put up for adoption. If so, can you see yourself for the first time in your adopted parents’ home? For all this, thinking about your birth and yourself today, do you feel you were welcomed into the world or do you continue to experience residue hurts or feelings of alienation or abandonment?

**As you picture your arrival into the world, what are your dominant feelings or sentiments?** If you are open to prayer, pray with these feelings, placing yourself and your feelings before God as you understand God. If not, articulate your feelings and honor them as you meditate the uniqueness of “you,” the particularities of “your family,” and then add the uniqueness of your religious or secular background, acknowledging the “for better and for worse” aspects of your story for these will inform your self-understanding and affirm your solidarity with all humanity.

**Now I invite Christians to merge your story and feelings with Jesus’ story and the feelings His story evoked. For people of other faiths, choose an analogous story of a birth from your own scriptures or tradition--be it the birth of Ishmael, Isaac, Joseph, Samuel, Mohammed, Buddah or the incarnations of Vishnu--and merge your thoughts and feelings about your birth with that story, and, only if you wish, add those to what you may have experienced in relation to hearing Luke’s Gospel story of Jesus’ birth. I invite secularists to merge thoughts and feelings concerning their birth with that of any significant birth story from your**

experience or from literature, and, if you wish, with the Christmas story as you are hearing it now. Pause this CD now and address these thoughts and feelings. Don't forget to consult THE FEELINGS CHART on the website as needed.

### **CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK THIRTEEN MEDITATION on LUKE CHAPTER 2: 8 – 20 (Continued)**

Now that you have reflected and discussed the moments of your births, we have we have arrived at a vital “POINT OF INTERSECTION” where we may relate to one another on a visceral level the mystery, beauty and terror of new birth in our common humanity. Because you have shared your stories, feelings and associations about your births, you are ready to hear some extraordinary good news:

To all who are listening, whatever faith or philosophy you embrace, I urge you to consider this image and to embrace it: on the day you were born, the angels sang! They sang for you then and they are still singing for you now. Whether you've felt accepted or not, or feel accomplished or not, successful or not--by whatever standards of faith or philosophy or social norms or any other criteria you choose--you may appropriate the

angels' song for you today and reach that place of peace and harmony within yourself and with those around you. And if you don't happen to believe in angels, think of the song then as the Song of the Universe, or the Collective Unconscious or your Higher Power. But listen, do listen and sing along! <sup>22</sup> Here's a Christmas Carol for your meditation:

Angels We Have Heard on High. Appropriate it as you will!

## **CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK FOURTEEN: Angles We Have Heard on High**

Sung with Ellen Bullinger <http://www.ellenbullinger.com/>

and Michael Walsh <http://thesmoothspot.com>

Piano: Laurence Rosania <http://www.ocp.org/artists/1268>

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<sup>22</sup> Christians are invited to understand that everything about the life of Jesus is meant to inform our own lives, to shape the way we see ourselves and others. We are meant to understand the Bible as our autobiography, meaning that our lives are guided by Providence for God's good purpose which is always for the greater good. With our free will we may advance or thwart Providence as evidenced by many of the biblical personages who represent aspects of ourselves. At the same time, we are asked to imitate Jesus to the best of our ability. Therefore, for us, whether we feel rejected or accepted by our family, by life, we always hold on to the bigger picture: God has a plan and purpose for us. The angels sang for Jesus on the day of his birth. They sang for you, too. They continue to sing for and to everyone one of us, no matter our faith, culture or language. Providence is at work for everyone, everywhere!

## Angles We Have Heard on High

Angles we have heard on high  
Sweetly singing o'er the plains  
And the mountains in reply  
Echo back their joyous strains:

### **Refrain**

Gloria in excelsis Deo!  
Gloria in excelsis Deo!

Shepherds, why this jubilee?  
Why your joyous strains prolong?  
Say, what may the tidings be  
Which inspire your heavenly song?

### *Refrain*

Come to Bethlehem and see  
Christ whose birth the angels sing!  
Come adore on bended knee  
Christ, the Lord, the newborn King!

### *Refrain*

See him in a manger laid  
Whom the choir of angels praise  
Mary! Joseph! Lend your aid  
While our hearts in love we raise

### *Refrain*

**CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK FIFTEEN: Additional commentary on LUKE  
CHAPTER 2: 8 – 20**

1. What was your experience of applying ANGELS WE HAVE HEARD ON HIGH to your birth?
2. For Christians, combining stories of Jesus' birth and our births confirms our belief that His story is ours, and our stories are His. The result: the very best of who we are reflects "Christ in us" to others. Did the song exercise help you own that? Why or why not?
3. For listeners of other faiths or philosophies, what song (and /or literature) would you use to affirm your birth, your goodness--the best of who you are? In what ways do you understand your scriptures to point to the ways you understand yourselves?
4. For Christians, what about our belief that God shares in all aspects of being human with us through Jesus, brings you the most comfort? The most? What aspects of this belief that we call "The Incarnation" may challenge you or trouble you?

## QUESTIONS ON ANGELS WE HAVE HEARD ON HIGH PRINT OUT

1. What was your experience of applying ANGELS WE HAVE HEARD ON HIGH to your birth?
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## CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK SIXTEEN Additional Commentary on the Christmas Story (PROVIDENCE)

Let's focus a bit more on the chorus the angels sang: "Glory to God in the highest ...and on earth, peace to those on whom God's favor rests." Taking the bible in totality, as we must, it is important that we understand this announcement to include everyone person born on the face of the earth. The phrase is, in fact, a universal blessing echoing the spirit of security and wellbeing characteristic of "peace" as explored and proclaimed throughout Tanakh. Each of us was born into a family, faith or mindset for God's good purpose, essentially to grow in learning and living the good, true and beautiful.

Yes, there is what critics call "the scandal of particularity." We continually ask ourselves "Why was I born into this family instead of that family, or adopted into this family with this religion or philosophy (or lack thereof) instead of another?" "Why did I inherit this genetic makeup-- these talents and interests in opposed to others?" "Why with this set of friends or enemies, these neighbors, this tribe, this country?" The answer I propose to you today is this: You were born this way so that you would

find those “points of intersection” with people in and outside of your family and group that foster the celebration of our common humanity and collaborate for the greater good. That is God’s plan for everyone! Use the life God has given you – your family, your culture, the religion bestowed upon you from childhood and/or the one you’ve adopted as an adult—your learning, your strengths and your weaknesses; all of these given to you to bring humanity to “The Great Embrace,” i.e. to embrace one another and engage in life’s struggles together for a common good greater than that what has heretofore ever been achieved--improving upon it from one generation to the next. In brief to live the Golden Rule and the Platinum Rule<sup>23</sup> and encounter the living God in every time and place. From there, we must simply respect what others view as the culmination of life (its visions and pronouncements of the afterlife or eternal life) and as to each respective religion, culture and/or individual,

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<sup>23</sup> 1 Timothy 2:3-4: “This is good and pleasing to God, our savior, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.” And Isaiah 45: 22; Turn to me and be safe, all you ends of the earth, for I am God; there is no other!

as always, agree to disagree. But while we are here, finding and celebrating the “points of intersection” is our goal.

Now critics point out that throughout the Bible a tremendous struggle is in evidence regarding “who belongs” and “who doesn’t belong,” “who is in God’s favor” and “who isn’t.” We find this in Tanakh and in Christianity’s Second Testament. We also find it in the Koran and texts from many religions. All evidence the same tribal struggle.

However, these statements are part of trajectories that solidify group identity—a very important first step in any faith, religion or culture. But these initial concepts are meant to ultimately empower communities to love and serve others beyond their tribe as one would one’s own. For example, in the Book of Job, Job says that for me, “no stranger lodged in the street for I opened my door to strangers.” (Jb 31:32) There’s also Exodus 22: 20 or 21 (depending on your translation): “Do not ill-treat foreigners because you were sojourners yourselves in Egypt,” Leviticus 25: 35 “Support foreigners as you do the poor,” and Matthew’s Gospel 25: 35 ff when Jesus says, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me. . . ‘Amen, I

say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” The Koran offers this: “Show kindness to orphans and to the destitute, to near and distant neighbors, to those that keep company with you, to the traveler in need.” (Koran section 4:36).

This is the greatest glory one can attribute to God and it concretizes our belief that God is at work in the world through us. It is also the highest human honor; the best way to worship and give thanks to God. Invite others to share how their sacred texts also affirm God’s love for all—especially “the other,” “the stranger” and importance of service to others. We’ll review more of this in detail in Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Plain in Luke, Chapter Six.

Here’s an example of the benefits offered to all who seek “points of intersection” among world’s great religions and secular writings.

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) said that he learned of nonviolence from Jesus (particularly in the Sermon on the Mount), the Bhagavad Gita, and the Koran. Gandhi didn't think he was doing anything new: "Truth and

nonviolence are as old as the hills." <sup>24</sup> Again we see how truth builds on truth, grace builds on grace, the more the same truths are affirmed in various forms from various sources. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to those on whom God's favor rests." To explore the many ways the Bible evidences God's call to move humanity beyond tribal warfare into peace and harmony, see my article entitled the STAGES OF FAITH DEVELOPMENT IN THE BIBLE AND OUR LIVES found on LukeLive.com .

<http://www.lukelive.com/gallerymedia/approaches-to-scripture/>

## **CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK SEVENTEEN**

This next section completes what is known as Luke's Infancy Narrative. You will hear about Mary and Joseph observing the Mosaic Laws, dedicating their son to God and later, including him as a 12-year-old in the Passover celebrations at the great temple in Jerusalem. I invite you to connect these stories to your experiences of sacraments of

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<sup>24</sup> Mahatma Gandhi, *Mahatma, Vol. IV, Meeting of the Gandhi Seva Sangh, February 29 to March 6, 1936*, section 139, as quoted by Krishna Kripalani, *All Men Are Brothers: Autobiographical Reflections of Mahatma Gandhi* (Continuum: 1980), 43.

initiation—Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation—and/or other rituals and rites of passage such as bris, bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah, pilgrimages of any and every kind, be it to Lourdes or Jerusalem or Mecca or the Taj Mahal. In addition, you may want to discuss your sensibilities about biblical prophecies and other forms of prophecy be they premonitions or hopes or expectations for yourself and for children in your life. Here now is Luke Chapter 2: verses 21 to 52

#### **CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK EIGHTEEN   Luke 2: 21-52**

*The Circumcision and Naming of Jesus.*<sup>21</sup> When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

*The Presentation in the Temple.*<sup>22</sup> When the days were completed for their purification\* according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, <sup>23</sup> just as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord,” <sup>24</sup> and to offer the sacrifice of “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,” in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.

<sup>25</sup> Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel,\* and the holy Spirit was upon him.<sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord. <sup>27</sup> He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents

brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, 28 he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying:

29 “Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.”

33 The child’s father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; 34 and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted 35 (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” 36 There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage, 37 and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer. 38 And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.

*The Return to Nazareth.* 39 When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. 40 The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

*The Boy Jesus in the Temple.* 41 Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, 42 and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom. 43 After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy

Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. 44 Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, 45 but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, 47 and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. 48 When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, “Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.” 49 And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”\* 50 But they did not understand what he said to them. 51 He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus advanced [in] wisdom and age and favor before God and man.



## CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK NINETEEN Commentary on Luke 2: 21-52

### Part 1

Ah, so much to explore here! First there are the benefits and burdens of rituals in our lives. Sometimes we are drawn to them, sometimes they evoke ambivalence, and sometimes we anticipate them and flee! Yet, we would be hard pressed not to allow some concrete explanations of their value. In essence, rituals make public the inner personal dynamics and choices people make. They affirm our interconnectedness, that we belong to a people, a group, a faith or country, and, in terms of Christian Sacraments, that we belong to God and are part of Jesus' story, perpetuating his love and truth throughout our lives.

Rituals make evident that we depend upon one another for support in life's passages with all their corresponding joys and sorrows. I hope you take some time to use Luke's brief but richly condensed portrait of Jesus' childhood as a springboard for appreciating and understanding rituals in your lives.

One of Luke's primary purposes here is to show how Jesus and his parents are rooted in Judaism and are faithfully attentive to the God of

Israel. We also have here a wonderful example of the importance of multi-generations of faith and how the young and the old benefit from interacting with one another. Many complain we no longer have true wisdom figures like Simeon and Anna among our seniors today. Is that true or are we simply not paying attention to the elderly? Or, if our seniors are feeling weary, maybe it's because we do not draw them out, energizing them with our inquiries and interest. And as for Simeon's and Anna's words—would that we all long for peace, consolation and the redemption of the world as they did. What do we need from one another today to keep that hope alive?

## **CD VOLUME TWO: TRACK TWENTY   Commentary on Luke 2: 21-52**

### **Part 2**

I am frequently asked to focus on the young Jesus being separated from his parents. They find him in the Jerusalem Temple but only after four days of searching (1 day in their camp, 3 in the city). From the parents' perspective, what an experience of fear and terror! From the son's perspective, well, who hasn't been so caught up in a moment of adventure that he or she hasn't lost all sense of time, when, indeed,

thoughts of others never enter our minds? The adolescent Jesus must have thrilled to the prospect of engaging with learned men and wisdom figures. There's a lesson in all this: to be a holy family does not mean to be a "perfect family." Role models that they are, if Mary and Joseph were totally perfect, they would not have lost their twelve-year old son in the first place. If Jesus were "the perfect son" by human standards, he would have "honored his father and mother" by informing them of his intent and whereabouts. Here we see the full humanity of Jesus expressed as a typical adolescent AND BECAUSE IT'S JESUS—IT'S A PERFECT WAY FOR AN ADOLESCENT TO ACT. Let's explore, for a moment, the early adolescent excitement when we take the first steps to clarify and own our individuality. (See Next Page.)

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: ADOLESCENCE/ GROWING UP**  
**PRINT OUT**

1. First listen to how the term: INDIVIDUATION as defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary: “the process by which individuals in society become differentiated from one another.” With that in mind, what were your earliest notions of being like and unlike members of your family?
2. How did your family respond to your growing pains?
3. Every person has to wrestle and struggle with both the need to belong and the need to be set apart, to become comfortable with our essential “aloneness.” How does your faith or philosophy assist you in addressing this challenge?
4. How does this Gospel passage help you in your discussion?

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