
**“We are called to show mercy because
mercy has first been shown to us.”**

—Pope Francis, *The Face of Mercy*, number 9



The Gospel of Luke: A Reading Guide

These passages from the Gospel of Luke invite you into Jesus' call to mercy. Find and read each passage, and then reflect on the quote from Pope Francis and the question or questions that follow.

1 Luke 1:46–55 Mary's Song in Praise of God's Mercy

"Contemplating Mary, we realize that she who praised God for 'bringing down the mighty from their thrones' and 'sending the rich away empty' (Lk 1:52–53) is also the one who brings a homely warmth to our pursuit of justice." (*Joy of the Gospel*, number 288)

Where do you need to let go of pride in your life?

2 Luke 1:67–79 Zechariah Praises God's Tender Mercy

"He [God] abandons no one, and he always shows his unfailing tenderness and mercy; this, therefore, is what we need to take to all people." (Video Message to Pilgrimage Meeting, November 16, 2013)

How have you experienced the tender mercy of God?

3 Luke 3:10–18 John the Baptist's Call to Justice and Mercy

"When the food was shared fairly, with solidarity, no one was deprived of what he needed, every community could meet the needs of its poorest members." ("General Audience on United Nations World Environment Day," June 5, 2013)

How have you helped bring God's mercy to people in need?

4 Luke 4:16–21 Jesus Announces His Mission

"When he began to preach the Kingdom, crowds of the dispossessed followed him, illustrating his words: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor' (Lk 4:18)." (*Joy of the Gospel*, number 197)

How are your actions and words "good news" for people who are poor?

5 Luke 6:20–26 The Beatitudes

"He assured those burdened by sorrow and crushed by poverty that God has a special place for them in his heart: 'Blessed are you poor, yours is the kingdom of God' (Lk 6:20)." (*Joy of the Gospel*, 197)

How can it be a blessing to be poor?



Luke

2:6-7

Dedication to Theophilus

1 Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, ²just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first,⁴ to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ^{4a}so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

5 In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. ⁷But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

8 Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, ⁹he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. ¹⁰Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. ¹¹Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. ¹³But the angel

said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. ¹⁴You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." ¹⁸Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." ¹⁹The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."

21 Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. ²²When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. ²³When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

24 After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in

a Or for a long time

seclusion. She said, ²⁵“This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.”

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” ^a
²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” ³⁴Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” ^b ³⁵The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born^c will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

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

Mary’s Song of Praise

46 And Mary^e said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

a Other ancient authorities add *Blessed are you among women*
b *Gk I do not know a man* *c* Other ancient authorities add *of your*
d *Or believed, for there will be* *e* Other ancient authorities read *Elizabeth*

Introducing...

Mary of Nazareth

Luke’s Gospel makes it clear that Mary of Nazareth has a special place in God’s plan of salvation. Beginning with Mary’s humble acceptance of God’s will revealed by the angel Gabriel (see Lk 1:26–38), Mary is presented as the true, first disciple who does the will of God. Her yes to God leads to Jesus’ presence among us. She follows Jesus to the cross and is with the disciples in the upper room during the coming of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:14). Mary reveals to us the meaning of true faith—a willingness to accept God’s call and to gradually discover the full meaning of God’s will.

In choosing Mary to be the mother of Jesus, God selects not a rich queen but a poor young girl open to the action of the Holy Spirit in her life. In Mary, Luke emphasizes God’s preference for the poor and the little ones (see “*The Magnificat: The Prayer of the Poor*” near Lk 1:39–56).

Besides being the mother of Jesus, Mary is presented in the Bible as the mother of the Church (see Jn 19:25–27). For this reason, Catholic Christians have a special devotion to Mary. They celebrate her virginal conception of Jesus on the feast of the Annunciation (March 25). They believe Mary was born free from original sin, and they celebrate this on the feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8). They also believe she was taken into heaven, body and soul, at the end of her life, and they celebrate this on the feast of the Assumption (August 15). Catholics also have a special prayer form honoring Mary, called the rosary.

► Lk 1:26–56



Cultural Connection

The Magnificat: The Prayer of the Poor

Mary gives a testimony of her faith right after she receives the news that she will be the mother of God. During her visit to her cousin Elizabeth, she sings of God's salvation in a song known as the *Magnificat*, which means "[my soul] praises." This prayer is mainly made up of verses taken from the Psalms and the prophets. Mary first sings of her salvation; then she sings of God's salvation brought to the humble, the poor, and the hungry; and she finishes by singing of the salvation brought to all the people of God as promised to Abraham.

The *Magnificat* is an important prayer for Hispanic people. It is the song of the poor of God, those who expected salvation from God, not from people in power or through wars and conquests. The social consequences of God's salvation are clearly revealed in Mary's song. The prayer is directed to God and talks about God's care for the poor. Jesus is the one who acts as God's agent, accomplishing these things on God's behalf; he raises up the lowly and brings down the powerful to build the Reign of God.

- In a world marked by huge gaps

between rich people and poor people, is it clear that Christians are in solidarity with the poor?

- How are you helping the poor now, and how are you planning to do so as an adult?
- Pray the *Magnificat* slowly, savoring what it says, letting it move to the core of your heart.

▶ Lk 1:39-56



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49 for the Mighty One has done great things
for me,
and holy is his name.
50 His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
51 He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of
their hearts.
52 He has brought down the powerful from their
thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
53 he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
54 He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
55 according to the promise he made to our
ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."
56 And Mary remained with her about three
months and then returned to her home.

The Birth of John the Baptist

57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. 58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.
59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. 60 But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." 61 They said

to her, "None of your relatives has this name."
62 Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him.
63 He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed.
64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. 65 Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. 66 All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

Zechariah's Prophecy

67 Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:
68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.
69 He has raised up a mighty savior^a for us
in the house of his servant David,
70 as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
71 that we would be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us.
72 Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our
ancestors,

^a Gk a horn of salvation



Cultural Connection

O Christmas Tree

Did you ever wonder where the tradition of the Christmas tree came from? It began in Germany, the country that also gave us the beautiful song “Silent Night.” For hundreds of years, the Christmas tree has been the focal point and symbol of the Christmas season for the people of Germany.

In the year AD 350, Pope Julius declared December 25, which had been the day of the pagan feast of the sun god, a feast day in observance of the birth of the Son of God. Prior to AD 350,

the German people had a tradition of keeping evergreen branches in the house to ward off evil spirits. This pagan tradition was exchanged for a Christian tradition of having branches in the house to symbolize the life that Jesus brought to the world. After some time, the branches themselves were exchanged for entire trees, which were brought into homes and decorated with candles. Centuries later, as the German people immigrated into North America, especially to the U.S. and Canada,

they brought the lovely tradition of the Christmas tree with them.

Today, the Christmas tree is a central symbol of Christmas in the United States. Adding lights and decorations helps us to celebrate the birth of Jesus, the light of the world.

▶ Lk 2:1–14



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and has remembered his holy covenant,
⁷³ the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,
 to grant us ⁷⁴ that we, being rescued from the
 hands of our enemies,
 might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and
 righteousness
 before him all our days.

⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the
 Most High;
 for you will go before the Lord to prepare his
 ways,

⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people
 by the forgiveness of their sins.

⁷⁸ By the tender mercy of our God,
 the dawn from on high will break upon^a us,

⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in
 the shadow of death,
 to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

⁸⁰ The child grew and became strong in spirit,
 and he was in the wilderness until the day he ap-
 peared publicly to Israel.

The Birth of Jesus

2 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with

Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The Shepherds and the Angels

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,^b the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,^c praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
 and on earth peace among those whom he
 favors!”^d

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made

^a Other ancient authorities read *has broken upon* ^b Or *the Christ* ^c Gk *army* ^d Other ancient authorities read *peace, goodwill among people*

Live It!

Jesus' Birth: Good News to the Poor

On December 25, we celebrate Christmas, the birth of Jesus. We recall the moment of God's entering our world—a defining moment in the history of salvation. As Luke records the moment of the birth of the Messiah, who are the stars of the show? To whom do the angels appear to announce this remarkable event, this "good news of great joy for all the people" (Lk 2:10)? the high priest? the rich and important residents of Bethlehem? No. The announcement is made to shepherds, poor workers living in the fields nearby.

Like Mary the shepherds are people of little power and significance. Luke makes the point that sometimes what the world sees as unimportant, God honors. This is the justice of God. It is the same today. The poorest in our world, the most hidden people who have no power, hold a special place in the heart of God. And, like the shepherds, those who are poor often know God better than those who are rich or powerful by this world's standards.

This truth is a challenge but also good news for all of us, rich and poor alike. How do your attitudes and actions—even the way you celebrate Christmas—reflect God's special attention to those who are poor?

▶ Lk 2:8-20



known to us." ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Jesus Is Named

²¹ After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the

name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Jesus Is Presented in the Temple

²² When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), ²⁴and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon;^a this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.^b ²⁷Guided by the Spirit, Simeon^c came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸Simeon^d took him in his arms and praised God, saying, ²⁹"Master, now you are dismissing your servant^e in

peace,
 according to your word;
³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,
³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of
 all peoples,
³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles
 and for glory to your people Israel."

³³ And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴Then Simeon^a blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna^f the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child^g to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

The Return to Nazareth

³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to

a Gk Symeon b Or the Lord's Christ c Gk In the Spirit, he
 d Gk he e Gk slave f Gk Hanna g Gk him

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For more on Mercy

- ▶ *Scandal of Mercy* album: Music for a world in need of mercy. Find it at www.Mission85Music.com.
- ▶ *The Face of Mercy*, Pope Francis's official announcement of the Jubilee Year of Mercy. Find it at www.vatican.va.
- ▶ "Digging Deeper: An Extended Look at Mercy in the Gospel of Luke," reading guide. Find it at www.smp.org/resourcecenter/resource/12066.
- ▶ Video "Seven Corporal Works of Mercy." Find it at www.smp.org/resourcecenter/resource/11751.
- ▶ *Called to Mercy: Confirming Young People for a Mission of Witness*, all-new Confirmation preparation program. Find it at www.CalledtoMercy.com.

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