

*discover*  
**THE GIFT OF  
CHRISTMAS**



STUDY GUIDE

*discover*  
**THE GIFT OF  
CHRISTMAS**



*CoffeeBreak*





We thank Deb Fennema for writing the original lesson material (1996) on which this revision of *Discover the Gift of Christmas* is based. We also thank Diane Averill for her contributions to this revised edition.

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# How to Study

The questions in this study booklet will help you “do it yourself” and discover together what the Bible says.

Questions are the key to Bible discovery. Through questions you search for the writers’ thoughts and ideas. The questions in this study guide are designed to help you in your quest for answers. You can and should ask your own questions too. The Bible comes alive with meaning for many people as they uncover the exciting truths it contains. Our hope and prayer is that this guide will help the Bible come alive for you.

The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

## **Step 1.**

**Read through each Bible passage several times.** Allow the ideas to sink in. Think about the meaning of the passage.

## **Step 2.**

**Answer the questions** in the “What does it say?” section of the study guide lesson, drawing your answers from each passage. Write answers in your own words. If you use Bible study aids such as commentaries, Bible handbooks, or Internet sites, do so only after completing your own personal study. Answering the questions before the group meets enables you to remember what you have discovered and to prepare for the group conversation.

### Step 3.

Fill in the “Conversation” boxes with your questions and thoughts. Include questions that you would like to discuss with the group, topics that you would like to learn more about, and ideas from the passage that have made an impact on you. For example, in the “Conversation” boxes, you might include answers to questions like these:

- What is this passage saying to me?
- How does it challenge me? Comfort me?
- Is there a promise I can claim?
- For what can I give thanks?

### Step 4.

Have fun talking with others about what you have discovered!

Step 1.

Step 2.

Step 3.

**1** **Isaiah 1**  
**Judgment and Justice**

**Getting Started**  
The prophecy of Isaiah beautifully reveals the amazing, surprising God who is the Lord of heaven and earth. Let's see what the opening chapter of Isaiah shows about this God, and how he calls his people to live.

**What Does It Say?**

**1. Isaiah 1:1**  
What does Isaiah tell us about himself and his book in the opening verse?

**2. Isaiah 1:2-9**  
What charge does God bring against his people? Describe their situation.

**3. Isaiah 1:10-15**  
In the Old Testament, God set up a sacrificial system that became part of Israel's covenant relationship with the Lord. Animals such as bulls, lambs, and goats would be sacrificed to atone for ("cover over") sin. The purpose of this type of sacrifice was to bring the people close to God and seek his forgiveness. Ultimately the sacrifices pointed to Jesus' death for our sins once and for all (Heb. 10:10, 9:26-28).  
New Moon feasts (usually the first day of the month in the Hebrew lunar calendar) and

Let's talk about ...

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# Introduction

The Christmas story may be the most familiar story in the Bible. We see angels, stars, and wise men on Christmas cards and Christmas trees. We sing Christmas carols and display nativity scenes. And in a rare quiet moment we ponder the real meaning of it all.

This short Bible study offers you an opportunity to discover the real meaning of the Christmas story. Though the story may be familiar, you may be surprised at what you'll learn. A careful look at the details may challenge some of your assumptions. Some of the facts may be unfamiliar to you. As a result, you may well find this an exciting adventure in Bible discovery.

The point of this study, though, is to come face to face with the Christ of Christmas. For in the Christmas story we see the God who loved us so much that he sent his one and only Son, Jesus, into the world so that we could belong to him.

The Christmas story is a poignant and powerful story of God's love. It's a story for you.

*A note about prophecy:* You will encounter prophecy several times in this study. Prophecy is commonly thought of as predicting future events. While that does occur in some cases, prophecy is primarily a matter of bringing God's Word to his people in their time and place. Sometimes a message from God includes a promise or the mention of a future event. That may be fulfilled in part soon after people hear it, and it may also be fulfilled more completely in later history. It is helpful to remember that while the history presented in the Bible can be trusted as accurate, the Bible is not primarily a history book. The Bible is a gradual revelation of who God is and how he deals with people. In this sense, some events in the Old Testament have significance beyond the events themselves, and most of those point to the coming of Christ and are ultimately fulfilled in Christ. The New Testament writers had a fuller understanding of the Old Testament than the Old Testament writers did. And you, having access to the entire New Testament, will be able to understand even more. So don't let prophecies intimidate you. They are God's words to his people in every age.

# Glossary of Terms

**Aaron**—the first person appointed by God to serve as priest for the people of Israel in the Old Testament. Only his descendants could be priests.

**Abijah**—one of the heads of the priestly families during the time of King David, centuries before Zechariah's time. The people of Israel kept careful records of their ancestry, especially those families chosen to serve as priests in the temple.

**Abraham**—father of the Jewish nation, which was set apart as God's people.

**angel**—messenger sent by God to earth to deliver God's messages to people chosen for special tasks.

**atonement**—from the Hebrew word meaning “to cover over.” The atoning death of Jesus on the cross covers over human sin and brings believers into a right relationship with God.

**blessed**—receiving approval and favor from God.

**Caesar Augustus**—emperor of the Roman empire at the time of Jesus' birth. He was the first emperor to unify the entire Mediterranean world and to inaugurate an era of peace.

**Christ**—Greek word for the Hebrew word *Messiah*, which means “Anointed One.”

**circumcise**—to remove the foreskin of the penis. All male Jews were required to be circumcised as a sign of belonging to God's people. This sign was first given by God to Abraham and his sons.

**covenant**—a mutually binding agreement between two parties, similar to a contract. The covenant referred to most frequently in the Bible is the one made by God with Abraham, which included God's promise to be the God of Abraham's descendants (Gen. 17:7).

**David**—Israel's greatest Old Testament king, a man greatly loved by God. God promised that one of David's sons would occupy the throne of Israel forever.

**Elijah**—one of the greatest Old Testament prophets. He lived in the ninth century B.C. and spoke God's words powerfully to Israel at that time.

**fear (of the Lord)**—awe of God's power and holiness, combined with love for God and an obedience to his will.

**frankincense**—a costly and sweet-smelling resin from the bark of several trees that was mixed with oil and burned during certain Old Testament offerings.

**Gabriel**—one of only two angels identified by name in the Bible. Gabriel also is mentioned in the Old Testament (Dan. 8:16; 9:21).

**Galilee**—the Roman province in northern Palestine where Jesus grew up, in the town of Nazareth.

**Gentiles**—any persons not included in the nation of Israel.

**glorify (glorifies)**—to praise and honor.

**glory (of God)**—God’s brilliance, splendor, and majesty; God’s essence.

**Herod (the Great)**—the king of Palestine at the time of Jesus’ birth due to his friendship with the Roman government. He was a gifted builder and architect but a cruel and jealous man. The Jews benefited from his rebuilding of their temple, but they hated him for his cruelty.

**holy (holiness)**—pure, perfect in goodness and righteousness, morally blameless. Only God is perfectly holy. People, though sinful, may be said to be holy when they are devoted to God and bring him glory.

**Holy Spirit**—the third person of the Trinity, equal to and one with the Father and the Son.

**horn**—a symbol of strength often used in Old Testament poetry.

**Isaiah**—one of Israel’s greatest prophets. His writings are recorded in the Old Testament book bearing his name. Isaiah lived centuries before Christ but prophesied the Messiah’s virgin birth; his suffering, death, and resurrection; and the salvation that would come to all people through Christ.

**Israel**—the descendants of Jacob; they were God’s chosen nation in the Old Testament and the people from whom the Savior would come; also called “the Jews.”

**Jacob**—grandson of Abraham, father of the Jewish nation. Jacob was renamed Israel, and his twelve sons became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel.

**Jerusalem**—Israel’s capital city, the location of God’s temple. It was the center of Jewish religion and spiritual headquarters for the nation of Israel.

**Joseph**—the husband of Mary, mother of Jesus.

**Magi**—Gentile astrologers (either star studiers or practitioners of magical arts), also called wise men, from Persia or southern Arabia, east of Palestine.

**manger**—a feeding trough for animals.

**mercy**—free and undeserved compassion.

**Most High**—an ancient name for God, the Creator of heaven and earth.

**myrrh**—a costly spice and perfume obtained from the cistus rose tree and used as a beauty treatment or pain reliever.

**priest**—one set apart by God to perform the rites of Old Testament worship, such as working in the temple, supervising the sacrifices, and doing other religious duties (Num. 3:5-10).

**prophet**—one who receives a special revelation from God and communicates it to others.

**Rachel**—Jacob's wife who died giving birth to Benjamin, father of one of the tribes of Israel. Jacob buried her by a roadside in the area of Bethlehem (see Gen. 48:7).

**Ramah**—a town near Bethlehem. In the Old Testament the Jewish exiles were gathered at Ramah for their deportation into captivity in Babylon (Jer. 31:15; 40:1).

**righteousness**—freedom from guilt or sin. God regards believers as righteous through Christ, a gift received by faith.

**sin**—missing the mark in actions and in attitudes of the heart; deliberately turning away from God to follow one's own desires.

**Son of the Most High (Son of God)**—titles given in the Old Testament to the Messiah for whom the Jews (the people of Israel) waited.

# 1 Luke 1:5-38

## Birth Announcements

### Getting Started

This is the story of two unusual birth announcements. In our culture new parents often send announcements to family and friends after their baby is born. Even before birth, a child's parents often share ultrasound scans of their baby in utero. The birth announcements described in Luke 1 were brought by an angel to the parents even before their babies were conceived. In both cases, conception involved God's intervention. As you look at this first chapter of the book of Luke, enjoy discovering how the people in the story were told they would become parents and how they reacted.

### What Does It Say?

#### 1. Luke 1:5-10

a. Describe Zechariah and Elizabeth.

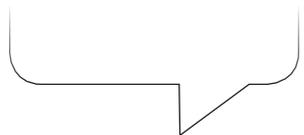
Let's talk about...

b. What was Zechariah chosen to do?

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#### 2. Luke 1:11-17

a. What good news did Zechariah receive, and who brought this news?



b. What would be unusual about John?

For conversation ...

c. Describe John's role.

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**3. Luke 1:18-20**

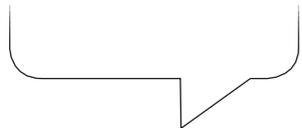
a. What was Zechariah's response to the angel's message?

b. How did the angel respond to that?

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**4. Luke 1:21-25**

a. Describe the situation outside the temple and what the people were thinking.



b. What happened to Elizabeth, and how did she react?

I wonder about...

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**5. Luke 1:26-33**

a. Describe the setting and time of the announcement made here.

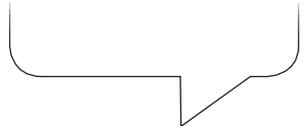
b. Who received this announcement, and what do we learn about her?

c. What did the angel say about her child?

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**6. Luke 1:34-38**

a. What did Mary want to know?



b. What explanation did the angel give her? What proof?

For discussion...

c. How did Mary respond?

**Taking It Home**

What can we learn from Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Mary? Consider why they were chosen and how they responded to the announcements they received.

Come face to face with the Christ of Christmas and discover the real meaning of the Christmas story. This study offers an exciting adventure in Bible discovery, not only as you learn facts that may be unfamiliar and may challenge some assumptions, but also as you grow together in understanding why Jesus came.

*Discover the Gift of Christmas* features four lessons on the birth of Jesus Christ and why he came to live among us. This material is intended for small group Bible study, but it can also be used profitably for personal study. Guides for leaders and group members are available.

The approach to Bible study in this series emphasizes discovery (the reader discovers what the Bible has to say by asking questions and seeking answers from the passage studied). This is an effective and enjoyable way to study God's Word.

For a complete list of titles in the Discover Your Bible series, call toll-free 1-800-333-8300 or visit [www.FaithAliveResources.org](http://www.FaithAliveResources.org).

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