

# CREATIVE SCRIPTURE READINGS

## The Christmas You've Always Longed For

**By Rev. Linda Adams**

*All Scripture, unless otherwise indicated, is taken from the New International Version (NIV) and is used with permission.*

### ADVENT SUNDAY 1: SLOW DOWN FOR REFLECTION

Luke 1:39-45, 56a; Psalms 46:10; 130:5, 37:7; 62:1; 91:1; 23:1-3a

*This reading involves a male narrator, a mature woman (Elizabeth), and a young woman (Mary). If you'd like, the women can be dressed in costumes to represent Bible times; remember that Elizabeth is six month pregnant. The narrator should be offstage, or at least some distance away from the women to create their dramatic space. If they wear costumes, they should definitely memorize their parts.*

*At one point, acoustic guitar music (live or recorded) will come up quietly under the reading. The music should be slow, reflective, meditative.*

**Narrator:** At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed:

**Elizabeth:** (*Loudly*) Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!

*(The women embrace)*

**Narrator:** Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months.

**Elizabeth:** *(An aside)* Three months to reflect, to pray, to wait on God, to listen...Three months.

*(Guitar music begins as she is speaking. These next lines are spoken slowly, with a slight pause between each speaker.)*

**Narrator:** Be still, and know that I am God.

**Mary:** I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.

**Narrator:** Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.

**Mary:** My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him.

**Narrator:** He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

**Mary:** The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters. *(slower, to indicate the end of the reading)* he restores my soul.

*(It would be appropriate to follow this reading with prayers, highlighting this week's theme of taking time to reflect and prepare for Advent to be a season of peace and worship. The guitar music could continue, very quietly, during the prayer.)*

## **ADVENT SUNDAY 2: KEEP A CHRIST-CENTERED FOCUS**

1 Samuel 2:1-2; Judges 13:6a-7; Luke 1:42a-55

*This reading involves a narrator and four women. The women should stand in a square formation with their backs to each other, almost touching at the shoulders. At the beginning, Hannah faces front; after she speaks, they rotate so Manoah's wife faces front; then, Elizabeth; and finally, Mary. This will visually represent their unity as women who have miraculous births in common, despite the centuries that separate them. If you choose to have them wear costumes, Elizabeth should be a mature woman who is made to look pregnant. The narrator stands at a podium, completely separate from the women.*

**Optional musical addition to the reading:** *John Michael Talbot has written a beautiful melodic version of Mary's song, "The Magnificat" (from For the Bride, Sparrow Records, 1981, 1990; ISBN BWD2021). This would be appropriate for Mary (or a soloist) to sing as soon as she finishes her verses. You could use singers for the other three readers, too, so all four women could move into a forward-facing line and sing this song together a second time. This would be powerful!*

**Narrator:** In Mary's song, we hear the echoes of earlier triumphs, other miraculous births to women of faith. The song of Hannah, the mother of Samuel.

**Hannah:**

My heart rejoices in the Lord;  
in the Lord my horn is lifted high.  
My mouth boasts over my enemies,  
for I delight in your deliverance.  
There is no one holy like the Lord;  
there is no one besides you;  
there is no Rock like our God.

**Narrator:** The testimony of Samson's mother, the wife of Manoah:

*(The women rotate so Manoah's wife faces front)*

**Manoah's Wife:** A man of God came to me. He looked like an angel of God, very awesome. I didn't ask him where he came from, and he didn't tell me his name. But he said to me, "You will conceive and give birth to a son. Now then, drink no wine or other fermented drink and do not eat anything unclean, because the boy will be a Nazirite of God from birth until the day of his death."

**Narrator:** The prophecy of Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist.

*(The women rotate so Elizabeth faces front)*

**Elizabeth:** Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!

**Narrator:** And now we hear Mary's song:

*(The women rotate so Mary faces front)*

**Mary:**

My soul glorifies the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant.  
From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
holy is his name.  
His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.  
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.  
He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.  
He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering to be merciful  
to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
even as he said to our fathers.

*(If you can, bring in "The Magnificat" here.)*

### **ADVENT SUNDAY 3: MANAGE THE INEVITABLE DISTRACTIONS**

Luke 2:1-5; Micah 5:2; Isaiah 11:1-3a; Jeremiah 33:15

*This week's focus is on doing God's will despite distractions and inconveniences. The cumbersome journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem will be the foreground of the reading; the fulfillment of prophecy will be the background.*

*If possible, project a transparency of a map of Palestine at the time of Jesus so it is in view during the entire reading. The 70-mile route from Nazareth to Bethlehem can be highlighted ahead of time so Joseph can trace the route with his finger as he speaks.*

*Joseph should be dressed in Bible-times costume and should speak directly to the people, with his lines memorized. The narrator and the three prophets can read their parts.*

**Narrator:** In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.

**Joseph:** (*Wanders onto the platform or up the center aisle, addressing the people*) "Register." That's short for "prepare to be taxed by Rome."

**Narrator:** So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

**Joseph:** (*Pointing out the route*) Seventy miles on foot—it took a while. But you do what you need to do....And how could we have known how it would all fit into God's plan? Hundreds of years earlier, the prophet Micah had pinpointed Bethlehem....

**Micah:** (*A voice from offstage or from the back of the room—use a microphone, if necessary*)

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
though you are small among the clans of Judah,  
out of you will come for me one who will be  
ruler over Israel,  
whose origins are from of old,  
from ancient times.

**Joseph:** The great prophet Isaiah foresaw the Messiah's springing from our ancestor Jesse, father of the great King David.

**Isaiah:** (*Another voice from offstage or from the back of the room*)

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;

from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.  
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—  
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and of power,  
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord;  
and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

**Joseph:** The Messiah's heritage in the family line of David was also prophesied by Jeremiah:

**Jeremiah:** *(A voice from offstage or from the back of the room)*

In those days and at that time  
I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line;  
He will do what is just and right in the land.

**Joseph:** So our inconvenient trip was more than a journey. It was a destiny!

#### **ADVENT SUNDAY 4: CELEBRATE WHATEVER YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES**

Luke 2:6-18

*This reading is for seven voices—three readers, an angel, and three shepherds. It would be great to have a new mom or a mother-to-be as Reader 1.*

**Reader 1:** While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her first-born, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

**Reader 2:** And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

**Reader 3:** An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them,

**All:** and they were terrified.

**Reader 3:** But the angel said to them,

**Angel:** Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

**Reader 2:** Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

**All:** (*Loudly*) Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.

*(A choral rendition of these words could be sung here very effectively. Just make sure it begins immediately, without having to move people into place.)*

**Reader 1:** When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another,

**Shepherd 1:** (*Quickly*) Let's go to Bethlehem—

**Shepherd 2:** (*Interrupting Shepherd 1*) —and see this thing that has happened—

**Shepherd 3:** (*Interrupting Shepherd 2*) —which the Lord has told us about.

**Reader 1:** So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

**Reader 2:** When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,

**Reader 3:** and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

## **CHRISTMAS EVE/DAY: ENJOY A GOD-PLEASING CHRISTMAS**

Luke 2:19; 1:13-15a; 1:35, 37; 2:8a, 20

*This reading is pretty straightforward. It might be striking to use as an accompaniment the acoustic guitar piece that you used in Week 1. This adds a sense of completion as well as concretely portraying the idea of remembering.*

**Narrator:** Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

She thought of the words of the angel Gabriel to Zechariah—

**Gabriel:** Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord.

**Narrator:** She pondered the miracle of Elizabeth's pregnancy in her old age—

**Elizabeth:** The Lord has done this for me. In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.

**Narrator:** The unforgettable words of her own encounter with Gabriel—

**Gabriel:** The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God...For nothing is impossible with God.

**Mary:** (*Softly, reflective, affirming*) Nothing is impossible with God.

**Narrator:** She marveled at God's timing and provision, and treasured the memory of giving birth to her firstborn son, wrapping him in cloths and placing him in a manger.

**Mary:** (*Quietly, but with intensity*) And there were shepherds...angels...all glorifying and praising God.

**Narrator:** Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.