



**PRESBYTERIAN  
DISASTER ASSISTANCE**

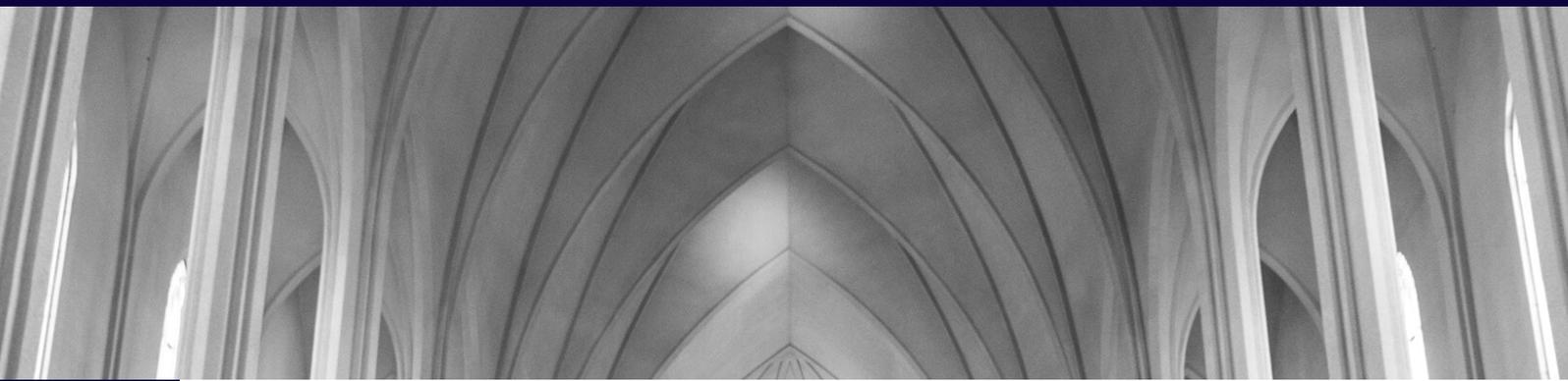
OUT OF CHAOS, **HOPE**



# ANNUNCIATIONS: DISRUPTION & INVITATION



AN ADVENT STUDY GUIDE



**T**he idea for this Advent Study was conceived before COVID-19 changed the world, and the way faith communities are able to be with one another. It was conceived before renewed cries for social justice in the wake of the deaths of George Floyd, Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor and too many more sent people of every faith and of no particular faith into the streets to protest. This study was envisioned as a way to explore the sacred stories of Advent and Christmas through the lens of film: particularly, the films produced by the Story Ministry division of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance.

These films were made in order to honor and share the stories of survivors of disasters and the communities that work for the healing and inclusion of those who experience such events. They have been used by congregations and communities to begin civic conversations. They are substantive, critically acclaimed documentaries that feature the stories of survivors, healers, activists, and believers.

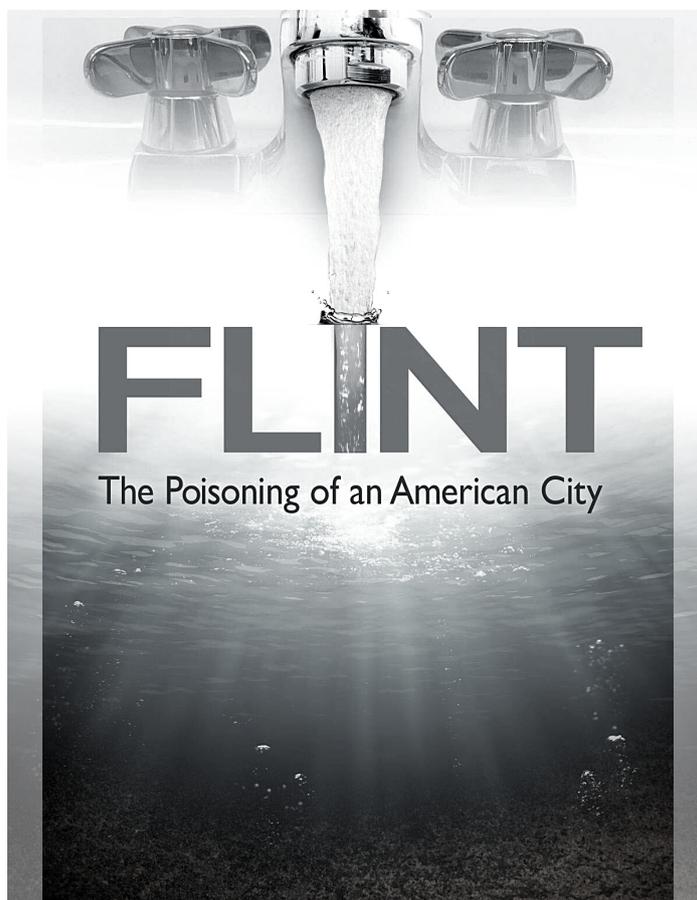
The study aims to create a dialogue between the Bible's sacred stories and these also-holy stories by using brief clips as conversation starters and interweaving them with the biblical narrative and the Advent themes that shape Christian experience. The films that were shaped by these stories address a broad range of human experience and human distress.

*Kepulihan: When the Waters Recede* looks at the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami that killed more than 200,000 people.



*Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence* explores the impact of gun violence on families and communities. *To Breathe Free* follows Chevy Chase Presbyterian Church as it welcomes a resettled refugee family from Syria. *Locked in a Box* explores the detention of refugees and asylum-seekers, hearing both from individuals seeking asylum in the U.S. who have endured detention and from people who have been moved by their faith to live out the vision Jesus shared in Matthew 25, that “when I was in prison, you visited me, and when I was a stranger, you welcomed me.”

*Flint: The Poisoning of an American City* follows the unfolding of the Flint water crisis and shares its impact on the lives of vulnerable and disenfranchised citizens.



---

*Trouble the Water: Conversations to Disrupt Racism and Dominance*, is a docuseries resource to have difficult but honest conversations and collectively disrupt systemic racism. When COVID-19 struck, and we entered perhaps the largest and most uncertain disruption of our lifetimes, we decided this study could not be complete without adding emerging reflections on pandemic, and how this global disruption is beginning to shape our lives in new ways. Thus our final clips include our filmmaker, David Barnhart, interviewing one of the community leaders from Flint, Lisa Horne, by Zoom to begin the COVID conversation within the framework of Advent.

The staff and volunteers of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, the national PC(USA) program responsible for humanitarian response to refugees and for responding to natural and human-caused disasters around the world, are no strangers to the realities of disruption. In a minute, in an hour, everything can change. Life is now seen through the lens of the trauma endured; a B.C. (before chaos) and an A.C. (after chaos). Making sense of those experiences and the aftermath is hard work: physical, emotional, and spiritual.

Building a bridge from B.C. to A.C., and especially to the A.C. that represents healing, restoration and wisdom, is sometimes the work of a lifetime.

---

In a community afflicted by disaster, stories are told: at first, tentatively, as though the teller, still bound tightly with cloths like Lazarus in the tomb, cannot loosen the bindings of trauma enough to stagger to the door of the tomb. Stories are woven with tears and grief, with anger, bewilderment, and despair; and with wonder and hope. They change from voice to voice. They grow with each new telling, with each turning that offers a longer view or a new perspective. With each transformative telling, the grave-cloths loosen a little more until at last they drop away, and the ones bound are free to emerge from the valley of the shadow to embrace the renewal of life.

When we are in conversation with communities of faith after disaster and the theological work of recovering begins to take shape, we often reference the role of apocalyptic literature in the Bible and in culture. In culture, apocalypse is invoked as a way to describe an impact of devastation beyond imagining or bearing. “Recovery” from such events is a task of epic proportion, for which “getting back to normal” is the ultimate goal. But in the Bible, where there is no word for “recovery,” there is a different process, and a different goal entirely. We are not seeking to cover up trauma and the effects of a disaster’s impact. Rather, we are embracing apocalypse, from the Greek *apo* and *kalypto* — literally, “uncover”.

---



This Advent season, we believe God is inviting us to see what is being revealed about the powers and principalities at play in disruption. In the midst of pandemics of disease, poverty and racism, as well as fires, floods, storms, and other disasters, we pray these stories will help you to have conversations that generate strength, inspiration, and courage.

# *let us pray:*

God our Shelter, beneath the shadow of your wings hold us fast  
as we bow before you in grief and pain for the brokenness of our world.

We are all too aware of our flawed humanity, our need for the hope of your coming:  
the hope that once again, as long ago, you may show up among us

in our cities, our neighbors and ourselves —  
in the grip of a global virus that stalks us invisibly,  
in the aftermath of fire, storm, earthquake or flood  
in the midst of civic unrest and social disorder,  
around joyful family tables and neighborhood gatherings,  
in the angry streets: Oh, show up in our midst!

A stranger without privilege or place: Emmanuel, God with us.

We pray for our neighbors who struggle for justice and work to rebuild  
in cities torn apart, in the midst of mistrust, judgment and fear

for each of them is a child made in your image.

We pray for ourselves, that this hurt will not fade from our minds

before our hearts are broken open with your passion for mercy, justice and love.

Restore our hope, our heart, our sense of the possibility of wholeness in your Creation.

Fill us, your wounded, willing people, with

the expectation of the coming of the Prince of Peace,  
the hope that we might nurture the healing of the nations,  
and the willingness to bear the Christ-light, even in these days of shadow,

that the peaceable kin-dom for which our ancestors yearned and prayed

might one day, someday soon, dawn among us.

In the name of Jesus, our justice and our peace, we pray.

*Amen.*

---

# *trauma-informed facilitation:*

*Some of the film clips in this study may be difficult to watch and if you have previous trauma history or you are exposed to trauma through listening and interacting with traumatized clients/patients/co-workers/congregants, this could be an especially intense experience. The tips below offers some suggestions for preparing group members to listen in a relaxed body and pursue appropriate self-care practices if stories become painful or triggering.*

## **1.Be aware of your internal reaction to content and the narratives within each film clip-**

There are physiological reactions to trauma, like rapid heart rate, shallow breathing, dry mouth, sweating, tightened muscles. It's important to pay attention to what is going on in your own body and to learn the best ways to regulate and relax your muscles.

## **2.Practice relaxation techniques on your own-**

For example, diaphragmatic breathing is an established method to manage physiological reactions to stress. There are other methods that are also effective, such as progressive muscle relaxation. Various resources like [Breathe2Relax](#), (free in your smartphone's App Store) and YouTube videos like [Dr. Andrew Weil's 4-7-8 Breathing Exercise](#) will greatly enhance your effectiveness.

## **3.Be mindful of others viewing the film clips-**

You don't know how or when someone may react. Perhaps there is wisdom in considering going through a breathing exercise with your participants before you begin. It may help your class to be less anxious and more open to the content and the conversation that follows.

## **4.Be aware that viewing the film clips may result in participants abruptly leaving the conversation-**

Try to have someone follow up with this person. This person does not need to be a professional. People whose reaction is flight just need someone who can be a caring presence and help them catch their breath. If appropriate, it may be helpful to encourage those affected to seek additional support via local resources or through the Disaster Distress Helpline (800-985-5990).

## **5.Set the basic conversational guidelines at the beginning of the study and stay accountable to them-**

Don't dismiss the importance of setting the rules for discussion, like:

- Listen respectfully, without interrupting.
  - Make space for everyone to speak.
  - Listen actively and with the intention to understand the views of others.
-

# Session I

## *Zechariah: Faithfulness & Paralysis*

**Centering/Opening Prayer:** If your group has a particular practice or ritual when you gather for study, we encourage you to continue that practice. If not, this prayer may serve as an opening.

**[Light a candle.]**

*Holy God, you gather us here in this place to begin our journey in Advent. May we breathe in your Spirit opening us to receive your message. In the disruption that paralyzes, either experienced or witnessed, you always invite us into a deeper faithfulness. Let us learn from each other and let Christ, the light, illumine and guide us. Amen.*

**Wonderings & Wanderings | Getting Oriented to the Conversation:**

The story of Zechariah, the Levite Priest husband of Elizabeth who in old age bore the child who became John the Baptist, is a tale that could be summed up in the old saying, “Be careful what you wish for.”

After long years of disappointment, Zechariah is at the beginning of this story, reconciled to a childless life, to the ending of his priestly line. In later years, he has found meaning and purpose in a life of faithfulness. His disappointment and longing have resolved into acceptance; his sorrow at what was not to be assuaged by a life of fidelity to God and the predictable comfort of his continuing service in the Temple. And then, annunciation. “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard.” What prayer? A son? Why now? How? Though the angel Gabriel promised that Zechariah would have joy and gladness, surely what he experienced in the moment of this momentous disruption of his orderly life was not joy, but confusion ... not gladness, but something more akin to panic. In reaction to this unexpected and even perhaps unwelcome news, Zechariah’s questions could be seen as reasonable, understandable, even. But in the strange ways of divine encounter, instead of answers, Zechariah received silence — not just God’s, but his own. For the length of his wife’s pregnancy, Zechariah found himself unable to speak, unable to explain, unable to ask more questions, unable to bring the meaning of his and Elizabeth’s divine encounter into the healing structure of story.

What does it mean to experience this kind of paralysis of voice and vocation? To not be able to bring meaning, or seek meaning, through the medium of words, of prayer? To even take refuge in the familiar expression of liturgy and ritual that was the daily work of a priest? What did Zechariah see, and learn, in the enforced discipline of silence? We are people shaped by story, who need to make meaning by telling our stories, until we and those we trust know them by heart. What does it mean to be struck dumb, forced to wait for days, for months, while our life is the one disrupted yet all around us the story is being told for us and about us, without our input or consent? What will we have to say, when the time finally comes that we are freed to speak?

# Session I

## *Zechariah: Faithfulness & Paralysis*

**Introducing Lectio/Consolations & Desolations:** Consider using a modified version of the old Daily Examen originally developed by Ignatius of Loyola in *The Spiritual Exercises* before you dive into the text. In this process, individuals review each day as a spiritual discipline, opening themselves to God and to the experience of the day by asking, “For what moment am I most grateful today?” And, “For what moment am I least grateful today?” Ignatius used the terms *consolation* and *desolation* to encompass these questions. After sharing each moment of consolation (gratitude) and *desolation* (regret, anger, despair, shame ...), we give thanks and release the experiences with thanks to God, with an intercession that God will help us where we need help. Next consider approaching your Bible reading with a kind of modified lectio divina, or “divine reading.” Read the passage out loud together and then ask, “What did you notice? What did you feel?” as a way of staying with the immediacy of the story, rather than turning too quickly to exegesis or explication.

The reason we might use these practices in an Advent study rooted in story can be summed up in the words of St. Ignatius: “It is wisely said, ‘Experience is the best teacher. ... The primary and most obvious reason for this is that revelation is not over, God is constantly revealing (God’s) self to us in our experience. ... Of course, the Bible is divine revelation — no one denies that. But so is life! It is precisely because God is present to life and available to human experience that we have a divinely inspired story to tell, and that the story once told is revelation.”

**Read the Text:** Luke 1:5-23

**Ask:** What speaks to you immediately from the text?

## Learning About Zechariah

---

- Zechariah was a descendent of Aaron, as was his wife, Elizabeth.
- The tribe of Aaron had become the priestly tribe. Divided into 24 divisions, one for each of Aaron’s 24 sons, they took turns ministering in the Temple.
- Though Elizabeth and Zechariah lived in the hill country, housing was provided to them in Jerusalem while Zechariah presided in the Temple. To be asked to be a part of the group leading worship in the Temple was a rare honor.
- In addition, Zechariah was selected by his group to enter the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctum, to present the sacrifice before the Ark of the Covenant; the object had led his ancestors through the wilderness, led Joshua to conquer the land and led King David into battle.

**Dig Deeper:** Craddock, Fred B., *Interpretation*, Luke 1:5-56

# Session I

## *Zechariah: Faithfulness & Paralysis*

**Using the Film Clips:** Based on the duration of your session and the technical requirements of showing these clips, you may want to strategize with your leaders before the session about how many and which clips to use, and whether you want to process/discuss each clip before proceeding. Remember that the use of these clips is intended to be in dialogue with the biblical text and the themes of Zechariah's paralysis and faithfulness. [You can find the session one videos at pcusa.org/PDA-annunciations](http://pcusa.org/PDA-annunciations)

**Clip 1:** *Kepulihan: When the Waters Recede* (Minute 1:04-4:37)

If you choose to show this clip, consider asking the following questions before you continue watching the the next clip or on into the section of the study:

- Do you remember the 2004 tsunami and how hearing the news of it impacted you?
- As a church, did we respond?
- Are there themes from this clip that resonate with this week's biblical text?

**Clip 2:** *Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence* (Minute 4:38 - 9:24)

If you choose to show this clip, consider asking the following questions before you transition into the next clip or section:

- As a church, did we respond to the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting?
- Have we responded to mass shootings since then?
- Are there themes from this clip that resonate with this week's biblical text?

**Clip 3:** *Flint: The Poisoning of an American City* (Minute 9:25 - 12:23)

If you choose to show this clip, consider asking the following questions before you transition into the next clip or section:

- Did our church engage or intervene at all with the Flint water crisis?
- Are there other ways our congregation is connected to environmental or water justice?
- Are there themes from this clip that resonate with this week's biblical text?

**Clip 4:** *COVID-19 and its Impact* with Lisa Horne, a counselor and director of community ministry at First Presbyterian Church in Flint, Michigan. (Minute 12:25 -15:11)

If you choose to show this clip, consider asking the following questions:

- Can you name some of the communities that have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19?
- Are there connections you can make between COVID-19 and other justice issues?
- Are there themes from this clip that resonate with this week's biblical text?

# *Session I*

## *Zechariah: Faithfulness & Paralysis*

### *Pause to Breathe Together*

#### *Discussion Questions:*

1. Do you experience any commonality with Zechariah within Luke 1:5-23 or any of the protagonists in the clips?
2. How do you interact with the idea of silence in the text as discipline or virtue?
3. Are there ways, in the clips or in your personal life, that you have seen people silenced not as virtue but as a function of dominance and oppression?
4. Have you ever had an experience of being silenced?
5. How did that impact you?
6. Has disruption in your religious, personal or professional life ever led to any type of paralysis?
7. Like in the case of Flint, Michigan, or other recovery efforts, what have been some practical ways for you to maintain faithfulness when disruption or systemic injustice is ongoing?
8. While the word “disruption” often has a negative connotation, as in the case with the natural disasters, violence and environmental racism, were there invitations and expressions of any hope heard by the people interviewed in these clips?
9. In your faith journey, have you ever experienced a disruption that was ultimately for the best or was outright positive?

*A Few Words About Next Week's Discussion: Feel free to include any announcements or housekeeping items in this section of the session.*

### *Closing Prayer*

# Session II

## Elizabeth: Finding Our Identity

**Centering/Opening Prayer:** If your group has a particular practice or ritual when you gather for study, we encourage you to continue that practice. If not, this prayer may serve as an opening.

**[Light a candle.]**

*Holy God, we gather again in this place to listen and to discover how to live more faithfully. May we breathe in your Spirit opening us to receive your announcements. The disruption, experienced or witnessed, makes us feel helpless, yet you invite us to renew our identity as your beloved. Let us learn from each other and let Christ, the light, illumine and guide us. Amen.*

### **Wonderings & Wanderings | Getting Oriented to the Conversation:**

Like many women in the biblical witness, Elizabeth's identity and personhood is primarily defined by her roles in relationship to others in the story, as a wife, a mother, a vehicle through which an important part of Jesus' "backstory" is moved forward. Even "her" story is a trope; it is based on Hebrew Scripture predecessors like Sarai/Sarah and Hannah: righteous women, "barren," good wives whose "disgrace" was taken away by God not just for their own blessing, but because God's needs and the needs of the community required it. In a very real way, all three women are archetypes, though not ones to whom many contemporary women would easily relate. For women who wish to bear children and can't; for women who juggle many roles and still don't feel they have a clear identity; for women who have struggled to be seen as more than a wife and/or mother; for women for whom the choices to be made are confusing and difficult. And in addition to reducing a woman's value and identity to the single matter of whether she can or cannot bear a child, the very label, "barren," evokes blame, guilt and judgment. Even today, women may hear that word as a triggering one, so pay gentle attention to the women in your group as you explore this lesson.

Elizabeth experiences her unexpected and late-in-life pregnancy as a blessing from God, and a chance to lay aside the unwelcome and ungenerous identity of barrenness that has been assigned to her. It is a mystery and a risk. It is perhaps not surprising that after discovering her condition, she moves into a period of seclusion for several months. How will she navigate this perilous pregnancy? Does she dare hope for a happy conclusion, a healthy birth? What does it mean for her as a person, to become a mother at this moment and in this way? The story of this family, and the stories of wife and husband, are undergoing a radical change ... and yet they cannot talk about it; Zechariah cannot bring the comfort of words to the journey they are undertaking. When the child is born, the images of isolation and exclusion evaporate, family and friends circle around to celebrate. She has a new and better place in her community's eyes, and yet, when the time comes for the child to be named and she asserts his name is John, the neighbors and community members dismiss her words, and turn instead to her silent husband for corroboration of her claim. Still, Elizabeth in her pregnancy claims her voice, her prophetic role and a compassionate presence as she reaches out in solidarity to the pregnant Mary.

# Session II

## Elizabeth: Finding Our Identity

### **Consolations & Desolations:**

**Ask:** “For what moment am I most grateful today?” And, “For what moment am I least grateful today?”

### **Lectio – Read the Text:** Luke 1:24-25; 57-63

**Ask:** What speaks to you immediately from the text? What emotions does the text stir?

## Learning About Elizabeth

---

- Elizabeth, like her husband Zechariah, was a descendent of Aaron.
- She finds herself in a long line of righteous women who longed to have a child, yet could not conceive.
- Like Sarah, the wife of Abraham, who longed for a son, Elizabeth longs to give her husband an heir.
- Like Hannah, wife of Elkanah, who pleaded with God for a son, promising to give him back to God when he was of age, Elizabeth has hope beyond hope that she will be so blessed.
- In a patriarchal society, a woman’s value and identity were often reduced to the single matter of whether she could or could not bear a child, the very label, “barren,” evoked blame, guilt and judgment.

**Dig Deeper:** Craddock, Fred B., *Interpretation*, Luke 1:5-56

# *Session II*

## *Elizabeth: Finding Our Identity*

**Using the Film Clips:** *All of this week's clips are from To Breathe Free which follows the five-year journey of a Syrian family fleeing the war in Homs, to the refugee camps in Jordan, and ultimately starting a new life in Washington, D.C. We recommend showing all of them together and then reflecting. Remember the clips are intended to be in dialogue with the biblical text and to help participants explore the themes of identity through Elizabeth's story. You can find the session two video at [pcusa.org/PDA-annunciations](http://pcusa.org/PDA-annunciations)*

**Clip 1:** Loan, who came to the U.S. as a child refugee during the Vietnam War, drives to the airport to welcome the Syrian family that Chevy Chase is helping to resettle. (2 minutes)

**Clip 2:** An apartment was not ready for the Syrian family and they lived with a family from Chevy Chase Presbyterian Church. (2 minutes)

**Clip 3:** Loan reflects on what it means to "love your neighbor" and her identity inherited and gifted/given to her from her father. (2 minutes)

- How does Loan's personal experience as a child inform how she responds to the Syrian refugee crisis as an adult?
- Who are Merritt and Amar and what consequences has the Syrian conflict had on the identities of their families?
- How does Loan describe the formation of her identity (lived experience, heritage, knowledge)?

**Clip 4:** *COVID-19 and its Impact* with Lisa Horne, a counselor and director of community ministry at First Presbyterian Church in Flint, Michigan. (Minute 6:23 - 8:15)

If you choose to show this clip consider asking the following questions before you transition into the next section;

- How can tragedy be formative in the development of our own individual identity?
- How does tragedy and disruption impact and form a community identity?
- Can you name some of the "ripple effects" you've seen from a collective disruption?
- Are there themes from this clip that resonate with this week's biblical text?

***Pause to Breathe Together***

---

# *Session II*

## *Elizabeth: Finding Our Identity*

### ***Discussion Questions:***

1. Are there ways our church or community has responded to the Syrian refugee crisis since 2011?
2. Are there connections you can make between welcoming refugees and this week's biblical text?
3. How much of your identity do you relate to individual formation and how much of it would you say is informed by collective (family members, community members, church) understanding?
4. Do you ever experience a gap between what you know of your identity and what other people perceive of you?
5. How did disruption change the way that Elizabeth thought of her identity in the text this week?
6. The role of faith and tradition can be subversive/transformational or, at other times, conserving/reinforcing of structures and systems that may not be serving the emergence of God's kingdom in our midst. How, and with whom, do we do the work of discernment that helps us embrace the necessary changes that disruption may invite us to consider?
7. How do any anchors in your sense of identity help you to navigate disruptions?
8. Have you seen this to be true for the protagonists in the film's clips as well?
9. What kinds of "barrenness" do we experience in our lives, our families, our communities? How do they shape how we see ourselves, how others see us? Is there anything we might observe from the enforced isolation of COVID-19 that might illuminate the experience of Elizabeth?
10. How do our various identities — and how those identities position us in our communities and in the world — help to bring "good trouble" to the work of disruption and to invite others to join with us in what our Jewish neighbors call "tikkun olam," or world repair?

***A Few Words About Next Week's Discussion:*** *Feel free to include any announcements or housekeeping items in this section of the session.*

### ***Closing Prayer***

# Session III

## Joseph: Finding Our Courage

**Centering/Opening Prayer:** If your group has a particular practice or ritual when you gather for study, we encourage you to continue that practice. If not, this prayer may serve as an opening.

**[Light a candle.]**

*Holy God, we gather again in this place to listen and to discover how to live more faithfully. May we breathe in your Spirit opening us to receive your announcements. The disruption, experienced or witnessed, makes us feel helpless, yet you invite us to renew our identity as your beloved. Let us learn from each other and let Christ, the light, illumine and guide us. Amen.*

**Wonderings & Wanderings | Getting Oriented to the Conversation:**

We begin our journey with Joseph by noting that he, like Zechariah and Elizabeth before him, is a righteous man. But what does it mean to be “righteous”? How does that righteousness shape the way we empathize with, or resist, the stories that are unfolding before us? For many, “righteousness” has to do with obedience and rule following. Rule breakers are, by definition, unrighteous. Joseph, as an extension of his world, likely would have had a similar sensibility. As a Jewish man living in an occupied country, shaped by his tradition and norms, he was engaged to a young girl whose unexplainable pregnancy was both a personal and a societal affront to his dignity. We know he was also, by implication, a man of kindness, who wants to do the correct thing (divorce her) but in a gentle way (privately, to save her public disgrace). For Joseph, as for many of us who have lived through challenges to our understandings of right and wrong and changed our perspectives, the unfolding of this deeply personal disruption must have been deeply unsettling. Whatever path he chose had implications for himself and his reputation, as well as for the woman to whom he had pledged his life. At first he chooses to stay with the tradition of his formation and his community and to put her aside. The language of this decision — “*he had resolved to do this*” hints at the struggle this good man has endured, and the weariness such hard decisions evoke in us. His decision is not a particularly courageous one: his intended path in no way challenges the system or puts his own life at risk of real or harm. It is correct, but it is not brave.

But then, he dreams. And in the dream, a second disruption. A challenge to the way things have always been and one that puts Joseph at risk: of ridicule, of reputational harm, of being played for a fool and stuck with the financial and emotional obligation to raise a child not his own with a wife who was by all common understanding must have been unfaithful. This was the time for courage — and the courage Joseph is asked to reach for requires him to break with tradition. It requires him to believe that fidelity to a dream and a promise will be a more faithful, and a more authentic, way forward than merely following the rules.

---

# Session III

## Joseph: Finding Our Courage

### *Consolations & Desolations:*

*Ask: "For what moment am I most grateful today?" And, "For what moment am I least grateful today?"*

### *Lectio – Read the Text: Matthew 1:18-25*

*Ask: What speaks to you immediately from the text? What emotions does the text stir?*

## Learning About Joseph

---

- Joseph, like Job of the Old Testament, is noted for trying his very best to follow the rules.
- The rule being called into question was the one that said a man and woman spent a year of betrothal before they were married.
- During this year of waiting, they were not to have sexual relations. If this rule was violated, the man could refuse to marry the woman, and she could be stoned for bringing shame on her future husband and both of their families.
- Joseph is credited as demonstrating compassion, grace and forgiveness by deciding to “put her away quietly.”
- For Matthew, Joseph is often interpreted by scholars as an archetype of Christ, who comes to teach about a loving and forgiving God.
- This archetype is demonstrated primarily in and through the messenger (angel) from God appearing, and Joseph choosing to remain with Mary and the child.

*Dig Deeper:* Hare, Douglas R.A., *Interpretation*, Matthew 1:18-25

# Session III

## Joseph: Finding Our Courage

**Using the Film Clips:** Based on the duration of your session and the technical requirements of showing these clips, you may want to strategize with your leaders before the session about how many and which clips to use, and whether you want to process/discuss each clip before proceeding. Remember that the use of these clips is intended to be in dialogue with the biblical text and the themes of Joseph's dilemma and the uncovering of his courage. [You can find session three clips at pcusa.org/PDA-annunciations](http://pcusa.org/PDA-annunciations)

**Clip 1:** *Kepulihan: When the Waters Recede* (Minute 1:04 - 3:03)

If you choose to show this clip, consider asking the following questions before you continue watching the the next clip or on into the section of the study:

- How does the disruption in Yadi's story invite him to be courageous?
- Are there themes from this clip that resonate with this week's biblical text?

**Clip 2:** *Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence* (Minute 3:03 - 4:54)

If you choose to show this clip, consider asking the following questions before you transition into the next clip or section:

- In what ways does Nardyne's broken heart propel her to courageous action?
- What does it mean to you to "take heart" when you have experienced loss, devastation and grief?
- What connections can you make between Nardyne's reflection and the biblical text this week?

**Clip 3:** *Locked in a Box* (Minute 4:55 - 7:22)

If you choose to show this clip, consider asking the following questions before you transition into the next clip or section:

- How did Melanie's courage lead to more courage among others?
- Has our church had any meaningful response to the injustices and abuses within the U.S. immigration system?

**Clip 4:** *COVID-19 and its Impact with Lisa Horne, a counselor and director of community ministry at First Presbyterian Church in Flint, Michigan.* (Minute 7:23 - 8:56)

If you choose to show this clip consider asking the following questions before you transition into the next section;

- How is the theme of "finding courage" reflected in this clip?
- Within the context of a city like Flint, how have you seen courage embodied or manifested?

# *Session III*

## *Joseph: Finding Our Courage*

### *Pause to Breathe Together*

#### *Discussion Questions:*

1. How do you define courage? Is it different than bravery?
2. Do you have any specific examples of courage that required the person or group to go against received tradition, law and order, the commonly held mores of their family or community or church?
3. Have you ever experienced a tension between being perceived positively by your family or community and speaking up on behalf of what you believed to be more right or true?
4. Can you recall a time when a disruption invited you to be courageous?
5. Can you recall a time in the life of your congregation when a disruption invited you to be courageous collectively?
6. What is the relationship between courage and hope in the lives of the protagonists and the clips and in the characters of the biblical text?

*A Few Words About Next Week's Discussion: Feel free to include any announcements or housekeeping items in this section of the session.*

#### *Closing Prayer*

---

# Session IV

## Mary's Invitation: Using Our Voice

**Centering/Opening Prayer:** If your group has a particular practice or ritual when you gather for study, we encourage you to continue that practice. If not, this prayer may serve as an opening.

**[Light a candle.]**

*Holy God, we gather again in this place to listen and to discover how to live more faithfully. May we breathe in your Spirit opening us to receive your announcements. The disruption, experienced or witnessed, makes us feel helpless, yet you invite us to renew our identity as your beloved. Let us learn from each other and let Christ, the light, illumine and guide us. Amen.*

### **Wonderings & Wanderings | Getting Oriented to the Conversation:**

Every Advent season, many social media feeds are filled with commentary about Mary. The posts are divided between people sharing renditions of the pop carol “Mary Did You Know?” and a host of very inventive memes that all could be summed up as some version of “Of course I knew, stupid, have you actually read the Magnificat, or did you just skip down to the comments?” Did Mary know? What did Mary know?

The liberative power of God’s *kin*-dom is at work here, even before Mary knows anything. Mary is not forced to bear a child of promise for God and humankind; she is invited by the angel Gabriel, and she chooses. “Let it be with me according to your word.” The annunciation initiates a disruption that, in time, changes the whole world and the course of history. But before that, “the angel departed from her.” For Mary, this pregnancy, this beginning, this hope for Israel — puts her at risk of humiliation, exclusion, rejection. Elizabeth brings her another annunciation: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord!”

As the pandemics of disease and racism remain in full force this Advent season, many of us are pondering what it means to follow through on courageous choices we have made so far. We hear the voices of Nardyne, the mother of Brishell in *Trigger*, and Tamika Palmer, Breonna Taylor’s mother. Like Mary, a sword has pierced their hearts ... and because of the loss and the injustice they have seen, these women, and many others like them, have found their voice. When Mary, the mother of Jesus finds her voice, the song of justice she sings comes from her own faith tradition — from the words of Hannah in the Hebrew Scriptures. Mary sings of a God who cares about those who live in poverty. She sings about God’s regard for people who suffer injustice. She sings about a God whose word and work empowers the “lowly”. She sings that, because of this God, a new day is coming, and a new world is about to be born, and she is going to show up to be a part of making it so.

---

# Session IV

## Mary's Invitation: Using Our Voice

### *Consolations & Desolations:*

*Ask: "For what moment am I most grateful today?" And, "For what moment am I least grateful today?"*

### *Lectio – Read the Text: Luke 1:26-38*

*Ask: What speaks to you immediately from the text? What emotions does the text stir?*

## Learning About Mary

---

- Scholars believe that Mary of the Lukan narrative was likely between the ages of 14 and 16 when she was promised in marriage to a man named Joseph.
- This was because in this context, once a young woman came to 'childbearing age' and her family could provide a dowry, she was betrothed to someone who could provide for her and their future children.
- Often the man was 10 to 20 years older, someone with proven ability to work and good standing in the community.
- It is likely that, similar to Elizabeth before her, the character of Mary in the Bible is less a sketch of a real woman and more of a caricature or type shaped by expectation, ideal and history.
- She is the girl/virgin of Isaiah, the poor but faithful daughter, the humble, obedient servant. She is acted upon, not an agent of her own life but this is not where the story ends.

**Dig Deeper:** D'Angelo, M.R., Women in Luke-Acts: A Redactional View

# Session IV

## Mary's Invitation: Using Our Voice

**Using the Film Clips:** Remember to strategize with your leaders before the session about how many and which clips to use, and whether you want to process/discuss each clip before proceeding. Remember that the use of these clips is intended to be in dialogue with the themes of Mary's Invitation and choice to speak up and out. [You can find session four clips at \[pcusa.org/PDA-annunciations\]\(http://pcusa.org/PDA-annunciations\)](http://pcusa.org/PDA-annunciations)

**Clip 1:** *“Flint: The Poisoning of an American City”* (Minute 1:04 - 6:00)

If you choose to show this clip, consider asking the following questions before you transition into the next clip or section:

- What was the result of erasing the authority of lived experience among the residents in Flint?
- What are the differences between the invitation in the text for Mary to suppress the information she received from the angel and the suppression of voices experienced in Flint?

**Clip 2:** *Trouble the Water* (Minute 6:01 - 8:46)

If you choose to show this clip, consider asking the following questions before you transition into the next clip or section:

- Denise describes the invalidation frequently experienced by Black women and non-binary people when it comes to story telling, how and why do you think this is the case?
- Are there ways that the increased national consciousness around systemic anti-Blackness has functioned as an invitation for our congregation? Why or why not?

**Clip 3:** *Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence* (Minute 8:47 - 9:56)

If you choose to show this clip, consider asking the following questions before you transition into the next clip:

- Are there particular beliefs or values that seem to drive the mothers of gun violence victims to speak out?
- What, if any, connections can be made between the mother in this clip and Mary in the text?

**Clip 4:** *COVID-19 and its Impact with Lisa Horne, a counselor and director of community ministry at First Presbyterian Church in Flint, Michigan.* (Minute 9:57 - 13:30)

If you choose to show this clip, consider asking the following questions:

- How is the theme of “finding our voice” reflected in this clip of Lisa’s interview?
- Within the context of a community or a city like Flint, what have been some of the barriers to community members finding their voice?

# *Session IV*

## *Mary's Invitation: Using Our Voice*

### *Pause to Breathe to Together*

#### *Discussion Questions:*

1. The text indicates that Mary was perplexed by the angel's message. Why do you think this was the case?
2. Can you describe a time in your life when you believed you heard something from God, from Scripture, your church or your community that was contrary to your own common sense?
3. Does perplexity generally impel you more toward action or move you into paralysis?
4. Can you describe a time when you chose to respond to an invitation or an opportunity to get involved with a matter of justice rather than remaining a bystander?
5. Are there any ways and places you want your soul to magnify the Lord and your voice to be raised? Is there anything holding you back from engaging more deeply?

---

## **Final Questions**

1. How have you as an individual/we as a group been shaped by disruption this year?
2. In the face of ongoing natural and human-caused disaster, racial terror, global pandemics and ecological devastation, what do you think our invitation is today as the body of Christ?
3. What can we do on an individual level? As a small group? What about as a larger community?

### *Closing Prayer*

#### *Advent Guide Contributors:*

*The Rev. Dr. Laurie Ann Kraus, Director, PDA // David Barnhart, Story Ministry/Filmmaker  
Cameron Stevens, Editor & Outreach // Myles Markham, Editor and Designer  
Presbyterian Disaster Assistance National Response Team: The Rev. Dr. Bruce Wismer,  
The Rev. Katherine "Cully" Culpepper, The Rev. Bill Neely*