

are we called to participate in the reversal of the fortunes as followers of Christ, not just for the marginalized, but for the rest of creation, groaning under oppressing at our hands?

- c. How can the radical nature of God's kingdom shape how we as Christians respond to worldly values of power, success and wealth to reverse the impacts of climate change through reduction of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere?

### KEY QUESTION

How is the Theme: Lamentation to HOPE, PEACE, JOY and LOVE reflected in your study and discussion of the texts and its historical background and application to the experience of your community today and Why?

# *Anglican Church Diocese of Polynesia*



***ADVENT RESOURCE FOR YEAR C  
LAMENTATION TO HOPE, PEACE, JOY, AND LOVE.***

INTRODUCTION

Advent extends an invitation to us as Christians not just to go through the motions and rituals of the season, but to be intentional in our approach to discipleship at the beginning of the liturgical year. Hence our theme: “Lamentation to Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love,” continues to integrate the diocesan special focus on creation from the Moana Water of Life II conference and the Season of Creation into the seasonal message of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

The traditional Advent themes of standing and being alert, waiting, watching, and preparing for the final advent of our Lord presents a “*Kairos*” moment to be prophetic, to warn, judge, and to move us to act in making the good news of the kingdom of God concrete in the lives and experiences of all creatures in this world. It invites us to ‘take a stand’ with the whole of creation described in Romans 8:22-24, “groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time,” eagerly awaiting redemption. The earth and all creatures lament and wait upon us, placing all hopes in us as the first fruits of the Spirit (Rom 8:23) for salvation from the ecological and climate crisis. Our actions and efforts is a measure of our commitment to the 5<sup>th</sup> Mark of Mission to safeguard the integrity of creation, sustain and renew the life of the earth, and the redemption of our bodies at the Lord’s final advent.

Upholding the Bishop’s Charge to Review, Revitalize, and Reinforce, how we do mission in this diocese, we have developed several resources to help us celebrate Advent in a way that Revitalizes and Reinforces our intentionality in discipleship and mission to utilizes the first 4 Marks of Mission:

- 1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- 2. To Teach, Baptize and Nurture new believers
- 3. To respond to human need by loving service
- 4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation... with a special focus on the 5<sup>th</sup> Mark of Mission
- 5. To preserve the integrity of creation, renewing the life of the earth and all its creatures.

LIST OF ADVENT RESOURCES

1.	Advent Bible Study Resources
2.	Liturgical Resources for each Sunday of Advent
3.	Resource for Advent Wreath Year C
4.	Lamentation to Hope: Acting with Creation

GUIDING QUESTIONS

*You can come up with your own questions to suit your Bible-Study group.  
These are guiding questions if you are engaging adults and youths*

- 1. God’s Plan and Fulfillment
  - a. How does the prophecy in Micah 5:2-5 point to the unexpected nature of God’s plan for the Messiah, and how do we see this fulfilled in Luke 1:39-55
  - b. In what ways does Mary’s Magnificat reflect her understanding of the long-awaited promises of God? How does this connect with Micah’s prophecy about a ruler from Bethlehem?
  - c. What can we learn about God’s timing and the way He fulfills His promises from the contrast between Micah’s prophecy and its fulfilment in Jesus?
- 2. Reversal of Fortunes
  - a. Both Micah and Mary’s song speak of a reversal of worldly power – how do these passages challenge our understanding of power, wealth and status?
  - b. Micah 5:2-5 prophesies a ruler who will bring peace by overturning worldly power and structure. How does Mary’s Magnificat echo this theme of God’s justice and mercy for the humble and oppressed. Who are the humble and oppressed in our communities today?
- 3. God’s Faithfulness and Promise to Israel.
  - a. How does the events in Luke 1:39-55 demonstrate that God’s promises to Israel are also extended to all people? How does this inclusivity echo the global reach of Micah’s prophecy about the Messiah’s rule?
  - a. How does understanding God’s covenant with Israel in these passages deepen our understanding of Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s plan for both Israel and the world?
- 4. The Role of the Marginalized and the Oppressed
  - a. Micah speaks of the humble being lifted up, and Mary’s Magnificat praises God for caring for the oppressed. How do these themes inform the way we view the marginalized and oppressed in society today?
  - a. In the context of Climate Change and Stewardship of Creation, how does the Messiah’s coming challenge systems of power, oppression, and greed and how



glorious entrance of the anointed one into the world. The visitation reinforces and re-emphasizes the identity of the baby within Mary’s womb.

The main message of Luke in the passage is one of joy, praise and thanksgiving to God for His mercy, power and faithfulness. Through the Magnificat, Mary expresses her awe at God’s choice of her, a humble servant, to bear the Messiah, and she highlights God’s work in reversing worldly power structures, lifting up the humble, and fulfilling His promise to Israel. The passage emphasizes God’s justice, mercy, and the fulfilment of His promises we have heard through out this season of Advent, and offering a vision of the radical transformation that Jesus’ birth brings to the world.

REFLECTION

Each week throughout this Advent season as we lit the candles of Hope, Peace, Joy the light becomes brighter and brighter as we come to the eve of the miraculous birth of Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s promise to save and restore the fortunes of His people. We also continue to observe in our Old Testament and New Testament readings the pattern of Lamentation to Hope, Peace, Joy and this week Mary and Elizabeth, both expressing their Love for God’s faithfulness and favor. When we dive beneath the text we continue to witness the underlying message of social justice in both Micah and the Song of Mary. Both rejoice in the coming of the one of ancient origins who will bring about the reversal of worldly power structures whom Micah calls the “social cannibals” who exploit the poor and restore the fortunes of the lost, the least and the last as expressed in the Magnificat.

The context of Bethlehem as a small insignificant town and Mary as a lowly girl re-emphasizes the nature of the new Kingdom that was about to breakthrough into the world where the last shall be first, the humble are exalted, and true peace and justice are found in God alone. Overall, the passage invites us to live in hope, to trust in God’s promises, and to actively participate in His kingdom of mercy and justice.

Micah 6:8 says: “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

ADVENT BIBLE STUDY RESOURCE [YEAR C]

Liturgical Readings for Advent Sunday’s (Year C)

ADVENT	ADVENT 1	ADVENT 2	ADVENT 3	ADVENT 4
THEME	Lamentation to Hope (Blessed Hope)	Lamentation to Peace (Prince of Peace)	Lamentation to Joy (Joy to the World)	Lamentation to Love (Love for all Creation)
BIBLICAL TEXT	Jer 33:14-16 Ps 25:1-9 1 Thess 3:9-13 Luke 21:25-36	Malachi 3:1-4 For Psalm: Luke 1:68-79 Phil 1:3-11 Luke 3:1-6	Zeph 3:14-20 For Ps: Isa 12:2-6 Phil 4:4-7 Luke 3:7-18	Micah 5:2-5a Psalm 80:1-7 Heb 10:5-10 Luke 1:39-55)
CORE TEXTS for Bible Study	Jer 33:14-16 Luke 21:25-36	Malachi 3:1-4 Luke 3:1-6	Zephaniah 3:14-20 Luke 3:7-18	Micah 5:2-5 Luke 1:39-55

Introduction

The Year C Bible Study series invites us to stand alert, watching and waiting through reflection, prayer, and the leading of godly lives, as we prepare for the final coming of our Lord. At the same time, it alerts us to be prepared for calamities brought by our neglect in caring for creation and the earth as our mother, the tragedies of wars, colonization, natural disasters and the impacts of climate change. This act of preparation in our contemporary context involves assessing potential risks, and our vulnerabilities to disasters, we build resilience to support us through those disasters and improve our ability to bounce back or recover from those challenges.

Being resilient is part of the transformation we experience from lamentation to hope, peace, joy and love in the birth of Jesus as the visible image of the invisible God who is revealed in Jeremiah 33:16 as the “righteous savior.”

The Bible Study resources provide:

- Background information on the reading, author, and context for two core readings:
  1. Old Testament Reading

- ii. New Testament Reading (Gospel)
  - iii. Core Themes of each Text
- Reflections and, (or) exegesis of the core texts to:
  - i. assist with preparation for Bible Study
  - ii. assist with sermon preparations
- Guiding questions when planning your Bible Study with the **Key Question** to connect everything back to the Theme.

### 1st Sunday of Advent—01 December 2024

Date	Sunday of Advent	Key Scripture	Key Theme(s)
01/12/2024	Advent 1	Jeremiah 33:14-16	God promises Justice and Goodness
		Luke 21:25-36	Choosing to Notice

#### BACKGROUND AUTHOR: JEREMIAH

Jeremiah was a prophet called by God to be his mouthpiece during the reigns of the five kings of Judah: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. He called for repentance and restoration of covenantal relationship and loyalty to Yahweh. Israel through its leadership has turned away from God and worshiped Idols and false gods. Jeremiah warned about the impending judgment upon Jerusalem if it did not repent from its wicked ways. In chapter 32 Jeremiah is imprisoned by King Zedekiah to silence him from his continuous barrage of warnings about Jerusalem's destruction.

#### BACKGROUND AUTHOR: LUKE

The Gospel according to Luke was obviously written by a man named Luke. He is credited with writing not only his own gospel but the New Testament Book of Acts as well. According to tradition, he was a physician and a friend of Paul and he is described as a gentile writing for a gentile audience. So out of the four gospels, he is the only Gentile, or non Jewish author of the Synoptic Gospels. The NIV Life Application Study Bible puts it that Luke was probably written in Rome or Caesarea. As the most comprehensive of the gospels, the general vocabulary and diction suggests that the author was educated.

transformation that Jesus' birth brings to the world.

#### REFLECTION

Each week throughout this Advent season as we lit the candles of Hope, Peace, Joy the light becomes brighter and brighter as we come to the eve of the miraculous birth of Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise to save and restore the fortunes of His people. We also continue to observe in our Old Testament and New Testament readings the pattern of Lamentation to Hope, Peace, Joy and this week Mary and Elizabeth, both expressing their Love for God's faithfulness and favor. When we dive beneath the text we continue to witness the underlying message of social justice in both Micah and the Song of Mary. Both rejoice in the coming of the one of ancient origins who will bring about the reversal of worldly power structures whom Micah calls the "social cannibals" who exploit the poor and restore the fortunes of the lost, the least and the last as expressed in the Magnificat.

The context of Bethlehem as a small insignificant town and Mary as a lowly girl re-emphasizes the nature of the new Kingdom that was about to breakthrough into the world where the last shall be first, the humble are exalted, and true peace and justice are found in God alone. Overall, the passage invites us to live in hope, to trust in God's promises, and to actively participate in His kingdom of mercy and justice.

Micah 6:8 says: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

#### GUIDING QUESTIONS

*You can come up with your own questions to suit your Bible-Study group.*

*These are guiding questions if you are engaging adults and youths*

God's Plan and Fulfillment

#### CONTEXT: World behind and in the Text (Luke 1:39-55)

The historical context of Palestine during the reign of Emperor Tiberius and Governor Pontius Pilate remains the same as described in the examination of previous Advent Sundays. By focussing on the world of the text we see Luke preparing the scene for the

were widespread in eighth-century Judah. He is known as a prophet of social justice who opposed the oppression of the poor and the abuses of the rich class. The widespread corruption, injustice, idolatry, and exploitation of the poor by the wealthy elite resulted in Micah calling them “social cannibals.”

Micah proclaimed judgment upon them “Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it. They covet the fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellow man of his inheritance” (Micah 2:1-2 NIV)

The passage points to the coming of a divinely appointed ruler who will arise from the humble town of Bethlehem. The ruler will have eternal origins, meaning he is more than just a human leader – he will be a divinely anointed shepherd who will care for and protect his people. He will establish peace and security, leading Israel to a time of restoration and overcoming of external threats. The prophecy speaks both of an immediate deliverance from the Assyrian threat and a broader messianic hope that is fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ. For us as Christians the prophesy clearly points towards the birth of Jesus, particularly his birth in Bethlehem, his divine nature, and his role as the shepherd and bringer of Peace. For the Jews, it points to a future Messiah who will restore Israel and bring peace to the world.

**AUTHOR BACKGROUND: LUKE** (*Refer to 1st Sunday of Advent*)

**CONTEXT: World behind and in the Text (Luke 1:39-55)**

The historical context of Palestine during the reign of Emperor Tiberius and Governor Pontius Pilate remains the same as described in the examination of previous Advent Sundays. By focussing on the world of the text we see Luke preparing the scene for the glorious entrance of the anointed one into the world. The visitation reinforces and re-emphasizes the identity of the baby within Mary’s womb.

The main message of Luke in the passage is one of joy, praise and thanksgiving to God for His mercy, power and faithfulness. Through the Magnificat, Mary expresses her awe at God’s choice of her, a humble servant, to bear the Messiah, and she highlights God’s work in reversing worldly power structures, lifting up the humble, and fulfilling His promise to Israel. The passage emphasizes God’s justice, mercy, and the fulfilment of His promises we have heard through out this season of Advent, and offering a vision of the radical

**CONTEXT: The world within and behind the Text**

After the Assyrians invaded the Northern Kingdom of Israel and its subsequent invasion by the Babylonians, the Southern Kingdom of Judah found itself a pawn in the geopolitical struggle for dominance between Babylon and Egypt, as the two superpowers of that time. Choosing to secure an alliance with Egypt strained relations with Babylon to move against Judah. The suspense of waiting to be invaded cultivated hopelessness which fueled anxiety, confusion, uncertainty, and fear, as they anticipated and imagined the terror, savagery, and death that the Babylonian army was known for, and was about to inflict on an apocalyptic scale. Those who survive will be forcefully removed and expelled into captivity in Babylon. The future security, survival, and continuity of Israel as a nation, its people, and their belonging to the promised land and their God now hung in the balance.

It was from this setting that God spoke through Jeremiah: “Days are coming,’ ‘when I fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.” ‘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. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it<sup>[a]</sup> will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior.”

**REFLECTION**

This Advent Bible Study Series in Year C, allows us to experience the lamentation of God’s people in the invasion and destruction of their nation, city, homes, livelihood, welfare, and abolition of their ethnicity and identity as a people, separation from their ancestors, land, and temple of worship where their God dwells.

“Days are coming” is like a warning, a prediction, or a forecast. It is like a burning arrow fired into the looming darkness, lighting it up like a shooting star, pointing towards Jesus as the Messiah, and the Hope of Israel. He is the righteous branch sprouting from David’s line who will, unlike their previous rulers, do what is just and right to reconcile and save them and the whole of creation, and will be called “The Lord our Righteous Savior.”

In Luke 21:25-36 as the gospel paired with Jeremiah for the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent in Year C, Jesus says: “There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time, they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

The tone of the gospel for 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent is like a runaway train derailing from the tracks of ordinary time with its uneventful, silence, normalcy, peace, and crashing into the middle of the apocalypse filled with fire, destruction and death to remind us of our frailty and need for right relationship with God to secure our future destiny with him.

The message resonates with:

1. The destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem, ending the Davidic line resulting in the mass deportation of God’s people into exile.
2. Our contemporary contexts in our Pacific communities on Kiribati, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands, Carteret island, and other low-lying atoll islands, coastal communities like Vunidogoloa in Fiji who are threatened by sea-level-rise and coastal erosions, and communities on flood plains and those on the leeward side of islands who are prone to droughts, those located on the Pacific ring of fire who are susceptible to volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and tsunamis, and regions on the direct paths of tropical cyclones that increase in frequency and intensity due to climate change.
3. Refugees fleeing wars and civilians in Gaza, Lebanon, and Ukraine whose homes, livelihood, welfare, and futures have been obliterated by bombs, killing them and forcing them to live in rubbles without food and water, and outbreaks of diseases which threaten to decimate what is left of the population not destroyed by bombs.
4. Communities that are becoming more dangerous with drug usage and trafficking and high rate of drug-related crimes which impact the mental health, and future security of individuals and families
5. Families and breadwinners are challenged with paying bills and putting food on the table.

**Guiding Questions for Jeremiah 33:14-16**

*You can come up with your own questions to suit your Bible-Study group.  
These are guiding questions if you are engaging adults and youths*

1. What is the historical and theological context of this passage in Jeremiah and the Gospel in Luke? How does the fear, anxiety, and hopelessness relate to you when you are faced with a Category 5 Cyclone, earthquake, volcanic eruptions, tsunami or impacts of Climate Change such as Sea-level-rising, flooding, droughts, or the reality of war coming to our region in the Pacific?
2. When facing these types of situations, what lessons can we learn from God’s promise

**KEY QUESTION**

**How is the Theme: Lamentation to HOPE, to PEACE, to JOY reflected in your study and discussion of the texts and its historical background and application to the experience of your community today and Why?**

**4th Sunday of Advent - 22 December 2024**

Date	Sunday of Advent	Key Scripture	Key Theme(s)
22/12/2024	Advent 4	Micah 5:2-5	The divinely anointed shepherd of God’s flock will arise from the humble town of Bethlehem.
		Luke 1:39-55	Mary rejoices and praises God for His mercy, power, and faithfulness

**AUTHOR BACKGROUND: MICAH**

Micah was from the village of Moresheth, located in the southern part of Judah, near the Philistine plain (Micah 1:1). His background as a rural prophet sets him apart from the more urban prophets like Isaiah. This location was strategically important as it lay near the border with the northern kingdom of Israel and the powerful Philistine city-states. His position as a prophet from the countryside gave him a unique perspective on the social and economic injustices in both Israel and Judah. He ministered in the last part of the eighth century BCE.

**CONTEXT: World behind and in the Text (Micah 5:2-5)**

*Mariottini (2021) – The Book of the Prophet Micah – Part 1*

Micah was active from the relatively peaceful days of Jotham until the stormy days of Hezekiah, king of Judah. He witnessed a double threat to the survival of Judah. The first threat was the arrival of the Assyrian army which conquered Samaria in 722 BCE and deported 27,290 people. The second threat was the social decay and the corruption that

punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you, never again will you fear any harm.” These very words inspired repentance and religious reform by king Josiah in his time and still ring true for us as we prepare for Christmas. In the words of John the Baptist (v.9) “The axe is already at the root of the tree, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire,” alerts us to the 1<sup>st</sup> Advent of Jesus, but always pointing to His final and Second Coming, judgment and eternity.

Preparation is still the focus of the message taken up by John the Baptist from the wilderness for the people of his time and us as the steps towards from Hope, Peace, and Joy towards the embracing love of God in eternity through these points:

1. turning from our wicked ways to lead righteous and ethical lives,
2. advocate for social justice, and
3. Spiritual renewal and revival.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

*You can come up with your own questions to suit your Bible-Study group.  
These are guiding questions if you are engaging adults and youths*

1. What kind of empire, system of power or rule, can we compare today with the Roman empire in Luke and the Assyrian and Babylonian empire in the context of Zephaniah who control the world and control nations as its vassals who are subordinate to its power?
2. How does this system of power or empire dominate, shape and impact our lives as Christians and our response of love to the poor, needy, oppressed, marginalized, the lowly, last and least, as well as our response to the care of creation?
3. What Practical Steps can we take as (a) individuals (b) families, and (c) the Church community to prepare for Christmas and Judgment day according to the 3 steps provided by John the Baptist for repentance:
  - a. Righteous and Ethical Living
  - b. Advocating for Social Justice
  - c. Spiritual Renewal and Revival

to fulfill for the people to Israel and Judah in Jeremiah? How does this reflect God’s faithfulness?

3. Who is the “Righteous Branch” mentioned in verse 15? How is this figure significant in the context of Biblical prophecy? How does the passage connect to the New Testament understanding of Jesus as the Messiah? What parallels can be drawn between the prophecy and the life and work of Jesus.

## Guiding Questions for Luke 21:25-36

*You can come up with your own questions to suit your Bible-Study group.  
These are guiding questions if you are engaging adults and youths*

1. What significance do the signs in the sun, moon, and stars hold? How do they relate to the end of times?
2. What lessons does Jesus convey through the parable of the fig tree (vv. 29-31)? How does this parable help us understand the timing of the events and how does it relate to what we should do in relation to the impacts of Climate Change and disasters?
3. What does it mean when Jesus says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (v.33)? Why is this an important reassurance for believers?
4. In Jesus words in (vv. 34-36) what practical steps can we take to be watchful and prayerful? Why is prayer emphasized as a crucial response and how can believers prepare themselves to face challenges and natural disasters, and to “stand before the Son of Man”?

## KEY QUESTION

**How is the Theme: Lamentation to Hope reflected in your study of the texts and its historical background and application to the experience of your community today and Why?**



2nd Sunday of Advent—08 December 2024

Date	Sunday of Advent	Key Scripture	Key Theme(s)
08/12/2024	Advent 2	Malachi 3:1-4	Sending a Messenger who will prepare the way
	Advent 2	Luke 3:1-6	Preparing the way for the messiah through baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sin

AUTHOR BACKGROUND: MALACHI

The final book of the Old Testament received its name from its author (Malachi 1:1). In Hebrew, the name comes from a word meaning “messenger,” which point to Malachi’s role as a prophet of the Lord, delivering God’s message to God’s people. His unique position as the final book of the Old Testament offers a glimpse into the hearts of Israelite men and women, members of a nation that had been specially chosen by God, descendants of Abraham, and inheritors of the rich tradition of the Jewish people.

**CONTEXT: The world within and behind the Text** *(Crossway: 2011 ESV Global Study Bible)*

Malachi’s ministry took place nearly a hundred years after the decree of Cyrus in 538 BC, which ended the Babylonian captivity and allowed the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple ([2 Chronicles 36:23](#)). This was some 80 years after [Haggai](#) and [Zechariah](#) encouraged the rebuilding of the temple. Those two earlier prophets had said that the rebuilding of the temple would result in peace, prosperity, the conversion of people from other nations, and the return of God’s own glorious presence (see [Haggai 2](#); [Zechariah 1:16–17](#); [2:1–13](#); [8:1–9:17](#)). To the discouraged people of Malachi’s day, these predictions must have seemed a cruel mockery. In contrast to the glowing promises, they faced economic difficulties due to drought and crop failure ([Malachi 3:11](#)). They remained an insignificant territory, no longer an independent nation and no longer ruled by a Davidic king. Worst of all, despite the promise of God’s presence, they experienced only spiritual decline.

AUTHOR BACKGROUND: LUKE

The Gospel according to Luke was obviously written by a man named Luke. He is credited

super power Babylon was born after overthrowing Assyria. It is within the political turmoil with the struggle between Assyria and Babylon that provided a opportunity for Judah to embark on serious religious reforms. His preaching set the stage for King Josiah to introduce religious reforms to restore the worship of the Lord in the land. The Lord sent him to proclaim that the terrible Day of the Lord was at hand and in Chapter 3:14-20 declare restoration for Jerusalem that is also messianic and eschatological in nature.

AUTHOR BACKGROUND: LUKE *(Refer to Advent Sunday 1)*

[The Historical Context of Zephaniah’s Ministry | Dr. Claude Mariottini – Professor of Old Testament](#)

CONTEXT: World behind and in the Text (Luke 3:7-18)

The setting of the passage occurs again during the reign of Emperor Tiberius when Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea (A.D. 26-36) and Herod Antipas ruled over Galilee in a time of great tension in Jewish society created by political oppression and religious discontent. John the Baptist call from the wilderness for repentance attracted many who longed for the coming of the messiah and liberation from the Roman rule. Many hoped for a military solution, but John’s message was that repentance was necessary for preparing the way for the coming messiah. This preparation included a call for ethical behavior, social justice, and spiritual renewal, alongside his humbling acknowledgement of the greater messiah to come showing the urgency of repentance and the hope of salvation that will come through Jesus.

REFLECTION

We learn from the historical context of both Zephaniah and Luke that Judah is under occupation in an environment of not only oppression, but also dealing with wicked kings who have turned their back on God, and religious establishments that are morally corrupt. From this backdrop we hear the Word of the Lord from Zephaniah (v.14) “Sing daughter of Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, daughter of Jerusalem!” as flaming arrows fired into the grey clouds of doom offering future hope of peace and restoration of fortunes for God’s peoples on earth.

It resonates with the theme of JOY in the third Sunday of Advent. It signals the fulfillment of prophecy in the birth of Jesus who on Calvary is the Lord in (v. 15) “has taken away your



3rd Sunday of Advent—15 December 2024

Date	Sunday of Advent	Key Scripture	Key Theme(s)
15/12/2024	Advent 3	Zephaniah 3:14-20	Rejoicing and Restoration of fortunes
		Luke 3:7-18	Urgent call for repentance, ethical living, and preparation for the coming of Christ

AUTHOR BACKGROUND: ZEPHANIAH

Zephaniah in Hebrew is a word which means “the Lord hides” or “the Lord has hidden.” Biblical scholars believe that his name reflects the heart of faith-filled parents; entrusting their child to the Lord’s care during a time when the culture around them dishonored and despised the things of God. In the book the prophet traces his genealogy back four generations to King Hezekiah who was a righteous king who honored YHWH. It is not clear whether his genealogy is directly connected to the King, but many scholars belief that he is of a more higher social standing than other prophets.

His ministry is generally dated to around 640-609 BCE during the reign of King Josiah of Judah. This was a critical time as Josiah initiated major religious reforms aimed at renewing the worship of Yahweh from human sacrifices and worship of idols the plagued Judah and caused spiritual decline.

CONTEXT: World behind and in the Text (Claude Mariottini: 2010)

Zephaniah begin his ministry during a time when Judah was a vassal of Assyria. In-fact Judah had been a vassal of Assyria since Hezekiah was king to his death in 687 B.C.. Attempt by Hezekiah and his son kings Manasseh, and grandson king Amon have been futile. The book of Kings tell us that after Hezekiah his son and grandson were evil and turned away from the Lord. Josiah became king after his father Amon was assassinated and was regarded as one of Judah’s greatest kings: “Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the low of Moses; nor did nay like him arise after him” (2 Kings 23:25)

The Assyrian empire was on the brink of collapse when Josiah became king and the new

with writing not only his own gospel but the New Testament Book of Acts as well. According to tradition, he was a physician and a friend of Paul and he is described as a gentile writing for a gentile audience. So out of the four gospels, he is the only Gentile, or non Jewish author of the Synoptic Gospels. The NIV Life Application Study Bible puts it that Luke was probably written in Rome or Caesarea. As the most comprehensive of the gospels, the general vocabulary and diction suggests that the author was educated.

CONTEXT: The World within and behind the Text

The historical context of the passage places the story in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, around AD 26-29 when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod Antipas ruled Galilee. During that time the Jewish religious leadership structure saw Annas and Caiaphas at the helm as High Priests. For around 400 years since Malachi prophesied about a messenger who will prepare the way for the Lord, the Messiah is still no where in sight. Roman occupation has created social and political tension among the Jewish people and many were longing for the messianic figure and the righteous branch sprouting from David to liberate them and drive the Romans out of Judea. There is widespread spiritual discontent which provide the fertile soil for John the Baptist to preach the baptism of repentance and forgiveness to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah.

REFLECTION

Malachi alludes to the prophecy from Jeremiah about the righteous branch sprouting from David’s line in (v.1) as “the Lord you are seeking.” He continues the prophetical tradition (Isaiah 40:3) as a messenger himself by forecasting a future messenger who will prepare the way for the Lord who will reconcile Judah and Jerusalem back to the Almighty God.

He speaks to a remnant of a people returning from a traumatic experience of captivity in Babylon after 70 years, and 100 years after the rebuilding of the temple who still find no peace and prosperity despite the glowing promises for a full restoration of Jerusalem. One hundred and seventy years of intergenerational trauma, economic difficulty, and no self-government has increased the tension and entrenched hopelessness. But Malachi continues to offer hope of stability, calm and peace for Israel with judgment that the Lord will refine and purify their worship and find their offerings acceptable once more.

Fast forward 400 years to AD 26-29 Judea and Jerusalem are still occupied. The backdrop

of Roman political rule, the oppression, persecution and the immorality and corruption of the Jewish religious tradition provide fertile soil for Luke's introduction of John the Baptist's message. His gospel of a baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sins begins the initial process of preparation for cleansing by a launderers soap (Mal 3:2) and refining by fire.

When we reflect upon the historical context of both readings, we find that it speaks to many of our communities who are still recovering from the impacts of the Volcanic eruption and tsunami in Tonga, Cyclone Gita, Harold, Winston. For the Melanesian communities in Fiji and other Melanesian diasporic communities in Queensland, the inherited trauma of the era of captivity of their ancestors in the cotton farms in Fiji and the sugarcane farms in Queensland still haunt and impact the generation 160 or so years today.

It becomes a challenge for us as the Church, as disciples of Jesus and professionals in our own careers on how to be messengers like John the Baptist to prepare the way for healing from present and inherited trauma, liberation from the chains of past and present injustices that imprison us, and restoration of dignity, identity, voice to receive salvation in Christ.

Making straight paths for them, fill every valley and make low mountains and hills in their ways, make straight every crooked roads, and rough ways smooth for Jesus as the Savior to enter into the picture as the Prince of Peace who will bring stability, level the playing field and access to salvation for them and for all nations, and open the way for what Malachi prophesied (Mal 3:3) "...Then the Lord will have all men bring offerings in righteousness."

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

*You can come up with your own questions to suit your Bible-Study group.*

*These are guiding questions if you are engaging adults and youths*

1. What does the core message of "Preparing the way" in both Malachi and the gospel of Luke mean to you considering our journey towards:
  - a. Christmas?
  - b. The second Advent or coming of Christ?
  - c. Our own preparations for the Cyclone Season, natural disasters and making sure that our churches are safe and resilient against the impacts of Climate Change and other social issues such as domestic violence, child abuse, crime, drug trafficking, human trafficking, and substance abuse etc.

2. In the prophetic tradition, Malachi points towards John the Baptist as the Messenger who will prepare the way for the Lord. What are the roles of messengers in both the Bible and our own cultural context? How do you see yourself as a messenger in:
  - a. Your traditional role in your Vanua or culture, professional career and in your role as a disciple of Christ, as:
    - i. Lay person and lay leadership role in the church as Vestry or wardens
    - ii. As the Clergy in the Church
  - b. Reflect upon and attempt to define the scope of your ministry as a messenger and who are your targeted audience?
  - c. What is the gospel that you are called to preach?
3. What does the gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sin mean to you and how can you package it and deliver it on:
  - a. Physical transformation?
  - b. Spiritual transformation?
  - c. Addressing the ecological and the climate change crisis?

## KEY QUESTION

**How is the Theme: LAMENTATION to HOPE to PEACE reflected in your study of the texts and its historical background and application to the experience of your community today and Why?**