

LIVING OUR **BAPTISM**...*Five gifts of discipleship*

When a baptized Christian affirms the faith (often called confirmation) the presiding minister addresses those making public affirmation of baptism and asks the question: Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism:

**to live among God's faithful people,
to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,
to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,
and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?**

RESPONSE: We do, and ask God to help and guide us. (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 236)

And so begins a daily claiming and re-discovering of the God-given gifts of discipleship. These gifts overlap and are intertwined as one gift flows into another and into faithful living.

FIVE GIFTS OF DISCIPLESHIP ... *during Advent and Christmas*

Advent and Christmas are ideal seasons of the church year to emphasize LIVING OUR BAPTISM and to discover the five gifts of discipleship. Gifts! Gifts! Gifts! Gift-giving and gift-receiving dominate today's Advent and Christmas seasons. Millions of dollars are spent in advertising to convince us to purchase the perfect gift to ensure perfect holidays and happiness.

The church has an opportunity (and challenge) to shift attention to the real gift of Christmas—Emmanuel, God with us. Two possible themes to celebrate the gifts of discipleship during Advent and Christmas:

- Emmanuel—God's Gift to Us
- Mary's Song—God's Gift to the World

Theme 1: Emmanuel—God's Gift to Us

God came and dwelt among us in Jesus. He is the gift which surpasses the beautifully wrapped gifts placed under the Christmas tree. He is the gift of God born as an infant in a manger. But Jesus is also the one who grew to be an adult, who healed, taught, performed miracles, and ultimately sacrificed his life on a cross, only to live again. God's gift made known in Christ is truly the "reason for the season."



The GIFT of Community—to live among God's faithful people.

Reach out to church members who are lonely and grieving.

The GIFT of God's Word—hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper.

Hear about Emmanuel through song, drama, film, preaching, and acts of generosity.

The GIFT of Good News—proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed.

Go out into the community to share the good news of God. Be intentional.

The GIFT of Service—serve all people, following the example of Jesus.

Reach out and respond to those in need in your local community.

The GIFT of Justice and Peace—strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

Be open to your voice becoming an advocate for justice and peace.





Theme 2: Mary's Song—God's Gift to the World

This Advent and Christmas, you are invited to prayerfully ponder one story—the story of Mary, the mother of Jesus—and how her song inspires faithful discipleship.

There once was a young woman named Mary who found favor with God. The angel Gabriel was sent by God to deliver a message to this favored one:

“Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you...Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (Luke 1:28, 30-33 NRSV)

Her cousin Elizabeth confirmed the truth, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb... And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.” (Luke 1:42, 45 NRSV) Talk about a world turned upside down!

During Advent, discover the gifts of discipleship:

ADVENT 1: Live among God's faithful people

Each day this week, read Mary's Song—The Magnificat. Pray.

Reflect: *How can I encourage others in their faith?*

ADVENT 2: Hear the Word of God and share in the Lord's supper

Each day this week, read Mary's Song—the Magnificat. Pray. Make plans to spend time with those who are lonely at the holidays.

Reflect: *How does (or might) my soul magnify the Lord?*

ADVENT 3: Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

Each day this week, read Mary's Song—The Magnificat. Prayerfully consider lifestyles changes which might translate into a more positive reflection of your faith.

Reflect: *How does Christmas draw me closer to Christ?*

ADVENT 4: Serve all people, following the example of Jesus

Each day this week, read Mary's Song—the Magnificat. Pray. Invite others. Make plans to fill the hungry with good things.

Reflect: *How might I share with those in need?*

CHRISTMAS: Strive for justice and peace in all the earth

Each day during the 12 days of Christmas, listen to a musical version of Mary's Song—the Magnificat. Focus on the theme of justice in her story. Ponder and name injustices in your local community. Select one area of justice to lend your voice in the coming year.

Reflect: *How might I lend my voice to bring justice?*

Mary's Song—The Magnificat

And Mary said,
“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices
in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor
on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will
call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done
great things for me, and holy is
his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him from
generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in
the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down
the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with
good things, and sent the rich
away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he
made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his
descendants forever.”

Luke 1:46-55 NRSV