

## Discipleship

Study provided by UMC Discipleship Ministries, adapted by Kathryn Rauhauser

### Gathering

- Reflect and respond to the following: Consider your Christmas celebration. Christmas day is past, and in much of the community, Christmas (which began with retailers weeks ago) is over. Today is actually the seventh day of Christmastide. Are you still celebrating the birth of Christ, or are you ready to be done?
  - If over-indulging in goodies and more-than-usual social activity has been the norm of late, how might you celebrate the Christ child in a quieter, more contemplative way?
- Read: Isaiah 61:10-62:3, Galatians 4:4-7, and Luke 2:22-40.

### Discussion

- The wedding finery mentioned in Isaiah 61:10 (garland and jewels) is a metaphor for the finest gifts of God (salvation and righteousness). The wedding as a joyous occasion is a metaphor for the much longed-for restoration of the community of exiles. What metaphors can you use to portray how you feel about the gifts of God to you?
  - Think about a time when you had a promise or hope fulfilled. What was that experience like for you?
  - How do past promises fulfilled help us to connect with the promises of God yet to come?
- Galatians 4:4-7 reminds us that we are no longer slaves, but children; as children, then heirs—because in the fullness of time, God’s promise came to fruition. Do you see yourself as a child and an heir?
  - What does that mean to you in the context of day-to-day life?
  - Have you had an experience of vindication or restoration “in the fullness of time”?
  - What is it like to be patient; waiting (and hopefully, working) until the fullness of time?
- Simeon (Luke 2:25-32) was apparently not an invited participant in Jesus’ presentation, but the Spirit guided him to the Temple, where he announced the holy purpose of Jesus. Have you ever felt that you were part of a holy moment? What was that like?
  - Have you ever had an “aha moment” of insight when some purpose or direction from God (or a trusted person of faith) became clear?
  - Have you experienced the “light for revelation” in any other way?
- Simeon also described this baby’s life as one filled with opposition and pain (Luke 2:33-35). What must it have been like for new parents to feel the weight of responsibility for what was to come from Jesus’ life?
  - Has God called you to a special task? How did it feel to embark upon it?
  - What sort of support did you need and what did you get?
  - How does your faith enable or empower you to act in spite of risk, opposition, or pain?

- Anna, a prophet and righteous widow, (Luke 2:36-38) reiterated, even legitimized, Simeon's claim of Jesus as redeemer. What "elders" in your church help support ministry, encourage participation, or otherwise advance the goals of the church? How can you cultivate an openness both to the voice of experience as well as to the voice of the "holy children" in your congregation?
- What are the gifts of the Christmas season that you will take with you into the season of "business as usual"?

### **Prayer and Sending Forth**

- If studying with a group, share prayer requests and praise reports as well as those on the church prayer list. If studying on your own, take time to pray for those on our church prayer list and lift up your own prayer concerns to the Lord.
- Consider praying the following or a similar prayer: Holy, Saving God, we confess that we have focused during Advent on many things besides the "reason for the season." We have overextended, overindulged, and under-appreciated. Yet, we are the continual recipients of your gifts and grace, for which we are humbly grateful. Return our focus to the gifts of salvation and restoration and enliven us to be full partners in redemption. In the name of Christ, the light of revelation to the world. Amen.