

October 2024 – Mixed emotions

Please note Bible stories and themes may occasionally differ from this overview.

This October we will visit four different moments in the life story of Jesus. We begin with something you may find a little 'Christmassy' but which in fact is an outpouring of **joy** between Elizabeth and Mary. Jesus then describes God's mercy by encouraging us to be surprisingly **kind** to those we may not like. In Week Three Jesus' offer to light our world either causes **gratitude** or **confusion** among his listeners. Then we finish with Jesus showing his tears of **human emotion** prior to raising Lazarus from the dead. His birth, his teaching, his identity, his connection with us – four 'Jesus moments' in a month of 'mixed emotions'.

Session 1 Oct 5/6

Session Aim: To learn how Elizabeth and Mary experienced joy

Bible Ref: Luke 1:31-33,35-38,46-56

Today's fruit

Knowing the character of God brought **peace** to Mary in this strange situation.

Jesus' birth

Today Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth and shares some incredible news: that the angel Gabriel had appeared to her at home in Nazareth and told her she would have a baby. This would not be an ordinary child:

'Listen! You will become pregnant. You will give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and people will call him the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of King David, his ancestor. He will rule over the people of Jacob for ever. His kingdom will never end.'

(Luke 1:31-33 *ICB*)

Elizabeth was also pregnant and the baby inside her 'jumped with joy' (v44) when Mary arrived. Mary just had to share her joy, but clearly linked this emotion to who God was, what he had done for her and how God would use her and her baby.

'My heart is happy' (v47).

'The Powerful One has done great things for me' (v49).

'God brings down rulers from their thrones, and he raises up the humble' (v52).

Today's happy emotions have their root in God and how he works in partnership with Elizabeth and Mary. God is the foundation for their hopes, their joy and their peace about the future.

Think about

What brings you joy? Can you describe a moment in your life when you felt content? These moments are not always spectacular but can be times of calm

when we are walking outdoors, listening to music, or enjoying the company of friends.

How would you feel if, like Mary, you felt as if God was prompting you to do something? For some this may bring fear of the unknown.

Whenever you experience changes in your life, is there something that brings you peace? How do you think Mary arrived at a point of peace and was able to say 'I am the servant girl of the Lord. Let this happen to me as you say!' in v38?

5 October: World Teachers' Day

October: Black History Month

Discuss teachers who enable you to feel calm at school, or those people who have historically fought for peace in racially diverse societies.

Session 2 Oct 12/13

Session Aim: To know the mercy of God through how we treat others

Bible Ref: Luke 6:27-36

Today's fruit

If you are going to love your enemies, you will need **self-control** from God.

Jesus' teaching

Jesus was a remarkable teacher who attracted crowds to listen to him, but sometimes his words were difficult to take in. In today's verses he teaches a very different way to live, such as praying for those who are cruel to us. His listeners may have experienced cruelty, possibly from the Romans who occupied their land and often ruled over their lives.

Jesus also encourages people to lend without expecting something back. This is very surprising because nobody would have lived with that much kindness before. This would take a lot of self-control.

Why does Jesus recommend living in this different way? Because he is trying to reveal God. God is kind to people who are ungrateful, and Jesus calls this mercy. It is 'counter-cultural' and goes against the normal flow of how we treat friends and enemies. Jesus is asking his listeners to do the same.

What a different world it would be if we could put others first, especially our enemies! God's kindness could change the world.

Think about

Do you have any enemies? Perhaps you can think of famous ones in the world of film or stories you have read? How do you feel about enemies? Do you always want to see them defeated, or do you prefer people becoming friends and reaching an agreement?

When you hear these words of Jesus, it might feel like he is describing a topsy-turvy world! Perhaps that is the point, and that God wants to surprise us with a new way of living. But why would he want us to know this?

Many of our schools have a simple rule in place which is something like: 'Treat others as you would like to be treated.' Have you noticed how this was Jesus' idea?

What would it be like to show self-control rather than getting your own back? Would it puzzle other people, or make them ask questions about your actions?

Session 3 Oct 19/20

Session Aim: To explore a claim that Jesus made about himself
Bible Ref: John 8:12-20

Today's fruit

Jesus wanted to bring light to the world. We can do so through his fruit of **kindness** to those we meet..

Jesus' identity

Following on from last week, Jesus again uses words today that were difficult to take in. This time they are difficult because they are words about himself and his potential to guide others.

'He said, "I am the light of the world. The person who follows me will never live in darkness. He will have the light that gives life."
(John 8:12 *ICB*)

When Jesus was challenged about this, he explained that he was sent by his Father.

'Jesus answered, "You don't know me or my Father. But if you knew me, then you would know my Father, too."
(John 8:19 *ICB*)

Jesus is confident that he is one with the Father. To know him is to know the one who sent him. Looking at Jesus is looking at God, and so he uses light and darkness to explain the impact God can have in our lives.

Think about

Do you prefer night or day, darkness or light? Both can be good, like choosing between a sunrise or sunset.

What do we use to help us see our way? For example, bicycle lamps, headtorches, lighthouses. If somebody needed to navigate their way through the dark, it would be kind to light their path – perhaps sharing light? For example, using the torch on a mobile phone when someone is trying to unlock the front door.

What might Jesus mean by living in darkness? When we are in darkness, we might come to harm, or at least knock into obstacles. How is Jesus trying to be helpful to us here?

Jesus made some claims about himself that were very bold. What is your reaction to people who make statements about themselves, and how do we test them for ourselves?

Session 4 Oct 26/27

Session Aim: To learn that Jesus shared human emotions

Bible Ref: John 11:1-16,33-44

Today's fruit

When we connect with others, we show **gentleness**. It takes this fruit to be sensitive to other people's emotions.

Jesus' connection

This moment begins with Martha and Mary sending someone to tell Jesus that their brother Lazarus was sick and dying. Jesus surprised his followers with these words:

'Jesus said plainly, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there so that you may believe. But let us go to him now."
(John 11:14,15 *ICB*)

It looks like this was another teaching moment for the developing faith of Jesus' followers.

When Jesus eventually arrived in Bethany, he learned that Lazarus had been dead and buried in a tomb for four days already. Martha and Mary were upset, and we are told that Jesus cried too (v35).

As he had done with his followers, Jesus referred to belief in God.

'Then Jesus said to her [Martha], "Didn't I tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"
(John 11:40 *ICB*)

Jesus asked for the stone to be rolled away and ordered Lazarus to come out. And Lazarus appeared, still wrapped in burial cloths which Jesus told them to remove before letting him go.

Think about

One of the biggest questions of Christian faith is about suffering. We never want to simplify this difficult and personal subject, but if you are able to, share any other questions you have today.

How do you feel about Jesus crying? Does it surprise you that God connects with human suffering in this way? What does that teach us about God? At school we might call this 'empathy'. Why is it important to be able to step into someone else's shoes?

Lazarus rising from the dead showed 'the glory of God'. Where would you like to see 'God's glory' today? If you were Lazarus, Mary or Martha, how would this moment impact you? Where would you go, and who would you talk to about it?