

PREPARATION

- Familiarize yourself with this Study Guide.
- You can watch the sermon online [HERE](#).
- Spend some time in prayer before your group gathers.
- You **always** have the option to use some or all the questions and/or prepare your own questions.

Welcome: *Icebreaker – Who is the most famous person you have ever interacted with?*

Study Tip: In this week's study guide, we meet Zechariah who has been selected to go into the temple and burn incense, one of the highest honors the Jewish priesthood has to offer. This ritual burning of incense takes place inside the Holy Place of the temple on the altar of incense which is directly *in front of* the veil protecting the priest from the Holy of Holies. This altar of incense would have generated a thick cloud of smoke allowing the people and priests of Israel to be shielded from the Lord's glorious presence behind the veil. This "glory-cloud" burnt right in front of the *cherubim*-laced curtain that guarded the Holy of Holies and the Ark of the Covenant replicated the same glory-clouds that appeared when the presence of the Lord inhabited in the midst of His people (Ex. 19:9, 40:34; Matt. 17:5; Acts 1:9; Rev. 1:7). Thus, Zechariah approached the closest possible position to the Lord and offered up a cloud of incense. As a result, the incense would have ascended to the Lord offering Him "a good and pleasing aroma". It is for these roles of shielding and offering a pleasing aroma that the act of offering incense has been closely related to the act of *prayer* (Ps. 141:2). Today, Christians are now able to *approach the throne of God boldly and expectantly* when we pray because of the sacrifice made by Jesus Christ our High Priest! When we approach the throne, we are then able to offer our prayers as well as our entire lives as living sacrifices that are good and pleasing to the Lord. As you wrestle with this week's study guide, pay attention to your own role as one who is a part of God's **kingdom of priests** that He calls his church. Remember that whenever you pray, you are acting like Zechariah, a priest that is going before the throne of God mediating and representing Him to your community. Every time you pray, you offer the incense of your prayers to Him that provide a good and pleasing aroma. As you think about your own prayer life, meditate on this imagery and challenge yourself to see the true spiritual nature of prayer as you go about your daily routines and pray to the living and true God who has come to us in the person of Jesus Christ!

What's Going on This Week

This week, Pastor Danny brought us into fourth and final week of our Advent series titled *Encountering God*. Pastor Danny brought our attention to *Luke 1:5-25* to talk about how God's encounter with Zechariah disrupted his season of low expectations in prayer as well as his numbness to other religious temple activities. As you engage with this study guide, challenge your group to identify all the ways you may feel like you are "going through the motions" and falling asleep on your faith in God to answer your prayers. Then, spend some time praying for an exciting vision in the year 2022 as you prepare to expectantly encounter God in powerful ways!

"We can need God's presence and seek God's presence, and still be surprised by God's presence." – Pastor Danny Strange

GROUP MEETING (60 – 90 minutes)**Worship** (10 – 15 minutes)

Take time with your group and prepare your hearts as you enter into the presence of God for this meeting.

<p>Option 1: Christmas Music Have someone share their favorite CHRISTMAS song. Find it online, play it, and sing along! Have them explain why the lyrics have impacted them!</p>	<p>Option 2: Meditation Spend time letting your imagination determine what it would be like to encounter God or his messenger. What would it look like and how do you believe you would respond?</p>	<p>Option 3: <u>Advent Book</u> This year's advent booklet walks through the Bible's description of various encounters with the Lord. Challenge your group to follow along and openly discuss the readings!</p>
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Word #1: Identify areas of depleting hope in your prayer life (15 – 25 minutes)

Primary Texts: Luke 1:5-25 – Luke's account of the gospel begins with Zechariah – a priest who had gone through the motions of the priesthood while praying repeatedly for a child. Zechariah had gotten to a point where he was more expectant of God's *inactivity* towards His prayers. However, the angel Gabriel prophesies a child for Elizabeth and makes him mute in response to his unbelief as a way to (a) punish his disbelief while simultaneously (b) strengthen and restore his faith in God's *activity* in the world. **What part of Zechariah's encounter with God's messenger stands out to you and why? Is there something that you have been praying about for a long period of time for which you have gotten used to God's *inactivity* towards your prayer? If so, how do you think the Lord may be working in the midst of this season?**

Host Tip: Keep this question vague so that the group members can derive a lesson from the scriptures. Then draw out the specific lesson of routinely seeking God's presence and being caught off guard when God shows up. As people share long-term prayer requests, write them down and prepare to use them as material for question number two.

Word #2: Share the story that the Lord has given you (15 – 25 minutes)

Primary Texts: Luke 1:57-80 – After nine months of being mute and after his wife Elizabeth gives birth to John the Baptist, Zechariah is finally able to speak. He gives the child his divinely appointed name and offers a song of praise to the Lord. **What stands out to you the most in Zechariah's song of praise? If God were to show up in this suddenly and miraculous way in your life in the year 2022, what bold request would you make of God? How can you as a group continue to hold onto these bold requests and how can your group act *expecting* that God will show up?**

Host Tip: Do something creative to retain these bold prayer requests for 2022!

Witness (20 – 25 minutes)

- Pray that the Lord would disrupt our normal spiritual rhythms and show up in a miraculous way!
- Pray for the Spirit of boldness as we look ahead into a new year!
- Pray for any individual prayer request that comes up in your group.
- **Pray for the entire group and how they may be able to participate in future group meetings.**
- **Pray for an interaction with someone who you can invite into your next group meeting!**
- **Pray for God's hand in the multiplication and revival of your group!**

Throughout the Week

-Stay up to date with Ministry Opportunities: If you or anyone in your group is looking to serve, access spiritual care, or seek financial assistance, you can find all you need at 3Crosses.org/neighborhood

-Join relief efforts locally and around the world: Looking to contribute to what is going on both locally and around the world? Visit our website and join one of the [relief efforts](#) being made available through our church partners or sponsor an [indigenous missionary](#)!

-Life Groups 2022: For more information about joining a group, hosting a group, or general inquiries, contact AJ at avanegas@3crosses.org