

**Office of Disciples Women**

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Authored By:

**Mindi  
Welton-Mitchell**

# Pausing Our Time

**Purpose:**

In the busy season of Advent that becomes the shopping season before Christmas, how do we find time to slow down and remember Christ's birth, God's coming into our world in a new way? We look at Mary's example in the Magnificat to remind us of the purpose of God's coming in a new way: to lift up the lowly, to fill the hungry with good things, to remember God's promises of old. How might we participate in Christ's coming into our lives in a new way this Advent?

**Suggestions for the Leader:**

- Ask the participants to bring their Bibles and a journal or notebook and pen.
- Have the following materials ready:
  - Large sheets of paper
  - Markers
  - a few Bibles, Notebooks and pens, in case anyone has forgotten
  - Chalice Hymnal* or other hymnal (hymns listed in the Worship section)
- Choose two women to be "Hannah" and "Mary" in the Call to Worship

**Introduction:**

Begin with a discussion: what are your favorite things about the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas? What do you look forward to? What is your least favorite thing about this season?

It is easy to get caught up in the busy-ness and the rush of the commercialized season. What do you find gets lost in this time? Do you find yourself rushed or stressed?

Today's focus is on looking beyond the rush of the Christmas season and the focus of consumerism and pleasing others, to being a vessel of God's love and change in the world, no matter who we are. We will read two stories of women whose life situations were used by God—though the timing didn't seem to be right for either of them.

**Lesson:****Study Together:**

Prepare to read Mary's Song (Luke 1:46-56) and Hannah's Song (1 Sam. 2:1-10). Mary, as we know, was the mother of Jesus, while Hannah was the mother of the prophet Samuel. Mary was a young woman not yet married, while Hannah was married but had not had any

children. In ancient times, a woman was not deemed worthy by her family if she couldn't have children, and she would have been the subject of scorn and ridicule in her society. Mary as well would be the subject of shame and ridicule for being unmarried and pregnant.

You can divide into two groups with each group reading one lesson, or you can have two people read them out loud to the entire group.

These two passages are very similar, stories of women having an unexpected birth. What do they say about God? What do they say about what God is doing for them? What do they say about what God is doing for the world through them?

Together, compare and contrast the two songs, noting the similarities of their praise in terms of what God will do for the world. Mary's Song, known as the Magnificat, echoes the words of her ancestor Hannah. Both songs are not simply praise at the miracle of birth, but are praise at what God is doing for the world through the birth of these children.

Both women struggled in the roles and stereotypes that their society had placed upon them, but both women also saw beyond their position to what God was doing for the entire world.

Let us not get caught up into the image of Mary and Hannah as mothers, for we all know that not all of us are mothers, nor all of us have had positive experiences with mothers. Rather, let us look at Mary and Hannah as examples of how God's use of unexpected time *paused* the world around them, and God did something new in the world through them.

Again, look back at Luke 1:39-55. This is a familiar story for most of us—the story of Mary being in Elizabeth's presence, Elizabeth's proclamation (with a little help of the child in her womb) of the Lord's coming, and Mary's response in song. What does Mary say about herself?

Mary says very little about herself, besides "Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed," (Luke 1:48b, NRSV). She turns the attention on what God will do for the world now.

What if we were to drop the stress, the tension, the busy-ness of the season—what if we were to simply spend this time focusing on what God is and will be doing new in our world this year?

Does it matter to God if our Christmas shopping is done? Does it matter to God that our Christmas Pageant be perfect and go off without a hitch? Does God need our busy-ness, our hurriedness, our worry?

Rather, God needs our presence rather than presents. We celebrate Advent as a time of remembering God's promises, a time of awaiting Christ's return to our world, and a time of recognizing how God is coming in a new way into our lives. Are we paying attention to how God is using us as vessels of God's light and love in a world of darkness, or are there other distractions at this time of year?

**Reflection Time:**

You have been given this bit of time right now as a gift. This is your time, paused from the business of the world. Take a few moments in silence to prayerfully reflect on where you are in your life right now. Think about moments in your life where you suspect God has used you as a vessel of God's love in the world, in the lives of others.

Draw a line down the length of a sheet of paper. At one end of the line write "Birth." Think of this line as a timeline of your life so far. Draw lines that intersect in places where you have encountered God's presence, specifically where you feel God has used you for God's purpose in the world (i.e. inviting a friend to church, being in prayer for someone who had gone through a difficult time, volunteering at a food pantry, leading a friend to Christ).

Next, journal about those moments. Try to remember in detail what moved within you as God used you (i.e. what caused you to want to pray for a friend or to volunteer to help someone?).

Finally, write a prayer to God. Seek God's wisdom in using your life in a new way this Advent and Christmas. Ask for God's help to seek Christ in a new way as we prepare for Christmas, and to see Christ's work in our world in a new way.

After 20-30 minutes, allow participants the opportunity to share their timeline and experiences of God's presence and the ways God has used them in their life, if they wish to.

Conclude with a discussion of how we might see Christ in a new way this Advent, and how we might be used by God in a new way this season.

### **Worship:**

#### **Call to Worship (from 1 Samuel 2: 1-10 and Luke 1: 46-55)**

Hannah: My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God.

Mary: My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

Hannah: There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you;

Mary: For the Mighty One has done great things for me,

**ALL: God had done great things for us!**

Hannah: There is no rock like our God,

Mary: And Holy is his name.

Hannah: The Lord brings up the low and also exalts.

Mary: He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.

**ALL: Holy is our God, who lifts us up.**

Hannah: He raises up the poor from the dust, to make them sit with princes.

Mary: He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

Hannah: The Lord will judge the ends of the earth

Mary: In remembrance of his mercy, according to the promises he made to our ancestors.

**ALL: Our God will not forget us; our God calls us to serve with the love of Christ.**

#### **Chalice Hymnal #130 My Soul Gives Glory to My God**

**(or #131 with the chant and response)**

### **Prayer of Invocation:**

God of our ancestors, God of our Mothers, we come to You, Your daughters, ready to serve You. There are many distractions in our lives, many needs that pull us every which way. Gentle God, ease our fears and turn us away from those things that take attention from You. Help us to remember You are always with us, You will never neglect us, You will never forget us. Help us to slow down, to remember You, and to listen for the ways You

are doing new things in our lives, and in our world. In the name of Christ, and in the name of Your servants Hannah and Mary, we pray all things. Amen.

**Scripture: Luke 1:26-38**

**Meditation:**

“Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” I don’t think any of us, for a moment, would really want to be in Mary’s shoes: to be in that time, that place, bearing the son of God. But how many of us have longed for the faith to say, “Let it be with me according to your word”? More likely, for many of us, the rest of our lives get in the way. Sure, we volunteer at church, in Sunday school, or at the food pantry; we pray for those we know are in need, we share out of what we have, we give faithfully to the church; but we also have families to care for, or work that needs to be done, or papers that need to be written. We have lessons to teach or to run to, budgets to be balances, bills to be paid. There is enough in the world around us, even at church, to keep us so busy, especially in this time of year.

Mary had enough going on in her life. While weddings were probably not the big productions they are today, weddings have always been a big deal, and I’m sure she was in the midst of wedding preparations when this unexpected, untimely arrival of Gabriel interrupted the flow of her life. But Gabriel said, “Do not be afraid, Mary.”

Perhaps God is coming into your life in a new way. Rest assured, it is most likely not the announcement that Mary received! Perhaps God is coming to you now, in an unexpected, untimely way, to put the “pause button” on. Where do you need to slow down? Where can you let go? What things are less important in your life, yet take up so much time?

Allow God to put the pause on. Give yourself some time. Maybe its only 15 minutes a day. Slow down. Get up a little earlier or stay up a little later or slip in a longer lunch bread. Pause. Ask for God’s guidance. In what ways is God using you in this time? How might you serve God now, in this time, in the place you are at in your life?

In the midst of this upcoming season, don’t let the all-too familiar story of Christmas be washed down by all the busy things you have to do. Don’t let it just be the same old story. Listen for something new. What is God saying to you? How is God using you?

**Offering:**

We often give in the life of the church, to further Christ's mission, to respond to what God has done for us. As we share out of our finances, as we pass the plate around, let us also make an offering of our time, our very selves, to God, remembering the ways God has blessed us and has made us blessings to others. Let us give graciously.

**Prayer of Dedication:**

God, we lift up all of our gifts to You, our talents, time, and finances, and our very selves. May our gifts be blessed to do Your work in our world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Chalice Hymnal #125 Come, O Long-expected Jesus****Closing Prayers:**

Invite those that wish to share their written prayers from their journals during the Reflection Time to pray them out loud.

**Benediction:**

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." "There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you." Go in the spirit of Hannah and Mary, knowing that our lives are full and rich, but they are richer still when we allow God to pause our lives, to slow us down, and to fill us as vessels of His love and light in the world. Go with the peace of Christ in this season. Amen.

**Potential service projects:**

1. Go to [www.adventconspiracy.com](http://www.adventconspiracy.com) or search for Advent Conspiracy on Facebook. This is a movement to move away from consumption towards compassion, and there are many good suggestions on how to live with less "things" at Christmas and be rich in the life of Christ.
2. The Heifer Project ([www.heifer.org](http://www.heifer.org)) is another alternative to traditional gift-giving. Heifer International provides animals and education for impoverished communities to become self-reliant and self-sustaining against hunger in our world. Heifer is especially involved in the education and empowerment of women around the world, a valuable tool in fighting human trafficking.

My Notes: