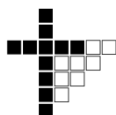




Winter 2026
Growth Group Study



St. Luke Lutheran Church

“Strange Gospel” Study Overview

“But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.” – Luke 1:29

Have you ever read a Bible passage and wondered ... “What did I just read?” Surely, the Bible is full of heroic tales, mighty works, and God’s unfolding plan of salvation. But for every beloved story, there’s another story that is weird, disturbing, or just plain strange.

The Old Testament is full of stories that make people raise an eyebrow, but the New Testament has some as well. Even the life and ministry of Jesus is strange sometimes.

Everything He does, He does for us. It’s all good news, and we benefit from Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection – even if we struggle to understand what Jesus is doing, or how it connects to our lives.

This study will address the following questions:

- Does it matter that Jesus was circumcised?
- Why did Jesus curse the fig tree, and what does that mean for us?
- How is the ascension good news if Jesus is going away?
- What do angel wars have to do with my daily life?

Even in the small, strange, and unfamiliar details of Scripture, God is at work to redeem His people. There is no detail too small, no story too strange, to be part of God’s story of salvation through Jesus.

Session Overview

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| The Circumcision and Naming of Jesus: Fully Human | Luke 2:21-40 | Jesus Fulfills the Law |
| Jesus Curses the Fig Tree: Clothed by Grace | Mark 11:12-14, 20-25 | The Power of Faith |
| The Ascension: He Goes to Return | Acts 1:1-11 | The Mission Continues |
| St. Michael and the Angels: The Battle of Good and Evil | Revelation 12 | Victory Belongs to the Lord |

Online resources

The videos for this study are available at KnowingJesus.org/Grow, on the St. Luke app, or at [Youtube.com/StLukeHaslett](https://www.youtube.com/StLukeHaslett). Please contact the church office if you need assistance.

About this study

This four-session study is designed to encourage questions and conversations about God's work in strange situations. By reading together, participants may glean insights into stories they had not previously read or understood. Each session is designed to be completed in around an hour, but groups may proceed at their own pace. The study materials, including this study guide and the videos, were produced by the staff of St. Luke Lutheran Church.



Session I: The Circumcision and Naming of Jesus

Jesus Fulfills the Law

GETTING STARTED

Be sure to welcome any new members to the group. Take a few moments to get reacquainted with returning group members. Begin your study with prayer.

What are some Bible stories that you find strange? Are they mostly in the Old Testament or New Testament?

READ | Luke 2:21-40

WATCH VIDEO

ETERNAL – Session No. 1 (The Circumcision and Naming of Jesus)

DIG IN

With Luke 2:21-40 in mind discuss the following:

- The name Jesus means “Yahweh saves.” This is not a name Mary and Joseph chose for their baby, but the name given them by the angel (v. 21). Names are important: They tell us who we are, and that we belong. Do you know what your name means?
- Jewish babies are circumcised and officially named on the eighth day (Leviticus 12:3). Circumcision was a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham (Genesis 17:11). Besides his own circumcision, what other parts of the law has Jesus fulfilled for us?
- This story shows the “humiliation” of Jesus: He humbles Himself not only to be born, but to be named, circumcised, and placed into the arms of Simeon (v. 28). What are some other ways Jesus has humbled Himself for our benefit?

- Circumcision is painful and bloody. Jesus bled, even as a little baby. This points forward to His once-for-all sacrifice of His body and blood on the cross. What other details from this reading from Luke 2 point forward to Jesus' death and resurrection?

Read Romans 3:1-4 and 9-20. Paul writes that circumcision is of some value, because knowledge of salvation came first to the Jews, who received God's Word. Circumcision was part of the Law of Moses, but the law could never save people. Only grace can do that through faith. The law makes us aware of our sin and our need for a Savior. Faith puts us in relationship with our Savior. How is this good news for us?

Read Proverbs 22:1-2. Having a good name is a great blessing. God has given us His name to call upon in times of trouble, and He knows your name. How does this bring you comfort?

WRAPPING UP

Read Colossians 2:6-15. Paul writes that baptism has replaced circumcision. Just as circumcision made someone a part of God's covenant with Abraham, baptism makes us part of God's covenant through Christ. We are joined to Him in baptism. That means His death and resurrection become our death and resurrection. We are dead to sin and alive to God.

As you close in prayer, thank God for placing His name upon you in baptism.

Prayer Requests



Session II: Jesus Curses the Fig Tree

Clothed By Grace

GETTING STARTED

After beginning with prayer, wrap up any loose ends from the first session. Feel free to share any insights you've had about Jesus' humanity since your last meeting.

What are some ways that a relationship can go wrong? What are some ways that a relationship can be made right? What does God do to make our relationship with Him right?

READ | Genesis 3:1-7, 20-24

WATCH VIDEO

Strange Gospel – Session No. 2 (Clothed by Grace)

DIG IN

With Genesis 3:1-7, 20-24 in mind discuss the following:

- From ancient times, the Church has understood that this language of being “clothed” here refers to more than physical clothing, but also to being clothed in righteousness. Adam and Eve attempt to clothe themselves with fig leaves but fail.
- How do they end up clothed in the end?
- In the Old Testament, how did God deliver atonement for the sins of the people?

Read Hebrews 10:1-10. What happened to the old sacrifices? What replaced them?

Read Galatians 3:10-14, 19-27. How are the works of the Law like the fig leaves in the Garden of Eden? How does God clothe us instead?

Read Luke 13:6-9 and Micah 7:1-4. Jesus teaches that when something does not produce its expected fruit, it is destroyed. Ever since the Old Testament, God has spoken of righteousness as the fruit He desires from His people. However, in Jesus' parable, He does not instantly destroy the fruitless tree, but gives it time and fertilizer to perhaps produce. How did Jesus give Israel time and fertilizer? How does God give us time and fertilizer?

Read Mark 11:12-14, 20-25. Jesus curses the fig tree on account of being fruitless, finding leaves, but no fruit. We have heard from our readings that the Old Covenant did not produce the fruit of righteousness that Jesus desired. What will the Lord do with a useless fruit tree?

WRAPPING UP

As long as there has been sin, humans have tried to justify themselves by works. The Law was given, not as the end-all be-all, but to point us to Jesus Christ, so that we would be clothed in His righteousness and made fruitful by His Holy Spirit indwelling us. Jesus found no fruit on the fig tree because it was not the season for bearing fruit. We must bear fruit in season and out of season, following the Holy Spirit Christ has given us and not rejecting His urging.

As you close in prayer, consider what fruitfulness would look like in the church and your life.

Prayer Requests



Session III: The Ascension: He Goes to Return

The Mission Continues

GETTING STARTED

Take a few moments to reflect on the first two weeks of this study. How has this study opened your eyes to the strangeness of the Gospel? What has been challenging or confusing for you?

Think of someone you haven't seen in a long time. What are you most looking forward to when you see them again?

READ | Acts 1:1-11

WATCH VIDEO

Strange Gospel – Session No. 3 (The Ascension)

DIG IN

With Acts 1:1-11 in mind discuss the following:

- One of the more difficult things about our faith is when we have unmet expectations. We expect Jesus to do one thing, but something else happens instead. The disciples certainly felt this way when Jesus ascended: They thought He would restore an earthly kingdom to Israel (v. 6). What emotions often come with unmet expectations?
- When talking about the earthly ministry of Jesus, we often mention His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Which of these do you think you understand the best? Which do you understand the least?

- Before ascending, Jesus tells His disciples they will receive power from the Holy Spirit and will be witnesses to the ends of the earth (v. 8). The disciples often suffered while witnessing about Jesus. For whom is this verse good news?

Read John 16:5-15. Jesus understands His followers have sorrow because He will leave them, but He promises to send a Helper: The Holy Spirit. According to this passage, how does the Holy Spirit help us? What else does the Holy Spirit do?

Read Ephesians 4:4-16. Paul writes that when Christ ascended, He gave gifts to the church so that believers would not be tossed to and fro by strange teachings, but that the church would be unified as one body to worship one Lord. What gifts has God given you to serve in the church? How have you been blessed by the church?

WRAPPING UP

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Reading about the end times can be strange, too, but there is good news: Jesus will descend from heaven in power to raise the dead and lead us into eternal life with Him. Christians have long debated exactly what will happen on that day, but it will be glorious: “We will always be with the Lord” (v. 18). What is something you can do to get ready for Christ’s return?

Close by saying the Lord’s Prayer together.

Prayer Requests



Session IV: St. Michael and the Angels

Peace and Joy

GETTING STARTED

After greeting one another, begin with prayer. Be sure to thank your hosts and group leaders for their time and efforts throughout this study.

Where is the devil today? What is he up to?

Sing or play a recording of “A Mighty Fortress is our God”

WATCH VIDEO

Strange Gospel – Session No. 4 (The Battle of Good and Evil)

DIG IN

Read Revelation 12:1-6 and discuss the following:

- Many astronomers believe the description of the signs in heaven refers to the relative positions of constellations, stars, and planets at Christ’s birth, but nobody knows exactly.
- In Greek, dragon, serpent, and leviathan are the same word, which is “drakon.” You could just as easily translate it as “serpent” in this text. Think about “the woman” and “the serpent.” What story do we know involving a woman and a serpent?
- “The woman” here seems to still be around for the serpent to persecute, so she likely refers not only to Eve, but also to God’s bride, that which is called Israel and Church.

Read Genesis 3:12-19. God promises enmity and antagonism between the woman and the devil, between her seed, and between his seed. For this reason, the devil is called “Satan” which means “Enemy” in Hebrew. Who is this son who comes to crush the serpent’s head?

Reread Revelation 12:7-12. Michael and his angels have cast down the devil and his angels and they traverse the earth in wrath, knowing their time is short. The devil no longer has any authority. Furthermore, even us on earth overcome him by the blood of Christ and the word of our testimony. What does this text’s good news mean for our lives right now?

Reread Revelation 12:13-17 and read Ephesians 6:10-20. The dragon seeks to make war on the Church’s children, which is us. What equipment have we to use for this conflict? How do we use each piece of armor?

WRAPPING UP

Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-26. We are in a competition against the devil and against spiritual powers of wickedness, so we cannot afford to run aimlessly. God’s victory is certain, but the Church cannot afford to lose its focus or else there will be far fewer Christians to share the victory.

How do Christians lose their focus? Where have you seen yourself “striking the air” and not your real opponent? Where have you seen others running aimlessly?

As you close in prayer, consider how you can focus on God’s efforts through you to make a real difference in the world and benefit God’s kingdom.

Prayer Requests