

EVANGELIZATION

AND THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

LEADER'S RESOURCE GUIDE

SESSION 1

SAMPLE



LECTIO™

UNVEILING SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

DR. MARY HEALY

Nihil Obstat: Dr. André Villeneuve, *Censor Librorum*

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Writers: Heather Akers, Ashley Crane, Kris Gray, Therese Obagi

Video Production: Jon Ervin, Steve Flanigan, Justin Leddick, Kevin Mallory, Ted Mast, John Schmidt

Print Production/Graphic Design: Ann Diaz, Brenda Kraft, Jane Myers, Devin Schadt

Augustine Institute

6160 South Syracuse Way, Suite 310
Greenwood Village, CO 80111

For more information: 303-937-4420

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LECTIO

Welcome to the LECTIO Study Series. In these sessions of *LECTIO*, your participants will begin to discover the profound importance, meaning, purpose, and beauty of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, as seen through the eyes of the Church.

LECTIO studies are designed for adult faith formation, to help unveil both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. The Latin word *LECTIO* means “reading,” and often refers to a careful and prayerful reading of Scripture. These studies cover a wide variety of topics, including individual books or letters of the Bible, the lives and writings of the saints, Church teaching, and topics to help serve the formation of Catholics living out the call of the New Evangelization.

The Leader’s Resource Guide, Study Guide, and Session Videos are the three components you will be using for each *LECTIO* session. All three work together to enable a small group to receive the truth of the Catholic Faith and apply it to their everyday lives. We’ve found that when these resources are used along with your personal witness to the faith, you and your participants can better grow together in knowledge of the Faith and in relationship with Jesus Christ. By leading a *lectio* study, you can help participants encounter Jesus Christ and his Church in their own lives, and help them share the faith in the lives of others.

LECTIO CAN BE USED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS:

- **Men’s & Women’s Groups:** For groups of men and women within the parish to grow in the faith through study, discussion, prayer, and service
- **Bible Study Groups:** To explore the profound connections between the Sacred Scriptures and the teachings of the Catholic Church
- **Before/After Mass:** To enrich Catholics’ understanding of the faith and the mysteries of the liturgy
- **Advent & Lent:** To enhance efforts for ongoing conversion, especially during the seasons of Advent and Lent
- **Catechist Training:** To give those who teach the faith in the parish a more complete and cohesive understanding of the Catholic Faith and to help them express the faith more clearly to those whom they teach
- **Small Christian Communities:** To deepen the growth of parishioners as they participate in a variety of subgroups and apostolates within the parish
- **Families:** As an in-home tool to help parents raise their children to be lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ
- **Individuals:** As a resource for anyone who wants to better understand the Catholic Faith and be equipped to better live it out and explain it to others

LEADING A LECTIO SESSION

The Study Guide takes participants step by step through each session, both the small group gathering and video teaching, as well as five days of follow-up study. The resources are carefully crafted to lead participants through an opening of their hearts and minds to God's Word and the traditions of the Catholic Church.

The Leader's Resource Guide begins with an introduction of the key points to be covered in each session and includes suggested answers for each of the discussion questions.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN EACH LECTIO SESSION:

CONNECT

- 1. Opening Prayer:** This is found in the Study Guide, so participants can read along in order to focus their attention during the prayer.
- 2. Introduction:** The leader starts with a brief overview of the topic, including the key points for the session. This helps contextualize the topic, show its relevance for daily life, and inspire participants to delve into the particular aspect of the faith that is being presented.
- 3. CONNECT Questions:** These first "ice-breaker" questions are provided to get your group talking. As participants watch the video teaching, they will soon find that these questions connect to a theme or topic of the current session.

VIDEO

- 4. Video Teaching:** The video segments present teaching that delves into and makes relevant the Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition of the Catholic Church. The video teachings for the study on Evangelization are presented by Dr. Mary Healy, Associate Professor of Sacred Scripture at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit. The Study Guide includes a brief outline of the key points in the teaching.

DISCUSS

- 5. DISCUSS Questions:** Each video segment is followed by questions in the Study Guide to help participants discuss and apply what they have learned to their lives. If you have a large group, consider forming smaller groups for the discussion, with team members facilitating and keeping each small group on track.

We have included possible responses for the DISCUSS Questions in this Leader's Resource Guide (toward the back of this guide), which can help to get a discussion started, bring greater clarity to the study topic, or answer a difficult question.
- 6. Memory Verse:** The participants are encouraged to memorize and reflect on a Scripture verse for every session so as to nurture the faith that has been deepened through your catechetical session.
- 7. Closing Prayer:** The Closing Prayer in your Study Guide has been chosen to reflect back to God an appropriate response to his loving action in the session.
- 8. For Further Reading:** Your participants should be encouraged to check out other resources that will help them throughout the week to nurture their faith.

9. Quotes, Tips, and Definitions: We have also included throughout the study interesting quotes and excerpts from saints, Catholic documents, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to help further understanding of a particular topic. The leader can choose to share this information during the session or direct the participants to it after the session.

COMMIT

The Study Guide includes five COMMIT reflections that will help participants more deeply explore the main topics of each session—and more firmly commit to following Christ in their daily lives. These reflections include more information on Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, as well as topics such as geography, history, and art. These reflections will also include times of prayer, including the practice of Scripture meditation known as *lectio divina*.

AN OVERVIEW OF LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio divina is an ancient practice of enhancing one's prayer life through the power of God's Word. The term itself means "divine reading" of the Sacred Scriptures. It is our hope that by using these simple steps each day as they study Sacred Scripture in *lectio*, participants will develop an effective way to study and pray with God's Word and hear God's voice in their daily lives.

Here is a brief description of each step of *lectio divina* for your reference as you guide participants through the practice:

- **Sacred Reading of the Scriptures (*lectio*):** The reading and rereading of the Scripture passage, with close attention to words, details, themes, and patterns that speak to you.
- **Meditation (*meditatio*):** Meditating or reflecting on what you've read, to gain understanding. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you as you spend time pondering what you have read and striving to understand it in meditation.
- **Prayer (*oratio*):** A time to bring your meditative thoughts to God in prayer. Talk with God about how the connections and implications of your meditation on the Scripture affect your life and the lives of those around you.
- **Contemplation (*contemplatio*):** A time of quiet and rest, we listen and await God's voice. Contemplation allows one to enter decisively and more deeply into the Mystery of God—this is no small endeavor, so be patient as you engage this step and strive to be receptive to God's voice speaking into your life.
- **Resolution (*operatio*):** A call for resolution and action, inviting you to respond to the things you have read in Scripture and have prayed about and to put them into practice.

To learn more about *lectio divina*, refer to Dr. Tim Gray's book *Praying Scripture for a Change*, available at www.AscensionPress.com.

HOW TO LEAD SMALL GROUPS

The *LECTIO* Study Series Leader's Resource Guide provides opportunities for small group discussion. Leading a small group discussion does not mean you have to lecture or teach—a successful small group leader facilitates, getting group participants to interact with each other as they make new discoveries. Here are some tips to help you get started as you lead and facilitate your small group:

ENVIRONMENT

- ***Make It Friendly:*** Set up your meeting space so discussion and conversation happen naturally. Avoid sitting at tables or desks; instead arrange chairs in a circle or meet in a living room environment that encourages casual, friendly conversation. Choose a meeting space that's free of distractions and that offers a fair amount of privacy.
- ***Prep Ahead:*** Set up and test your audio/video equipment ahead of time. Queue videos so they're ready to go to avoid losing valuable discussion time.
- ***Consider Refreshments:*** Depending on your meeting time, consider offering a light snack so participants won't be distracted by growling stomachs. Even if you don't offer any food items, always have water available for participants.

LOGISTICS

- ***Provide Name Tags:*** Especially when you first begin meeting, have participants wear name tags so you can easily address them by name and other participants don't have to worry about trying to remember everyone's names.
- ***Bring Supplies:*** Always have extra pens on hand for people to take notes. Also consider having highlighter pens, paper, and extra materials or Bibles available for participants to use.
- ***Be Prompt:*** While you can encourage a time to mingle at the beginning of your meeting time, don't let it get out of control so you have to rush through materials and discussion. If people know you're dedicated to starting on time, they'll begin to arrive a bit early to socialize. Likewise, reserve your meeting space for 30 minutes after you're scheduled to end so people can mingle afterward. Be diligent in starting and ending on time.

BEFORE YOU MEET

- ***Prepare:*** Look over discussion materials and preview video segments before your meeting time. Go through the questions to make discoveries about how they apply to your own life—this will help you to be more credible as a leader.
- ***Pray:*** Take time to pray for group members individually and lift up any needs they've expressed during previous meetings. Pray specifically for the Holy Spirit to open the participants' hearts to spiritual growth, renewal, and new discoveries.
- ***Evaluate:*** As you get to know the needs of individuals and your group's dynamics, evaluate your discussion materials and highlight information or questions that you think would be particularly helpful and insightful for your group.

DURING THE MEETING

- **Set the Tone:** Let group members know from the beginning that your time together is meant to be for discussion and discovery, not lecture. Also remind participants that every question is welcomed and worthy of discussion.
- **Encourage Involvement:** Work to invite all participants to engage in discussion. Don't be afraid of periods of silence, especially during your first few meetings. If one person begins to dominate the discussion time or gets off track, kindly acknowledge the person and invite him or her to explore that topic more after your group time. Ask questions such as "What do the rest of you think?" or "Anyone else?" to encourage several people to respond.
- **Use Open-Ended Questions:** Use questions that invite thought-provoking answers rather than "yes" or "no," "true" or "false," or a one-word, fill-in-the-blank answers. As a leader, your job is to get participants to think about the topic and how the Scriptures and reflections can be relevant and applicable to their daily lives.
- **Affirm Answers:** People are often reluctant to speak up for fear of giving an incorrect answer. Affirm every participant by saying things such as "Great idea," "I hadn't thought of that before," or "That's a great insight." These types of phrases communicate that you value everyone's comments and opinions.
- **Avoid Advice:** Remember, you're acting as a facilitator—not a college professor or counselor. Instead of giving advice or lecturing, when appropriate offer how a Scripture passage or something in the video spoke to you personally, or give an example of how you've been able to apply a specific concept in your own life.
- **Be Flexible and Real:** Sometimes your group time may veer off-track due to something that's going on in our culture or your community (for example, a natural disaster strikes your area or a group member is experiencing a family tragedy). Use relevant topics as a time to model for participants how God is always with us and that we can seek guidance from Scripture, the Church's teachings, and the Holy Spirit in every situation. If you model relevant discussion and transparency, your group participants are more likely to do the same.
- **Transition to Life:** Toward the end of each session, transition discussions toward sharing how participants will apply what has been discussed to their lives in the upcoming week. Close your time together in prayer each time you meet. Invite participants to share requests, either verbally or in writing, so you know how you can pray for them throughout the week.

AFTER THE MEETING

- **Stick Around:** As the leader, make yourself available after your meeting time for questions, concerns, or further discussion on a topic that a participant may have been hesitant about during the scheduled time. If a question arises that has you stumped, admit that you don't have the answer and offer to contact someone who may be able to provide one, such as your parish priest, deacon, or someone else in your diocese.
- **Follow Up:** Making contact with group members during the week will strengthen your relationship. Call or email to see how they're doing at making lessons relevant in their own lives, give a quick encouragement to engage in daily Scripture reading and prayer, or recognize a birthday or anniversary.

SAMPLE 90-MINUTE SESSION

Below is the suggested outline for an hour-and-a-half LECTIO session. Use the time allotments as a guideline; the length of time spent on each section will vary from group to group.

	TIME	STEPS	OVERVIEW
CONNECT	5 minutes	Opening Prayer and Introduction	Begin with the Opening Prayer, then go over the Introduction of the session's key points.
	5 minutes	Review	Go over any follow-up questions that participants might have from the previous session's daily COMMIT reflections.
	10 minutes	CONNECT Questions	Present questions to introduce the topic for the current session.
VIDEO	40-45 minutes (generally 3 parts, 10-15 minutes each)	Video	Play the video segments and then facilitate the DISCUSS questions that follow. Repeat for each segment.
DISCUSS	20-25 minutes (7-8 minutes for each video part)	DISCUSS Questions	After each video segment, facilitate discussion of the DISCUSS questions in large or small groups.
COMMIT	5 minutes	Summary and Closing Prayer	Summarize the main points from the study, and encourage participants to complete the daily COMMIT reflections.

SAMPLE 120-MINUTE SESSION

Below is the suggested outline for a two-hour LECTIO session. Use the time allotments as a guideline; the length of time spent on each section will vary from group to group.

	TIME	STEPS	OVERVIEW
CONNECT	10 minutes	Opening Prayer and Introduction	Begin with the Opening Prayer, then go over the Introduction of the session's key points.
	10 minutes	Review	Go over any follow-up questions that participants might have from the previous session's daily COMMIT reflections.
	15 minutes	CONNECT Questions	Present questions to introduce the topic for the current session.
VIDEO	40-45 minutes (generally 3 parts, 10-15 minutes each)	Video	Play the video segments and then facilitate the DISCUSS questions that follow. Repeat for each segment.
DISCUSS	30 minutes (10 minutes for each video part)	DISCUSS Questions	After each video segment, facilitate discussion of the DISCUSS questions in large or small groups.
COMMIT	10 minutes	Summary and Closing Prayer	Summarize the main points from the study, and encourage participants to complete the daily COMMIT reflections.

SESSION 1

WHY STUDY ACTS?

SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

Sometimes a word or phrase becomes so familiar that we no longer really think about it. We can get so used to an idea that it ceases to catch our attention. Many Catholics are familiar with Pope St. John Paul II's call for a New Evangelization—the Church's mission to proclaim the gospel with new ardor, methods, and expression—but this has become such a common catchphrase that many people toss it around without really thinking about it. Why do we need a New Evangelization? How do we go about accomplishing it? Where can we find practical tips for what successful evangelization looks like?

As is often the case, the answer is to go back to the beginning. The Acts of the Apostles tells the story of the birth and spread of the Church, starting in Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria, and finally to the end of the earth (see Acts 1:8). This first evangelization provides a model for evangelization in our world today, especially because in both the first century and today Christians are called to share the gospel with a world that is largely ignorant of it.

This session will address some of the signs of our modern times—sobering reminders of how desperately our world needs a restoration of a biblical worldview. As Pope Francis has reminded us, the Church is ministering to a world engulfed in a great spiritual war, and each one of us has a role to play. We'll also look at the missionary character of the Church. Evangelization is not an optional activity for the Church; it is the reason she exists. In the same way, we as Catholics don't get to choose whether or not we want to share the gospel—we are all called to be missionary disciples.

We'll dive into the Acts of the Apostles and look at how the first evangelization began with waiting for the power of the Holy Spirit. The annunciation to Mary and her visitation to Elizabeth serve as a proto-Pentecost and proto-evangelization, setting an example for the Church to follow, both for the first evangelization described in the Acts of the Apostles and for the New Evangelization today.



CONNECT

*Use this section of the study to help your group members get to better know one another. Then begin the session by leading the **Opening Prayer**, and then read or summarize the **Introduction** for your group. Both can be found in the Study Guide, page 3. Then discuss the following questions.*

What do you think of when you hear the word “evangelize”?

Some associations may include televangelists like Billy Graham, missionaries going door to door to talk about religion, preachers on street corners, having a conversation about the Church with a co-worker or family member, or correcting misconceptions about the Church or the Bible, etc. The word “evangelize” comes from the Greek for “good news.” Christian evangelization is announcing the “good news” of Jesus Christ, his love and his mercy, and especially sharing our personal encounter of this in our own lives.

Do you think that spreading the faith is a priority for the Catholic Church? What about for your parish, specifically?

Some people may not be familiar with the call for the Church and all Catholics to spread the gospel. Others may recognize this and be aware of various missionary efforts of the Church. Some parishes are very active with outreach in their communities to share the faith through classes or door-to-door evangelization, while other parishes may do very little active outreach.



Play the video segments. Encourage participants to follow along with the outlines in their Study Guides and take notes as key points are made during the video teachings. Then discuss the questions after each segment.



DISCUSS

Following are possible responses to the DISCUSS questions.



PART 1: SIGNS OF THE TIMES



Play the first video segment, which will last about 14 minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss the following questions.

1. What was one thing you heard for the first time or that was an “aha” moment for you?

Some participants may have found the quote from Gaudium et Spes, calling the Church to read the signs of the times, to be new to them. Some may have found the importance of a biblical worldview new. Others may not have been familiar with Pope Francis’s description of the Church as a “field hospital.”

2. In what ways have you experienced or witnessed the “tsunami of secularism” mentioned by Cardinal Wuerl? How might this make evangelization difficult?

Some people might see secularism in the media, both in news reporting and in entertainment media, as a challenge to evangelization because we are constantly exposed to a variety of secular worldviews. Others may be concerned about secularism in education, such as misrepresentations of the Church in history classes or emphasis on anti-Christian philosophies in psychology or philosophy classes. When secular ideas are ingrained at a young age they are often more difficult to overcome.

3. What is the difference between living according to a “practical atheism” and living according to a biblical worldview? What can we do to foster a biblical worldview in ourselves and in others?

“Practical atheism” means living life like God doesn’t exist or matter, or at least as if God doesn’t actually expect certain things of us or intervene in the physical world. Living according to a biblical worldview means recognizing all of history as the story of God loving and saving his people, and recognizing that we fit into that story in a specific way. Knowing the story of Scripture and keeping supernatural realities in mind in our day-to-day life will help to foster a biblical worldview.

PART 2: A BLUEPRINT FOR THE CHURCH



Play the second video segment, which will last about 16 minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss the following questions.

4. We are tasked with evangelizing a society that was once largely Christian, but has abandoned the gospel. How is the need for evangelization today both similar to and different from the situation of the first Christians? What particular challenges do you think exist in evangelizing a post-Christian culture?

The need is similar because in both the first century and today there are many people who do not know or embrace the gospel. The paganism of the ancient world is similar in many ways to the relativism and hedonism of the modern world. The situation is different because the ancient world knew absolutely nothing about the gospel, but our modern world has heard just enough truth to think it knows what Christianity is all about and often reject what it doesn't fully understand. Some challenges of evangelizing a post-Christian culture include convincing people of what the Church and Scripture truly teach, getting people interested in hearing the truth, and overcoming suspicion or hostility that arises from real scandals or perceived problems in the Church.

5. Pope Francis has called for each Christian to be a “missionary disciple.” What does this mean? What can you do to live out this call?

Being a missionary disciple means not just following Jesus, but inviting others on the journey as well. Some people answer this call by dropping everything to be missionaries in foreign countries or on college campuses, others share the truth of the faith with those they encounter through work or social situations, and many others also use modern technology and social media to share the gospel.

PART 3: ACTS OF THE APOSTLES



Play the third video segment, which will last about 17 minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss the following questions.

6. What does the opening of the Acts of the Apostles teach us about evangelization? How can we apply this to our evangelization efforts today?

It teaches us that evangelization must depend on the power of the Holy Spirit and must wait for God's timing. This reminds us that our efforts are not accomplished on our own power or by our own merits, and we have to pray and discern God's will if we want to be successful—we can't just go forward at our own pace and desire.

7. What are the similarities between the coming of the Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles (Pentecost) and the coming of the Spirit in the gospel (the Annunciation)? How is Mary a model of evangelization for us?

Both accounts talk about the Holy Spirit coming upon someone and overshadowing. Both accounts result in overflowing praise of God from those who have received the Spirit. Both accounts lead to sharing the Spirit and the love of God with others. Mary is a model of evangelization because she doesn't keep what God gives her for herself; she goes out to share it and to serve.

*Direct participants to this session's **Memory Verse** in their Study Guides, and read it together. Then lead the **Closing Prayer**. Encourage participants to do the **COMMIT** reflections on their own before you meet again as a group.*



COMMIT

Following are possible responses to the questions participants will be asked in their daily COMMIT reflections. Emphasis (**bold text**) has been added to some of the Scripture passages to indicate how the passage answers the question.



DAY 1 – ST. LUKE

Participants will read about St. Luke, the author of Acts, and consider how knowing the author sheds light on the text.

Look up Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–21:18; and 27:1–28:16. What are some of the events Luke witnessed or participated in? Why is Luke's status as an eyewitness important to our understanding of Acts?

St. Luke witnesses preaching in Philippi, the conversion of Lydia and her household, St. Paul and Silas being beaten and imprisoned, Paul bringing Eutychus back to life, Paul's return to Jerusalem and arrest, Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea, and Paul's shipwreck and journey to Rome. His eyewitness account adds credibility to both the history he records and the way in which he interprets it.



DAY 2 – SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Participants will look at statistics about the modern world and the Church today to further explain why evangelization is so necessary. Participants will also explore examples from Scripture to give encouragement and inspiration even in these dark times.

In abandoning a biblical worldview, our society has opened itself up to a wide variety of alternatives. What are some of the secular worldviews you have encountered in your interactions with others? How have such interactions impacted your life?

Some examples of secular worldviews include relativism, hedonism, nihilism, humanism, scientism, radical feminism, socialism/communism, fascism, skepticism, etc. Some people have spent part of their lives following one or more of these worldviews before experiencing conversion. Others may have close family or friends who subscribe to these worldviews and therefore must deal with them on a regular basis.

Have you or someone you know experienced persecution for your faith? What happened? How did you respond?

Persecution comes in many forms. It might include ridicule or exclusion. Some people may have experienced more serious persecution, especially in various areas of the Middle East. Some people may not feel they have experienced any persecution for their faith, or that other people's poor opinions or mockery don't really count as persecution.

How do the stories of Jonah, Hezekiah, and Josiah apply to our own times? What encouragement and lessons can we draw from these stories?

In each case the situation seemed very dark and desperate—lots of sin and wickedness. But with each story God used one individual to turn things around and bring about conversion. In Jonah's case it is a reminder that although we might rather see our enemies punished for their sin, God wants to offer mercy to all. In the case of Hezekiah and Josiah, there is a reminder that no matter how serious the sin, God wants to offer his forgiveness and bring us back into right relationship. A whole city or nation can be converted—nothing is too difficult for God.



DAY 3 – LECTIO: THE VISITATION

Participants will reflect on Mary's visitation to Elizabeth as a model of evangelization.

LECTIO

What actions does Mary perform in this passage? What does Elizabeth do? What does the child (St. John the Baptist) do?

Mary goes with haste, she enters the house, she greets her cousin, she magnifies the Lord. Elizabeth hears and exclaims (blesses). John leaps.

What are Elizabeth and John's reactions to Mary's arrival? What emotions does Mary express?

Elizabeth and John react with overflowing joy and praise. Mary expresses emotions of wonder and thanksgiving.

What are the themes of Mary's Magnificat (verses 46-55)?

The great works that God has done and his faithfulness in keeping his promises.

MEDITATIO

Consider the actions of each person in this passage. How is each action an appropriate response to the presence of the Holy Spirit? How do these actions present a model for evangelization?

Mary follows the prompting of the Spirit to go and greet Elizabeth. Elizabeth, John, and Mary all respond to the coming of the Spirit with praise. Elizabeth also responds with prophetic words. All of these relate to evangelization: we must go out to others, we must greet and serve them, and we must give glory to God.

With whom do you identify most closely in this passage? Why?

Perhaps with Mary because she is the one on a mission, the one going to serve her cousin. Perhaps with Elizabeth, wondering at the honor and blessing of God visiting her through Mary. Perhaps with John, responding in joy beyond words.

Our emotions often play a key role in our lives of faith. When has your response or reaction to the Holy Spirit been similar to that of Elizabeth or John? When has it been similar to the response of Mary?

On some occasions we have just the right words and feel like we have great insight into what is going on, as Mary and Elizabeth do. Sometimes we feel like we understand very well, as Mary seems to; sometimes we have joy but questions, as Elizabeth does. Sometimes we are overflowing with emotion but have no words, like the infant John.

Which themes of Mary's Magnificat resonate most with you? Why? If you were to write your own Magnificat modeled on Mary's, what would it include?

God's faithfulness experienced personally may be an important theme; God's faithfulness demonstrated in history may be most striking. A personal Magnificat might include praise for great works done by God in one's own life, or promises that God has fulfilled in a special way already. It might also focus on promises as yet unfulfilled, but express faith and trust because of what God has already done in the past.