

## Family and Journey Group Resources for the Advent/Christmas Season

For the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas, we're taking a break from the "normal" Journey Group discussion guides. Instead, the Adult Ministries team will provide a variety of ideas to use with your family and/or journey and new community groups. Each week will include three categories with a suggested theme, an idea for a shared experience, and a few discussion questions. Our hope is that this flexibility allows groups and families to focus on relationships and shared experiences that make the holidays more meaningful and joyous. Happiest of holidays to you!

### Option 1 – Christmas Story/Biblical Text

Over the next four weeks, we will be looking at four different sections of the Christmas story and the way people respond when God speaks. This week we will be looking at Luke 1:26-56. This passage describes Mary's response to the angel Gabriel foretelling the birth of Jesus.

#### Objectives:

- Discuss the message given to Mary and how her response and interaction with the angel compares to Zechariah's.
- Reflect on how Mary's story encourages us to live by the power of God's spirit as we respond to God in surrender.
- Pray that we will recognize God's presence and that God's Word will speak to our hearts in a transformative and God-honoring way. Ask God to continue revealing himself in life-changing ways, and pray that we will be responsive and obedient.

#### Bible Discussion:

- Read Luke 1:26-56 as a group. Let everyone have a moment to reflect on the text, then open up discussion by inviting everyone to share their initial responses.
- **How does Mary's response to Gabriel compare to Zechariah's response in the previous passage?**
  - **Why do you think Gabriel deals with Mary so much differently than he dealt with Zechariah?**
- Though Mary and Zechariah's reactions are recorded very similarly, God knows the intensions of the heart. Gabriel silences Zechariah in his unbelief and while Mary's voice/ song is magnified and immortalized because of her faith and obedience (verses 46-55).
  - **How does the author portray Mary after her encounter with Gabriel?**
  - **What can we learn about God from Mary's song?**
- **Is there sincere passion and joy in your heart when you hear the good news of Jesus?**
- **How does Mary's story encourage us to live by the power of God's spirit as we respond to God in surrender?**

#### Activity Suggestion:

Ask God for a fresh heart alignment and for him to purify the motives and intents of your heart. God is faithful to do so. Then spend some time writing your own version of Mary's song of praise/ *The Magnificat*. As you write ask,

- **"God, thank you for what have you done through Jesus. How are you including me in your redemptive plan?"**
- **God, how have you revealed yourself to me and what can I know to be true about you?**

## **Option 2 – PEACE- Week 2- Isaiah 9:6-7**

Advent means “the coming,” and is a time of expectant waiting. Christians have been celebrating the Advent season since the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. We celebrate the coming of Jesus’ birth, which has already occurred, and we wait in expectation for the return of Christ which is yet to come. This is not a passive waiting, but an active waiting.

### **Activity (Optional):**

- Light the second candle of your [advent wreath](#) symbolizing “peace” when you gather. [History/Tradition of Advent Wreaths](#)
- Use this [Advent calendar](#) as the official Advent season begins.

**Open with prayer. Read Isaiah 9:6-7.**

### **Watch the Bible project video- "[Shalom / Peace](#)"**

The video emphasizes “peace takes a lot of work” because it isn’t just the absence of conflict but the restoration of wholeness to that which is broken. (3:10 in video)

*Read Ephesians 2:11-18 and Colossians 1:19-20.*

**How might the idea of peace as a restoration transform the way we understand these passages?**

**Read Ephesians 4:1-6. In what ways does this passage teach us to be peacemakers in a broken world?**

**In light of this video, in what ways can we share peace with others during the holiday season?**

- With our words?
- In our actions?

**In what way can we experience Jesus as the Prince of Peace for ourselves this holiday season?**

### **Listen (Optional): “Silent Night”**

*Pray for one another that you would have a spirit of peace that brings wholeness to brokenness this holiday season.*

### Option 3 – Movie Night - A Christmas Carol

Dickens' tale of a miserly old man who encounters three ghosts is well known. Embittered by poverty and abandonment as a young child, Scrooge is so focused on making money that he fails to make a life, and his bitterness affects all his relationships. Unaware of (or uncaring toward) the pain in the lives around him, he pushes others away and finds himself lonely and resentful at the end of his life. Only by engaging with his past, present, and future will he be able to find wholeness and see God's perspective on what life's purpose should be.

#### A Christmas Carol – Full Movie – Scrooge (1970 Musical version)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99BfCytGEGY>

**3:34 – 7:17** – To set up this scene, have participants note words, attitudes, responses, or expressions you note in each of the characters (Carolers, Scrooge, Bob, Fred)

Based on this scene, what would you say are some of Scrooge's priorities?

Contrast those with some of the priorities of his nephew, Fred, or his employee, Bob.

- **How do our priorities show up, even if they are unspoken? How does the fruit of our spiritual lives express itself in our relationships and actions?**
- Read Luke 6:43-45. **What can we assume about Scrooge's heart, based on the fruit of his actions?**

**32:22- 34:00** - Marley indicates that the reason for the chains he wears is their shared focus on business at the expense of "mankind" while on earth. He cannot escape the choices he made while living, but Scrooge still has time to do so.

- **What are some lifestyle choices that can keep us in bondage?**
- Read Romans 8:1-4. **How can we escape this bondage to sin and live in freedom?**

**41:23 – 42:40** - This scene gives us a glimpse of why Scrooge is so bitter (abandoned by his family)

- **Does Scrooge's experience of deep pain and abandonment as a child give you more empathy for his behavior as an adult? Why or why not?**
- **What might we learn from this as we consider people who've hurt us, or behaved in ways that seemed un-Christlike?**

Often, understanding a person's backstory gives us more empathy for them today. Everyone is going through something.

**1:07:18 -1:14:01** - In both these scenes, one with the Cratchit family and one with Scrooge's nephew, we see Bob and Fred are willing to "drink to the health" of Mr. Scrooge, even though he has not treated them well.

- Read Matthew 5:43-48. **What does it require, in your own life, to be able to wish the best for those who treat you poorly, or who are your enemies?**

**1:35:20- 1:38:08** – Scrooge realizes he's been spared and promises to change his life.

- **Even though Scrooge doesn't mention God or Jesus in his song of thanksgiving, how is his message reminiscent of our gift of the Gospel?**
- Every day we have the option to "begin again." **For what are you most thankful to God?**

**Activity/Response: What might we do this Christmas season in a response of thanksgiving to the God who gives us such a wonderful gift?** Discuss possible service opportunities at the church or in the community. Consider adopting a single mom, serving together at Open Door Mission, or caroling in a nursing home to bring joy to those who are lonely.