



Advent Small Groups

The following is an outline based on Adam Hamilton's *The Journey, Walking the Road to Bethlehem*. This outline has simplified the Leader's Guide for this study. It would be suggested that the leader purchase the guide as it has all the necessary background and scriptural support.

Week 1: Small Group

Welcome and Opening Prayer:

Merciful God, you sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation. Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may celebrate aright the commemoration of the Nativity and may await with joy the coming in glory of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Key Verse or Quote:

Grace is goodness we don't deserve; kindness, forgiveness, blessing- all these things when they are a pure gift. Giving of grace has the power to change lives.

Breaking the Ice:

- Share something special about your hometown or city that has shaped who you are today.
- If you do not have a "hometown" how has that had an impact on your identity?

Wrestling with the Word:

Read Luke 1:26-38

- What strikes you about this passage?
- What was unique about Mary being chosen by God?
- What does the angel mean Mary is "full of grace"?
- What questions would you ask if an angel appeared to you with a word from God?
- Adam Hamilton's definition of angels is "messengers". Name and describe some of the angels in your life.

Next Steps:

- The angel's message set forth God's plan. What can we learn from Mary's complete willingness to serve?

Prayer for the Week:

Pray for one another's needs.

Lord, thank you for the people for whom you have spoken to me. Help me to pay attention and to listen for your voice through those you send. Speak, Lord: your servant is listening. Amen.



Week 2: Small Group

Welcome and Opening Prayer:

We come together - tired from rushing around, tired of trying to meet the demands and expectations of the season. Slow us down. Help us center our thoughts. Restore in us a childlike wonder, and a belief that dreams really do come true. We call on your name. Be with us and in us, Emmanuel. Amen. (adapted Ministry Matters, Joanne Brown 12/16)

Key Verse or Quote: We too are called to be signs of Emmanuel, of God's presence in the world and to the visible reminders of hope.

Breaking the Ice:

- How did the Christmas storybooks that you may have been read or heard as a child help shape your images of the Christmas story?
- How do your recollections line up with the gospel accounts? (Was it really silent? Was there an innkeeper? Were there 3 kings?)

Wrestling with the Word:

Read Matthew 1:18-25

- What strikes you about this passage?
- What is the significance of Bethlehem in the story?
- What are the distinct characteristics of Joseph that are lifted up in the gospel?
- What about the angel's pronouncements might have surprised Joseph?
- What is the primary lesson for us to learn about Joseph and his part in the birth of Jesus the Christ?

Next Steps:

- Do you believe God speaks to us in daydreams and night dreams?
- Why or why not?
- How might we intentionally listen for God speaking to us?

Prayer for the Week:

Lord help me listen for your dreams for my life and give me the boldness and courage to pursue them. Speak Lord, your servant is listening. Amen.



Week 3: Small Group

Welcome and Opening Prayer:

Lord be with us as we encounter Mary and hear of the wondrous news that she received. Remind us that, like Mary, each one of us is a bearer of your Good News. We are called to proclaim hope, peace, joy and love in your name. Open our hearts and our spirits today to receive with great joy the love that you have for us. For we ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen. (adapted Ministry Matters, Nancy Townley 12/15)

Key Verse or Quote: Mentoring blesses the one who is being mentored, but it also blesses the one who is mentoring.

Breaking the Ice:

- Name someone who has helped shape and form you in faith?
- Who are you investing your time and talent into?

Wrestling with The Word:

Read Luke 1:39-45

- Describe Mary and Elizabeth's relationship? How did Elizabeth come alongside Mary in this time of need?
- Do you equate being blessed with good fortune? How does Adam Hamilton define being blessed by God?
- Do you think Mary grasped the significance of all of this?
- Think about the phrase "magnifies the Lord." What does it mean? Is it possible to magnify the Lord? Why or why not?

Next Steps:

- Invite each person to write ways they will seek to lift the lowly and feed the hungry.
- Carry that slip of paper as a reminder of this special call to be blessed by being a blessing for others.

Prayer for The Week:

Lord, thank you even now for your blessings in my life. Help me to see past my circumstances to what you will do with and through them, help me to trust you. Use my adversity for your glory. Amen



Week 4: Small Group

Welcome and Opening Prayer:

Almighty God, by the birth of Jesus you gave us a great light to dawn on our darkness. Grant that in his light we may see light. Bestow upon us that most excellent Christmas gift of love to all people, so that the likeness of your Son may be formed in us and that we may have the hope of everlasting life. Amen. (adapted Book of Worship)

Key Verse or Quote: The journey to Bethlehem lead Mary and Joseph to retrace sixteen hundred years of biblical history.

Breaking the Ice:

- Do you have a special connection to a manger scene or crèche in your home or church?
- What sounds, sights and smells may have filled the place as Jesus was born?

Wrestling with the Word:

Read Luke 2:1-8

- What new insights into the story of the Nativity have you gained from the book?
- Do you think the many meanings in the Nativity are evidence of God's plan?
- How did the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem change and define the lives of Mary and Joseph?
- How have journeys in your life changed and defined your life?

Next Steps:

- The journey of Mary and Joseph demonstrated that God was with them. How do you experience God being with you as you journey through life and as you face significant journeys ahead?

Prayer for the Week:

Almighty God, you are our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. We will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though it's waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. Lord of hosts, you are with us. You are our refuge. Thanks be to God. We offer this prayer in the name of Christ Jesus. Amen.