



Week 1 Small Group: Deck the Halls with Hope

OPENING PRAYER:

God of Hope, we come here today looking for a word of encouragement and hope from you. Focus our minds on your words, open our hearts to your guidance, allow our souls to seek your will. Amen.

Hymn: "Come, Thou long-expected Jesus, Born to set Thy people free. From our fears and sins release us, Let us find our rest in Thee." Charles Wesley, Come Long Expected Jesus

BREAKING THE ICE:

The popular Christmas carol, "Deck the Halls" combines a few favorite holiday traditions, decorating and singing! What are the things that you do around the holidays that bring you and others joy?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read Isaiah 9:2-7

- Advent recognizes the coming of Jesus as well as his return. How does this passage reflect this principle?
- As you read the text, what kind of conditions are the people of Israel living under? How do the promises of Isaiah address these circumstances?
- Isaiah was written 700 years before the birth of Jesus. How were these conditions still prevalent when Jesus was born? How about now?
- What comes to mind when you look at the titles given to the child?

NEXT STEPS:

- What does "the season of advent" mean to you? How has this Christian tradition impacted your life and faith in the past? What are your hopes for this year?
- As you consider the deep darkness in our world, what are the areas where God is asking you to help?
- How does this passage offer you hope today?
- This familiar Advent and Christmas passage describes a kingdom where justice and righteousness reign forever. Where are the injustices that people face in our community? How are we offering hope?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Jesus, giver of hope, we begin this Advent season with hope in your promises. We long for your light to fill our world, we desire for your righteousness to offer relief to those who are suffering, we offer ourselves to be used by you so that your kingdom may come establishing justice and righteous forever. Amen.



Week 2 Small Group: Deck the Halls with Peace

OPENING PRAYER:

God of peace, we come today seeking a peace in these days of challenge. Focus our minds on your words, open our hearts to your guidance, allow our souls to seek your will. Amen.

*Hymn: "Mountains and valleys will have to be prepared, new highways opened, now protocols declared, Almost here, God is nearing, in beauty and grace, All clear every gateway, in haste, come out in haste!"
Alberto Taulè, Toda la Tierra (All Earth Is Waiting)*

BREAKING THE ICE:

What setting or situation brings you comfort?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read Isaiah 26:7-13

- What words does Isaiah offer that would have reassured people who are in hard times and do not see an end in sight?
- What is the good news that Isaiah is offering to his audience? How might the people of the New Testament have heard this as good news?
- What about Jesus' birth brings you comfort and peace?

NEXT STEPS:

- What are the things that "pretend" to offer us peace, yet fail to do so?
- How are we being asked to be a witness to the peace Jesus offers in our families, our church, our communities and the world?
- Where do you find peace in knowing that God's glory has been revealed in Jesus and will completely be made known when Jesus returns?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Jesus, giver of peace, we trust in you to be with us and guide us. In this season of preparation, help us to prepare not just our homes and our churches for your coming, but help us to get ready our minds, hearts and spirits. Help us to be people who provide comfort and peace to those who are in need of your good news. Amen.



Week 3 Small Group: Deck the Halls with Joy

OPENING PRAYER:

Oh God of joy, we come here today looking for true joy. Focus our minds on your words, open our hearts to your guidance, allow our souls to seek your will. Amen.

Hymn: "O children of the forest free, O songs of Manitou, The Holy Child of earth and heav'n, Is born today for you. Come kneel before the radiant Boy, Who brings you beauty, peace and joy: Jesus, your King, is born; Jesus is born! In excelsis gloria!" Twas in the Moon of Wintertime, Jean de Brebeuf, Native American Carol

BREAKING THE ICE:

A favorite Christmas song is "Joy to the World." What are the things that bring you joy, even when facing life's challenges?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read Luke 1:39-55

- Considering this passage, how would you define authentic joy? How is it different than happiness?
- The exchange between Mary and Elizabeth is one of great joy. What is bringing each of them joy in this passage? How is their joy a contrast to their situations? How is it a reflection of their faith?
- Make a list of all the things that she describes in the song that God has done. What things were done for Mary, and what things were done for God's people? What does this say about the reasons for her joy?

NEXT STEPS:

This scripture names Jesus as the source of immeasurable joy, even before he is born. How has Jesus brought you joy?

- Mary's words are those of praise and worship. She glorifies God as well as reflects on God's goodness to her. How might you give God glory and share of God's goodness in your life?
- How are you being called to join Mary's joy and commitment to God's purposes named in this passage?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Jesus, source of all joy, our souls glorify you, and our spirits rejoice in your goodness. We continue on this Advent journey desiring to bring true joy into this world. May we be bearers of joy for the people who have been cast aside, for the lonely, for the poor and hungry. We know this is possible because of your goodness, greatness, power and faithfulness. Amen.



Week 4 Small Group: Deck the Halls with Love

OPENING PRAYER:

God of perfect love, we come here today hoping that we are doing the right things, making the right choices. Focus our minds on your words, open our hearts to your guidance, allow our souls to seek your will. Amen.

Hymn: Let us now go to Bethlehem, To see the wondrous thing. Mary and Joseph and with them The babe, our infant king. His Father's glory come To lift our hearts above. First loved by Him and angel hosts We carol back His love. Lois F. Bello, Manglakat na Kita sa Bele

BREAKING THE ICE:

In general, are you good about making simple decisions or choices like what you want for dinner, or what to watch on TV, or are you indecisive? How about with big life decisions?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read Matthew 1:18-25

- What fears does the angel address in this passage? How does Joseph still need to step out in faith?
- What do you learn about the character of Joseph in this text? How will this serve Joseph later as the earthly father of Jesus?
- How does Joseph's response in a difficult situation point to God's love and care?

NEXT STEPS:

- In what ways does this scripture make you more confident in God's plan for your life?
- Joseph's response still has a cost. How can following God's way have a cost involved?
- God offered Joseph insight into his situation; how might God be offering you insight into your current circumstances? How might that impact your approach to your circumstances?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Jesus, source of endless love, we are thankful in that all circumstances you are with us. As Christmas draws closer, we are ever grateful for the gift of your presence, God with us, today, tomorrow and always. We ask that as our various life circumstances unfold that you help us to choose you and choose love above all other things. Amen.



Week 5 Small Group: Deck the Halls with a Promise Fulfilled

OPENING PRAYER:

Faithful God, we come here today longing for the day you will fulfill the promises you have made to us. Focus our minds on your words, open our hearts to your guidance, allow our souls to seek your will. Amen.

Quote: "Go, tell it on the mountain, Over the hills and everywhere; Go, tell it on the mountain, That Jesus Christ is born." Go Tell It on the Mountain, African-American Spiritual, compiled by John Wesley Work Jr.

BREAKING THE ICE:

Do you have a bucket list? Name one thing that is on it.

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read: Luke 2:22-40

- Simeon waited his whole life for God to fulfill the promise of salvation to the people. What is most striking to you about Simeon's words of praise to God?
- What are some of the ways Jesus' life was the revelation of his words to Mary and Joseph?
- How is Anna's life and response the same as Simeon's? How is it different?

NEXT STEPS:

- The year 2020 was filled with many unexpected changes and challenges. How has God's hope, peace, joy and love sustained you? How will you bring these virtues into the new year?
- Deck the Halls carries the imagery of bright decorations and merry times. For some, the decorations will be packed away, allowing post-holiday blues to set in. For others, this holiday season may have never lived up to expectations. How are the promises and plans of God far better than fleeting moments of merriment?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Jesus, the giver of hope, joy, peace and love, as we end this study and as this season draws to a close, help us to be mindful of the ways you are working so that all may see your light and be redeemed. Help us to live in ways that lead others to worship you and trust in your promises. Amen.