



## Week 1 Small Group: Peace Made Possible

### OPENING PRAYER:

Loving God, help us to experience peace in this season that can be so hectic and difficult. May we sense your presence all around us, uplifting us and reminding us that no matter what we feel or experience this season, you are near. Amen.

*Hymn: It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*

*"For lo! the days are hastening on, by prophet seen of old, when with the ever-circling years shall come the time foretold when peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendors fling, and the whole world send back the song which now the angels sing." Edmund H Sears*

### BREAKING THE ICE:

What is your favorite Christmas or Advent memory?

### WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read *Isaiah 2:2-5*

- How would you describe the world in the opening chapters of Isaiah?
- Like many biblical prophecies, these passages point toward multiple layers of fulfillment. How do you see these passages pointing toward Jesus' life on earth? How do they point toward the second coming?
- What does this prophecy of the future Jerusalem tell us about God's plan?

### NEXT STEPS:

- The history of Israel is filled with violence, political disruption, and confusion. In light of this scripture, how might we trust God no matter the chaos of the world?
- What are the "swords" in your life or the world? What keeps them drawn? How can they be reformed into "plowshares"?
- What can we let go of in this season, so that we can embrace some of the peace offered to us?

### CLOSING PRAYER:

Amazing God who offers us freely the gifts of hope, peace, joy, and love, we give our thanks. Help us to keep these treasures at the forefront during this busy season. Today we choose to believe in your promises and will try to live in a way that gives you all the glory. Amen.



## Week 2 Small Group: Hope Made Possible

### OPENING PRAYER:

God of hope and direction, we thank you for helping us navigate this life. Grant us the wisdom and courage this week to be opened to surprises, to see your presence in new ways, and to trust you will do good things in our lives and in the world. Amen.

*Hymn: O Holy Night*

*"A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices. For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn'. Fall on your knees, o hear the angels' voices. O night divine, o night when Christ was born. O night divine." Placide Cappeau*

### BREAKING THE ICE:

Can you remember a time during the Christmas season when you felt overwhelmed instead of filled with the Christmas spirit?

### WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read *Isaiah 11:1-10*

- What is the character of the "shoot from the stump of Jesse"? How does this point to Jesus' characteristics?
- How are each of these godly characteristics different than their worldly counterpart? For example, how is Godly wisdom different from the world's understanding of wisdom?
- Read the contrasts in verses 6-8. What might they be alluding to? Are there any surprises?

### NEXT STEPS:

- How does it encourage you and inspire you to see God's faithfulness in the midst of our broken world?
- What is the hope that Jesus offers to us? How does that influence our daily lives?
- As we approach Christmas, how can the hope that Christ will come again encourage, comfort and preserve us? How are we being called to wait?

### CLOSING PRAYER:

Amazing God who offers us freely the gifts of hope, peace, joy and love, we give our thanks. Help us to keep these treasures at the forefront during this busy season. Today we choose to believe in your promises and will try to live in a way that gives you all the glory. Amen.



### Week 3 Small Group: Joy Made Possible

#### OPENING PRAYER:

Creative God, we thank you for the countless opportunities we have each day to live fully and joyfully. Help us to remain close to you and not lose the spirit of Christmas, but instead to celebrate your presence with us each day. Amen.

*Hymn: Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*

*"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. Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art; dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart." Charles Wesley*

#### BREAKING THE ICE:

When was the last time you experienced joy? What did that look like and how did you express joy?

#### WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read Isaiah 35:1-10

- Joy is different than happiness. Can you define joy?
- What does this Isaiah 35 text tell us about God's action in our joy?
- How do you see God bringing dead things to life in this passage and in your own life?

#### NEXT STEPS:

- What words from the passage speak to challenges you are experiencing right now and how? (For example, how is your life "parched" or "feeble" or "speechless"? Looking at the scripture, what is the contrast that God is offering? What does that mean for you?)
- What do you turn to when you are needing some joy? How might this scripture change your habits?
- In this Christmas season, have you experienced God's transformative joy?

#### CLOSING PRAYER:

Amazing God who offers us freely the gifts of hope, peace, joy and love, we give our thanks. Help us to keep these treasures at the forefront during this busy season. Today we choose to believe in your promises and will try to live in a way that gives you all the glory. Amen.





## Week 4 Small Group: Love Made Possible

### OPENING PRAYER:

O God of incarnation, we thank you for your gift of love which greets us in this season. Give us the grace to be like the shepherds and the angels in spreading the good news that a Savior has been born! Help us to live fully in the light of your amazing love. In Christ's name, amen.

*Hymn: Love Came Down at Christmas*

*"Love shall be our token; love be yours and love be mine; love to God and others, love for plea and gift and sign."*

*Christina Rossetti*

### BREAKING THE ICE:

What are some of the ways you see or experience love during the Christmas season?

### WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read *Matthew 1:18-25*

- What do you learn about Joseph from these verses?
- Consider the historical setting of the Christmas story and the human reality of it all. What could have been a typical reaction to having learned that Mary was pregnant?
- Why does Joseph's plan in verse 19 show that he is a righteous man? What do you think of his plan?

### NEXT STEPS:

- In this scripture God is called Emmanuel, which means "God is with us." When have you experienced God with you?
- Joseph's experience with the angel led to his transformation. Has there been a time in your life when an experience made you change your course?
- How does Joseph's story encourage you to cooperate with God even when God wants you to do something very difficult?

### CLOSING PRAYER:

Amazing God who offers us freely the gifts of hope, peace, joy and love, we give our thanks. Help us to keep these treasures at the forefront during this busy season. Today we choose to believe in your promises and will try to live in a way that gives you all the glory. Amen.



## Week 5 Small Group: God Found in Impossible Places

### OPENING PRAYER:

God of the impossible, we thank you for your unending love. It is because of your love for us through Jesus that we have peace, hope and joy. Open our eyes to your works of love even when there seems to be no answers. Give us the courage to share your love with all the world. Amen.

*Hymn: God, You Wrap Your Love Around Us*

*"May the women, men and children fleeing danger every day. Know, through us, your living presence; You walk with them on their way. Spirit, as you give them comfort, teach us here to freely give; May we blanket this world over. With your love, so all may live." Carolyn Gillette*

### BREAKING THE ICE:

How will you bring the hope, peace, joy and love of this season into the new year?

### WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read Matthew 2:13-23

- There are three Old Testament prophecies that are fulfilled in this text: Micah 5:2,4 (Matthew 2:6), Hosea 11:1 (Matthew 2:13-15), Jer. 31:15 (Matthew 2:18). What is their significance?
- How do the prophecies in the chart point to what Jesus will be like and what role he will play?
- What is the significance of Nazareth?



<p><b>Micah 5:2,4</b>          But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,          who are one of the little clans of          Judah,          from you shall come forth for me          one who is to rule in Israel,          whose origin is from of old,          from ancient days.  <sup>4</sup>And he shall stand and feed his flock          in the strength of the LORD,          in the majesty of the name of          the LORD his God.          And they shall live secure, for now he          shall be great          to the ends of the earth,</p>	<p><b>Hosea 11:1</b>          When Israel was a child, I loved him,          and out of Egypt I called my son.</p>	<p><b>Jer. 31:15</b>          Thus says the LORD:          A voice is heard in Ramah,          lamentation and bitter weeping.          Rachel is weeping for her children;          she refuses to be comforted for her          children,          because they are no more.</p>
<p><b>Matthew 2:6</b>          'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of          Judah,          are by no means least among the          rulers of Judah,          for from you shall come a ruler          who is to shepherd my people,          Israel.' "</p>	<p><b>Matthew 2:13-15</b>  <sup>13</sup>Now after they had left, an angel of          the Lord appeared to Joseph in a          dream and said, "Get up, take the          child and his mother, and flee to          Egypt, and remain there until I tell          you, for Herod is about to search for          the child, to destroy him." <sup>14</sup>Then          Joseph got up, took the child and his          mother by night, and went to          Egypt <sup>15</sup>and remained there until the          death of Herod. This was to fulfill          what had been spoken by the Lord          through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I          have called my son."</p>	<p><b>Matthew 2:16-18</b>  <sup>16</sup>When Herod saw that he had been          tricked by the magi, he was          infuriated, and he sent and killed all          the children in and around          Bethlehem who were two years old          or under, according to the time that          he had learned from the magi.  <sup>17</sup>Then what had been spoken          through the prophet Jeremiah was          fulfilled:  <sup>18</sup>"A voice was heard in Ramah,          wailing and loud lamentation,          Rachel weeping for her children;          she refused to be consoled,          because they are no more."</p>





#### **NEXT STEPS:**

- Joseph followed God's instructions immediately. What is the significance of this? How does this align with your response to God?
- Share a time when you needed to move forward, even when life was uncertain.
- What is the significance of Jesus being known from a place that others looked down on? What does that teach us about God? Where might be "Nazareth" today?

#### **CLOSING PRAYER:**

Amazing God who offers us freely the gifts of hope, peace, joy and love, we give our thanks. Thank you for helping us to keep these treasures at the forefront of our thoughts during the Advent and Christmas seasons. Now we look for your guidance to bring these gifts into each and every day as we aim to live in a way that gives you all the glory. Amen.