

Chapter 1 Small Group Guide

Title: The Origin, Meaning, and Traditions of Christmas

Primary Questions:

Question 1: What is the meaning of Christmas?

Question 2: What is the reason we give gifts during Christmas and adorn evergreen trees with decorations?

Question 3: What were the prophecies of the Messiah's birth and did Jesus fulfill all of them?

Question 4: Was Jesus born on December 25th and in which year did His birth take place?

Group Discussion:

1) Have you ever wondered why we exchange gifts in celebration of Jesus' birthday? What was your influence on giving gifts to others on Christmas?

2) The story of the Magi bringing gifts to Baby Jesus is a familiar one, but do you know what those gifts symbolize and why they were so significant?

3) Christmas is widely celebrated around the world, have you ever wondered how other religions and cultures observe the birth of Christ, and have you ever celebrated Christmas in another country before?

4) Did you know that the tradition of gift-giving during Christmas has its roots in the ancient Roman festival of Saturnalia? How is this festival connected to our modern-day Christmas celebrations? What is the biblical reason found for why we give gifts in celebration of the birth of Christ? Other than gift giving, how else might you celebrate the birth of Christ with others?

5) For many, the true gift of Christmas is the birth of Christ. But why is this event considered the ultimate gift and how does it impact your celebration of the holiday season?

6) Early religious leaders often incorporated pagan traditions into Christmas celebrations. Why might they have done this and what value is there in doing so?

7) Have you ever stopped to think about why we decorate evergreen trees during Christmas? What is the significance behind this tradition? Do you have any special decorating traditions that you do? How did those traditions start?

8) In the beloved Christmas classic, "A Charlie Brown Christmas", Linus famously drops his security blanket during a pivotal scene. Do you know the symbolism behind this moment?

9) There are several prophecies related to the birth of the Messiah in the Bible. Which prophecies do you remember from this chapter?

10) The exact date of Jesus' birth is a subject of debate, but many celebrate Christmas on December 25th. Do you know why this date was chosen and what month Jesus might have been born?

Closing Thoughts: Christmas is a holiday with rich history and meaning. The true meaning of Christmas is not found in the commercialization of the holiday but in the story of the Nativity and the gift of salvation offered by Christ. The accuracy and trustworthiness of the Bible's account of the Nativity are supported by historical evidence, eyewitness accounts, and the meticulous attention to detail given by Luke, a physician and historian. As we celebrate Christmas, let us cherish the love and grace God has bestowed upon us and spread the gift of Christ to others across the world.

Chapter 2 Small Group Guide

Title: Mary's Found Favor

Primary Questions:

Question 5: Why was Mary chosen to be the mother of Jesus?

Question 6: How did Mary become pregnant and what was her age at the time?

Question 7: Why was the virgin birth necessary and did it happen?

Question 8: Which angel visited Mary?

Group Discussion:

1) Why was Mary the right choice in God's plan to bring forth the Messiah?

2) What impact would Joseph's bloodline have had on Jesus if there would not have been a virgin birth? Do you think it was part of God's divine plan that Joseph would be of the bloodline of Jeconiah?

3) What do we know about Mary's probable age when she became pregnant and gave birth to Jesus? Does this give you a new perspective on the challenges she faced at such an early age?

4) What is the argument made against the virgin Birth taken from Isaiah 7:14, and how is it refuted?

5) What is the argument the Virgin Birth was mythical and borrowed from stories like Mithra, and how is it refuted?

Closing Thoughts: Mary was a humble peasant woman from the tribe of Judah and the lineage of King David. She and her husband Joseph were not wealthy or powerful people, and they made offerings of two doves or pigeons as a sacrifice in the temple. Mary's life was characterized by courage, faith, obedience, and purity. She was chosen by God to be the mother of Jesus, the Savior of the world, because of her lineage, her engagement to Joseph, her virginity, and her good character. The genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke serve different purposes but both show that Jesus was born of a virgin and that Joseph was not His biological father. Mary's age at the time of Jesus' birth is uncertain, but she was likely between 13 and 16 years old. The Bible tells us that Mary became pregnant through the Holy Spirit and gave birth to Jesus as a virgin. While we do not know exactly how the miracle of the Virgin Birth took place, we know that it was through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 3 Small Group Guide

Title: Joseph's Reaction to Mary's Pregnancy and the Journey to Bethlehem

Primary Questions:

Primary Questions answered in the chapter:

Question 9: What was Joseph's reaction to finding out Mary was pregnant and who changed his mind?

Question 10: Why might Mary travel with Joseph to Bethlehem when she was so far along in her pregnancy?

Question 11: What would the journey have been like for Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem? How far did they travel and how long would it have taken?

Group Discussion:

1) What option did Joseph have according to the Mosaic Law in properly handling Mary's pregnancy?

2) How harsh was the punishment for adultery if there were multiple witnesses under the Mosaic Law? Why would this have not been an option for Joseph with Mary's pregnancy?

3) What was the reason Joseph didn't consider of why he could still marry Mary?

4) What emotions do you think Joseph felt immediately after he woke up from his divine dream?

5) If you were a Roman official, why might you want your subjects to return to their present homes rather than their ancestral homes to be counted in a census?

6) Which day of the journey to Bethlehem would you have enjoyed the most?

7) Which day of the journey to Bethlehem would have been your least favorite and why?

Closing Thoughts: The story of Joseph and Mary in Matthew 1:19 highlights the cultural and legal context of Jewish betrothal and marriage. Joseph, as a righteous man, had only one option in dealing with Mary's pregnancy according to the Mosaic Law, which was to issue a certificate of divorce. However, an angel revealed to him that Jesus was conceived in Mary through the Holy Spirit and that the Child would be the Son of God so he could take Mary as his wife. The journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem was a challenging one, filled with uncertainty, fear, and hardship. However, it was also a journey of faith, hope, and perseverance, as they trusted in God's plan for their lives and remained obedient to His will.

Their journey reminds us of the power of faith in times of difficulty and uncertainty. It also teaches us to trust in God's timing and to have faith that He will provide for us, even during our struggles. As we reflect on Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem, let us be inspired by their unwavering faith and commitment to God's plan for their lives. May we also learn to trust in God's goodness and faithfulness, even when our circumstances may seem overwhelming.

Chapter 4 Small Group Guide

Title: The Response to the News of the Coming Messiah

Primary Questions:

Question 12: What were the different responses to the news of Jesus' birth or impending arrival?

Question 13: What do we learn from the song Mary wrote when she was pregnant? What do we learn from the song Zechariah wrote?

Question 14: Why did the angels appear to shepherds?

Question 15: What was the sign for the shepherds to find the Messiah?

Group Discussion:

1) How many different responses to Jesus' birth are recorded in Scripture, and what do these responses tell us about the diversity of human reactions to God's grace given in our world?

2) When Mary received the news of Jesus' birth, what emotions did she experience, and how can we relate to her varied emotions when something life-changing happens to us?

3) When Elizabeth greeted Mary, what did she say, and how did her prophetic words affirm God's plan for salvation through Jesus?

4) How did John the Baptist respond to the news of Jesus' birth, and what does this tell us about the special relationship between the two?

5) When Joseph learned of Mary's unexpected pregnancy, how did he react, and what can we learn from his willingness to trust God's plan despite any doubts and fears he might have had?

6) What did the angels' message reveal about God's love and grace for humanity?

7) What was the shepherds' response to the announcement of the birth of the Messiah, and how did their immediate action to see the newborn Savior reflect their faith and hope?

8) Why did King Herod feel threatened by the possibility of a new king? How did his fear and jealousy lead to violence and tragedy?

9) When Simeon saw the Baby Jesus in the temple, how did he respond, and what can we learn from his faith and patience in waiting on God to fulfill His promise?

10) How did Anna, a prophetess in the temple, respond to the news of Jesus' birth, and what can we learn from her devotion to God and her recognition of Jesus as the Messiah?

11) When the Magi heard about the birth of a new king, how did they respond, and what can we learn from their journey of faith and their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh?

12) What does Mary's song, also known as the Magnificat, teach us about God's character, His mercy, and His concern for the marginalized and oppressed?

13) What can we learn from Zechariah's song, the Benedictus, about God's faithfulness, His promise of salvation through Jesus, and the role of John the Baptist in preparing the way for the Lord?

14) What is the significance of the ancient Jewish tradition of wrapping the first-born lamb in swaddling cloth, and how does it foreshadow the sacrificial death of Jesus, the Lamb of God?

15) Why did the shepherds find the Baby Jesus lying in a manger, and what does this humble setting reveal about God's love for the poor and the powerless, and His willingness to enter into our world as one of us?

Closing Thoughts: The different responses to the birth of Jesus in the Bible demonstrate the multifaceted nature of the event and the complex ways in which people can respond to it. Some, like the shepherds and the Magi, responded with joy and wonder, recognizing the birth of a Savior who would bring hope and salvation to the world. Others, like King Herod, responded with fear and hostility, recognizing the potential threat to their power and control.

These different responses highlight the transformative power of Jesus' birth and how it challenged and disrupted the status quo. The birth of Jesus was not just another historical event, but a moment of profound significance that would change the course of human history.

As we reflect on these different responses, we think of how the world today responds similarly to the good news of Jesus Christ. Some respond with joy and wonder, recognizing the message of hope, love, and redemption that He brings. Others respond with fear and hostility, clinging to the illusion of power and control they think they have. The choice is everyone's to make, but the consequences of our individual responses are profound.

Chapter 5 Small Group Guide

Title: The Birth of the Messiah

Primary Questions:

Question 16: Where was Jesus born and why would God choose this town?

Question 17: Did the inn where Mary and Joseph sought shelter during Jesus' birth belong to a relative or was it a lodging facility? Also, is there any prior mention of this inn in the Bible?

Question 18: What is the significance behind Jesus being wrapped in swaddling cloths, and how does this relate to the purpose of His birth?

Question 19: Why was Jesus born in a manger and what did the manger birth foreshadow?

Group Discussion:

1) What is the significance of Jesus being born in Bethlehem placed in a manger?

2) Why is Micah 5:2 important in proving the real location of Jesus' birth?

3) What is the history and significance of Bethlehem in the Bible?

4) How does the story of Benjamin's birth in Bethlehem foreshadow the birth of Jesus?

5) Can you imagine walking around 90 miles, the same distance as Mary and Joseph did while being pregnant? What is the farthest you have traveled on foot or by animal before?

6) What was Geruth Kimham, and why is it significant?

7) Who was Kimham and what did King David do for him?

8) What lesson can we learn from Kimham's willingness to say "yes" to King David's invitation?

Closing Thoughts: The birth of Jesus in a manger, wrapped in swaddling cloth points to Jesus' mission on Earth. The swaddling cloths foreshadowed Jesus' burial cloths, reminding us that He came into the world to die for our sins. Furthermore, the fact that Jesus was born in a manger, a feeding trough for animals, reminds us that He is the Bread of Life that we feed on. Let us receive the sustenance He offers. Let us feast on His Word, be nourished in His presence, and let us share this life-giving bread with others so that they too may find sustenance and eternal life in Christ.

Chapter 6 Small Group Guide

Title: The Murderous Plan and the Great Escape

Primary Questions:

Question 20: Who were the Magi, and how were they aware of the Messiah's arrival? Additionally, what was the reason for presenting the specific gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh?

Question 21: What was the star of Bethlehem?

Question 22: Why did Herod want to kill Jesus and how was his plan thwarted?

Group Discussion:

1) What Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled by Herod's actions and the events surrounding Jesus' birth and early life?

2) How did the Magi know that the Messiah was coming? Which prophet would they have known his prophecies and why might that be?

3) What lessons can we learn from the story of the Magi and how can we apply it to our own lives?

4) What did the Magi do when they finally saw Jesus? What route do you think they took to return back home?

5) Some Bible scholars suggest that the Star of Bethlehem was a natural occurrence, while others believe it was a supernatural event. What do you think, and why?

Closing Thoughts: The story of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem and their subsequent escape from Herod's wrath is a powerful reminder of God's protection and faithfulness to His promises. Despite facing numerous obstacles and challenges along the way, God's hand was always at work, guiding and protecting them.

Moreover, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in the birth and life of Jesus is a testament to the divine plan and purpose that God had for His people. From the prophecy of the virgin birth to the predictions of Jesus' suffering and death, these prophecies demonstrate God's omniscience and His deep love for humanity.

As we reflect on this story, we are reminded of God's ability to guide and protect us. We can take comfort in the knowledge that just as God protected Mary and Joseph, He is with us in our own journeys, providing the strength and guidance we need to fulfill His plan for our lives.

Chapter 7 Small Group Guide

Title: The Impact of Jesus

Primary Questions:

Question 23: Who named Jesus and what does His name mean and reveal?

Question 24: Who does God's favor rest upon and what does that mean for those who have it?

Question 25: What sacrifice did Jesus make in taking on human flesh and dwelling among us and what does that tell us about His love for us?

Group Discussion:

1) Why was Jesus not named Immanuel despite the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14?

2) What does the name Jesus mean in Hebrew and what does it tell us about Jesus' reason for leaving Heaven to be with us?

3) What does the prophecy in Micah 5:5 say about our peace?

4) What sacrifice did Jesus make by taking on human likeness?

5) Why did God have Jesus to be born in a manger rather than in a palace?
What did this tell us about this "good news"?

6) How did Jesus' sacrificial death pay for the sins of humanity?

7) In what ways did Jesus' life and ministry challenge the world's understanding of power and greatness?

Closing Thoughts: God's gift of Jesus to humanity is an incredible demonstration of His love and grace. Through Jesus, God showed us the depth of His love and His desire to have a relationship with us. Jesus came to Earth, lived among us, and ultimately sacrificed His life on the cross so that we could be forgiven and reconciled to God.

Jesus took on the sins of the world, bearing the weight of our guilt and shame. Through His death and Resurrection, Jesus could offer to us the opportunity to have a new life in Him, freedom from the burden of sin and death.

By putting our faith in Jesus, we can have a hope that goes beyond this life, with the assurance of eternal life with God. Let us honor and glorify God every day by celebrating the precious gift of Jesus to us.