



Life Group Study Guide
The Gift: God With Us – Advent 2018
1st Advent
Luke 1:26-38, Isaiah 7:14
December 1/2 weekend

Connect with One Another

Welcome one another to Life Group! Feel free to ask the “Question of the Day” to get things started in your circle.

Question of the day

For the next two weeks we’re going to be looking at *The Gift: God With Us* as we prepare for Advent and Christmas.

Have you ever looked at a wrapped gift and thought you knew exactly what was inside waiting for you, only to be surprised by what was actually inside the box?

Share some stories with your life group about this experience.

Watch the “*The Gift: God With Us* – 1st Advent” video available either online, or the DVD.

In *The Gift: God With Us*, we’re going to explore how the grand story of God, the creator of the universe, intentionally intersects with our stories as human beings; how he desires to see us receive and live in the fullness of life he longs for us to discover and apply every day.

Connect with Scripture

An Unexpected Problem

Read Luke 1:26-38

(Have someone volunteer as a reader or have everyone take turns reading a verse. Discern what your group is most comfortable with.)

After you read this passage, listen to the Holy Spirit for any moments, words or phrases in the text which jumped out to you.

Make a note of this for yourself here:

Look at verses 28 and 29 again.

What could be troubling about being told you are highly favoured and that the Lord is with you? Aren't these good news statements you would like to hear every day?

Discuss this with your Life Group.

How does your view of God and his holiness impact your response to him?

A Long Anticipated Promise

Let's look at some Old Testament passages to learn more about the anticipation of *The Gift: God With Us*.

Read Isaiah 7:14

How does this word from Isaiah relate to what Mary experiences in Luke 1?

Names matter to us; that's why parents think carefully when a child is named. In the Old Testament, God often told people what to name a child, or a place indicating what message he wanted to give at that time. What does the name "Immanuel" mean and why is it significant?

How do you think you would feel as a young parent placing this name on your child?

Read Psalm 25:4-6

Look at these three verses from Psalm 25 and circle the nouns and verbs describing who God is and what he will do. As you anticipate God's work in your life, talk about the good gifts he has ready for you in what you've circled in these verses.

How would Mary have been living in anticipation of these same things?

But what about the obstacles? *“How will this be?”* (Luke 1:34)

What is your default (first response) to obstacles or challenges you face?

Often, we want God to remove the obstacles and challenges, yet in this passage, God himself is the one presenting a difficult thing to Mary. How does an awareness that God can be present in a difficulty or challenge be a good gift?

Have you experienced this? If so, share how this mattered to you at the time.

Read Matthew 19:26

Reflect on these words of Jesus. This isn't “the power of positive thinking,” “name it and claim it” or “reaching your potential.” Jesus is talking about salvation, God's gift to restore us to relationship with himself. One commentator helps us to understand Mary's situation by giving this background information:

“The betrothal period was often a year, and Jewish tradition suggests that couples in Galilee were not left unchaperoned during that time. Betrothal involved a financial agreement between families, and it could be ended only by divorce or death. It concluded with the wedding night, at which point the marriage could finally be consummated sexually. Because the royal line was through the father, any legal son of Joseph would belong to David's line.”

Even as Mary faces an unexpected problem, her response in verse 38 is "May your word to me be fulfilled" or "Let it be to me as you have said." "Mary knows she is God's servant, so she will allow God to work through her as he wills. He can place her in whatever difficult circumstances he desires, for she knows that God is with her."¹ Mary's anticipation of a Saviour gives her courage to face her present challenges.

How are you anticipating a Saviour in your life? This is more than "asking Jesus into your heart" it's how you live each day in the salvation he provides for the life he intends for us. What things are you facing where God's gift of a Saviour, of Emmanuel, will give you courage?

Connect in Prayer

Now you can connect with God and with one another in prayer. It's certainly not mandatory that each person pray out loud, but a smaller circle may help give you confidence to pray if you want. You can keep your prayers brief, even just one sentence. It's not the amount or quality of our vocabulary which God wants to hear, he wants to hear your heart.

- Thank God for his gift of salvation and relationship through Jesus.
- Pray for someone you know who has yet to embrace God's gift for their life.
- Pray something from the Scriptures we have looked at today for yourself. Then pray that same thing for someone else in your Life Group as you pray together.

¹ Darrel L. Bock, *Luke: The NIV Application Commentary*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1996, p. 58

**The Gift: God With Us
2nd Advent
Luke 2:1-20
December 8/9 Weekend**

Connect with One Another

Welcome one another to Life Group! Feel free to ask the “Question of the Day” to get things started in your circle.

Question of the day

This is our last Life Group Study in *The Gift: God With Us* series. Maybe next week your Life Group would like to plan a time to serve in our community together or to gather for some fun?

Think about what you’ve told someone this week which you really thought they should know. Was it where to find a good deal on Christmas groceries? Was it a great experience you had that you just have to share? Maybe you just couldn’t help telling someone about something you’ve just learned that would help them too? What was an “I’ve just got to tell you this” moment for you this week?

Watch the “The Gift: God With Us – 2nd Advent” video available either online, or the DVD.

In *The Gift: God With Us*, we’re going to explore how the grand story of God, the creator of the universe, intentionally intersects with our stories as human beings. How he desires to see us receive and live in the fullness of life he longs for us to discover and apply every day.

Connect with Scripture

Divinely Directed Drama

Read Luke 2:1-20

(Have someone volunteer as a reader or have everyone take turns reading a verse. Discern what your group is most comfortable with.)

After you read this passage, listen to the Holy Spirit for any moments, words or phrases in the text which jumped out to you.

Make a note of this for yourself here:

It's helpful to remind ourselves of why Luke was writing this gospel, this message of good news.

Read Luke 1:1-4

We have a tendency, because of our traditions, to look at Luke 2:1-20 as “The Christmas Story”; to dislocate this story from other events. Yet Luke is writing for a much grander purpose than to help us explain to our present culture why we give gifts, decorate trees and eat turkey at this time. He writes so that we will be certain that Jesus is the Messiah, the promised Son of God who will save Theophilus and us!

Read Micah 5:2

Let's do some group brainstorming! In light of this prophecy, grab a piece of paper and a marker and make a step-by-

step sequence of actions which transpired for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem.

Now we recognize Luke's intentionality in developing this narrative of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and of the years and years spent in anticipation of God acting to save his people.

Read Isaiah 9:6

Isaiah lists attributes of the Messiah. How do you feel about these?

As you look at this list, is there an attribute of Jesus which is particularly meaningful to you today? Which one have you chosen and why?

The Heart of the Message

In the midst of the terror gripping the shepherds, the angel speaks the core message of this chapter.

Read Luke 2:10-11 again.

What is the heart of the angels' message?

Jesus, the newborn infant in a feeding trough, is given three titles in verse eleven; Saviour, Messiah and Lord. Take some time as a Life Group to understand and discuss each of these titles. What is distinctive about each title?

Luke also wrote the book of Acts to follow his gospel account.

Read Acts 5:30-31

Jesus is identified as "Prince and Saviour" echoing the words of prophecy and his birth announcement to the shepherds. I hope this encourages you to read more and more of the Bible. As you do, you will see the beautiful details of the work of the Holy Spirit as he inspires Scripture and events over centuries. Just as it took years for prophecy to be fulfilled or for the story of Jesus to unfold, it's good to know that even after years of hearing a familiar story there's always more God wants to reveal to us in his Word. We see this in Mary's actions we'll study now.

Read Luke 2:19

What do you think Mary pondered?

Read Luke 2:51-53

Jesus is now twelve years old and has just visited Jerusalem with Mary and Joseph for Passover. What do you think Mary is treasuring now?

What could we learn from this about parenting, or how we relate with our parents on our spiritual journey?

Read John 19:25-27

Mary was given the opportunity to be deeply linked with God’s gift to us. Her life illustrates the growth we can have in our relationships when we follow Jesus together over a long period of time. He wants to live each day with us and to have us reflect on who he is and why he has come as *The Gift: God With Us*.

Read Romans 5:1-2

The infant swaddled in a feeding trough becomes the one *“through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.”*

How are you thankful for God’s gift this Advent?

Connect in Prayer

Now you can connect with God and with one another in prayer.

- Pray together as a Life Group and express your thanks for God’s gift.
- Is there something which you are “pondering in your heart” which you would like to bring to Jesus in this Advent Season? Share this with someone in your group and ask them to pray for you.
- Thank God for his beautiful detailed plan for Jesus birth. Ask him to help you to see his divine direction in your life.
- Ask God to help you to share what you have seen and heard as you follow Jesus.