

Advent 2023

Life Group Guides



*"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
And the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*

- Isaiah 9:6

How to Use This Guide

As we enter the advent season, we are taking a break from our usual rhythm of study guides based on sermon texts. Instead, we are encouraging groups to gather for discussion, service, and growing in relationship. This guide will be used for all four weeks of advent, and it will offer options for:

- 1. Less structured discussion based on advent Scripture passages.**
- 2. Ideas and opportunities for serving in your community.**
- 3. Connections within your group that have a focus on socializing, celebration, and deep connections.**

Decide which option your group wishes to do each week, as this guide is not linear and contains more than four weeks' worth of potential content. We encourage you to engage in service and group celebrations in particular, as these are different than our study guides throughout the year and are fitting with the season of advent.

We hope this encourages you to know God, know each other, and love your communities well this Christmas season!

Study

Begin with Prayer

In silence, invite the Holy Spirit to guide you. Then pray: *Empowering God, we pray that you will send your Holy Spirit to move us to understanding; to help us to believe the gospel; to give us strength and wisdom to live by it. Amen.* (Worship Sourcebook Q.3.5.8)

Reconnecting and Debriefing

Take a moment to check in with one another. Start with a light icebreaker question (e.g. *What is your favorite Christmas treat?*) and/or a more intentional question (e.g. *How have you sensed God's presence so far this advent?*)

Listening to God's Word

The following passages are all related to the Christmas story. Choose one of the following options, and after a short moment of silence, read through it out loud.

Due to the popularization and retellings of it, many of us are very familiar with the Christmas story. As you read through this week's passage, try to hear it as if for the first time. Some of the ideas we have about the Christmas story may be more from cultural versions of it and could actually be quite different from the biblical version. As best you can, seek to lay aside your familiarity and preconceived understanding of the passage, allowing the Bible to speak to you as if for the first time.

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| 1. John 1:1-18 | <i>("The Word became flesh...")</i> |
| 2. Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-25 | <i>(Angels visit Mary & Joseph)</i> |
| 3. Luke 2:1-21; Matthew 2:1-12 | <i>(Visits of the shepherds & the magi)</i> |
| 4. Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 1:46-56 | <i>(Old Testament prophecy & Mary's song of praise)</i> |

Small Group Discussion

After reading the passage, use the following questions as a guide for discussion:

- *What are your first thoughts when you read this passage?*
- *What questions does this passage of Scripture raise for you?*
- *From this passage, what do we learn about:*
 - *God, Jesus, and the mission of God in the world?*
 - *The state and nature of humanity?*
- *What does this passage teach us about Jesus as "Immanuel" ("God with us")?*
- *How do you sense the Holy Spirit calling you to respond to or act on what we have read and discussed?*

Caring for One Another

- *Suggest a prayer request that is related to the topic we've discussed.*
- *Do you or your family have a need that the Life Group can help meet?*

Using **the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13)** as a guide, based on what you've shared together, spend time listening to God and praying for one another.

Service

Christmas is often a time when the needs of those in our communities are highlighted. Whether it is material, social, or spiritual, many people around us have needs and are carrying heavy burdens. This season is an opportunity to display the love of God to those around us, both within our church and the world around us.

Spend time prayerfully considering how your group could bless others this season. Consider your gifts, passions, and resources as you find a fitting way to serve, and then schedule a time that you can do so. The list below contains various organizations and opportunities for meeting the needs of your community.

Langley Food Bank – The Langley Food Bank is a Christian run food bank that serves hundreds of families each week. With locations in Langley and Aldergrove, all campuses can contribute to areas near their church home.

- Gather some items that they are currently needing and bring it to their location during their drop off hours (Mon/Wed/Fri after 2pm, or Tues/Thurs anytime @ Langley; Tues at 8-11 AM @ Aldergrove)
- Monetary donations are also welcome. Service opportunities may be possible and would be organized by contacting the food bank directly.
- See the website for contact info, locations, times, and items needed: <https://langleyfoodbank.com/>

Langley Christmas Bureau – The Langley Christmas Bureau helps provide for families in Langley around Christmas time. Alongside food and monetary donations, toys can also be donated for families unable to purchase gifts for their children.

- Purchase some new toys and bring them to their office in the Langley City Hall (20550 Douglas Crescent, Langley). Note that stuffed animals are less preferred due to allergies.

Gift Bags for Langley Street Outreach – We have a dedicated team that serves meals year round to those living on the streets in downtown Langley. During the advent season, they will continue to serve meals on Sunday evenings, with additional gift bags being handed out.

- Create gift bags that can be distributed to those coming for meals. Bags can include homemade (not store-bought) cookies, granola bars, candy canes, new socks, a Christmas ornament, and a card with some words of encouragement. Put these into individual bags that are ready to be distributed.
- These bags can be brought to guest services at the Walnut Grove campus on the morning of either December 10th or December 24th.
- This option can be adapted for other settings. Create similar bags that can be handed out to your neighbors, the houseless in your community, or specific people you would like to encourage. As a group you could create the bags together, and/or spend some time distributing them as a group.

Creative Service Opportunities – As all life groups have different passions, relational connections, and resources, we encourage you to think creatively about unique ways that your group can serve those that you know! Some ideas to start thinking about this are:

- Consider supporting individuals and families in our church through “Advent Blessings.” Details for this will be released on Sunday, December 3rd. Visit <https://www.nlcc.ca/blessings> at that time for more information.
- Keep an eye on your neighborhood’s Facebook page, as this is often where people post when they are looking for help in various areas.
- Think about the people you have relationship with and ask “*Who that I know of has needs? How could we help meet those needs?*” This might include shoveling a driveway, cooking a meal, helping someone move, taking a low-income parent Christmas shopping, etc.
- Think about other organizations in your area or that you have connections with, and contact them to ask what needs they currently have and how you could help meet them.

Social Connections & Celebrations

Introduction

While we value the reading and discussion of Scripture in our apprenticeship journey, celebration, connection, and fellowship are also vital components. In this way, we take time to intentionally gather with a focus on fun, celebration, laughter, and relational connections.

Activities

Here are some ideas for social gatherings. Pick one, combine a few, adapt them, or create your own fun events! Find something that leads to good connections and joy in your group.

- Have a Christmas potluck.
 - Decide who can host, who will bring the main dish, side, dessert, etc.
- Do a group gift exchange.
 - Either have everyone draw names from a hat to decide who you are shopping for or do a “white elephant.”
 - *White Elephant*. Get a gift that could be given to anyone in the group. One person picks a gift from the collection of gifts and opens it. On the next person’s turn, they can either open a new gift or “steal” a gift that has already been opened. If your gift is stolen, you can either choose a new gift or “steal” from someone else. Once all the gifts have been selected, the game is over.
 - Be sure to agree on a price limit for the gift that is reasonable for everyone. Homemade gifts are another option as cost may be an issue for some.
- Have a games night.
 - Spend the gathering playing board or card games. Charades can be a fun group game.
- Make hot chocolate and look at Christmas lights.
 - Walk around your neighborhood together looking at lights, or go to an official Christmas light display such as at Williams Park, “Glow,” or even Stanley Park.

Discussion

These activities (or others like it if you’ve created your own) are designed for fun. But they are also a great way to have good conversation! Below are some ideas for intentional conversation starters to accompany your group activities.

- *What is your most precious Christmas memory?*
- *How have you sensed Jesus being “Immanuel” (“God with us”) this season?*
- *What is your favorite part of the Christmas story? Why?*
- *Who do you feel the most compassion for in this season (a specific family member/friend, the homeless, those without family, etc.)?*
- *Is there a particular passage of Scripture that has been standing out to you lately?*
- *How has God been speaking to you lately? What has God been teaching you lately?*

Merry Christmas NLCC Family!

May this Advent be a time of rest, joy, and peace
as you reflect on God's presence with us through the
Christmas story.

*"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.
We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son,
who came from the Father, full of grace and truth"*

- John 1:14

