

SESSION 1: ADVENT

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

John 5:39 NLT; Matthew 1:1-17; 1 Corinthians 13:12 NIRV

QUESTIONS

1. Reflect on God's personal plan of salvation for you:
 - a. How have you been able to see more of its perfection so far? If His plan seems confusing right now, how can you find strength to continue trusting in Him?
 - b. How does this influence your anticipation of the future?
2. How might some of God's perfection be experienced when disaster or tragedies occur?
3. Consider what Joseph says in Genesis 50:20, *"...you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring about as it is this day, to save many people..."* What does this tell you about our human understanding of God's plans?
4. Think about your lineage and how God intentionally choose each one of your ancestors.
5. How does taking time for reflection enhance our worship of God?
6. Advent is the beginning of the Christian calendar. How can taking time for reflection this Advent season influence what you anticipate in the new year?
7. **PERSONAL TAKE-HOME:** Take time this Advent season to consider how God has created beauty in your life, in the midst of sin and shame.

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SESSION 2: ADVENT

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

John 1:4-5, 9; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Luke 2:10, 14;
John 8:12; Galatians 4:3-5

QUESTIONS

1. Why does knowing that God dwells among us at all times and never leaves us fill you with confidence? With humility? With the desire to glorify God in all that you do?
2. Share how God has already fulfilled promises in your life.
3. What can you say that you know about God when you reflect on Jesus' life and teachings? Share an example or two with the group.
4. *God with us*. What meaning did this have at the time of Jesus' birth? What meaning does it have to you now?
5. In the Bible verse that was mentioned in the video, *"and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it"* (John 1:4-5), who or what is the darkness? (Consider the other definitions of "comprehend" or other translations of the Bible.)
6. The video states that "there is no greater gift we can give to others than to share this truth of the Gospel with them." How would you explain the gospel to someone that hasn't heard it before?
7. The video ends with a famous verse from Luke 2 when the angel greets the shepherds in the field: *Do not be afraid...good tidings of great joy...to all people! Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!* How will you bring glory to God this Advent season?
8. Do you consider yourself a person of light? How can your faith in Jesus illuminate the lives of those around you?

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SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 1: ADVENT

During this Advent season let us reflect on Jesus' words, *"The scriptures point to Me"* (John 5:39 NLT). From Genesis to Revelation, the Old and New Testaments are linked together. The Old Testament prophets predicted that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem, He would be born of a virgin. He would crush the head of the serpent, and He would be a blessing to all the nations. He would be the root of Jesse and the offspring of David and would come from the royal line of Judah. He was raised in the despised town of Nazareth in the region of Galilee.

We can see in the Holy Scriptures how everything foreshadows and points to Jesus. The Scriptures are God's Word, revealed to us by the Holy Spirit through men. When we take a step back we can be amazed by how He has ordained everything to unfold across time and history.

Now let us reflect on Jesus' lineage as Son of Man (Matthew 1:1-17). These blood kin included Gentiles and Jews, a Canaanite and a Moabite with questionable behaviors by today's standards. In many cases an embarrassing lineage for the Son of God as Son of Man. However, it was no accident.

Wow! God, the Father, chose this ancestry for His Son. From the lineage of imperfect people came the perfect Son of God. We can find great hope and joy in this fact. From *our* own ancestry, which may also be imperfect, God is preparing a bride for His Son. God certainly loves us and because of this, He has called you and me!

These reflections heighten the anticipation of our faith becoming sight. We will see in its fullness that God and His plan of salvation are perfect. Even though His will is often beyond our understanding, if we trust in His will, we can become the people that He has purposed us to be. Just as the ancestors of Jesus allowed God to use them in His plan, we should also accept God's plan for us. We can be confident knowing that no matter what lies in our past, God can make something beautiful even when we are full of sin and shame.

God's plan of salvation is relevant to all time periods and all people, no matter their life experiences. Through Jesus Christ, we are invited into fellowship with God and are called to be a part of His expansive plan.

It is important for us to start seeing how perfectly our Heavenly Father has arranged everything in our lives, the good and bad, clear and unclear. Paul reminds us that... *Now we see only a dim likeness of things. It is as if we were seeing them*

in a foggy mirror. But someday we will see clearly. We will see face to face. What I know now is not complete. But someday I will know completely, just as God knows me completely (1 Corinthians 13:12 NIRV).

We do not deny the difficulties of our time, nor the imperfections in and around us. The conditions of Jesus' birth demonstrate to us that no one and no place is beneath His reach. The Lord will always be with us (Matthew 28:20). When the Lord has finished His plan of salvation, He will once again be able to say, *Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good – full circle!*

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SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 2: ADVENT

The prophets who spoke on behalf of God during Old Testament times told the people of Israel about the promised Messiah who would restore and redeem them. After the prophet Malachi, the people entered into a period of about 400 years when God was silent and the people were left to hope that the prophets' words would come true one day. The silence was broken and the hope was realized with the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. The Son of God dwelt among the people, fully God and fully human, to rescue us all from the bondage of sin.

How would you answer if this question was posed to you, "What does the incarnation of God in Jesus mean to you?" Some say, "Well, it happened some 2,000 years ago, so it doesn't really have an impact on me." How could you respond and share that the impact of the birth of Jesus is the same today as it was all those years ago? Let's ponder the following points.

First, with the arrival of Jesus, light shined into a world of darkness. Just as God said, "Let there be light" during the time of creation, Jesus's arrival was light penetrating the darkness of the world that encompassed God's people. John wrote the following in His Gospel - *In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it* (John 1:4-5). Additionally, John said that Jesus is *the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world* (John 1:9). In His own words, Jesus said, *I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life* (John 8:12). With the birth of Christ, the eternal God broke barriers of space and time – every person, past, present, and future, would be given the opportunity to walk in the light instead of the darkness and have the chance to be reborn. Many call the Advent season the season of light and the season of hope. When Jesus dwells within us and is the light of our lives, we also become people of light and hope.

Second, Jesus coming in the flesh opened the way for all to know and understand God, our Heavenly Father. Paul wrote, *For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* (2 Corinthians 4:6). In Jesus, we see God the Father, and through what has been shared with us by the Spirit through the Scriptures, we understand that our God is a God of love who desires all to share eternity with Him. Our God wants all who are lost to be found in Him. In addition, our God welcomes us into His presence as our Heavenly Father. Matthew echoed

the prophet Isaiah when writing about the birth of Jesus and that they would call His name Immanuel, which means "God with us." Because of Jesus, we know that our God dwells among us at all times and never leaves us. This knowledge fills us with confidence, humility, and the desire to glorify our God in all that we do. Jesus' life on earth gives us an example of a life that truly glorifies God.

Third, Jesus came out of the eternal and stepped into time to rescue humankind from their sin and restore the relationship between God and man. Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant. In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he wrote, *Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons* (Galatians 4:3-5). At a perfectly chosen time, God fulfilled the promises given through the prophets that He would save all from the bondage of sin. God's ways are, and have always been, perfect. And, just as He fulfilled all of His promises in the past, He will fulfill His promises in the future. We, as His sons and daughters, have been set free from our sin. God became flesh in Jesus Christ; He took upon Himself our sin and died the death that we have all deserved. He then offered to all of us His righteousness, so we can stand justified before our God. There is no greater gift we can give to others than to share this truth of the Gospel with them!

Through the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, we no longer have to walk in darkness, we have a better understanding of our Heavenly Father, and we have been given the opportunity to be set free from our sin. God broke His silence with a thunderous crescendo of His words, "Let there be light," and proclaimed His love for us with the birth of Jesus. Just as the angel of the Lord and the heavenly hosts proclaimed, let us remind each other to share the same wonderful truths at Christmas time and throughout the year: *"Do not be afraid... good tidings of great joy...to all people! Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"*

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

NKJV Study Bible

Luke 2:14 – Glory here refers to praise given to God. Goodwill toward men: The phrase means that people are the objects of God's goodwill. In ancient Judaism this phrase described a limited group of people who were the objects of God's special grace. The promise of peace (1:79) and goodwill would come to those who welcome God's only son.

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