

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 1: LIGHT AND LIFE

Have you ever stood in a room so dark that you can't see your hand in front of you? Even when your eyes adjust to the dark, you still cannot see a thing. But then, as soon as any type of light shines – a flashlight or even a phone screen – you begin to have points of reference, and instantly get a better feel for your surroundings. This light helps prevent you from stumbling or knocking into things. It alerts you to what is around you, and helps guide you as you try to move forward.

With the fall into sin, darkness surrounded humanity. We were removed from the presence of God, dwelling in the land of the shadow of death (Isaiah 9:2). Though we had air and blood in our bodies, we were spiritually dead. Living in darkness, we were blind to the truth of God and what He has done for us. But with the coming of Jesus, light shined in the darkness. With Him, we don't have to stumble around in life, confused and lacking direction. His life shines a light for us, guiding us into the fullness of His glory and eternal life. When we have faith in Him, we have hope for our future.

John 1:4 says, *In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.* As true God, Jesus has life-giving power. And when we are given faith to believe in Him, then our lives are illuminated. The light of Christ leads us to God. We no longer dwell in darkness, but we walk in the presence of God with new life and new sight.

Jesus says in John 8, *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). The light of Jesus Christ changes us because He pours His life into us. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross made it so that we could have a reconciled relationship with God, allowing us to come into His presence. And we can continue to dwell in His presence as we follow Christ's example, study God's Word, and allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit. In these ways, Jesus' light illuminates our lives and transforms us into new creatures.

When Jesus' light shines on us, we see ourselves more clearly. His light not only illuminates our need for transformation, but also how and where we need to grow. Hidden things are revealed – our struggle with anger, our relationships that are not based on love, our greed, our impatience. When we recognize our sinfulness and turn to God in repentance, transformation takes place in us. We experience the power of new life in Christ.

With the light of Jesus giving us new life, new sight, and new faith, we are then eager to share His light with others, to help them leave the darkness. If we look back at John 1, he writes, *And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it... He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him* (John 1:5, 10-11). Though the light of Jesus shines in the world, not all see it clearly. Some refuse to see His light, while others may be unable to see it through the veil of their heartache or sin. No matter the reason, we are called to keep sharing the light of Jesus. He overcame the world! He has saved all people! We must tell of the wonders and grace of God. New life is available for all. No one needs to live in the darkness.

During this Christmas season, we will reflect on and rejoice in the birth of the Messiah. Let us also joyfully celebrate the light and life He gives us, filling us with hope for our glorious future with Him.

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SESSION 2: LED BY THE LIGHT

As we continue moving through the month of Advent, pondering our theme of light, it would be hard to skip over the very strong reference to light in the story of Jesus' birth. That is, the story of the wise men. Let's read an excerpt from the Gospel of Matthew:

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet..."

Then Herod... sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

So who were these wise men? Most scholars agree that they were not kings, but rather astrologers, advisors, or priests from a pagan religion. We don't have a lot of background on them, but we know one thing from the biblical text – they were **wise**. They had done their studying, and reading, and noticed something different in the sky, a star that was seemingly out of place. And yet, even with all their knowledge and wisdom, they asked for help, realizing they didn't have all the answers.

The second thing that we can presume from the story is that the wise men were **curious**. They left their homes, embarking

on a risky journey into the unknown to find out about this King.

The last piece that we'll focus on is that the wise men **worshipped** and adored the Christ child. They first went to the palace, assuming that would be the place to find a newborn King. But He was not there. And so they continued on to Bethlehem, led by the star not to a magnificent court, but to a humble home where the Child was. It's difficult for us to see how unexpected this story is because we've heard it so many times, but these wise men were expecting to meet a king, and instead found a lowly Child with His mother. Perhaps they were confused, perhaps they didn't understand, but even so – they worshipped Him, and laid their gifts before Him.

What could this story possibly mean for us?

Let's start with **wisdom** and knowledge – do we think we have all the answers? Author and theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "*God confounds the reason of the reasonable.*" Many times in Scripture we read how God's thoughts are higher than ours, how we cannot understand His ways. Especially in the Christmas story, we see how He takes what is small and lowly and makes it marvelous. God loves the lowly, the broken, the lost (Luke 1:46-55). We also must learn to trust a wisdom that is far beyond our own.

Do we have a **curious** faith? Are we willing to journey into the unknown to find the Holy? We read in Scripture to ask, seek, and knock (Matthew 7 / Luke 11). That means having a faith that is curious and hungry to learn continually, to stretch our understanding, and to open ourselves to new perspectives. We can see this star in our own lives, as the Holy Spirit, guiding us and prompting us to go further.

Last, do these things lead us to **worship**? Do we have a set time and place where we come to worship God, or do we also find Him in the mysterious, the unexpected?

God in Jesus of Nazareth – that is the secret, hidden wisdom... that "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived"...that is the depth of the Deity whom we worship as mystery and comprehend as mystery. (1 Corinthians 2:8-10 / Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

In these last few weeks of Advent, let us allow the Holy Spirit to lead us to seek God in places we hadn't thought of before, take time to wonder at finding Him, and spend moments of worship and adoration there.