

THE WONDER OF IT ALL



SMALL GROUP GUIDE



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SESSION ONE

The Wonder in the Journey: Joseph's Story

READ MATTHEW 1:18–25 TOGETHER

1. Imagine what Joseph, Jesus's earthly father, looked like, sounded like, and what his personality was like. Describe him together—build him a profile. Use evidence from the Bible as well as your collective imagination.
2. The Bible presents Joseph as someone who obeyed God even in the face of uncertainty. Have you ever been asked by God to obey despite clear evidence of a safe and desirable future for you? Share as you are comfortable.
3. Joseph must have realized that being faithful to God meant becoming, alongside Mary, the subject of scandal. Have you ever had to risk your reputation for following Jesus? What would you describe is at stake for you if you were to lose your reputation in the way it was demanded of Joseph?
4. Verse 19 describes Joseph as a “righteous man.” Have you ever described someone this way? Has anyone ever described you this way? Why or why not? Why do you believe our culture—both inside and outside the church—has an aversion to employing this kind of language for people?
5. Have you ever written out and described the seasons of your spiritual journey, from childhood to where you are today—its ups and downs, victories and defeats? How would you summarize the major seasons of your life with Jesus Christ?
6. God invites all people into his story. How would you present the gospel to unchurched people if it required you only using story-form? Consider: plot, characters, problems, climax, resolution, etc. How would you craft our God-story in a way that inspired wonder in people?

Ask someone to pray in response to your conversation, or offer the following prayer:

Heavenly Father, make us worthy of your calling and fulfill every resolve in us for good works through faith and by the exercise of your holy power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in us. Move us entirely from the kingdom of darkness into your sanctifying light, that we might be a living testimony to your redemptive story. Amen.

SESSION TWO

The Wonder in Anticipation: Mary's story

READ LUKE 1:26–38 TOGETHER

1. What is a season, holiday, or time of year that you look forward to eagerly? What do you believe about your family history or traditions that have impacted this anticipation in your heart?
2. How would you describe the difference between doubt and wonder? Has God ever offered you a promise as he invited you to follow him into a difficult or seemingly unreasonable direction? What was the cost of your decision to be faithful to God?
3. How do you process seasons of waiting on the fulfillment of God's promises? Do you typically resign yourself to passivity or do you prepare your heart and life for what's ahead? What state characterizes your waiting—peace, anxiety, resentment, joy? Something else? What does this look like in the day-to-day for you and your family?
4. Mary's story is a demonstration that we are all invited to actively participate in God's advancing kingdom. Do you believe in the dignity of your life situation and God's calling for you? Why or why not? What do you imagine Jesus would say to you specifically with respect to your calling?
5. Mark reminds us that God's Word never fails as he recites, "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever" (Isa. 40:8). What is one daily practice you can engage to rehearse the faithfulness of God's Word?
6. If Advent is a season that invites us to see what God is doing around us, what do you observe in the lives of the people in your home? Your church? Your city? Might God be asking anything of you as you come alongside others in this season—how might you parallel the work of the angel Gabriel and bear good news to them?

Ask someone to pray in response to your conversation, or offer the following prayer:

Blessed Lord, grant that we might stand fast on your Word of promise, which was shared first with Mary through the angel Gabriel. May the kind of trust and reverence she demonstrated toward you be the kind of posture alive in our hearts, and propelling us forward to inspire wonder in our communities. Amen.

SESSION THREE

The Wonder of the Arrival: Shepherds

READ LUKE 2:8–20 TOGETHER

1. What images, practices, or concepts come to mind when you hear the word *ordinary*? Do these things have a negative connotation to you, or do they produce feelings of comfort? Something else? How well does your perception of ordinary things align with the way God announces and advances his kingdom?
2. How did God use two famous shepherds in the Old Testament—Moses and David? What set them apart from their contemporaries? Why did their stories get recorded in the canon of Scripture?
3. How do you feel about your own calling to announce the good news of the arrival of Jesus? Do you feel uniquely qualified or unqualified to talk to people about Jesus? Why or why not? What does the Holy Spirit have to do with it?
4. Do you ever wish that Jesus would return to earth? Are you oriented toward his future coming? Why or why not? How is his second coming good news for the world?
5. Describe what an ordinary day looks like in your home. What happens from breakfast to bedtime? Imagine the contrast for our homes, churches, and cities infused with the gospel of Jesus versus those concerned only with the form of religion or those whom reject it entirely. In other words, how does the good news make a difference where you are called to live?
6. What seeds announcing the kingdom of heaven and the arrival of Jesus can you plant this Advent season? How might you inspire wonder and holy waiting in the lives of those around you?

Ask someone to pray in response to your conversation, or offer the following prayer:

Heavenly Father, untangle us from the webs of sin and cycles of death that surround us, and free us to be living testimonies of your loving grace. Help us engage the ordinary ways you seek to transform our souls so that we might be active yet humble saints in your ministry to our world. Amen.

SESSION FOUR

The Wonder of the Revelation: Magi

READ MATTHEW 2:1–12 TOGETHER

1. If God’s revelation unfolds over time, what does this mean for our own lives? How well do you handle incremental revelation of his purpose and plans for your life? Share a time or season in which your trust of God was tested in this way.
2. Some scholars have speculated that the magi learned the messianic expectation by advising Jews during the exile, during which they had access to their sacred texts (see Daniel 1:20; 2:2). How might God “going ahead” of our own evangelistic efforts impact the way we approach sharing the good news?
3. Rehearse the possible symbolism behind the three gifts that the magi brought to honor the young Jesus. How might these three roles Jesus serves help us with talking points or launching points for sharing the good news with people?
4. Share a time in your life you felt like an outsider—such as at a meeting, in a store, or at a social event. What difference would it have made if someone put their arm around you and served as your companion throughout? How might this apply to the people we are trying to reach with the good news about Jesus in our communities?
5. At the end of the video, Mark encouraged us to let God’s story be one which we tell with our very lives. How do you view the relationship between sharing the gospel with words and deeds? How might you begin to understand them as being in *union* rather than in *tension* in your life?
6. Advent begins what is called the Cycle of Light in the Christian (or liturgical) year, in which we memorialize the light of Jesus breaking into our dark world. What is an area of darkness in your own heart, home, church, or city that you believe God can heal with his balm of his Son—the light of the world?

Ask someone to pray in response to your conversation, or offer the following prayer:

Almighty God, may your holy love sanctify us make us even more whole so that your kingdom of power and light may dispel the darkness inside us. Ready our hearts to listen for where you are already active in the lives of those around us, so that we might testify to your advancing kingdom even in their hearts. Amen.