



SERMON STUDY GUIDE
For the sermon preached on
12/13/2020:
“In the Bleak Midwinter”
Luke 2:1-7, 17-19

How to use the Study Guide During Virtual Online Group Meetings

Group life is even more critical during this incredible season. Over and over, group leaders are reporting that suddenly there is a new hunger to connect, share, pray, and meditate on Scripture together, and so we are making these guides available weekly and suggesting a new format during this season.

As you know, our Group Life’s vision is to “practice the way of Jesus.” And while Jesus never had to lead a Torah study over Zoom, he was strategic in his teaching ministry, and we want to be as well.

There are a number of differences between meeting in person and meeting online, ranging from the obvious to the subtle. One is, given our attention spans for online meetings, we want to encourage you to limit the length of your call between 45-60 minutes and we are calling this “Check-In Plus One.” Meaning, spend a few minutes checking in with your group and see if there are any new needs with them (or even amongst their neighbors). “The One” is to spend time in study. As our virtual season continues, our desire for meaningful content and interaction will grow. Given our new format, the study guides based on Sunday’s Sermon will be designed to be more application based (as opposed to unpacking the text with the Inductive Bible Study method). You might consider sharing the passage beforehand with your group in hopes that they might spend more time with the Scripture before the gathering.

As always, we are so grateful for you, your gifting, your servant leadership, and all that you do in practicing the way of Jesus in community.

Grace and peace,
Pastor Tim Ghali and Pastor Rachel Keeler on behalf of the Group Life Team

For the Leader: “Check-In Plus One”

Welcome everyone to the Zoom call and outline the goal of this call being 45 minutes. Spend 15-20 minutes checking in with one another, then move into a time of prayer, and then spend some time discussing the application of the Scripture passage.

A “Check-in” question might be, “How are you doing, and is there anything new that has arisen in your life or in your neighborhood that we can pray about?”

Advent is the time of waiting and expectation and it's in leaning into the dark themes of Advent that allow our hearts to experience the comfort and joy of celebrating Christmas. This is why the Advent series has taken the themes "Comfort and Joy."

Both themes are evasive, especially these days, but were also difficult to find some 2000 years ago. Here in our Boston area, we are headed into a long winter, darker days, still in a pandemic. We crave comfort and we wonder when we'll experience joy. May the Lord be with us as we enter into a time of meaningful conversation marked by the teaching of Scripture, empowered by the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit.

(Open in prayer).

Q – We all have our quirks – Pastor Leah described one of hers in the forms of procrastination, perfectionism (and that at times the Third 'P' risks paralysis in decision-making). Some of us get tasks done in break-neck speed, errors and all ;) We all have our quirks. But the question we want to explore first is what prevents you from being present in the moment? It could be a personality quirk, but it could also be identifying what competes for your time and attention but what prevents you from being present with God and being present with others?

Q – One of the passages Leah looked at was Luke 2:17-19:

"When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." Luke 2:17-19

In the midst of chaos, in the midst of ordinary, non-ideal, and even more humbling circumstances, when the text says that "Mary treasured these things and pondered them in her heart," it's also saying that Mary chose "presence." Why do you think she was able to do so and what can we learn from this passage of Scripture?

Q – Each week, the sermon has featured a Christmas Carol and this week it's *everyone's favorite* "The Bleak Midwinter" (Bonus points for anyone that can sing a line or two :)

It was first a poem written in 1872 by the English poet Christian Rossetti and here's how the poem begins:

In the bleak midwinter,
Frosty wind made moan
Earth stood hard as iron
Water like a stone
Snow had fallen
Snow on snow on snow

While it doesn't truly describe Baby Jesus in Bethlehem, it does speak well to our context. The song continues :

In the bleak midwinter.
Long, long ago
Angels and Arc Angels
May have traveled there
Cherubim and Seraphim
Thronged the air
But only his Mother
In her maiden bliss
Worshipped the beloved
With a kiss

What can I give him?
Poor as I am
If I were a shepherd
I would give a lamb
If I were a wise man
I would do my part
But what I can I give him

But what I can I give him
Give him my heart
Give him my heart

Leah described that God had captured Mary's heart. For most of us gathering here, we can recall times where God has captured our heart often, also in less than ideal circumstances. What life events or stories come to mind when you experienced the nearness of Jesus in an unexpected moment?

Q – The message reminded us of the important truth that “We find comfort and joy in God's presence when we are present to this moment.” As we continue through Advent, preparing our hearts towards Christmas, what practices can we do to experience Jesus' presence?

Let's close our time in prayer.