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A VERY MIDTOWN  
ADVENT GUIDE



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# A VERY MIDTOWN ADVENT GUIDE

*Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

**- 1 Peter 1:8-13**

The prophets searched and inquired carefully. They wanted to know who God's Spirit was talking about. They wanted to know when He would come. They longed to see the fulfillment of the Holy Spirit's predictions regarding Christ—His glories and His sufferings.

And God's Spirit answered them that their prophetic work wasn't for them, but for us.

So now, in light of the prophecies we have seen fulfilled in the perfect life, death and resurrection of Jesus, Peter tells us to set our hope fully on the grace of Jesus. Both the grace that has already been shown to us and the future grace that is to come when Christ returns

This is what we celebrate during Advent:

*The Savior has come for His Church and He will come again.*

Advent comes from the Latin word that means “coming” or “arrival.” Throughout church history it has become the four-week season of celebration and waiting leading up to Christmas Sunday. We set our hearts and minds back on the humble coming of the Messiah as a baby in a manger and we set our hearts and minds forward as we eagerly long for Him to come back for His Church as He has promised.

## **HISTORY AND TRADITIONS:**

Historically people have celebrated Advent with Advent calendars and Advent wreaths. An Advent calendar contains 24 windows which contain poems, Scriptures, small gifts, and/or candies. Each day the window on that date is opened and helps children and adults visualize the waiting of God’s people. The goal is to grow a sense of building anticipation and waiting for God to make good on His promises. An Advent wreath is made up of five candles which are lit one at a time each week leading up to Christmas. The wreath displays the metaphor of Jesus being the Light of the World (Matt 4:16; John 1:4-9; 8:12). As more light from each consecutive candle shines in the darkness of the room, the wreath displays how the promises of Jesus have become progressively brighter and clearer throughout history.

We encourage you to use an Advent calendar or wreath with your household to celebrate this season and we also wanted to give you an Advent guide, full of Scripture, personal study questions, devotionals and community study guides to help set your hope on the first and second arrival of Jesus this Advent season.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

This Advent Guide contains four weeks of content for you, your household and your LifeGroup. For each week you have five days of Scripture readings with personal questions. The Scriptures help connect prophecies from Isaiah and New Testament passages that show God's fulfillment of those prophecies.

Following the daily readings you will find a weekly devotional that you can read personally or with your kids or roommates (alongside an Advent wreath if you'd like). We've also included our weekly LifeGroup study guides.

We hope this guide serves to stir your affections for the Messiah this Advent season. Jesus our Savior King has come as a babe and He will come again to usher in His kingdom once and for all. Rejoice!

*Come, Thou long expected Jesus*  
*Born to set Thy people free;*  
*From our fears and sins release us,*  
*Let us find our rest in Thee!*



WEEK 1

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GRACE FOR  
OUR SIN



## DAY 1: MATTHEW 1:18-21

*<sup>18</sup>Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup>But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION:

In v. 21, what reason does the angel give Joseph as to why God has caused Mary to conceive Jesus? If you were Joseph, how do you think you would have responded to this news?

Sometimes we make the mistake of believing that people in the first century were superstitious, and simple-minded. However, Joseph responds to Mary's report much like we would have - with skepticism and doubt. Are there any promises or truths about God that seem unbelievable or too good to be true and are therefore hard for you to believe?

In the angel's message to Joseph, God reveals that His plan for the Messiah is to deal with humanity's sin problem above all else. What problems in the world are you tempted to concern yourself with more than your personal sin issues?

- During the holidays, what trivial issues are you tempted to let feel big and overwhelm your thoughts? What are specific ways that you need to take your thoughts captive and guide your thoughts to the gospel?

## DAY 2: ISAIAH 52:1-3, 7-10

<sup>1</sup>*Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion;  
put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city;  
for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean.*

<sup>2</sup>*Shake yourself from the dust and arise;  
be seated, O Jerusalem;  
loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion.*

<sup>3</sup>*For thus says the Lord:  
“You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money.”*

*How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of him who brings good news,  
who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,  
who publishes salvation,  
who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”*

<sup>8</sup>*The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice;  
together they sing for joy;  
for eye to eye they see the return of the Lord to Zion.*

<sup>9</sup>*Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem,  
for the Lord has comforted his people;  
He has redeemed Jerusalem.*

<sup>10</sup>*The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations,  
and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION:

In v. 3, when Isaiah tells God’s people to “loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion”, what image is he painting?

When God’s people are physically enslaved (by the Babylonians, Egyptians, Romans, etc.) their captivity symbolically represents their spiritual imprisonment and by extension, all of mankind’s bondage to sin. What are you enslaved to? (Consider specific sin patterns, unhealthy emotional responses, addiction to any substances or behaviors, broken relationships that you can’t fix, etc.)

How has Jesus specifically fulfilled the promises found in v. 3 and v. 10? (Consider 1 Peter 1:18-19). Can you think of any ways it’s hard for you to believe that Jesus has purchased your redemption -- your price of freedom with His blood? What are practical ways you can fight to rest in the truth that Jesus has set you free even when you don’t feel free?



## DAY 3: ISAIAH 52:13 - 53:3

<sup>13</sup>*Behold, My Servant shall act wisely;*

*He shall be high and lifted up,  
and shall be exalted.*

<sup>14</sup>*As many were astonished at you—*

*His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,  
and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—*

<sup>15</sup>*so shall He sprinkle many nations.*

*Kings shall shut their mouths because of Him,  
for that which has not been told them they see,  
and that which they have not heard they understand.*

<sup>53:1</sup>*Who has believed what he has heard from us?*

*And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*

<sup>2</sup>*For He grew up before him like a young plant,*

*and like a root out of dry ground;  
He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him,  
and no beauty that we should desire Him.*

<sup>3</sup>*He was despised and rejected by men,*

*a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;  
and as one from whom men hide their faces  
He was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Consider the promise of Jesus' wisdom and exaltation in v. 13 and contrast it with the lowliness and mistreatment He is prophesied to receive in v. 14 and 53:2-3. Think of as many examples as you can in the gospels where Jesus doesn't receive the incredible treatment He deserves.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus tells His disciples on many occasions that He must suffer and die: Matthew 16:21, Mark 8:31 and 9:31, Luke 9:22, 17:25 and 24:7, John 13:14. Why did Jesus have to suffer so much and die?

## DAY 4: ISAIAH 53:4-6

*<sup>4</sup>Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.*

*<sup>5</sup>But He was pierced for our transgressions;  
He was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with His wounds we are healed.*

*<sup>6</sup>All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned—every one—to His own way;  
and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION:

List all of the things that are promised to happen to the Messiah in this text. How are these promises fulfilled physically and spiritually in Jesus' life and death?

List all of the effects that are promised for us through Jesus' suffering. What specific griefs, sorrows, transgressions and iniquities did Jesus have to carry for you?

What are practical ways you can regularly meditate on Christ's substitutionary suffering in your place during this Advent season?

## DAY 5: ISAIAH 53:7-11

<sup>7</sup>*He was oppressed, and He was afflicted,  
yet He opened not his mouth;  
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,  
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,  
so He opened not his mouth.*

<sup>8</sup>*By oppression and judgment He was taken away;  
and as for His generation, who considered  
that He was cut off out of the land of the living,  
stricken for the transgression of my people?*

<sup>9</sup>*And they made His grave with the wicked  
and with a rich man in His death,  
although He had done no violence,  
and there was no deceit in His mouth.*

<sup>10</sup>*Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush Him;  
He has put Him to grief;  
when His soul makes an offering for guilt,  
He shall see His offspring; He shall prolong his days;  
the will of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.*

<sup>11</sup>*Out of the anguish of His soul He shall see and be satisfied;  
by His knowledge shall the righteous one, My servant,  
make many to be accounted righteous,  
and He shall bear their iniquities.*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Imagine being Mary or Joseph and having the knowledge that these prophecies were promised about your young son. What reactions might you go through?

In v. 11, Isaiah says Jesus, the righteous one, would be in anguish in His soul. And that out of this anguish, a few things would happen:

- “God would see and be satisfied.” Why is it important that God was satisfied with Jesus’ sacrifice?
- “It would lead to many being accounted as righteous.” What does it mean to be counted as righteous through Jesus? In what ways do you struggle to believe or live as if you are completely righteous in Jesus?

## **DEVOTIONAL WEEK 1 - LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS**

### **READ MATTHEW 1:18-21 AND ISAIAH 52:2-3**

One night in Bethlehem...

The whole advent season culminates in a dark night in a dark, smelly stable with a young woman in the chaos of labor pains. But plenty of dark, troubling and confusing nights happened before that final scene. In the first chapter of Matthew, Joseph is experiencing a dark night of his own. His fiancée, Mary, is pregnant, but he isn't the father. Questions likely racked his mind: "Why did Mary cheat on me? Why is she saying she saw an angel? How can I quietly get past this and move on with my life?"

The nation of Israel was in a much longer, but similar darkness. Because of their sin, God had been silent for four hundred years. The glory of old was now faded. Once again they found themselves enslaved by another nation that had no regard for them or their God. In their darkness, they felt hopeless.

Perhaps you've felt this darkness too. You feel enslaved to a certain sin that you can't seem to overcome. God feels distant. You feel isolated and alone. You don't know what to do. You find yourself asking, "When will this end? Why is this happening? God, are you here? God, do you even love me?"

- When do you feel the most darkness, confusion or hopelessness in life?
  
- What makes you feel better in these dark, confusing times?

But that night in Bethlehem, out of the darkness, one solitary star pierced the night sky.

And in Nazareth, an angel of light appeared with a message to pierce Joseph's confusion. Not only had his fiancée not cheated on him, not only was her pregnancy a divine act of God's doing, but also Joseph's son, Jesus, would "save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)

God's promise to Isaiah would find its fulfillment in His Son's birth. No longer would God's people be held captive in their sin. The bonds from their neck would be loosed. Their redemption would be bought with no money. (Isaiah 52:2-3)

God is here to rescue us too. The birth of Jesus reminds us that all is not lost. Even in the worst confusion and darkness of our lives -- when sin seems big and hope seems small -- there is grace to find in the rescuing, redeeming love of God. By His grace, we know that sin will not win forever. By Jesus' birth we see light shining in the darkness and know that darkness will not overcome it.

That night in Bethlehem, King Jesus was born in a manger, but months before that, the reason for His birth was given to His earthly father. His birth was just the first step on the path to Calvary. The rescue plan was set in motion. What started in the manger would be finished on the Cross.

## FAMILY DISCUSSION - WEEK 1

**Q:** Read **Matthew 1:21**. Why would God want to save people from sin? What does this tell you about what God is like?

**A:** God loves people! He is patient, loving, and forgiving.

**Q:** What is sin?

**A:** Sin is not loving God or others as we should.

**Q:** What is grace?

**A:** Grace is God choosing to love us and forgive us despite our sin.

**Q:** Can you share a time this week when you sinned by not loving God or others as you should?

*NOTE: Parents, use this as an opportunity to lead in honest confession. Share first!*

**Q:** When is a time that you had to wait for a promise to come true?

*NOTE: Help your kids think of times they had to wait for a trip or a specific gift they were really hoping for!*

**Q:** In light of God's promise in Isaiah, how do you think it made people feel that God was finally beginning His rescue plan for sinners in Jesus' birth?

**A:** Relieved. Overjoyed. They had been waiting for a very long time and were excited because it was finally happening!

**Q:** Can you describe what Jesus has done for us to show us how much God loves us?

**A:** Jesus came to earth as a baby just like us, lived a perfect life, died to save us from our sin, and rose again.



## STUDY GUIDE WEEK 1 - GRACE FOR OUR SIN

**Primary Passage:** Isaiah 52:1-6 + 52:13-53:6, Matthew 1:18-21

*O come, O come, Emmanuel*

*And ransom captive Israel*

*That mourns in lonely exile here*

*Until the Son of God appear*

### LIFEGROUP STUDY GUIDE:

**Read and Recap:** Have someone read **Isaiah 52:1-6, 52:13-5:6** and **Matthew 1:18-21** and recap the highlights from this week's sermon.

**Read Matthew 1:18-21.** What is relatable about Joseph? How might you have responded if you were in his situation?

**Read Isaiah 52:1-2.** Israel's captivity symbolically represents our spiritual captivity to sin. What specific sins do you need Jesus to set you free from currently?

**Reread Isaiah 52:3 and 53:4-5.** Redemption is freedom from slavery. If you were enslaved, what type of rescuer/redeemer would you be hoping for?

- What aspects of God's redemption through Jesus are surprising?
- Are there any specific ways that you look for redemption outside of Jesus during the holiday season?

**Reread Isaiah 53:10-12.** List all of the promises of God in this passage and how they are accomplished through Jesus.

**Pray** this Christmas season that we will delight in Jesus' grace and agree with God that our sin is our biggest problem, not anything else.

WEEK 2

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HOPE IN OUR  
SUFFERING



## DAY 1: ISAIAH 43:1-4

<sup>1</sup>*But now thus says the Lord,  
He who created you, O Jacob,  
He who formed you, O Israel:  
“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are Mine.*

<sup>2</sup>*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.*

<sup>3</sup>*For I am the Lord your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.  
I give Egypt as your ransom,  
Cush and Seba in exchange for you.*

<sup>4</sup>*Because you are precious in My eyes,  
and honored, and I love you,  
I give men in return for you,  
peoples in exchange for your life.*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION:

In v. 1, God tells His people to fear not which He often tells people when they stand in His presence. Why is the thought of looking God in the face both exhilarating and terrifying?

List all of the reasons God gives for why we should not fear in this text. What are the biggest fears in your life? How can you use these promises of God to specifically fight your fears?

In v. 2, God promises His presence right in the midst of their trials and suffering. Why is it hard to believe that God is with us in the midst of our pain?

## **DAY 2: MATTHEW 1:22-23 AND REVELATION 21:3**

*<sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: <sup>23</sup>“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).*

*- Matthew 1:22-23*

*“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God.”*

*- Revelation 21:3*

### **PERSONAL REFLECTION:**

Think back on moments of your life when you have experienced suffering. Have you ever felt Gods presence in the midst of your suffering?

How does focusing on Gods presence change our experience of suffering? What are practical things that help you experience God’s presence in your life?

In Jesus’ birth, we see the fulfilment of God’s promise to Isaiah that God would come and live with us. In Revelation 21, we see the ultimate fulfillment of Emanuel, God’s presence dwelling with His people forever. How can looking back on Jesus’ first advent empower your hope to endure until His second advent?

## DAY 3: LUKE 1:26-38

*<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" <sup>29</sup>But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup>and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

*<sup>34</sup>And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"*

*<sup>35</sup>And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. <sup>36</sup>And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God." <sup>38</sup>And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Reread v. 29 and 34. What do you notice about Mary's initial responses to Gabriel's visit and message? Why is her response comforting to us?

Reread v. 30 and 35-37. Gabriel is not offended or shocked by Mary's confusion, but seems to welcome her question. How comfortable are you bringing your fears and questions to God in the midst of suffering?

Are there any fears and questions you need to bring to God and others right now? If so, what are they?

The angel offers Mary a promise in the midst of her fear. What are promises God offers you in Scripture that you should memorize and meditate on to help fight your fears?



## DAY 4: LUKE 1:46-55

*<sup>46</sup>And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, <sup>47</sup>and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup>for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; <sup>49</sup>for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. <sup>50</sup>And His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup>He has shown strength with His arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; <sup>52</sup>He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; <sup>53</sup>He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. <sup>54</sup>He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, <sup>55</sup>as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to His offspring forever.”*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Think of this passage as a worship song Mary sings to remind herself of God’s goodness and promises. Why is it so necessary to actively remind yourself of God’s promises?

List out all the things you can do to actively remind yourself of God’s hope and promises.

In v. 47, Mary says her spirit rejoices in God, her Savior. The more we remind ourselves of who God is, the more we will join Mary in worshipping God no matter what our circumstances are. What is making it hard for you to rejoice in God?

In v. 51-54, Mary describes the kind of people to whom God gladly offers His strength and mercy. How can pride and affluence become an obstacle to us receiving God’s grace? Where do you need to confess pride and over-reliance on your own might and riches?

## DAY 5: LUKE 2:1-7

*<sup>1</sup>In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>And all went to be registered, each to his own town. <sup>4</sup>And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, <sup>5</sup>to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. <sup>6</sup>And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Jesus was literally born into suffering. The Prince of Heaven was born in a dirty manger to a teenage girl and her fiancé. Why is it important that God's Son was born into a blue-collar family in squalor as opposed to being born into a royal family in a palace?

- What do you learn about God's character as you meditate on the lowly conditions of Jesus' birth? How does Jesus' birth show God's empathy for His people in their suffering?

In what ways have you suffered or are you suffering right now? Have you considered how Jesus is able to relate to you in the midst of whatever kinds of suffering you're going through?

## DEVOTIONAL WEEK 2 - PRESENT IN THE FIRE AND THE FLOOD

### READ LUKE 1:26-38, 46-55 AND ISAIAH 43:1-4

Nine months before Jesus was born in a manger...

An angel named Gabriel appeared to Mary. The teenage girl was frightened and confused. Why was this happening? Had she done something wrong and God sent Gabriel to rebuke her?

But Gabriel was not there to rebuke, but to bring good news for her and the entire world. She would soon have a baby. And this wouldn't be any ordinary baby. This would be the Son of God, the one who would bring hope to the hopeless, the one who would bring justice to the suffering. Mary was stunned.

She had more questions than answers. What did Gabriel's words mean exactly? How was this even possible? What would her fiance Joseph think? In spite of all her questions, Mary trusted that God was going to accomplish what He set out to do, so she worshipped God. (Luke 1:46-55)

Six to eight hundred years prior in Judah, the prophet Isaiah saw a vision, not from an angel, but from God Himself. And God made a promise to Isaiah. God would bring hope to His people by being present with them in the midst of their suffering. He promised His very presence to His people. When His people passed through the Red Sea, God walked alongside them. When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would walk through the flames of persecution, God would be right there in the furnace with them. His people never brought any might or wisdom to the table; they simply brought their neediness to Him and depended on God through it all. (Isaiah 43:1-4)

It would be God's very presence alone that could save His people and help them endure during the pain of life. On the Cross, God would allow Himself to be drowned in our sin and suffering. At the mount of crucifixion, God Himself would step into the flames of our sin and be burned alive.

- Why did Jesus, the most perfect human being to ever walk the planet, undergo such suffering and agony?

Emmanuel is God's name most connected with Advent: God with us.

Emmanuel is more than a spiritual nicety to comfort our souls; it is a declaration of how far God is willing to go to be with His people in the midst of their pain.

Where are you suffering right now? How does God's presence give you hope and confront your fears?

Whether it's a hard relationship, financial tension or physical pain, Jesus was born into suffering and died in suffering so we could know without a shadow of doubt that God is with us in the midst of our suffering. Emmanuel - God with us - in the flood and in the fire empowers us to stand with Mary - bringing our questions and doubts to God and worshipping Him even in the midst of our pain.

## FAMILY DISCUSSION - WEEK 2

**Q:** Read **Luke 1:26-38**. What did the angel tell Mary? How did she feel when the angel appeared to her?

**A:** The angel told Mary that God was with her and that she was going to give birth to Jesus. At first she was afraid but then she was comforted because God was with her.

**Q:** Jesus' birth shows us that God wants to be with us, even in our sadness and pain. What things are you going through that make it hard to trust God?

*NOTE: Parents, use this as an opportunity to lead in honest sharing. Share first!*

**Q:** What is suffering?

**A:** Suffering is any kind of pain that comes from God's good world being broken by sin.

**Q:** What is hope?

**A:** Hope is trusting God's promise to fix what is broken while we patiently wait for Him to do so.

**Q:** Who do we as a family know that is going through a difficult time? How can we be with them in their suffering, just like God is with us in our suffering?

**Pray as a family!** Ask God for an opportunity to talk to them about a God so good that He would be willing to suffer with His people in Jesus.

## STUDY GUIDE WEEK 2 - HOPE IN OUR SUFFERING

**Primary Passages:** Isaiah 43:1-4, Matthew 1:22:23, Luke 1:26-38, 46-55 and 2:1-7

*O come, Thou Day-Spring  
Come and cheer  
Our spirits by Thine advent here  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night  
And death's dark shadows put to flight  
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, o Israel*

*“Any one thinking of the Holy Child as born in December would mean by it exactly what we mean by it; that Christ is not merely a summer sun of the prosperous but a winter fire for the unfortunate.”*

**-G.K. Chesterton**

### LIFEGROUP STUDY GUIDE:

**Read and Recap:** Have someone read **Isaiah 43:1-4, Matthew 1:22:23, Luke 1:26-38, 46-55 and 2:1-7** and recap the highlights from this week's sermon.

**Read Isaiah 43:1-4.** Why does suffering tend to make us feel isolated from God and other people? How does this promise in Isaiah confront our assumptions about suffering?



- Are there any specific types of suffering that you frequently experience during the holiday season? Are there any other ways you are suffering right now?

**Read Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:22-23.** Immanuel means “God with us.” How have you seen evidence of God’s presence in your life?

- How does remembering times God has provided for us in the past (particularly in the gospel), encourage hope in our current suffering?

**Read Luke 1:26-38 and 46-55.** How does Mary’s response - both her questioning and rejoicing in truth - challenge/encourage us in our response to suffering?

- Are there any friends of ours who are suffering right now? How can we offer them gospel hope and relief in the midst of their pain?

**Pray** that we would be a people bold enough to bring whatever doubts we have to God and His people.

**Pray** that through Jesus we would learn to hope and rejoice no matter what our circumstances.

WEEK 3

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PEACE FOR  
OUR WORLD



## DAY 1: LUKE 2:8-14

<sup>8</sup>And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. <sup>10</sup>And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup>For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!"

### PERSONAL REFLECTION:

The angels promise that Jesus' birth would bring peace on earth. Personally, culturally and globally, where do you see the most need for peace?

The phrase, "Glory to God in the highest" is a proclamation that God is better than anything or anyone else. Nothing and no one else is worthy of our worship. What people or things outside of God are you most tempted to worship this Advent season?

Think about the connections between the three parts of the angels' song: 1.) Glory to God in the highest, 2.) peace on earth 3.) among those with whom He is pleased!

- How are these three ideas connected? Why does peace on earth require receiving God's favor and worshipping God above all else?

## DAY 2: ISAIAH 9:2-7

- <sup>2</sup>*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
those who dwell in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.*
- <sup>3</sup>*You have multiplied the nation; You have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before You as with joy at the harvest,  
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.*
- <sup>4</sup>*For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder,  
the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.*
- <sup>5</sup>*For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult  
and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.*
- <sup>6</sup>*For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given;  
and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*
- <sup>7</sup>*Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Isaiah promises in v. 2 that the light in the darkness will bring joyful harvest and economic prosperity (v. 3), freedom from oppressive rulers (v. 4), the end of war (v. 5) and a never ending kingdom (v. 6-7).

- List all the examples you know of (domestic or foreign) where people are suffering in poverty, under oppressive powers, war and/or governmental instability.
- Describe what kind of global response would happen if all of these examples of brokenness were suddenly and sustainably fixed.

What are practical ways that you can labor and long for King Jesus' kingdom to come in full?

## DAY 3: ISAIAH 11:1-5

- <sup>1</sup>*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.*
- <sup>2</sup>*And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him,  
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and might,  
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.*
- <sup>3</sup>*And His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.  
He shall not judge by what His eyes see,  
or decide disputes by what His ears hear,  
<sup>4</sup>but with righteousness He shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
and He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,  
and with the breath of His lips He shall kill the wicked.*
- <sup>5</sup>*Righteousness shall be the belt of His waist,  
and faithfulness the belt of His loins.*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION:

What aspects of rulers or politicians frustrate you the most? What characteristics are you most drawn to/encouraged by in a human leader?

List all the specific characteristics prophesied about King Jesus in this passage. Where can you think of examples in the gospels where Jesus displays these characteristics?

What would following a leader like this feel and look like? What impact would this kind of King have on His subjects?

## DAY 4: ISAIAH 11:6-10

<sup>6</sup>*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,  
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,  
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;  
and a little child shall lead them.*

<sup>7</sup>*The cow and the bear shall graze;  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*

<sup>8</sup>*The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,  
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.*

<sup>9</sup>*They shall not hurt or destroy  
in all My holy mountain;  
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.*

<sup>10</sup>*In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of Him shall the  
nations inquire, and His resting place shall be glorious.*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION:

After describing the type of King that Jesus would be in v. 1-5, the next verses describe the effects of Jesus' kingdom coming by painting a beautiful, poetic image of ultimate peace and security.

- What things disturb your peace and security most often? What gives you the most anxiety or fear?
- Try to imagine a world where the very things that cause you fear now became completely peaceful and powerless to disturb you. Let these images lead you to long for Jesus' second advent.

V. 9-10 describe the spiritual impact of Jesus' kingdom coming in its fullness. Where can you already see small examples of Jesus bringing His kingdom and fulfilling these promises?

## DAY 5: LUKE 2:13-20

*<sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,*

*<sup>14</sup>“Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!”*

*<sup>15</sup>When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” <sup>16</sup>And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup>And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. <sup>18</sup>And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION:

In v. 19, we’re told that Mary made a conscious decision to treasure up all that led up to Jesus’ first advent. What does it look like for you to consciously treasure the beautiful details of Jesus’ incarnation?

In v. 15-20, how do the shepherds respond to the angels’ proclamation in v. 14?

Without instruction, the shepherds see what God is doing and can’t help but glorify God and talk about it. Why is talking about what is glorious a natural and/or universal human reaction?

- Where do you see God at work in your life and community? Who has God put around you who needs to hear you talk about the incredible hope, joy and peace that is found in His kingdom?

## **DEVOTIONAL WEEK 3 - LONGING FOR PEACE ON EARTH**

### **READ LUKE 2:18-20 AND ISAIAH 11:1-10**

Have you ever imagined what a perfect world would look like? Deep down every one of us longs for a world like this. A world without war, racism or bigotry. A world with no disease or destruction. A world where perfect love and justice reign over everything and everyone.

In Isaiah 11 we see such a world. This world, according to the Bible is marked by shalom - widespread peace in which violence and injustice will be no more. God established shalom in the very beginning when He created everything out of nothing. And we have longed for this shalom to be restored ever since sin first disrupted human history in Genesis 3.

- Where do you see injustice, brokenness and pain in our world?
  
- Describe what you picture when you imagine a perfect world.

Rejecting God's way of life in the garden hasn't just affected our relationship with Him. Paul tells us in Romans 8 that all of creation has been disordered and disrupted. Perfect peace is out of reach for us now. Because of sin, the world around us, created as a paradise for us to enjoy God in, is now filled with violence, injustice and hatred. Instead of pursuing life, we chase after death and don't even realize we're doing it.



So God did something miraculous. He sent His Son, the prince of peace, from the throne room of Heaven to be born in a manger. The angels proclaim to the shepherds that Jesus' arrival is about restoring peace on earth (Luke 2:14). And the rest of their message proclaims how:

The Christ King born in a manger would give God's grace (His favor and pleasure that only Jesus deserved) to the sinful and He would lead sinful hearts back to glorifying God in the highest. To restore peace, Jesus would do battle on the Cross for all our sinful injustices and all the injustices that plague our world. In His death, we are forgiven. By his resurrection, we are given new life.

And On top of all that, we are promised that the peace that began in Jesus' first advent will be made complete in His second. On that day, cosmic shalom will become reality. The lion will dwell with the lamb. The King will take His throne once and for all. And His kingdom of peace will increase forever and ever with no end. (Isaiah 9:2-7)

## FAMILY DISCUSSION - WEEK 3

**Q:** Read Isaiah 11:1-5. Isaiah wrote that God would send a perfect King to end all evil and sin. Who was he talking about? What type of ruler does he describe?

**A:** Isaiah was talking about King Jesus coming! Isaiah describes King Jesus as being a descendant of King David (Jesse's son), having the Spirit of the Lord rest on Him, being wise and understanding and respecting God, treating people who are poor and weak well, etc.

**Q:** Read Isaiah 11:6-9. What stands out as crazy or unusual to you about these verses? What is Isaiah attempting to show by giving these examples?

**A:** These are animals that would hurt each other if they were left alone together. Because of sin, everything is broken--our relationship with ourselves, God, each other, and our world. Isaiah is giving us a picture of what the world will look like under King Jesus' perfect peace, making all the wrong things right.

**Q:** Read Luke 2:8-20. What did the big group of angels say?

**A:** The angels said, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased."

**Q:** What is peace? Who do the angels say will receive Christ's peace?

**A:** Peace is the comfort that comes from knowing you're safe and knowing God's love for you through Jesus. (For the world to have complete peace, sin and its effects have to be dealt with.)

**Q:** How does Jesus being born on the earth bring peace for our world?

**A:** When we trust in Jesus as our savior, Jesus' peace begins working in us because God has promised to bring us safely home to Him. Jesus' peace works THROUGH us as we love others and help keep others safe from harm. When Jesus comes back the second time, He will bring total peace for our world in every area!

**Q:** Where do you need Jesus' peace? Where do you see others who need Jesus' peace?

**A:** Everything from small acts of selfishness, anger and unkindness in us and others... all the way up to massive world issues like racism, hatred, wars, killing, natural disasters, sickness, sadness, sin in our own hearts and behavior, etc.

**Q:** What can we as a family do to help bring Jesus' peace to people around us?

**A:** Parents, help your kids think of ways that you as a family can show peace and goodwill towards people who need it this season. (Consider people in your LG, kids and families at school, neighbors, family members, community helpers like garbage collectors or postal workers, etc.).

## STUDY GUIDE WEEK 3 - PEACE FOR OUR WORLD

**Primary Passages:** Isaiah 11:1-10, Luke 2:13-20

*O come, Desire of nations, bind  
All peoples in one heart and mind;  
Bid envy, strife and discord cease,  
Fill the whole earth with Heaven's peace.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*“We are not at peace with others because we are not at peace with ourselves, and we are not at peace with ourselves because we are not at peace with God.”*

**- Thomas Merton**

### LIFEGROUP STUDY GUIDE:

**Read and Recap:** Have someone read **Isaiah 11:1-10 and Luke 2:13-20** and recap the highlights from this week's sermon.

**Reread Luke 2:13-14.** Why is the angels' proclamation of peace on earth such a welcome greeting?

Where do you see needed peace in the following areas:

- Within yourself. Where are you marked by fear, anxiety and other inner conflicts?

- Relationally within your family, roommates or friend group?
- Professionally in your workplace?
- Communally in your neighborhood/town/city?
- Globally?

**Reread Isaiah 11:9.** How does the earth being full of the knowledge of the Lord lead to peace?

- Think of specific ways that Jesus has and/or can bring peace to all of the areas of needed peace you just talked through.

**Reread Luke 2:10, 13-14 and 20.** What does it look like for us to join Jesus in bringing peace on earth by proclaiming His goodness? Who are people God has put around us that we can offer peace to in word and deed?

**Pray** that we would be a people who see God's peace triumphing over our sin and reigning in our lives and relationships.

**Pray** that we would be a family who sees and takes opportunities to extend this peace to others.

WEEK 4

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JOY FOR  
ETERNITY



## DAY 1: LUKE 2:8-11

*<sup>8</sup>And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. <sup>10</sup>And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup>For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Last week we focussed on the multitude of angels proclaiming peace on earth through Jesus' coming. But before their song (v. 13-14), a lone angel prepared the shepherds for what kind of message it would be (v. 10): "good news of great joy for all the people."

- What kinds of things threaten and diminish your joy in day to day normal life? Why is that?
- How does the good news of the gospel give you great joy regardless of your circumstances?
- What does it look like for you to fight for, rest in and live out of the joy that Jesus gives you today? Take some time right now to rejoice in the Lord.

## DAY 2: ISAIAH 25:6-9

*<sup>6</sup>On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples  
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,  
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.*

*<sup>7</sup>And He will swallow up on this mountain  
the covering that is cast over all peoples,  
the veil that is spread over all nations.*

*<sup>8</sup>He will swallow up death forever;  
and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces,  
and the reproach of His people He will take away from all the earth,  
for the Lord has spoken.*

*<sup>9</sup>It will be said on that day,  
“Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, that He might save us.  
This is the Lord; we have waited for Him;  
let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Describe in your own words the picture that Isaiah paints in v. 6-8.

In verse 6 Heaven is described as God preparing a feast for us. What comes to mind when you think of a feast (smells, tastes, people, etc.)?

In v. 7-8 Isaiah describes God swallowing up sin and death forever. How is this necessary for God's plan to give us eternal and indestructible joy in Jesus' return?

Read v. 9 - What does it look like to practice joy and gladness while we wait for the Lord to bring His salvation?



## DAY 3: ISAIAH 12:1-6

<sup>1</sup>*You will say in that day:*

*“I will give thanks to you, O Lord,  
for though You were angry with me,  
Your anger turned away,  
that You might comfort me.*

<sup>2</sup>*“Behold, God is my salvation;  
I will trust, and will not be afraid;  
for the Lord God is my strength and my song,  
and He has become my salvation.”*

<sup>3</sup>*With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. 4 And you will say in that day:*

*“Give thanks to the Lord,  
call upon His name,  
make known His deeds among the peoples,  
proclaim that His name is exalted.*

<sup>5</sup>*“Sing praises to the Lord, for He has done gloriously;  
let this be made known in all the earth.*

<sup>6</sup>*Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion,  
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Read v. 1. In the cross, Jesus fulfills these promises by taking God’s anger and that He might offer us comfort instead. Take some time right now to give thanks to the Lord for turning his anger away from you and offering you His comfort.

Read v. 2. What does it mean at a practical level for God to be your strength and your song?

In vs. 3-6, Isaiah instructs God’s people: “make known His deeds among the peoples, proclaim that His name is exalted.” How can you make known God’s goodness to the people He has put around you?

## DAY 4: REVELATION 21:1-4

*<sup>1</sup>Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup>He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."*

*<sup>5</sup>And He who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION:

In the beginning God dwelt with man in the garden. Two thousand years ago, God dwelt with man at the first Advent. And now, in the Advent season we look ahead to Revelation 21, when God will physically make His home with us again forever. What do you look forward to the most about His return?

In v. 4 we see the promise of God's return removing all pain, death and suffering forever. List some of the major ways you have been impacted by these things throughout your life.

In v. 5 King Jesus promises to renew all things - our soul, our circumstances, our world. In light of question two, what does clinging to this hope look like for you right now?

- Setting our mind on future joy when Jesus makes all things new, fuels our joy in the broken world now. Take some time to meditate on the future joy you will have when God does away with all pain and suffering.

## DAY 5: JOHN 16:20-22

*<sup>20</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. <sup>21</sup>When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. <sup>22</sup>So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Two thousand years ago, Mary endured the pangs of childbirth as she awaited the joy of Jesus. Likewise, we are called to endure pain and suffering as we await the joy of Jesus's return. What is the current state of your joy?

- Are you fighting for joy to dictate how you perceive your circumstances, or are you letting your circumstances dictate how you perceive your joy?

When Jesus returns, He promises an everlasting joy so far beyond our imagination that we won't even remember the anguish of this life. Describe what you think this joy will look like for you.

How have you seen God use this season of Advent to increase your joy in Him?

What are practical ways you can continue to remind yourself of this future joy after the Advent season is over?

## DEVOTIONAL WEEK 4 - THE BIRTH OF JOY

### READ ISAIAH 12:1-6 AND JOHN 16:20-22.

The Christmas season for so many kids around the world is a season of waiting. They see the gifts under the tree and they're left to guess until Christmas morning what could possibly be under the wrapping. And then that day finally comes! They rush to the living room and open up the joy that awaits them.

Thousands of years leading up to Jesus's birth, God's people lay in a season of waiting, too. They were promised from the very beginning that the work wrought about by sin and death would one day be destroyed. From that point on, the world held its breath for this promised Savior to come.

Two thousand years ago this promise came to fruition. This is what the Advent season is all about. Joy dawned upon the earth, embodied in the infant Jesus. And everything He did on earth was both a display and invitation into this joy. From healing lepers, to dignifying the undignified, from welcoming those far off from God, to bringing the dead back to life. In His life, death and resurrection, Jesus came with outstretched arms to offer people the type of joy we all long for.

But that's not the end of the story.

It isn't the end of Jesus' joy-bringing.

We live now, on the other side of the Cross, in another season of waiting -- a second advent season. And every time we think about Jesus' first coming, it reminds us that He will come again! Although His joy has dawned, it hasn't come in full. Our joy is still marked by anguish. Our world is still wrecked by sin.

For those who find their joy in King Jesus, we recognize this tension: He has come and He will come again. He has dealt with sin on the Cross, and He will deal with sin once and for all when He returns. He has conquered death, and some day death will be no more. This is what Christians throughout history have called the already and not yet.

And childbirth is the perfect metaphor for this reality. Just like Mary went through agony before receiving the joy of her son, Jesus tells us we will all go through agony before His joy is made complete in the world. But until that day comes, no one can take our joy away.

We rejoice because we see glimpses of Christ's beauty already. We see it in God's Spirit working through us. We see it in Jesus's body, His Church. But one day we will see Him fully. We will experience the fullness of joy for all of eternity with each moment better than the moment before. Forever-Christmas is coming.

So now we wait, His faithful children, for that day to come soon.

Our Father has given us a foretaste of joy and we wait for the gift in its entirety.

As we wait for Jesus's return, let us press more and more into His joy here and now.

Let every heart prepare Him room.

## FAMILY DISCUSSION - WEEK 4

**Q:** What is joy?

**A:** Joy is a deep down happiness that comes from knowing God is good and that He loves you!

**Q:** **Read Luke 2:8-11.** How was Jesus' birth "good news of great joy for all people"?

**A:** Jesus was God's son who came to live a perfect life, die on the cross for our sin, and be raised again to conquer sin and death!

**Q:** What attacks your joy? What makes you sad or afraid or hurts your heart?

**A:** PARENTS: Use this as a time to share open and honestly as a family.

**Q:** How is it possible for us to have joy now even in the midst of feeling sad, hurt, or afraid?

**A:** Since joy is a deep-down happiness that comes from knowing God is good and that He loves us, we can remember and rest in the Truth of God's love and His promises even when we temporarily feel sad, or hurt, or afraid.

**Q:** How can we as a family grow our joy now before Jesus comes back?

**A:** We've actually been practicing a lot of these in our Advent guide. We can practice and grow our joy every time we:

- Read and think about the Bible.
- Remember what God has already done for us in Jesus.
- Believe God's promises to us about what He will do in the future.

No matter what happens from day to day, God's Word, God's love for us in Jesus and God's promises will never change! The best way to grow our joy is to train our brains to think about these things a lot.

PARENTS: Brainstorm with your kids different ways you and your family can practice these things! (In the car, at meals, before bed, etc.)

## STUDY GUIDE WEEK 4 - JOY FOR ETERNITY

\* \* \*

Since most of our LifeGroups do not meet officially in the weeks surrounding Christmas, we're giving you a short study guide and a series of additional blog resources in the coming weeks to help you in a number of situations you might find yourself in around Christmas.

\* \* \*

### RESOURCE #1: STUDY GUIDE

If your LifeGroup does meet over the Christmas holiday (or if you find yourself in the company of Christians and want to meditate on Jesus' joy together), here's a quick study guide to help you facilitate discussion.

**Primary Passages:** Isaiah 12:1-6 and John 16:20-22

*O come, Thou Key of David, come  
And open wide our heavenly home  
Make safe the way that leads on high  
And close the path to misery  
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, o Israel*

*“The joy Jesus was bringing into the world was like no other kind in history... It is the very joy that Jesus himself has in God the Father— which he has had from all eternity and will have forever... He promises to put that in us. That is what the Holy Spirit does... This is ‘great joy.’ And it cannot be taken away. It is indestructible.”*

**- John Piper**

**Read** the Scriptures and reading in the **wk. 4 Devotional - The Birth of Joy** together as a group. (pg. 46)

- How would you describe the state of your joy right now?
- Are you fighting for joy to dictate how you perceive your circumstances, or are you letting your circumstances dictate how you perceive your joy? Why is that?

**Read John 16:20-22.** Jesus makes two promises:

#1: Someday our joy will be so great that we won't remember all the pain and agony of this life.

#2: No one will ever take away the joy that He gives to us.

- How are these promises encouraging to you right now? What makes these promises hard to believe right now?
- What are practical ways we can repent and fight for gospel joy in the midst of whatever circumstances we find ourselves in?

**Pray** for our LG and church to see our pain in this life as birth pangs that will someday give way to a greater joy than we can imagine.

**Pray** for us to rest in the joy of Jesus' salvation and offer that joy to those around us no matter what our circumstances are.



## UPCOMING BLOG RESOURCES:

The following blog resources will be published the week of 12/11 to 12/17. To find them watch for activity on our blog at: [www.midtowncolumbia.com/blog](http://www.midtowncolumbia.com/blog) or come back here as we will publish them here as they are finished!

- **Painful/Awkward Family Relationships** - While many people will be enjoying the best family time of the year, we know that many will experience hard, broken family situations. Both sin and death rip apart the joy that we want to experience during the holidays. So we will be publishing some resources and scriptures to help you fight for joy in the midst of your family pain.
- **Infusing Gospel Elements in a LG Christmas Party** - One of our church planting candidates, Jake Blair, takes a look at some helpful suggestions on how you can infuse your LG Christmas party with singing, reading and general gospel merry-making.
- **CHRISTmas Experience** - Midtown's very own editor and blog curator, Courtney Gibson, is something of an Advent enthusiast. For over a decade she's been curating a playlist of theologically accurate, gospel-centered music that takes you on a roughly-chronological and smoothly-harmonious journey through the the events preceding and surrounding Jesus' birth.