

Small Group Discussion Guide — November 27, 2022

- Series: The Surprise of Christmas
 - Sermon: Bethlehem
 - Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12 (NIV) / Supporting Text: John 1:3-4
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FOLLOW-UP FROM LAST WEEK

Over the recent sermon series, our pastors shared several stories where friends or themselves interacted with people they can only imagine as angels. These stories likely had many of us reflecting on our own lives, wondering if/when we have encountered an angel? Although it can feel uncomfortable to unpack, has anyone experienced an interaction that left you questioning who exactly you were engaging?

CONNECT

1. What stood out to you from this past week's service, and why?
2. Do you have any seemingly small life hacks that make a world of difference in your life (i.e. apps on your phone, clicklist, etc.)?

ENGAGE

1. Read Matthew 2:1-4
 - Jesus was born in Bethlehem. What was this town like at the time of his birth? What does "Bethlehem" mean, and why is this significant?
 - When the wise men arrived in Jerusalem looking for the "king of the Jews," the text indicates that Herod was deeply disturbed, along with all of Jerusalem. Why do you think this was?
2. Read Matthew 2:5-6
 - God uses the term "shepherd" to describe Jesus as ruler. How is this different from the type of leadership Herod demonstrated, the leadership of that time, and the leadership of our current age?
3. Read Matthew 2:7-12
 - Try to put yourself in the shoes of the wise men. What do you think your reaction would have been seeing baby Jesus, knowing him as Savior of the world, but seeing him in his tiny human form in the arms of his mother?

APPLY

1. Let's start with Bethlehem. In God's perfect plan, he chose this little town off the beaten path to give way to the Savior of the world. What message do you think God wants us to glean from Jesus' humble beginnings?

2. King Herod can be described as a heavy-handed and proud ruler, while Jesus is known as the humble shepherd. Which of those styles do you most identify with? In what ways are you similar to Herod? How can we realign our hearts to become more like our King Jesus?
3. Pete made the point that we don't dictate our story to God, we participate in the story He is writing with us. What would it look like to more fully trust God to write our story and follow along with his plan verses trying to control the outcome ourselves?

PRAYER

Dear Father, as advent approaches, we thank you for a season of anticipation and an opportunity to set our hearts on the amazing yet humble birth of Jesus. We remain in awe that you used such simple beginnings for your own Son to walk the earth. Help us to ponder this throughout the season and give us the wisdom to understand why you chose the story to unfold as it did. Help us to return to Bethlehem, to see you in the simple, quiet places. Allow us to bring a little bit of Bethlehem to those around us. Thank you for sending your Son, to show us the way and to give us an everlasting hope. We love you!

GOING DEEPER

The bigger, the brighter, the better...is this not the message many of us have learned? Yet, what if we can experience more of God in the small, dark, quiet places? Why is it that God uses some of our lost and broken places, our bleak periods, our hopeless circumstances to reveal himself? Where can you be looking...in your life, how can you return to your Bethlehem? If we focus too largely on the grand scale, it may be harder to see, but if we can shift our eyes to the smaller places, is Jesus not still working miracles today? Take a few minutes to think about the ways Jesus is working in your life, in the lives of those around you, in the world at large. What is apparent to you?

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE

QUOTATIONS

"But I believe that there are some things that by and large God is always saying to each of us. All of us for instance, carry around inside ourselves a certain emptiness-a sense that something is missing; a restlessness, the deep feeling that somehow all is not right inside of our skin...In such a world, I suspect that maybe God speaks to us most clearly through his silence, his absence, so that we know him best through our missing him" - Frederick Buechner