

DIGGING DEEPER

During this 4-week Advent series, we will move backwards through the opening chapters of Matthew's Gospel, from Jesus' escape to Egypt all the way back to His family tree. Along the way we'll discover that God's arrival in our world was anything but expected, and we'll reflect on the Advent themes of hope, peace, joy, and love.

Follow the discussion guide for each week and end your time praying together.

SUNDAY	THEME	PASSAGE
November 29	**Hope**	Matthew 2:13–23
December 6	**Peace**	Matthew 2:1–12
December 13	**Joy**	Matthew 1:18–24
December 20	**Love**	Matthew 1:1–18

SHARE & PRAYER

After your discussion, end your time in prayer as a group. Advent is a season of watching and waiting. As we remember Jesus' unexpected arrival, we invite you to practice paying attention as you go about your week, noticing where God is showing up in unexpected places and people, and where He is inviting you to hope, rest in His peace, receive His joy, and share His love.

- **SHARE:** Where have you seen God at work this week? Share something that made you aware of God (a story, moment, conversation, unexpected provision, opportunity, etc.)
- **RESPOND:** What might God be inviting you to do, see, trust, or participate in this week?
- **PRAY:** Share prayer requests and pray together.



READ THE PASSAGE TOGETHER: Matthew 2:13–23

Sunday, November 29, 2026

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Don't feel pressured to get through every question! Follow as the Spirit leads and spend your time on the questions that spark meaningful conversation.

1. **Read Matthew 2:13–15.** Soon after the Magi leave, an angel tells Joseph, "*Get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt*." Christmas quickly became a refugee story. Jesus is reliving Israel's journey: "*Out of Egypt I called my son.*" When has life taken an unexpected turn for you? What does it mean that Jesus entered an unsafe world?
2. **Read Matthew 2:16–18.** Matthew doesn't skip the grief: "*Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted*." He quotes Jeremiah 31, where the very next lines promise, "*So there is hope for your descendants*." Biblical hope doesn't ignore pain; it speaks right into it. Where do we need hope that is honest about sorrow? Why do you think we rush past grief?
3. **Read Matthew 2:13–14, 19–21.** Four times Joseph receives direction in a dream, and each time he simply gets up and goes. He never sees the whole plan, only the next step. Henri Nouwen called this "active waiting" - trusting that God has already begun something, even when we can't see it yet. What next step might God be asking of you as you wait?
4. **Read Matthew 2:19–22.** Herod dies, but his son now rules Judea, and Joseph is afraid. Even good news arrives mixed with new worries. The Bible Project notes that the Hebrew word for hope can also mean a cord, something stretched tight. Hope often feels like tension. Where are you living in the tension between relief and fear?
5. **Read Matthew 2:23.** Jesus grows up in Nazareth, a village so ordinary that people would later ask, "*Can anything good come from there?*" (John 1:46). God's rescue often arrives through overlooked places and people. Where might God be at work in the unexpected corners of your life or our world? Who could you share that hope with this week?



READ THE PASSAGE TOGETHER: Matthew 2:1–12

Sunday, December 6, 2026

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Don't feel pressured to get through every question! Follow as the Spirit leads and spend your time on the questions that spark meaningful conversation.

1. **Read Matthew 2:1–2.** The first people in Matthew to worship Jesus are Magi, foreign stargazers from the east, and outsiders to Israel's faith. God met them through a star, in a language they understood. Tim Keller notes that God often meets seekers right where they are. Who are the unlikely seekers in our world today? How might God be drawing them toward Jesus?

2. **Read Matthew 2:3–8.** When Herod heard about a newborn king, "*he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.*" There is an irony here: the Magi traveled far to find the One who brings peace, but Herod (and Jerusalem) are disturbed by his arrival. Herod's life was built on control, and Jesus threatened it. Is there an area of your life where your desire for control is keeping you from experiencing the peace Jesus came to bring?

3. **Read Matthew 2:4–6.** The religious leaders knew exactly where the Messiah would be born, quoting Micah 5:2, yet none of them made the short trip to Bethlehem. Micah goes on to say of this ruler, "*And he will be our peace*" (Micah 5:5). What is the difference between knowing about Jesus and seeking Him? What keeps you/us from 'making the trip'?

4. **Read Matthew 2:9–11.** "*When they saw the star, they were overjoyed*," and they "*bowed down and worshiped him*." The Bible Project explains that the Hebrew word *shalom* means more than the absence of conflict; it means **wholeness**, things as they should be. How does worship move us toward that peace? What would it look like to offer Jesus your best this season?

5. **Read Matthew 2:12.** Warned in a dream, the Magi "*returned to their country by another route*." Meeting Jesus changed their direction. Peace with God often leads us home a different way: in our habits, our relationships, and how we treat others. Where is Jesus inviting you to take another route? How could you be a peacemaker this week?



READ THE PASSAGE TOGETHER: Matthew 1:18–24

Sunday, December 13, 2026

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Don't feel pressured to get through every question! Follow as the Spirit leads and spend your time on the questions that spark meaningful conversation.

1. **Read Matthew 1:18–19.** Joseph's hopes collapse: Mary is pregnant, and he is not the father. Yet even in his hurt, he chooses not "*to expose her to public disgrace*." Joseph shows mercy before he understands the whole story. Share a time when your plan fell apart. How did you respond? What might it look like to choose mercy in a painful situation?

2. **Read Matthew 1:20.** The angel's first words are, "*Joseph son of David, do not be afraid*." Fear is often a thief of joy, and God's messengers speak to it again and again. Henri Nouwen wrote that joy is knowing we are unconditionally loved and that nothing can take that love away. What fears tend to steal your joy? How does God's love speak to them?

3. **Read Matthew 1:21.** The angel says, "*You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins*." Jesus means "*the Lord saves*." The deepest joy of Christmas depends not on circumstances but on rescue: we are forgiven and made new. Why is it sometimes hard to feel joy about being forgiven? How does it change the way we face hard days?

4. **Read Matthew 1:22–23.** Matthew quotes Isaiah: "*They will call him Immanuel*" (which means "God with us"). J.I. Packer called the incarnation the supreme mystery: the Almighty arrived on earth as a helpless baby. God didn't fix the world from a distance; He came close. Where do you most need to know "*God with us*" this season? How does His nearness bring joy?

5. **Read Matthew 1:24.** "*When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him*." Joseph never speaks a word in Matthew's Gospel; his faith is seen in quiet, costly obedience. Joy often follows when we say yes to God, even at a cost. What 'yes' might God be asking of you this Christmas season? How could our group support one another in it?



READ THE PASSAGE TOGETHER: Matthew 1:1–18

Sunday, December 20, 2026

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Don't feel pressured to get through every question! Follow as the Spirit leads and spend your time on the questions that spark meaningful conversation.

1. **Read Matthew 1:1.** Matthew opens with a family tree: "*Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham*." God promised Abraham, "*All peoples on earth will be blessed through you*" (Genesis 12:3). N.T. Wright notes that the genealogy tells Israel's story, with Jesus as its goal. How does it change Christmas to see it as the high point of God's story of love?

2. **Read Matthew 1:2–6.** Genealogies usually listed only men, yet Matthew names four women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and "Uriah's wife." Several were foreigners; their stories involve scandal and pain. Tim Keller sees this family tree as a portrait of grace. Why do you think Matthew highlights these names? What does that say about who is welcome in God's family?

3. **Read Matthew 1:5.** Ruth, a Moabite widow, became the great-grandmother of King David. Her story is full of *hesed*, the Hebrew word for God's loyal love, which the Bible Project describes as love that never quits and goes beyond what is required. Who has shown you that kind of love? Where might God be inviting you to show loyal love to someone who is hard to love?

4. **Read Matthew 1:6–11.** The list includes faithful kings and terrible ones, and it runs straight into "*the exile to Babylon*," Israel's lowest point. Yet the line doesn't end there. God's love kept carrying His promise forward through seasons of failure and loss. Where do you see God's faithfulness in your own story, even in the low points? How might that give you hope today?

5. **Read Matthew 1:16–18.** The pattern breaks at the end: Joseph is "*the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah*." The long wait is over; God's love has taken on flesh. Every name before Jesus needed a Savior, and so do we. How has God's love found you? Who could you invite to experience that love at Christmas Eve this week?