

Welcoming the Stranger

Series Blurb/Teaser: Strangers feature prominently in the stories included in the Bible. None more so than in the birth of Jesus, in part, a story of how strangers reveal to us the character and nature of the God who comes to be with us and for us. So, as you make your Christmas preparations, we invite you to join us for Welcoming the Stranger: How Jesus Celebrates Christmas. Series starts December 1.

Series Outcome: Participants will respond to Jesus' message to offer compassion to those in need as they encounter God in the stories of the strangers included in the birth narrative of Christ.

Series Snapshot:

DATE	SERIES TITLE	MESSAGE TITLE	SCRIPTURE
12/01/2024	Welcoming the Stranger	The Divine Stranger	Luke 1:26-38
12/08/2024	Welcoming the Stranger	The Familiar Stranger	Luke 1:39-45
12/15/2024	Welcoming the Stranger	The Desperate Stranger	Luke 2:1-7
12/22/2024	Welcoming the Stranger	The Uninvited Stranger	Luke 2:8-20
Christmas Eve			
12/24/2024	Welcoming the Stranger	The Surprising Stranger	Matthew 25:31-35
12/29/2024	Welcoming the Stranger	The Hopeful Stranger	Luke 2:25-38
Epiphany Sun.			
01/05/2024	Welcoming the Stranger	The Gifted Stranger	Matthew 2:1-12

Expanded Series Snapshot:

12/01/2024 **Series Title:** Welcoming the Stranger

Message Title: The Divine Stranger

Scripture: Luke 1:26-38 (Gabriel visits Mary; Mary says "yes" to Jesus)

Main Point: Jesus' coming invites us to welcome God into our lives.

Next Step: Write down and share with someone you trust, three easy you will welcome God this Advent.

12/08/2024 **Series Title:** Welcoming the Stranger

Message Title: The Familiar Stranger

Scripture: Luke 1:39-45 (Mary visits Elizabeth)

Main Point: Jesus' coming invites us to connect with our family.

Next Step: Make the call. Write the letter. Share the meal. Find time to personally connect with family this week outside of exchanging gifts, hosting a big gathering, or other typical holiday celebration.

12/15/2024 **Series Title:** Welcoming the Stranger

Message Title: The Desperate Stranger

Scripture: Luke 2:1-7 (no room; Mary gives birth)

Main Point: Jesus' coming invites us to ask for what we need.

Next Step: Ask for help and allow others to assist in meeting your needs.

12/22/2024 **Series Title:** Welcoming the Stranger

Message Title: The Uninvited Stranger

Scripture: Luke 2:8-20 (shepherds visit Jesus)

Main Point: Jesus' coming invites us to be interruptible.

Next Step: Practice patience and flexibility as ways to celebrate the joy of the season.

12/24/2024 **Series Title:** Welcoming the Stranger

Message Title: The Surprising Stranger

Scripture: Matthew 25:31-35 (Jesus welcomed in meeting the needs of others)

Main Point: Jesus' coming is Good News, especially for the poor and marginalized and is an invitation to meet the needs of these people.

Next Step: Connect with the "strangers" of Della Lamb by sharing an offering to help meet their daily needs. [Christmas Eve offering to Della Lamb]

12/29/2024 **Series Title:** Welcoming the Stranger

Message Title: The Hopeful Stranger

Scripture: Luke 2:25-38 (Simeon and Anna welcome Jesus)

Main Point: Jesus' coming invites us to celebrate with those whose deferred hopes have been realized.

Next Step: Name and share at least one hope you have for the coming year and list it as a prayer request until it is realized.

01/05/2025 **Series Title:** Welcoming the Stranger

Message Title: The Gifted Stranger

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12 (Magi visit Jesus)

Main Point: Jesus' coming invites us to recognize the gifts of strangers.

Next Step: Choose a time to volunteer with Della Lamb (or other partner) to learn more about "strangers" and their unique gifts.

NOTES:

"The story of displaced people due to multi-layered social and political trauma is embedded in the Christmas story. Jesus, Joseph, and Mary sought asylum in Egypt from Herod (Matthew 2:13-15). It isn't a minor detail in Jesus' upbringing, but instead a profound life experience that shaped his social narrative, family calling, and the movement he patterned after his incarnation—the Church." - Daniel Yang

source: <https://churchleaders.com/voices/exchange/464123-home-for-the-holidays-refugees-and-the-christmas-story.html>

"I believe the Christmas story should open our eyes and our hearts to those most vulnerable in our midst. To those whose only hope is to travel by foot and inflatable raft for days in search of a livable life—many of whom look very much like the Middle Eastern Mary, Jesus' mother." - Serene Jones

source: <https://time.com/4155651/christmas-story-refugees/>

"Christmas is, for those who wish to follow the way of Jesus, an invitation to accept into our comfortable and safe lives those who come to us from far away, who seem ragged, marginal, in transition. This is how God finds us, at this very dark time of the year, the winter solstice, when the daylight hours have shrunk to their minimal light. He comes knocking at the door, looking for a haven, for a place to rest and recover." - Jay Parini

source: <https://www.cnn.com/2015/12/21/opinions/parini-jesus-refugees-christmas/index.html>

Additional ideas/resources:

Kelly Latimore = refugee holy family (<https://kellylatimoreicons.com/blogs/news/refugees-the-holy-family>)

He Gets Us - refugee story (<https://hegetsus.com/en/articles/jesus-was-a-refugee>)

Della Lamb - invite refugees/speakers

Invite Diana Kander (JVS)

Rev. Shannon Greene - capstone project