The Christmas Story:
From Four Perspectives

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John

An Advent Bible Study
In Four Sessions

Leader’s Guide
Creative Communications Sample
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In short, this Bible study attempts to explore how each gospel in the Bible (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) gives us a different perspective—a different lens—through which to see the Christmas story, the birth and beginnings of Jesus Christ. Each gospel’s emphasis is different, and by studying them both individually and side by side, we catch deeper glimpses into this marvelous event, that God the Father would send his Son to take on human flesh, that God would become a baby who would grow into a man who would die our death and then be raised for our everlasting life.

It is often the beginning of the story that tells us much about how the rest of the story will unfold. Thus, the beginning to each of the gospels is crucial to understanding each gospel as a whole. We will only focus on the beginnings here. And yet, perhaps by focusing on the beginnings, it will focus us for how we might then be able to read the rest of each particular gospel, and read it for its own perspective on who Jesus is, what he came do, and how he saved the world.

Each session begins and ends with prayer. Then there is a conversation starter to warm things up. The questions break each gospel’s Christmas story into sections, to make it more digestible and to encourage close reading. This also allows you to work on one set of questions a day or to do the whole session study at one time. Each session also focuses on a particular Christmas carol that seems to capture the essence of the particular gospel story of the session. I encourage you to sing together just as much as you pray, study and discuss together.

I pray your study of the biblical Christmas story brings you ever closer in faith to the Christ child himself.

—Rev. Travis Scholl, author
Tips For Using This Study Guide

1. Always begin each session with a prayer. One is included for each session. You are encouraged to expand each of them with prayer concerns from the group.

2. Feel free to follow the format of each session as presented here or rearrange and adapt the material to meet the needs of your group.

3. Have your Bible handy for referencing verses in this study guide. It may also be interesting to have a different translation of Scripture than you are used to using to get a fresh perspective and perhaps broaden your understanding.

4. As you work through the material in this study guide, be sure to write down in the margins any questions that come to mind or any thoughts that arise in the course of the discussion and your contemplation on each session’s Scripture verses.

5. There are many songs associated with the Christmas story, so in each session, you will find a popular Christmas song that will help you focus your reflections on themes in the session. Consult your hymnal and recruit a musician to accompany the singing of the song in the “Singing The Christmas Story” section, if desired. You can also speak the lyrics in unison.

6. If you are using this guide in a group setting, consider assigning Bible verses to various people in the class to look up and read aloud at the appropriate time, rather than having everyone look up every verse. This will move the session along more efficiently.

Note that some of the questions ask for facts. Typically, the answers to these questions will come from the Scripture verses just read. Other questions are more subjective, asking for your opinion or an example from your own experience. Since your life experiences are different from anyone else’s, answers to these questions are neither right nor wrong.

A Leader’s Guide that accompanies this material is available from Creative Communications for the Parish (Code SLG).
SESSION 2

The Favored One

Leader’s Guide
For Session 2

BEFORE CLASS: Read through this session yourself. Read through the Bible readings listed and become acquainted with them. If you plan on having members of the group read any of the Bible readings noted in this Leader’s Guide from their own Bibles, put the citations on note cards to hand out prior to class.

READ: Have a member of the group read the Introduction aloud.

READ: Have someone read the Opening Prayer or read the prayer in unison.

TALK: Have a conversation about favorite childhood memories of Christmas.

Introduction

“But Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.” (Luke 2:19)

If Mark is the least likely Christmas story, then Luke is the most famous one of all. Rich in details, imagery and drama, this is the one we make Christmas pageants out of. This is the one Linus recites to remind Charlie Brown what Christmas is all about.


But over and beyond all of this, Luke gives us Mary’s story. Luke’s winsome account of the Christmas story seems to have been written straight out of the treasure of Mary’s heart. Luke is Mary’s song, and it brims with the tender, but fierce, affection of a mother’s love.

Hence, the picture we get of Jesus in Luke is the Savior who has tender compassion for all God’s children, the one who will do anything to seek out what is lost, the father who will run after his prodigal child.

Opening Prayer

O God, give us the heart of Mary, to treasure with love the life of your Son, our brother, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Conversation Starter

What are some of your favorite childhood memories of Christmas? What role did mothers or mother-figures play in your Christmas memories?
Part 1: The Promise

- Read Luke 1:26-38

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

34 And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

35 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. 36 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. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God.” 38 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.

1. Why do you think the angel would call Mary “favored”?

2. Who are some others who have said “Here am I” (v. 38) in the Bible?
3. Answers may vary, and could make for some very meaningful conversation.

Part 2: The Song

READ: Read or have someone read Luke 1:39-56.

Part 2: The Song

- Read Luke 1:39-56

39 In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, 40 and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, 42 and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

46 And Mary said,

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

1. What role does the Holy Spirit play in what we’ve read in Luke so far?

2. What is the most meaningful line for you in Mary’s song (the Magnificat) in Luke 2:46-55? Why?

3. How would you describe Mary, and what does it say about God that he would choose her to bear the Christ child?

1. Answers may vary. In Luke 1, the Holy Spirit “come[s] upon” Mary (v. 35) and “filled” Zechariah (v.67). In both cases, this action resulted in holy words and holy actions, all of which point to the “bearing” of Christ in the world.

2. Answers will vary. The Magnificat is a beautiful song, a beautiful poem reminiscent of many of the great psalms, and we can draw much meaning from its lines.

3. Answers may vary.
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In this Bible study for the season of Advent, Rev. Travis Scholl delves into the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, to reveal what each one has to say about the story of the birth of Christ. Study and discussion questions, prayers and reflections help students see the story they have heard so often and know so well in new and surprising ways.