

BEHOLD



Follow the Light ✨ *Celebrate the Lamb!*

WEEKS 1-4
LEADER/MEMBER GUIDE

THE WONDER OF CHRISTMAS (ADVENT SERIES)

This Study Guide is a tool to help you combine the video and Bible study into a dynamic experience. As the leader, take some time in advance to consider the Bible study questions and come up with personal examples to encourage discussion.

With that in mind, let's preview the guide. The main body of the Study Guide is written as a conversation you would have with your group. When there's a specific question to ask, **it appears in bold type** and the paragraphs that follow after might include thoughts you could add to the discussion.

Each session has particular sections:

Session Goals

This is the point of each session—the big idea and what we hope participants walk away knowing, feeling, and doing differently as a result of studying the material. All of the teaching, questions, and reflections ultimately point back to these goals.

Open

This is an icebreaker. Adjust it to the character of your group, but don't skip it, for several reasons. (1) Every group needs some transition time. (2) Everyone gets to know each other. (3) The introductory questions draw out practical connections between the subject matter and their lives.

View

Before watching the video, take a moment or two to walk through the "things to look for" questions. They'll help concentrate attention on the most important parts of the video teaching. Then, when you watch the video, make sure to set the audio at a comfortable level and everyone can see the screen. You don't want your group to miss anything.

Review

People can forget what they see unless they review it right away. The discussion questions in this section help your group remember what they just viewed from the teaching and real-life stories. But other questions try to connect the video to their emotions or experience. How did you feel when the teacher said that? Is it true in your life? Do you have the same issue?

You, as the leader, will set the tone. If you offer a comment that's authentic, vulnerable, or a bit challenging, then others will feel that they have permission to do the same—and you will have meaningful discussion and growth.

Bible Exploration

This is a Bible study, so each session is grounded in Scripture. Within your group, you may find different levels of faith. This is a time to open up the Bible and help them grow in their faith.

Last Word

This is an opportunity for your group to be challenged to do something with what they've learned. This section will direct the group to reflect on how they live out their faith in their daily lives.

Deeper Walk

These are suggestions for individuals to do, read, and reflect on their own during the week for further study. Encourage your group to dive deeper, but don't demand it.

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WEEK 1

WATCH

Make sure everyone can see the screen and the audio is at a comfortable level.

READ

Take some time in advance to read and consider the Bible study questions and come up with personal examples to encourage discussion.

DISCUSS

We hope those who participate in the study walk away knowing, feeling, and doing differently as a result of amazing discussion.

Session 1: The Wonder of His Presence

NOTE TO LEADER

We intentionally created this study guide with more than enough material so that you can pick the questions that work best for your group. Before your meeting, watch the video, read the study guide's corresponding session, and decide which questions you'd like to discuss. For more information on using this guide in your group, click the three lines in the menu bar and select How to Use This Guide. Thank you for choosing this study and for faithfully leading your group.

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: We can trust God even in our unknown circumstances because we have the promise of his presence.

Head Change: To know God is always with us—even in our unknown circumstances.

Heart Change: To feel peace regardless of what difficulties we are facing.

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Have you ever visited a familiar place or rewatched a familiar movie with a friend or child who was seeing it for the first time? Did their response change your perspective? If so, in what ways?

It's easy to get comfortable with a place we frequent or a movie we've seen countless times. But when we join someone witnessing it for the first time, it can be magical. In a way, we get a chance to see it again with fresh eyes. What delighted us when we first experienced it can delight us again.

In this series, pastor Jarrett Stephens will help us revisit a familiar story—the Christmas story—but with a fresh perspective. In this session, he will explore the wonder of Christ's presence.

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Jarrett's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What did the angels say to everyone they visited?

According to Jarrett, what is the message of Christmas?

Watch Session 1: *The Wonder of His Presence* (13 minutes).

REVIEW

This series focuses on regaining the wonder of Christmas. In this session, we looked at God's promised presence with his people.

Jarrett opened this session with a story about his family's Christmas snow globe. For him, having seen it "a thousand times," it was just a decoration. But for his daughters, seeing it with fresh eyes, they were mesmerized by it. For Christians, the way we see Christmas is often the way Jarrett saw that snow globe. Sometimes it takes the fresh perspective of others to remind us of how wonderful the story of Christmas is.

Have you ever found yourself indifferent to the Christmas story? If so, what have you done to reignite your wonder of the Christmas story? If the story never gets old for you, how have you kept it fresh?

Jarrett discussed the stories of three angel visits. Let's take some time to review each story.

Read Luke 1:26–38. The angel brought Mary good news, but God’s good plan also presented real complications. As Jarrett said, “In her culture, this could cost [Mary] everything—her reputation, her marriage, possibly even her life.” While God will never call us to do something that contradicts his Word, following Christ often costs us something. Maybe it’s passing on a job promotion that would take you away from your family. Or swapping your luxury vacation for a mission trip. **When have you obeyed God, even when it cost you something? Was it worth it? In what ways can you focus on God’s faithfulness regardless of the outcome?**

Read Matthew 1:18–25. When Joseph found out Mary was pregnant, his world must have felt

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WEEK 2

WATCH

Make sure everyone can see the screen and the audio is at a comfortable level.

READ

Take some time in advance to read and consider the Bible study questions and come up with personal examples to encourage discussion.

DISCUSS

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Session 2: The Wonder of His Good News

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: We can receive, celebrate, and share the good news that God sent his Son, Jesus, who took on human flesh to redeem us from our sin.

Head Change: To know the good news that God sent his Son, Jesus, to redeem the world.

Heart Change: To feel joy that Jesus came to save us.

Life Change: To receive the good news for yourself and share it with others.

OPEN

When someone says to you, "I've got good news and bad news," do you want to hear the good news first or the bad news? Why?

In choosing good news or bad news first, we may want to get the disappointment out of the way so we can focus on the good news. Or perhaps hearing what's going well first will help us handle what has gone wrong. Regardless of the order, no one wants to get bad news.

But when the angels proclaimed the birth of Christ to the shepherds, it was *all* good news. In this session, Jarrett will teach us what the good news is and how we can share it with others.

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LAST WORD

In this session, we learned about the wonder-filled news of Christ's coming. Jarrett explained that the message of Christmas is not just good advice or information, but truly good news. Take a moment to absorb this good news, whether for the first time or with fresh understanding. Use this season to celebrate the amazing news that Jesus came to save. And look for opportunities to share this good news with your neighbors, coworkers, family, and everyone you meet during this Christmas season.

DEEPER WALK

Read: Study Luke 2:8–18. Pay attention to how the shepherds responded to the good news they heard from the angels and what they did once they saw Jesus for themselves. Meditate on how you have access to this good news today.

Reflect: Take time this week to reflect on the reality that Jesus, the Son of God, came as a human to save us from our sins. Journal your gratitude for this gift from God.

Pray: Pray that God would give you opportunities to share the good news with friends and family, co-workers and neighbors.

Memorize: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11, ESV).

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WEEK 3

WATCH

Make sure everyone can see the screen and the audio is at a comfortable level.

READ

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DISCUSS

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When it comes to God and his gift of salvation, God didn't wing it. His plan was far from last-minute—it was years in the making. In this session, Jarrett will explore how God's plan for us was from the beginning.

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Jarrett mentioned multiple passages that contain both promises and prophecies that predicted a coming Messiah. Scholars believe there are roughly 300 prophecies fulfilled through Christ's birth. Let's take a moment to look at four of the prophecies he mentioned.

1. Through Abraham's offspring, the nations of the world would be blessed.

1. Promise in the Old Testament:

Genesis 12:1–3

2. New Testament Fulfillment: Galatians 3:8–9

2. David's throne would be established forever.

1. Promise in the Old Testament: 2

Samuel 7:12–13, 16, 25–26

2. New Testament Fulfillment: Luke 1:32–33

3. The savior would be born in Bethlehem.

1. Old Testament prophecy: Micah 5:2

2. Fulfillment in New Testament:

Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:4, 10–11

4. The savior would come from a virgin birth.

1. Old Testament prophecy: Isaiah 7:14

2. Fulfillment in New Testament:

Matthew 1:22–23

What do these passages teach us about God's plan? What do these prophecies and their fulfillment teach us about God's character?

Read Luke 2:8–12. God fulfilled his promise at a moment when Israel was under Roman rule. Many Jews were hoping the Messiah would rescue them from their oppression, but instead, Jesus came as a baby and later died on a cross. Often, what we expect God to do is different from his plan. **When has God's plan looked**

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BIBLE EXPLORATION

Jarrett mentioned God's promise to bless the nations of the earth through Abraham's offspring. But like many of God's promises, waiting was involved. Let's look at how Abraham (who, prior to God renaming him, was known as Abram) trusted God's timing and stood on God's promise.

Read Genesis 12:1–3. Abraham trusted God's plan and left his family and everything he knew. All he had was the promise that in him "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (v. 3). God may not ask us to leave our home and our family to follow his commands, but he might ask us to give up something or act in a way that feels odd or uncomfortable to us. **When have you trusted God even though you didn't know the outcome? Which of God's promises do you stand on when you are uncertain of what may happen next?**

Read Genesis 15:1–6. When the Lord appeared to Abraham in a vision, Abraham was honest with God. He held up God's promise of many descendants against his current reality—he had no children—and God responded with a renewed promise. In our lives, what we believe God has promised may be dissonant with what we experience in our current circumstances. But we can trust God to provide while still being honest with him about our circumstances. **Is it easy for you to be honest with God? Why, or why not? In what ways does Abraham's example encourage you to be vulnerable with God in your circumstances?**

Read Genesis 16:1–4. God promised Abraham a child, but he and Sarah chose to conceive a child through Hagar. When God’s timeline doesn’t line

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DEEPER WALK

Read: Read Hebrews 11. Pay attention to all the people who placed their faith in God and trusted his promises. In what ways do these stories of faith encourage you as you trust God?

Write: Take time to write a note to someone you know who is in a season of waiting. Use Scripture passages from this session to remind them that God has a plan.

Pray: Pray, thanking God that he keeps his promises and trust him for his ultimate return. Ask the Lord to help you remain faithful as you wait.

Memorize: Commit Hebrews 11:1 to memory:
 "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,
 the conviction of things not seen."

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WEEK 4

WATCH

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READ

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DISCUSS

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At some point in our lives, we've probably been both the person searching for belonging and the one including others. Belonging is essential. It's the way God designed us to live in community and in fellowship with him. And God has always wanted us to belong to him. In this session, Jarrett will explain how God sent his Son, Jesus, to offer redemption for "all the people"—even those who feel out of place.

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What encourages you most about God's heart to save all people from their sin?

Read John 1:10–11. Jarrett compared his daughters' dismissal of a gift to Israel's rejection of Jesus. Just as we can miss the value of a physical gift, it can be easy to miss the significance of Christ's birth, especially in busy seasons like Christmas. **What have you done to make sure that you value Christ's birth even when you're busy? What practices have you implemented to help you slow down and intentionally celebrate Christ's birth?**

Read Luke 2:36–38. Anna waited many years for Jesus, and when she saw him, she couldn't help but tell other people about him. **Who do you know who joyfully shares Jesus with others? What could you learn or implement from the way they share their faith?**

Using the examples of the shepherds, the magi, and Mary and Joseph, Jarrett explained that no matter our social class or religious status, we all need salvation through Jesus. But it can be easy to look at someone's outside circumstances and assume they don't want to hear about Jesus.

When have you been reluctant to share the good news with someone based on their social or economic status? When have you been surprised when you shared the gospel with someone you thought wouldn't respond positively? What was the outcome?

At the conclusion of this session, Jarrett gave two applications. The first was to recognize and receive Jesus. He said, "Whatever your story, whatever your background, whatever you've done or left undone, Jesus is for you." **Who do you know who needs to receive the gift of**

Jesus this Christmas? What reasons have you heard from others for why they can't receive the gift of Jesus? How could you respond to those reasons?

Second, Jarrett said to share the gift of Jesus with others. Like Anna, we have the joyous opportunity to tell others that Jesus came to save everyone. **In what ways can you share Jesus in your Christmas celebrations this year? How might what you've learned in this study help you share the news that everyone can receive God's gift of salvation?**

BIBLE EXPLORATION

Jarrett said Jesus's earthly ministry shows that God has always cared for all nations. Just as Simeon prophesied, Jesus's ministry was a light for the Gentiles. Let's look at the story of one of the Gentiles that Jesus interacted with: the woman at the well.

Read John 4:7–15. When Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman—since Samaritans and Jews were enemies—he was demonstrating his love for all people. We don't always get along with everyone around us, but even when we don't like someone, we still need to look for ways to share the good news of Jesus with them. **Are you reluctant to share Christ with people you don't like? Why, or why not? How might relying on the Holy Spirit help you share the gospel regardless of how you feel about the person in front of you?**

While we may feel most comfortable with people like us, we also interact with people who are different from us—in our workplace, our neighborhood, and in the places we frequent. **What do you do to make sure you're around**

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is for them? What first step could you take to share that news with them?

Read John 4:39–42. The woman told the people in town about Jesus, but they had to see him for themselves. Although we get to share the gospel with others, we can't control the outcome. We simply introduce them to Jesus and pray that they receive him. **What do you do to encourage yourself to share the good news even if you're not sure of the outcome? Who do you hope to introduce to Jesus this Christmas?**

LAST WORD

As Jarrett said, "God's heart is for all people." He wants everyone—both Jews and Gentiles, the rich and the poor, the outcasts and the socially acceptable—to experience salvation. God sent his Son, Jesus, so people from every tribe, people group, and language could meet the savior of the world (Revelation 7:9). This Christmas, share this good news with everyone you can and find ways to intentionally celebrate the wonder of God's love.

DEEPER WALK

Read: Read Luke 2:1–38. As you read the Christmas story, consider what you’ve learned through this study. Take time to marvel at God’s great love for all the people of the world.

Write: Make a list of the places you frequent (work, grocery store, park, gym) and the people you often see in these spaces. Look for opportunities to start gospel conversations.

Pray: Pray for opportunities to share the love of God with the people you encounter this Christmas season. Ask God to open your eyes to

see those who need to hear the good news
(John 4:35).

Memorize: Commit Luke 2:10–11 to memory:
"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. For unto you is born
this day in the city of David a Savior, who is
Christ the Lord'" (ESV).

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