



At The Movies - Week 1

November 30 - December 1, 2019 | Tim Harlow

This weekend, Pastor Tim starts us off on our annual tradition of finding the bigger themes in our favorite Christmas movies.

CELEBRATE

At the beginning of your small group time, it's good to share about your week and share with each other how you're doing. So, spend some time, right now, connecting before jumping into the discussion questions. You can use the *Connect* section as a guide. If you're doing this Study Guide on your own, take a moment to focus your mind on God and what He might want you to hear today.

CONNECT

1. Talk about a Christmas from the past that you think fits the definition of an "old fashioned family Christmas." What is it about that Christmas that feels "traditional" to you?
2. Talk about a Christmas that you remember that didn't go so well. What obstacles or issues created that "not-so-great Christmas?"

Before watching the sermon, or moving on in this study, take a minute to remember that God is always with you. Pray as a group for God to bless your conversation and open your eyes and hearts to what He wants you to hear.

REFLECT

Before moving forward in your study, take a moment and review the key points from this weekend's message.

1. Our Christmas experiences, like Mary & Joseph's, are rarely perfect and without issues.
2. To guard our perspective about Christmas we: adjust our expectations, restrict our holiday schedule, budget our spending, focus on the needs of someone else, leave some time for deep reflection, and make new Christmas memories.
3. "The whole cosmic salvation plan for the universe comes down to the response of an unwed, teenage Jewish girl." (C.S. Lewis)

SCRIPTURES USED IN THE MESSAGE: Isaiah 9:6-7, Matthew 2:13-15, Luke 1:26-38, 2:34-35; John 14:27, Philipians 4:6-7

RESPOND

1. Talk about a thought, phrase, or moment from this weekend's message that resonated with you. What made it stick with you?
2. This weekend, Pastor Tim used the wild story of Clark Griswold and his family in *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* to talk about how all of our expectations about Christmas can fall flat. Talk about one particular part of this weekend's message that spoke to your experience heading into this Christmas season.
3. Read Luke 1:26-45. Read slowly making a note of any words or phrases that stand out to you. Luke's account of Jesus' birth is the longest of the Gospel birth stories. He wrote this account of Jesus' birth primarily to wealthy Roman Christians who were trying to understand Jesus' significance in light of the Jewish story of the Messiah. They were struggling because many of them did not grow up with the Jewish faith or Jewish story.
4. As you read the story in Luke 1, talk about any "expectations" you notice. This is the beginning of the story of Jesus, which is then followed by the reality of his life (including death and resurrection). Talk about how the "expectations" change based on the "reality" we see in Jesus' life. What are some expectations you had this year that were shifted by the reality of your life?
5. The angel responds to Mary by saying "Do not be afraid." (1:30) Talk about why that response was necessary. How can the Christmas season bring us to places of anxiety, worry, or stress? Talk about one place where you need to hear God's Spirit saying "Do not be afraid" this season.
6. The heart of *Christmas Vacation* is Clark's desire to have his whole family together, just like he experienced as a child. Talk about how our past experiences of good things creates a "promise." In other words, if we create that same event from the past (family gathering, etc.) we expect the same goodness we felt back then. How does the promise to Mary of God's goodness through Jesus (see 1:31-33) create an expectation for the future? Talk about the past experiences that you bring into this Christmas, and what good things you're expecting to come this year.
7. One of the big themes of the Christmas story is how things go against what people are expecting, even Mary. Consider this: she questions, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" (1:34) even though she's TALKING TO AN ANGEL! Talk about an area of your life this Christmas where you need God to defy or exceed your expectations.

8. Pastor Tim gave six ways for us to protect our Christmas expectations (see #2 in the REFLECT section above). Talk about which of the six suggestions connected most with you and your life right now. Talk as a group about how you can begin this week to put that suggestion into practice.

Closing Prayer:

God, thank you for the messy and unexpected story of Christmas. It is so easy for us to think that only OUR story of Christmas is messy - thank you for the reminder that we are in good company with our wild Christmas seasons. Help us to put into practice these six very practical steps. Give us the energy for family, work, and self so that we can celebrate your birthday with joy. Thank you for this season. We love you.

Amen.