

Small Group Guide: The Incarnation - Jesus' 33-Year Sacrifice



Opening Prayer & Icebreaker (10 minutes)

Icebreaker Question: Share about a time when you experienced a "wow" moment in nature or life that left you in awe of God. What made that moment so powerful for you?

Key Sermon Summary (5 minutes)

This week's sermon explored the incarnation of Jesus from a fresh perspective—recognizing that Jesus' sacrifice didn't begin on the cross, but started when He stepped out of glory and into human form. For 33 years, Jesus lived humbly, experiencing all the limitations, temptations, and difficulties of human life, yearning to return to His rightful place of glory with the Father. Mary's obedience and purity positioned her to be part of God's magnificent plan, reminding us that God works through our faithfulness even when we can't see the full picture.

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Story (15 minutes)

1. **Mary's Perspective:** Mary had no control over her arranged marriage, her financial situation, or most circumstances of her life. What was the ONE thing she did have control over, and why was that so significant?
2. **The Angel's Words:** The angel told Mary she was "highly favored" and "blessed among women." Why were these words considered "a punch in the face to the demonic realm"? What was ending in that moment?
3. **The Incarnation:** What does it mean that Jesus went through "all of human development including being a zygote and a fetus"? Why is this detail important to understanding Jesus' sacrifice?

Going Deeper (20 minutes)

4. **The 33-Year Sacrifice:** The sermon emphasized that Jesus' sacrifice wasn't limited to Passion Week. How does viewing His entire 33 years on earth as sacrifice change your understanding of what Jesus did for us?
5. **Jesus' Prayer in Gethsemane:** Before His arrest, Jesus prayed to be glorified again "with the glory which I had with you before the world was" (John 17:5). What does this tell us about what Jesus gave up and what He missed most during His time on earth?
6. **Living in Humility:** Jesus, the King of Kings, lived in poverty in a place people looked down on, worked as a carpenter, and was constantly at odds with religious leaders. Why do you think God chose this path rather than having Jesus born into wealth and power?

Personal Reflection (15 minutes)

7. **Obedience in the Unknown:** Mary was obedient without knowing the full plan. She simply said, "Let it be to me according to your word." What areas of your life is God asking you to be obedient in, even though you can't see the complete picture?
8. **Nothing is Impossible:** The angel told Mary, "For with God, nothing will be impossible." What situation in your life seems impossible right now? How does Mary's story encourage you?

9. **Pausing for Wonder:** The sermon challenged us not to "miss out on the magic" of the incarnation. How can we slow down this Christmas season to truly take in the wonder of what God did?
-

Key Takeaways

- **Mary's faithfulness in what she could control** (her purity and obedience) positioned her for God's extraordinary plan
 - **Jesus' sacrifice began at the incarnation**, not just at the cross—He spent 33 years away from His glory
 - **God orchestrated countless details** (family lines, timing, locations) that people had no control over to fulfill His purposes
 - **Jesus experienced full humanity**—all our temptations, limitations, and difficulties—yet remained sinless
 - **The incarnation was the beginning of the end** for darkness and the enemy's reign
-

Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge:

Choose one or more of the following to practice this week:

1. **Practice Obedience in the Small Things:** Identify one area where you know God is asking you to be obedient. Take one concrete step this week, even if you don't understand the full purpose.
2. **Meditation on the Incarnation:** Set aside 15-20 minutes this week to sit quietly and meditate on what Jesus gave up to become human. Journal about what this means for your relationship with Him.
3. **Create a "Wow" Moment:** Find a place this week (a quiet spot in nature, a late-night stargazing session, etc.) where you can pause and be in awe of God's creation and His plan for redemption.
4. **Share the Story:** Tell someone this week about the incarnation from this fresh perspective—that Jesus' sacrifice was 33 years, not just one week.

5. **Examine Your Control:** Make a list of things you can control versus things you cannot. Focus on being faithful in what you can control (like Mary) and trusting God with the rest.
-

Closing Reflection Question

How has this discussion changed or deepened your understanding of Christmas and what we're actually celebrating?

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Have someone close in prayer, or pray together:

"Father, thank you for the incarnation—for Jesus stepping out of glory and into our broken world. Thank you that He didn't just sacrifice one week, but 33 years of His life, experiencing everything we experience, yet without sin. Help us to be like Mary—obedient in what we can control and trusting You with what we cannot. This Christmas season, open our eyes to the true wonder and magnificence of what You've done. In Jesus' name, Amen."

5-Day Devotional: The Incarnation - God's Ultimate Sacrifice



Day 1: The Wonder of Divine Humility

Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

Devotional:

Before Mary ever heard the angel's greeting, Jesus existed in glory with the Father. Yet He willingly stepped out of eternity into time, beginning His journey not in a palace but in a womb. This wasn't just a 33-hour sacrifice—it was 33 years of limitation, of setting aside His rightful glory. When you face difficulties today, remember that Jesus understands human struggle intimately. He didn't just visit earth; He experienced every stage of human development, every temptation, every limitation. His sacrifice began long before the cross. How does knowing Jesus chose decades of humility change your perspective on your current challenges? Let His example of sustained obedience inspire your daily walk with Him.

Day 2: Obedience in the Ordinary

Reading: Luke 1:26-38

Devotional:

Mary's life seemed unremarkable—an arranged marriage, poverty, limited control over her circumstances. Yet her simple obedience to God's law positioned her for extraordinary purpose. She couldn't control her betrothal or financial status, but she could control her purity and faithfulness. When the angel appeared, her response was immediate: "Let it be to me according to your word." God doesn't need perfect circumstances; He needs willing hearts. What areas of your life feel ordinary or beyond your control? Mary's story reminds us that faithfulness in the small things prepares us for divine appointments. Your obedience today may be setting the stage for something you cannot yet see. Focus on what you can control—your devotion to God.

Day 3: Nothing Is Impossible With God

Reading: Luke 1:39-45

Devotional:

The angel's words to Mary echo through generations: "With God, nothing will be impossible." Mary received not one miracle but multiple confirmations—her own impossible pregnancy and Elizabeth's miraculous conception in old age. God orchestrated details Mary never controlled: her lineage, her betrothal, even her cousin's situation. All converged at the perfect moment. What impossibilities are you facing? Financial struggles? Broken relationships? Unfulfilled dreams? The same God who arranged royal lineage through poverty, who brought life from barren wombs, is working in your life. Like Mary, you may not see all the pieces coming together, but God is weaving a masterpiece. Trust His timing. Your impossibility is His opportunity to display His glory and faithfulness.

Day 4: The Long Sacrifice

Reading: John 17:1-5

Devotional:

In Gethsemane, before His arrest, Jesus prayed to be restored to the glory He had before creation. This reveals what He missed most—not earthly comfort, but His rightful place with the Father. For over three decades, Jesus lived away from that glory. Thirty years in obscurity, three years misunderstood and opposed, then crucifixion. We often focus on Passion Week, but Jesus' sacrifice was every day He walked as a man. He experienced poverty, rejection, and temptation—not for days, but for decades. When you feel weary in your faith journey, remember Jesus sustained His mission for 33 years. Your struggles aren't minimized because His were greater; they're validated because He truly understands. Let His endurance fuel yours today.

Day 5: Pause and Behold

Reading: Isaiah 9:6-7

Devotional:

The Christmas story invites us to pause—to step back in wonder at what God accomplished. The eternal Word became flesh. The King of Kings laid in a feeding trough. The Creator submitted to human development. Royalty lived in poverty. Divinity experienced mortality. This isn't just historical fact; it's personal love expressed in the most profound way. God didn't send a representative; He came Himself. Take time today to truly behold this mystery. Let awe replace routine. Let wonder displace familiarity. The incarnation wasn't just Mary's story or a distant theological concept—it's God's love letter to you. How will you respond? Like Mary, will you say, "Let it be according to Your word"? Let worship rise from genuine amazement at what God has done.