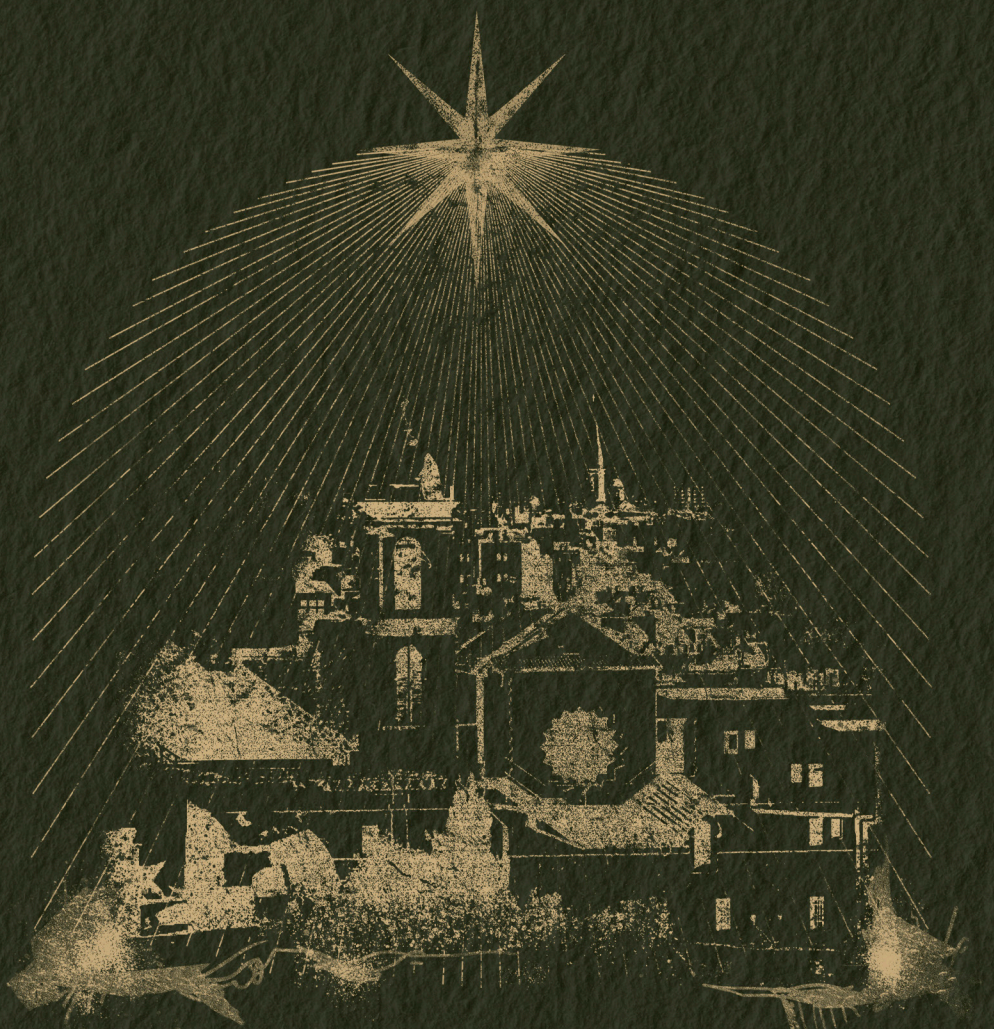


3 WEEKS



EYEWITNESS TO CHRISTMAS



**IN  
THIS  
CHRISTMAS  
SERIES, WE ARE  
TAKING A LOOK AT THE  
EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS OF  
CHRISTMAS; AT PEOPLE WHO WERE  
ACTUALLY THERE WHEN CHRIST WAS  
BORN. AS WE OBSERVE THEIR UNIQUE  
PERSPECTIVE ON THE BIRTH OF  
CHRIST, WE MAY JUST FIND  
OUR EXPERIENCE OF  
CHRISTMAS  
CHANGED.**

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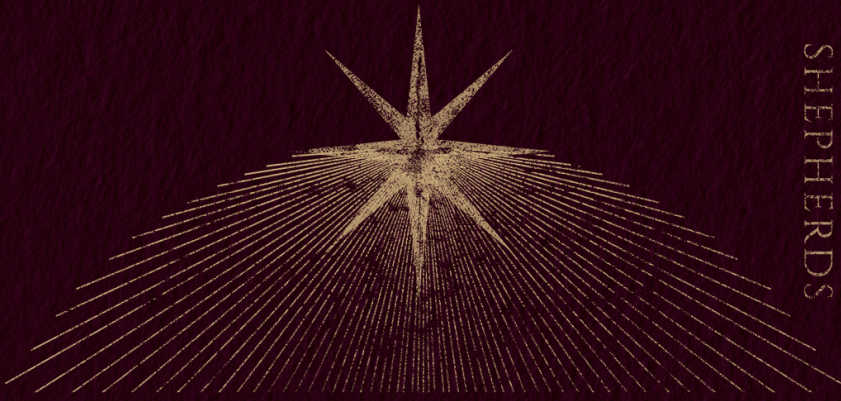
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## EYEWITNESS TO CHRISTMAS

**WEEK 1**  
**SMALL GROUP STUDY****Kicking it off:**

Have you ever had a supernatural experience? If so, and you're willing, share about it.

**Key Scriptures:****LUKE 2:8-20**

*"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,*

*<sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."*

*<sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the*

shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

<sup>16</sup> So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told."

## **Discussion:**

Read the eyewitness account of the angels' and shepherds' encounter with God in the event of Jesus' birth in Luke 2:8-20 and discuss the following:

1. What has been your general thinking around supernatural phenomena? About angels specifically?
2. Angels are considered God's messengers. Discuss what it must have been like for the angels that had a part in bringing the good news of Jesus' birth.
3. Visualize the chorus of angels who sang of the glory of God before the shepherds that night. It more than likely wasn't often that they actually appeared before people on earth. What must that experience have been like for them?
4. What was the most fascinating thing that you learned about angels in this week's message? Here's a recap:
  - a. AWARE- they are aware of what is going on in our lives
  - b. NUMBERED- their number remains constant
  - c. GOD CREATED- they are created by God
  - d. EXECUTE GOD'S PURPOSES- they carry out and execute God's purposes
  - e. LIMITED- they are limited in their nature, not equal to God or to be worshipped
5. Based on this week's message, why do you think God chose the shepherds to be eyewitnesses to Jesus miraculous birth?

6. Verse 17 shares that the shepherds spread the word to everyone about what they had been told. What holds you back from doing the same?

### **Wrapping It Up:**

Pray for a spirit of boldness to share the good news about Jesus this Christmas season- without presumption or precaution.

### **Prayer Focus:**

Pray for our Christmas at Liberty event on December 12, that the love of Christ will be evident to all as we serve these families.

**MEMORY VERSE**

**“GLORY TO GOD  
IN THE HIGHEST  
HEAVEN, AND ON EARTH  
PEACE TO THOSE ON WHOM HIS  
FAVOR RESTS.”**

**LUKE 2:14**





## EYEWITNESS TO CHRISTMAS

### WEEK 2 SMALL GROUP STUDY

#### Kicking it off:

How many different Marys do you know?

#### Key Scriptures:

### LUKE 1:26-56

*"In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,<sup>27</sup> to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.<sup>28</sup> The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."*

*<sup>29</sup> Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,<sup>33</sup> and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."*

*<sup>34</sup> "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"*

<sup>35</sup> The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. <sup>37</sup> For no word from God will ever fail."

<sup>38</sup> "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

<sup>39</sup> At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, <sup>40</sup> where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! <sup>43</sup> But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord

<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

<sup>48</sup> for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
<sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
holy is his name.

<sup>50</sup> His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.

<sup>51</sup> He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost  
thoughts.

<sup>52</sup> He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.



<sup>53</sup> *He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.*

<sup>54</sup> *He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering to be merciful*

<sup>55</sup> *to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
just as he promised our ancestors.”*

<sup>56</sup> *Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then  
returned home.”*

## **Discussion:**

*Read the eyewitness account in Luke 1 of Mary’s encounter with God as she was chosen to bear the Son of God. Discuss the following:*

1. We see in verse 30 that Mary had found favor with God. What did you learn in this week’s message that showed possible reasons she may have found favor with God? (you can refer to the message notes on the Sunnybrook app to check your memory)
2. Discuss your thoughts on how we find favor with God in our everyday lives.
3. What do you learn about Mary’s receptiveness to God in the above passage?
4. How might you cultivate a receptiveness to God in your own life?
5. Mary was a simple girl, but she was filled with faith. How does that encourage you in your faith walk?
6. Verses 46-55 are known as the Magnificat – Mary’s song of praise at the revelation of being chosen to bear the Son of God. Read those verses aloud and then discuss what she sings about the goodness of God.
7. If you were to express a song of praise and gratitude to God, what would you declare?
8. What would this world be like if Jesus hadn’t come?

## **Wrapping It Up:**

Pray for a spirit of receptiveness to God in this busy Christmas season.

## **Prayer Focus:**

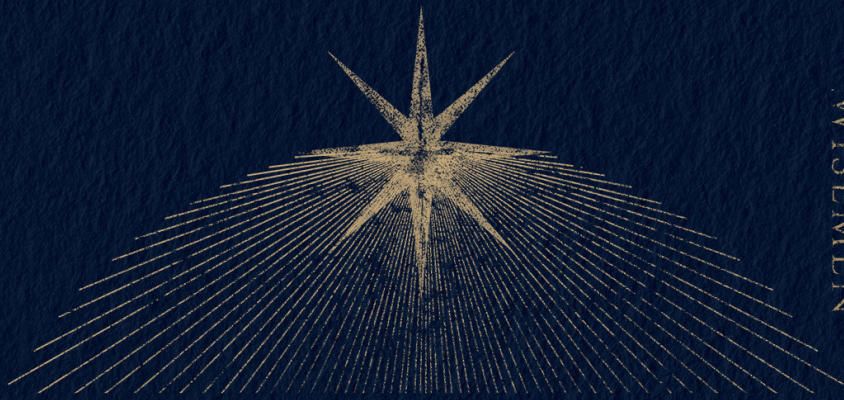
Pray for our worship and production team as they prepare for our Christmas services at the Orpheum.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

**“BLESSED IS SHE  
WHO HAS BELIEVED THAT  
THE LORD WOULD FULFILL HIS  
PROMISES TO HER!”**

**LUKE 1:45**





## EYEWITNESS TO CHRISTMAS

### WEEK 3 SMALL GROUP STUDY

#### Kicking it off:

What have you found yourself looking for lately?

#### Key Scriptures:

### MATTHEW 2:1-12

*"After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem<sup>2</sup> and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."*

*<sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup> "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:*

*<sup>6</sup> "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."*

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

<sup>9</sup> After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. <sup>11</sup> On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route."

### **Discussion:**

*Read the eyewitness account in Matthew 2 of the wisemen's encounter with God surrounding the birth of Jesus and discuss the following:*

1. Consider the commitment of the wise men or Magi, in making the months long trip following a star in order to worship the King of the Jews. What do you think compelled them to do so?
2. Certainly the wise men, who themselves were likely not Jewish, had great reverence and awe for the coming Messiah, seeking truth on their journey. Yet not one of the Jewish religious leaders, who were well-versed in Scripture and only lived about 6 miles away, sought to see what had been declared. Discuss the contrast between the two.
3. Often in Scripture, God uses different things to different people to get their attention: a burning bush, a pillar of fire, a pillar of cloud, manna, plagues, and in the case of the wise men, a star. Share some of the ways God has gotten your attention over the years.
4. The wise men were diligent in their search to find answers

about the coming King. What questions do you still have regarding Jesus?

5. We learned this week that God does not leave genuine seekers without a travel guide. He brings people into our lives to help guide our way. Who or what has been a guiding star in your life?
6. Discuss the response of the wise men when they finally came to where Jesus was lying in the manger.

### **Wrapping It Up:**

Wrap up by sharing how you can be intentional about worshipping the King this Christmas.

### **Prayer Focus:**

Pray for our Christmas services at the Orpheum this week – that many would come to place their faith and trust in Jesus.

**MEMORY VERSE**

**“WHERE IS THE  
ONE WHO HAS BEEN  
BORN KING OF THE JEWS?  
WE SAW HIS STAR WHEN IT ROSE  
AND HAVE COME TO WORSHIP  
HIM.”**

**MATTHEW 2:2**



# Top 10 Tips for Leading a Small Group

1. Establish a welcoming, accepting, and safe environment.
  - Take time to prepare.
  - Make sure to give a warm enthusiastic greeting to each person.
  - Verbally communicate the environment that you hope to create.
2. On the opening night of your group you need to have some intentional discussions centered around these questions:
  - What is the purpose of our group?
  - What is the vision for our group?
  - What are your expectations?
  - What do you hope to gain from this group experience?
  - What are some things we value as a group?
  - What are some healthy guidelines we need to have in place?Review and sign a group agreement.
3. Be authentic. Spend time sharing your life stories in order to get to know each other on a deeper level.
4. Find a good balance between:
  - Truth and grace/Bible study and life
  - Encouraging and challenging one another
  - Giving and receiving feedback from each other
5. Ask good questions to stimulate good discussion. Use open ended questions and follow up questions.
6. Hang out together, do things socially, eat together and have fun together!
7. Develop a missional lifestyle, find a service project to do together in the community.
8. Raise up new leadership by rotating facilitation of the group.
9. Share the responsibilities in order to increase individual commitment and ownership of the group.
10. Pray for your group and for each other!

Find ways to celebrate what God is doing in your group! Who else could you invite to join you in order that their life may be impacted by what God is doing in your group?

# Group Agreement

## OUR PURPOSE

To transform our spiritual lives by cultivating our spiritual health in a healthy small group community. In addition, we: \_\_\_\_\_

## OUR VALUES

**Group Attendance:** To give priority to the group meeting. We will call or email if we will be late or absent.

**Safe Environment:** To help create a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved. (Please, no quick answers, snap judgments, or simple fixes.)

**Respect Differences:** To be gentle and gracious to people with different spiritual maturity, personal opinions, temperaments, or imperfections. We are all works in progress.

**Confidentiality:** To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group, and to avoid sharing improper information about those outside the group.

**Encouragement for Growth:** To be not just takers but givers of life. We want to spiritually multiply our life by serving others with our God-given gifts.

**Welcome for Newcomers:** To keep an open chair and share Jesus' dream of finding a shepherd for every sheep.

**Shared Ownership:** To remember that every member is a minister and to ensure that each attender will share a small team role or responsibility over time.

**Rotating Hosts/Leaders and Homes:** To encourage different people to host the group in their homes, and to rotate the responsibility of facilitating each meeting.

## OUR EXPECTATIONS

- Refreshments/mealtimes \_\_\_\_\_
- Childcare \_\_\_\_\_
- When we will meet (day of week) \_\_\_\_\_
- Where we will meet (place) \_\_\_\_\_
- We will begin at (time) \_\_\_\_\_ and end at \_\_\_\_\_
- We will do our best to have some or all of us attend a worship service together.
- Our primary worship service time will be \_\_\_\_\_
- Date of this agreement \_\_\_\_\_
- Date we will review this agreement again \_\_\_\_\_
- Who (other than the leader) will review this agreement at the end of this study \_\_\_\_\_



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