



**Immanuel,
God with Us**

In the midst of a Christmas weekend with a myriad of different services, community gatherings as well as the wave of different emotions and experience – we remember the Christ child did not stay swaddled in the manger or in His mother's arms. The picturesque romanticism that can often keep our faith safe and unchallenging, must make way for deeper questions of how Jesus is incarnate in our lives and communities. How are we recognising Jesus in others? Where are we looking for Jesus? Where are we neglecting to or avoiding to look for Jesus?

Now that the wrapping paper is in the bin, and the thought of yet more turkey is pushing most of us over the edge, and nativity plays seem a distant memory, we are invited to move beyond the birth of Jesus

the Gospel story of his visit to the temple. We must move beyond our safe version of Christmas and encounter Jesus growing and maturing and asking us, 'Why were you searching for me?'

Carol: O Little Town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71ppzuPARXg>

Prayer

God of all things, we praise You as the 'All' – in all, through all and with all. We come to You in worship, help us to bring our all – the good, the difficult, the broken, the weariness, the indifference, the passion, the hope, the hopeless, the joy, the anger, the reality of our lives.

We have waited through Advent, through dark days and expectant nights. We have declared Your presence at Christmas, in the highs and lows, joys and pains. We look to You now, to gather us all together, to clothe us and to dwell in our hearts. Grow in us the desire to be Your kingdom builders, peace makers, psalm singers, justice bringers, creation carers, welcomers and forgivers. Let us praise Your name, in harmony with the angels and hosts, sun and moon, mountains and hills, trees and animals. Let all the people praise You, for You alone are exalted.

The Lord's Prayer

Reflection 1 – How does the season make you feel – discuss a joy or hurt

Breakout room

EXPLAIN: Use the paragraph on page 38 in the Daily Discipleship Guide (DDG) to comment on a couple of perspectives regarding the Christmas season.

The Christmas season fills many people with incredible delight in the experience of family, food, and fun. But for others, the Christmas season means anything but glee. Family strife, broken marriages, and illnesses protrude in this season like a mountain of pain standing in the way of joy.

INSTRUCT: Ask group members to use the table in their DDG (p. 38) to reflect briefly on their own joys and hurts associated with the Christmas season. Allow a moment for anyone to share who wants to, but don't force any responses.

What are some joys you're looking forward to this Christmas season?	What are some of the hurts you're feeling this Christmas season?
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Carol: What Child is this?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QcyYEN1j110>

Bible Reading: Matthew 1: 24-25

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Reflection 2 - Obedience

- obedience to God is an act of faith
- God's words to Joseph empowered his faith and subsequent obedience.
- Our scripture reading today highlights the incredible leap of faith Joseph took when he obeyed God's command to marry Mary and assume legal fatherhood of Jesus. Joseph would be subject to the town's confusion, distrust, and disdain. Who would believe Mary's baby wasn't the result of his lack of sexual restraint during their betrothal? **Can you imagine the whispers and scoffs dripping from people's lips at the mention of Joseph's name?** Joseph's obedience wouldn't be applauded by most people, but he sought the applause of the only One who matters. Empowered by God's words through the angel, Joseph believed and obeyed.

God's words, spoken through the angel, empowered Joseph's faith and subsequent obedience.

- First, God reminded Joseph who he was—a "son of David" through whom the promised Messiah would come (Matt. 1:20). By addressing Joseph in this way, God reminded Joseph that He never forgot His promise to David. God was now calling Joseph to take his place in the lineage that led to the Saviour.
- Second, God spoke to the fear that threatened Joseph's faith (Matt. 1:20). Joseph's fear certainly wasn't unfounded. God knows that we face circumstances that are legitimately frightful, but He also knows how to speak to our fears through His Word so that our fear doesn't keep us from obedience. God's words told Joseph that God was up to something greater than Joseph's fear: the salvation of His people from their sins. Empowered by God's words, Joseph believed and obeyed.
- Obedience to God is an act of faith. When we distrust God's goodness, wisdom, power, and authority, we aren't inclined to do what He says. But when we are convinced that God is good enough, gracious enough, and powerful enough both to command what He wants and to empower us to do what He

wants, we're compelled to obey. Our obedience or disobedience to God communicates whether or not we believe He is trustworthy. We become convinced of God's trustworthiness as we immerse ourselves in God's Word (Rom. 10:17), which declares over and over again God's holiness, love, power, and faithfulness. And as our faith grows, sweet fruits of obedience come forth.

Open discussion

Joseph is a model of faith for us. **But could he ever have imagined the significance of his faith-driven obedience?** He was a man from a small town who simply sought to pattern his life after God's word. Yet this is the very kind of person God delights to use in great ways for His glory (Isa. 66:2). This was the kind of person God used in the birth of the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. **So too, the acts of our obedience, even the smallest ones, are used by God in eternally significant ways.**

Following Christ often feels confounding and painful, thankless and marginalizing. We seek to live for God but then we lose our job, our reputation, our marriage, our child, our health. We may know of Jesus' promise that we will experience trouble in this life (John 16:33), yet the pain of a new or lingering trial always feels like a shock. Grief has a way of making us feel abandoned and condemned. Yet at the crossroads of our brokenness and faith, God is at work to sanctify us and to use us for His glory in ways we could never imagine. **We see this truth in Joseph's life, but do we believe it for our own?**

How does the promise of Jesus as Immanuel, God with us, encourage you to obey in faith?

Can you imagine the significance of your day-to-day simple acts of faith-driven obedience, such as choosing love over retaliation, gentleness over wrath, and faithfulness over dominance? If Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, then you can trust that every single step of obedience you take is well worth it. The God who used Joseph in the coming of Immanuel is the same God who is eager to use you for His eternal purposes as you daily yield to His Word in faith and obedience.

Prayers for others

Closing hymn: Trust and obey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KB4KcleYiWM>

Sending

God is with us. We take with us the certain knowledge that Jesus is always coming into the world. We seek Jesus, not in a long ago stable or ancient manger, but in the people we meet and in the depths of our own hearts. May the blessing of Christmas make you a blessing to others. May the peace of the season pervade all that we do. And may the grace....