

Sermon Discussion Guide

The Joy of Worship at Christmas

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There were some shepherds in that part of the country who were spending the night in the fields, taking care of their flocks. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid, but the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's town your Savior was born—Christ the Lord!" Luke 2:8-11 (GNB)

The joy of worship is declaring the worth and greatness of God! The angels worshiped by singing, the shepherds worshiped by sharing the Good News, and the wise men worshiped by giving. The gold the wise men gave represented Jesus' royalty, frankincense represented Jesus' divinity, and myrrh represented Jesus' humanity. But the angels, wise men, and shepherds first offered themselves—then they offered their gifts. What God wants most from us in worship is us. Let's *Talk It Over!*

OPEN YOUR GROUP WITH A PRAYER. THIS IS ONLY A GUIDE – SELECT THE POINTS YOU WANT TO DISCUSS.

1. Christmas represents the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. What does Luke 2:8-11 above and the many songs about Christmas say about the significance of this event? What are your favorite Christmas songs and why?

Suddenly a great army of heaven's angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!" Luke 2:13-14 (GNB)

2. It is said that the singing of praises to God on earth is also a rehearsal for heaven since there are many prophetic visions of praises given to God in heaven. However, unlike the angels, humans will offer a special worship to God because of the redemption God has given us in Christ. How have you experienced God's mercy and forgiveness as you've given your heart to Jesus? How does the enormity of God's grace make you feel? How will our songs be different?

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." So, they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen [Jesus], they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.... The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. Luke 2:15-20 (NIV)

3. Read Luke 2:15-20 above and discuss why humble shepherds were the first to hear about the birth of Jesus. Discuss how the shepherds shared their story and why their story was so compelling.
4. The shepherds simply spread the word about what they had seen and heard. Like the shepherds, our story is compelling evidence in the case for Jesus. Talk about your story and how you are sharing it.

"These people claim to worship me, but their words are meaningless, and their hearts are somewhere else. Their religion is nothing but human rules and traditions, which they have simply memorized." Isaiah 29:13 (GNB)

5. God calls us to offer ourselves before we offer our gifts. As Mark 12:30 (NIV) says: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." What does Mark 12:30 and Isaiah 29:13 above teach us about how we are to worship God?

Diving Deeper (optional)

[When the wise men] saw the child..., they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of frankincense and of myrrh. Matthew 2:11 (NIV)

Although the wise men were not part of God's covenant people, they chose to worship him as a baby in a manger! By bowing down and worshiping him, the wise men first offered themselves, then they offered their gifts representing Jesus' royalty, divinity, and humanity. The order matters: how will you first offer yourself to God—and what gifts will you bring?

REVIEW ANY ASSIGNMENTS OR COMMITMENTS MADE DURING YOUR PREVIOUS MEETING.



Sermon Discussion Guide Leader Notes

Suggestions for This Week’s Study

- **Icebreaker:** Share your favorite Christmas carol with the group and sing a few bars. Join in if you know the words.
- **Goals:** To experience the joy of worship at Christmas by declaring the worth and greatness of God! To worship like the angels by singing, like the shepherds by sharing the Good News, and like the wise men by giving. To acknowledge Jesus’ royalty, divinity, and humanity. To understand that the wise men first offered themselves to God—then they offered their gifts. To know that what God wants most from us in worship is our hearts.
- **Final Prayer:** Lord, we come to you with grateful hearts and we offer ourselves to you this Christmas season. In the joy of worship, we declare your worth and greatness! We pray that every heart prepares room for you, and accepts the gift of your Son in their lives. Hear us, Lord, as we sing our praises and share the greatest gift of your Son to us. We pray this in your name. Amen.

Preparing to Lead Your Group

- ✓ **PRAY** for insight as you begin to prepare for leading your group. Ask for God’s wisdom, that the Holy Spirit will be the teacher and that you will be God’s instrument to lead the group to greater understanding and a willingness to commit to becoming more like God. Prayer should be your primary source of personal preparation for leading your group.
- ✓ **PLAN** where you want to take your group in the next 60-90 days. Is your group strong in some areas and weak in others? How can you challenge the members to live more balanced Christian lives? Consider God’s five purposes for the church: Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry, Mission and Worship, and make a plan to encourage your group members to growth and commitment in their weak areas.
- ✓ **PONDER YOUR PROGRESS** after each session and at the end of a series. Reflect on what went well and what didn’t. Re-evaluation is key to your growth as a leader. Consider whether your plan is being effective in moving the group to greater understanding and commitment. How are you doing with leading the discussion: is it stimulating, challenging, and meaningful? Are you able to keep the group on track? Do you need to make some changes?

Using This Sermon Discussion Guide

- Talk It Over is a tool to aid you in meeting the needs of your group. We’ve designed it so it can be completed easily within 30-45 minutes. As the discussion leader, you should preview and evaluate the questions based on the needs of your group. Decide in advance what is most important to focus on, should time not allow for the entire lesson.
- Feel free to adapt the format to meet the needs of your group. If your group is mature and wants to dig deeper, consider using the Diving Deeper section or add additional Scripture and ask suitable questions. Remember that this is only a guide.
- The questions relating to Bible study methods are helpful to develop Bible literacy and spiritual maturity in our lives. You can help your group be aware of their needs in these areas by using these questions as a regular part of each discussion.
- Personal applications are essential for growth and should be included in every discussion. When discussing how they will apply principles, group members may state very general goals such as “I need to spend more time in prayer.” It is important for you to help people make goals that are very specific and commit to specific plans of action by asking, for example, “How are you going to begin?” An example is to get up 25 minutes earlier each morning, spending 15 minutes reading the Bible and 10 minutes in prayer. Encourage each group member to be accountable to the group for personal progress at the next meeting.
- Your goal as the leader is to bring the group into a stimulating discussion that helps the members recognize their needs for personal life change. Ultimately you want them to be willing to commit to change with accountability to the group. Accountability helps us to persevere in our commitments and achieve the blessings of success.