



ENTER God's presence

**May all the kings of the earth praise you, Lord,
when they hear what you have decreed.
May they sing of the ways of the Lord,
for the glory of the Lord is great.**

– Psalm 134:4-5

Heavenly Father, we praise you for your ways are so far beyond what we might dream or imagine. We thank you that you invite us into your plan of salvation through your son, Jesus Christ. May we come to know more of you and your plans for us, and the world, as we gather around your word today. Amen



SHARE life together

1. **Share your highs and lows with each other?**
2. **Share how you went with your living purposefully from last time?**
3. **As humans we experience a range of feelings throughout our lives. If you had to pick one, which feeling or emotion would you say you have experienced most strongly in your life so far?**
4. **What is it that makes Christmas 'feel' like Christmas to you?**

It doesn't feel like...

...Christmas, since Grandpa died, mum moved into care or the kids aren't going to be here.

...we're really married since she's been on deployment since the honeymoon.

...it's our house since we're still have boxes everywhere.

...it's my job since I'm still learning the ropes/cleaning up after my predecessor.

...I've graduated since I'm not sure what I'll do next.

...I'm retired since I have the grandkids 3 times a week.

It doesn't feel like... We all live with a sort of internal image of how life should and ought to be. We all have some sense of what an ideal Christmas, family gathering, job, church experience, family, life...is. When the reality doesn't line up with that image, that ideal...when it doesn't feel quite right or make sense, it's easy for us to dismiss it and move on.

Week beginning:
Sunday 20th December 2020

Worship series:

Christmas is more than a...



VERSE for the week

**But after he had considered this,
an angel of the Lord appeared to
him in a dream and said,
"Joseph son of David, do not be
afraid to take Mary home as your
wife, because what is
conceived in her is from the
Holy Spirit."
Matthew 1:20**



REMEMBER this week

**Christmas is more than a
feeling. It's a call to enter
into the mystery of what we
don't understand, to
embrace the messy
situations that don't feel
right and an invitation to
walk with obedience and
courage into the
unexpected, unexplainable
life and possibilities that
God offers in Jesus.**

Joseph knows that feeling. His fiancée is pregnant and the child is not his and it doesn't make sense and the easiest thing to do is dismiss it. But in dismissing what doesn't make sense or feel right, we might just miss out on something new, of the life and opportunities that God wants to birth in us and through us.



LISTEN attentively

Read Matthew 1:18-25

- 5. What key words/thoughts/ideas/questions arise for you as you hear this text?**
- 6. What do you hear this scripture saying to you right now?**
- 7. Try to imagine you are Joseph. How would you react or feel about Mary's news?**

Our feelings can either inform us or control us. They can help us but they can also harm us if we do not understand them. The problem with our feelings is that they are so changeable and they often react to the situations and environments around us which can be completely outside of our control. When we allow ourselves to get carried away by our feelings or emotions we often make terrible mistakes. However, when we completely dismiss or try to ignore our feelings or emotions, we can also find ourselves in big trouble. Joseph found himself in a difficult situation in which he felt the right thing to do was to quietly break off his engagement to Mary. To any self respecting Jew with a knowledge of the law, this would have seemed like a sensible and reasonable response. However, when God intervenes and sends an angel to Joseph in a dream, God calls Joseph to do something radical, something different than what those around him might have considered the 'right' thing to do.

- 8. Have you ever experienced a sense of being called by God to do something 'unusual'? Did you act on that sense or did you dismiss it as absurd or just too 'out there'?**
- 9. Have you ever experienced God at work in your own life in an unexpected way? What happened?**

God is aware of our feelings. The first words of the angel to Joseph, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife," speak directly to his feelings of fear and confusion. What is most important though, is Joseph's response to this message. He still has a choice to accept this message and act on it or to dismiss it and walk away from it. Every day we have numerous opportunities to act on the reality of God and his word to us in scripture. Every day we have the opportunity to live life for Jesus or to dismiss the promise of Jesus and live the way the world tells us; to do whatever makes us feel good. Many people have spent their entire lives chasing after what makes them feel good, or happy. Only to have those things for a time and then have the feeling of happiness slowly fade again from their lives. Finding happiness in Jesus is more than just a feeling that will fade over time. Joy and happiness in Jesus come from a relationship of love and trust.

- 10. We often describe love as a feeling. We say things like I feel so in love with... or perhaps we no longer feel 'in love' with someone. Real love is not based on feelings but on a relationship. How have you experienced the love of God in your relationship with Jesus?**
- 11. The reliability and steadfastness of God's love for his people is evident throughout the Bible but never more so than through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. How does God's reliability and commitment to loving you make you feel?**



GROW deeper

Take a look at John 3:1-21

Here is a prime example of a Jewish leader, a Pharisee named Nicodemus, who was unable to accept the absurd sounding reality that Jesus described. This was a problem for many Pharisees and Jewish teachers and leaders. To them, Jesus did not feel like a Messiah. The things he said did not feel or sound right to their understanding of God's revelation and law given to Moses and the Israelites in the desert. Jesus challenged the things that made them feel comfortable. Jesus upset the system that they had established.

Jesus re-wrote the terms of God's relationship with humanity and they dismissed Jesus because none of this 'felt' right to them.

Yet the established temple hierarchy and Jewish systems of religious piety, did not stop God enacting his plan for salvation. As Jesus clearly points out as he continues to explain things to Nicodemus, those who believe what he says will receive eternal life and those who do not will miss out on that blessing. God still loves them all and continues to extend his offer of grace and forgiveness to all. Like God sent Joseph a messenger, God has sent us as his messengers to tell the world what He is up to so that they can align themselves with Him and receive the blessings that come from life with Jesus.

12. The Greek word 'angelos' from which we get the word 'angel' literally means messenger. In what ways are you an angel or messenger of the Lord in your daily life?

13. Feelings can be tricky. Some people learn to trust their 'feelings' the way a detective might follow a hunch or 'trust their gut'. Likewise, we might have to learn to trust the Holy Spirit as he leads us through God's word and through promptings and feelings which might seem to counter logic at times. How do you think you might learn to trust the promptings and leadings of the Holy Spirit?



LIVE purposefully

Each day God has a plan for your life. Each day you have the opportunity to hear from him through his word and to speak with him in prayer. Each day, as one of God's children, his Holy Spirit is at work in you leading, guiding and prompting you along the path God has set out for your day; a path which he promises will bring blessing to you and others. Each day you have the choice to act on that information or to dismiss it as too strange, too difficult or too scary. Each day God's blessing awaits, you can walk in it or away from it. It might feel right... it might feel strange... it might feel uncomfortable... sometimes it may not even make sense. But just as the birth of the son of God to a virgin mother, in a dirty stable, surrounded by animals and visited by shepherds didn't make a lot of sense, it still brought blessing to the whole world. Imagine what blessing God might want to bring to the world through your faithful obedience!

14. How would your life look different if you expected God to use you to bring blessing to others every day?

15. This year Christmas is likely to feel very different for many people who won't be travelling to see friends and family. How might you be able to help them feel the love of God this Christmas?



PRAY intentionally

- Praise God for his constant and reliable love for us
- Thank Jesus for living as a human and experiencing and knowing the way we feel.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you be led by him, and not just by what feels good.



BLESS one another

You might like to address one person in your group and make the sign of the cross in the air as you say...

[Name], may the love of Christ fill your Christmas with so much more. Amen.