



ENTER God's presence

**But I, by your great love, can come into your house;
in reverence I bow down toward your holy temple.
Lead me, Lord, in your righteousness because of my
enemies—make your way straight before me.**

– Psalm 5:7-8

Heavenly Father, there are many things in life that seem to work against us; many things that distract us from you and your plans for us. As we gather around your word today, fill us again with your Holy Spirit and clear away the distractions that stop us from hearing you clearly. 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. **Some people love silence, others can't stand waiting in silence. Which one are you? What is it about silence or quiet that you love or hate?**
4. **For many people, the time after Christmas is a time to slow down and relax. How do you spend time in the days after Christmas?**

The Headlines are a constant reminder to us of the darkness of this world. "Christmas travel plans in disarray after Northern Beaches COVID-19 cluster." "US Coronavirus deaths soar to a new daily record." "Lawyer charged with sexual assault." "Mum accused of stabbing son." "Shock as virus rules change midflight." "Forcibly displaced people tops 80 million globally." "Over 100 million Australians rely on welfare and income support for the first time." The Christmas story in Matthew is no silent night. The world did not get cleaned up, sanitised and made presentable for Christ's birth. Christ is born into a world of darkness and into the stories of real lives where there is fear, oppression, violence, a loss of innocence, sorrow, weeping, struggle and death. But in the midst of this world – a world that seeks to disrupt, deny, displace and destroy our lives - we discover and experience the truth that Christmas is more than a silent night.

Week beginning:
Sunday 27th December 2020

Worship series:

Christmas is more than a...



VERSE for the week

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

Matthew 2:13



REMEMBER this week

In any given year and at any given time, the headlines of the world will be repeated. Each time they will try and deny the truth that God is with us. Survival in this world is not a life on the run, but a life that lives, nurtures and grows in the presence of the Holy One who journeys with us and reveals that God is for us and with us.



LISTEN attentively

Read Matthew 2:13-23

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. **What do you imagine life might have been like for Mary and Joseph trying to be parents to Jesus, the Son of God and saviour of mankind?**

It is strange how we have been trained by peaceful nativity scenes, Christmas plays, and Christmas carols like 'Silent Night' to picture the birth of Jesus as a calm and peaceful scene. But let's get real for a moment, Mary and Joseph are outside in a stable in a city, crowded for the census. They end up surrounded by smelly shepherds, possibly also sheep, not to mention any animals that may already have been in the stable. Even after the night of Jesus' birth, things don't get better very quickly. Matthew is a bit sketchy on the details but it seems that while Joseph and Mary are now living in a house (see Matt 2:11), they might well still be in Bethlehem almost 2 years after Jesus was born (Matt 2:16), and to top it all off, they are now being hunted by Herod who is threatened by the news of 'the king of the Jews' being born in Bethlehem. So Joseph is told to take his family to Egypt to escape the wrath and paranoia of Herod. Jesus' birth was messy and complicated and I'm sure it wasn't as peaceful as we have been led to believe.

8. **The birth of Jesus was supposed to bring peace and joy and good news to all mankind, yet to King Herod, Jesus was a threat to his own position and power. What things in your life have a tendency to rob you of the joy and good news of Jesus?**
9. **When we have important visitors, we prepare things, tidy up the house and get on our best behaviour. Occasionally we might let very close friends or family see us, and our homes, as we really are; messy, chaotic and tired. How do you react to God with your life? Do you feel you have to tidy things up before you let him in or are you prepared to let God see you 'warts and all'?**

God is not afraid of mess. In fact, God created the world from a chaotic mess of nothing. The Message paraphrase of Genesis 1:1-2 puts it like this, "*First this: God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.*" God is in the business of bringing beauty and order from chaos, bringing life from death. He has always been able to bring blessing from destruction. Yet that doesn't make passages like this one any easier for us to read, or the trouble and mess of our own lives any easier to understand. What good can possibly come from the cold hearted murder of every male child under the age of two in Bethlehem and the surrounding area? What joy is there to be had for those who have lost loved ones to fires, floods, and viruses over the past 12 months? Despite the birth of Jesus, the world in which we live, the world in which *he* lived, is not a peaceful place. And yet, God still works his plan in amongst the mess.

10. **Every event that happens in this passage of Matthew's gospel is linked to a piece of prophetic scripture in the Old Testament. What does the knowledge that God had this planned out in detail so far before the events came to pass make you feel about God's plans for you?**
11. **Being the Son of God on earth came with certain complications. Right from the moment of his birth Jesus experienced opposition. Being a child of God in this messy and hostile world today is not a lot different. What opposition have you encountered in your life because of your faith in Jesus?**



GROW deeper

Take a look at Acts 5:17-39

Life with Jesus is usually a life which encounters opposition. The apostles and leaders of the early church experienced it regularly. Around the world there are still many Christians who are persecuted relentlessly for their faith in Jesus and for sharing that faith with those around them. Yet in spite of all these obstacles, they continue to spread the good news of Jesus. History has shown us time and time again that the Pharisee Gamaliel, understood the true nature of the situation. A plan of God may draw opposition, it may involve times of hardship and difficulty, but if it is a plan of God, then nothing we might do (or not do) will get in the way of it. By the same logic, those plans that we dream up for ourselves, if they don't lign up with God's plans for us, they will ultimately fail.

- 12. God ensured Jesus and Mary and Joseph were safe while Herod went about securing his own power and authority but it took some extreme measures (relocating to a foreign land) How far would you be prepared to go to follow God's plans for you?**
- 13. Gamaliel's approach to testing if something was of God was to wait and see how it all played out. Have you ever experienced something come together in your life as if by divine intervention? Perhaps God has unexpectedly ended something in your life but brought new or unexpected blessings from the set back. Share a time you are confident that God has been at work in your life. What makes you confident it was him?**



LIVE purposefully

Each day we come up against new problems, new opposition, new opportunities. We have perhaps learned or re-learned this more in 2020 than we have in a long time. Yet even in the midst of the struggle, mess, and challenge that our lives can bring, God is always with us. He led Mary and Joseph every step of the way to Egypt and back to Nazareth. He released the Apostles from prison so they could proclaim the gospel of Jesus. He has a job for you to do, and he will be with you as you go out to do it. Don't be surprised when opposition comes, but don't be afraid of it either, because if what you are doing is of God, nothing will be able to stop you.

- 14. What is the biggest hurdle you think you are facing which is stopping you from following Jesus more closely in 2021? Pray about it and ask God to help you overcome it.**



PRAY intentionally

- Praise God for his ability to deal with mess and bring life from death.
- Thank Jesus for living out God's will even in the face of opposition from those he came to save.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you stand in the face of opposition and to trust that God has you in his hands.



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], you are never alone. God is always with you. Amen.