



ENTER God's presence

Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

– Psalm 100:3-4

Heavenly Father, we thank you that through Jesus, you call us all your children, your people. Remind us again of your love for us and your goodness to us as we gather together around your word. May it do its work in us and grow us into a greater likeness of Christ. 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. **What are the strong physical or personality traits that have been passed on in your family?**
4. **What are some unique Christmas traditions that you practice in your family?**

From coast to coast, the pictures said it all. Flowing tears, screams of joy and lingering hugs filled our airports as families were reunited and generations connected after months of Covid border bans and lockouts. It was an early Christmas gift for so many. For more than any other time, Christmas is when we want family around, to extend traditions, create new memories, share experiences, anchor together in unity and give a sense of belonging. It was no different for Mary when she was chosen to bear God's gift to the world. The first people she wanted to share the news with was family. But what she discovered in the process was that Christmas is so much more than a family. It's a movement of love that changes and revolutionises everything. That's what we will also explore and experience today.

Week beginning:
Sunday 13th December 2020

Worship series:

Christmas is more than a...



VERSE for the week
... the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.
Luke 1:49-50



REMEMBER this week

Christmas is more than a family, it's a movement of eternal love that extends from generation to generation, embracing all nations, connecting all people, and creating new moments that bring joy, life and a future that are unimaginable.



LISTEN attentively

Read Luke 1:26-56

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. **Put yourself in Mary's shoes. How do you think you would react to receiving that kind of news from an angel?**

The angel Gabriel had a few messages to deliver around that time. In the earlier verses of Luke chapter one, Gabriel delivers the news of the impending birth of John the Baptist to his father, Zechariah. As it turns out, Zechariah's wife, Elizabeth, is a relative of Mary. If it seems like God is fulfilling his promises through a particular family it is because that *is* exactly what he is doing. Throughout the Old Testament, God had promised to bring an eternal kingdom from the line of David. He had promised Abraham that all the world would be blessed through his descendants. This did all start with a promise to a particular family. We should not be surprised that it gets fulfilled through a particular family.

However, the birth of Jesus is not just a blessing to Mary and Joseph, the birth of Jesus was an event that was going to break down the barriers between our earthly, human families and the family of God.

8. **How has God used your family to show his love and share his good news with the world?**
9. **Christmas is often a time when we think about and spend time with our families. Yet the birth of Jesus is so much bigger than just 'you and your kin' as the Christmas carols put it. How does the birth of Jesus affect your family outside of the Christmas period?**

Mary's response to this news was undeniably positive. This is amazing, considering that she was a young, unwed, and now pregnant woman. Being in that position could have meant a lot of negative things for her. Her betrothal to Joseph could have been called off (Matt 1:19), her prospects of finding another husband would have been reduced to almost zero and tied to that, her future financial situation was at risk. Perhaps this is part of the reason for her visit to Elizabeth, to lay low and out of sight while Joseph sorted things out? But interestingly the first person to respond to Jesus as Mary enters Zechariah and Elizabeth's house is the unborn baby which Elizabeth carries. The first place that the identity of Jesus was recognised, was not Peter's confession, but in John's leap of joy in his mother's womb. It was recognised in the family.

10. **Family life can be incredibly hectic these days. How does your family ensure that you help each other to recognise and experience the love of Jesus in each other's lives?**
11. **The primary place that faith in Jesus is taught and caught, is not in churches, youth groups or schools. The most effective place to grow and establish faith is in family homes. Read Deuteronomy 4:9-10. Are their other members of your wider family (aunts, uncles, grandparents or cousins) who might need you to remind them about who God is and what he has done? How will you do that this Christmas?**



GROW deeper

Have another look at Mary's song of praise in verses 46-56

Despite the risks that came with this news that the angel had delivered to Mary, her response is to praise and glorify God. Not for a single moment does she worry about the earthly implications, she has faith that God will bring about everything he has said. Mary understands that she has been blessed and chosen for a special task by God and that he will see her through it. She also understands that this blessing is not just for her and her family but for 'all those who fear him, from generation to generation'(v.50). Through the birth of Jesus, God became part of humanity. No longer separate from us, God was here with us; he was part of us. Through this act of incarnation, the promises that God had made to Abraham and the nation of Israel, were now made to all of humankind. God had not just come into the world for the Israelites, he had come for all of humanity. We hear this again in the song of the angels to the shepherds, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests" (Luke 2:14)

Our Western culture has developed in such a way recently, that we have been encouraged to individualise everything. We can certainly say without any doubt that Jesus died to save 'me' from 'my' sin. However, we need to also be reminded as 1 John 2:2 tells us, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

12. **What changes when you stop thinking about what Jesus has done for you, and instead think about what he has done for the whole world?**
13. **What might change if we stopped thinking only of our parents, grandparents, children and close family members as our family and came to really think of all humanity as our family in Christ? How would our churches be different?**



LIVE purposefully

God may have indeed blessed Mary in a special way by making her the mother of Jesus. However, God did not just give Jesus to Mary and Joseph, Jesus was a gift to all the world, from generation to generation. We can join with Mary in her song of praise, because what God did for her, he has also done for every one of us. We too can have souls that glorify the Lord and a Spirit that rejoices in God our Saviour, because he has been mindful of our humble state. All generations can also call us blessed because God, the Might One has done great things for us – he has sent us Jesus so that through him we might be part of his holy family.

14. **How might you invite other people from you neighbourhood, workplace, or social circles to be a part of your family?**
15. **Many families experience conflict, and it can come to a head at Christmas. A hallmark of God's family is the practice of forgiveness. Is God calling you to forgive someone in your family this Christmas?**
16. **What is one way that your family can share the joy of being members of God's family with your local community?**



PRAY intentionally

- Praise God for restoring us and giving us a place as members of his family through Jesus.
- Thank Jesus for the hope, joy, love and peace that the story of his birth brings to our world.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you show others the joy that comes from being part of God's family.



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 joy of Christ fill your Christmas with so much more. Amen.