

GraceCity Advent Study

Home



Week #4

December 14-December 20, 2020

“Finding Home in the Midst of Trouble” (Matthew 2:13-18)

The manger scene is often portrayed in a sentimental style with the sweetly-sleeping baby, serene parents, and well-behaved animals. For this reason, we can be lulled into thinking that the Christmas story was one devoid of tension and filled with tranquility. But this is not the case. The story is filled with peril and danger. Jesus and his family fled their home due to the real threat of state-sponsored violence. They experienced danger and insecurity.

This advent we invite you to look to the Prince of Peace who is God-With-Us. When we journey with Him, we are home, even in the midst of life’s trials.

Preparation:

How do you define “peace”? Is it the absence of tension? Is it a feeling? Is it a physical state? What are the conditions necessary for peace? Where do you find peace?

Read: Matthew 2:13-18

Notes/Definitions:

Joseph – Of the house of David, Joseph is a carpenter by trade and betrothed to Mary. He is Jesus’ earthly father. The last reference to Joseph is when Jesus preaches in the temple at age twelve (Luke 2:41-52).

Herod the Great – The first king in a rather infamous dynasty. He came to power in 37 BC at a time when Rome was still sorting out political factions which had arisen following the assassination of Julius Caesar. Herod was a deeply insecure ruler—his title was “king of the Jews” but what dogged him his entire life was the fact that he was not an ethnic Jew. He was proud and arrogant, and while the Jews may have grudgingly given him credit for rebuilding the temple, they despised him and never accepted him as one of their own.

“This was to fulfill what had been spoken” – Matthew introduces many of his direct quotations from Scripture with this formula (1:22; 2:5, 15, 17, 23; 4:14, etc). In his gospel account, Matthew casts Jesus as the true fulfillment of the Law found in the Torah.

Shalom – The Hebrew word for peace, meaning completeness and wholeness, nothing missing, nothing broken

Questions:

1. As we have seen from the previous weeks, this is not Joseph’s (or Mary’s) first encounter with an angel. How might their previous encounters have prepared them for this angel’s message? When making decisions, how do you discern the “right” one?

Their previous encounters strengthened their faith, leading them to trust and obey the angel’s message. We should remember the ways God has been faithful to us in the past in order to have faith for the present and future.

This study has been developed for personal reflection and group discussion. To participate in the conversation, join a GraceCity small group. For more information on times and locations, email smallgroups@gracecitybaltimore.org.

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2. Joseph was not given an end date for the family's exile in Egypt. They were instructed to stay "until I tell you." How do you react in times of trouble—like this pandemic—when you have no idea how long it will last? Are you able to find peace before the trouble or suffering has passed?

Communicating with God through prayer is one of many great privileges we have to get us through hard times, but even the Psalmist desperately asked, "How long?" Consider Psalm 13 in full.

3. How did Herod respond to being outwitted by the Magi? What does this show about his character and how he handled adversity?
4. Read Isaiah 9:2-7. The gospel writers saw the claims of this poem fulfilled in the person of Jesus (see Matthew 4:13-16).
- How is Jesus "a great light" in the midst of the darkness? (See also John 1:1-14.)
 - One of the titles of the child is "Prince of Peace." Jesus was born in a stable and then had to escape because his life was in danger. Yet how does Jesus fulfill this title?
5. The birth of Jesus was met with peril, violence, and death. As Theologian N. T. Wright says, "He was a homeless refugee with a price on his head." This is how God chose to enter the scene, clothed in human flesh, to walk among us as Emanuel, God-With-Us. How have you experienced God with you in the midst of turmoil? How has God shown up unexpectedly in your life?
6. The Herods of this world are not going away. There is no shortage of strife, wars, discord, etc. in our lives, our city, and in the world. Although in this passage Mary and Joseph with baby Jesus flee to Egypt, the adult Jesus meets trouble head on in his ministry. Likewise, God calls us not to escape difficulty but to enter into it, just as our Lord did.
- As followers of the Prince of Peace, how are we to be active peacemakers (Matthew 5:9) in the midst of terrors, great and small?
- Matthew 5:9 (NIV) – "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."*
- Recall the definition of *shalom*. In what ways can we be part of bringing peace both materially and spiritually?
 - Where is God calling you to step in as an agent for peace and reconciliation?
7. The infant Jesus was spared from Herod's edict by fleeing to Egypt, yet many other innocent boys fell victim to Herod's wrath. How do we react to tragedies that seem to disproportionately affect some, often the most already marginalized? How do we hold onto both the coexistence of brutal atrocities and a loving God?
8. Read John 14:26-27. Peace, wholeness, security, and safety are indispensable ingredients for home. How does God provide peace in the midst of violence?

John 14:26-27 (NIV) – "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

9. Read Philippians 4:6-7. What is our posture in prayer? How does prayer remind us of our true home?

Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV) – "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

10. GraceCity's mission is, "By the grace of Jesus Christ, reconciling people to God and to one another." How is that mission reflected in your discussions of this study?

11. Think back to how you defined home in the first study. What would you add to that definition now? How can you experience "home" no matter where you are, who you are with, and what is happening?

Closing Prayer:

Praise God for being an ever-present help in times of trouble. Lift up His name, the Prince of Peace, for when He has protected and cared for you. Speak your doubts and fears to God, yet find rest in his character and the peace He offers. Listen to Matt Maher's [rendition](#) of "O Come, O Come Emanuel," and hear the line, "Take heart, oh weary soul, take heart, for help is on its way and Holy is his name." Pray for those who are weary and are waiting to see God arrive in their circumstances. Seek peace and home in the presence of God and this community, and ask God to show you how you can share that peace to those around you.