

# GIFTS OF *Christmas*

## **Incense: God is With Us**

Week 3 | December 10th, 2023  
Community Group Discussion Guide

*The following is a guide to help structure your time as a group together. Community Groups exist first and foremost to help us know and follow Jesus together.*

*Our groups organize their shared life together around four essential practices - Studying the Scriptures, Care and Prayer, Family Hangouts, and Missional Hospitality. Our hope is that our presence together, as a people of practice and patience will aid in our spiritual formation over time.*

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Lessons & Carols Christmas Service**

*Friday, December 22 | 6pm-7pm  
Matthews Community Playhouse*

On Friday, December 22nd, we will be gathering at the Matthews Playhouse with other local churches across our city to celebrate the birth of King Jesus together. This will be a traditional Lessons & Carols service, where we will sing traditional Christmas worship songs, hear the story of the birth of Jesus read through various passages of Scripture, and take intentional time to reflect on the meaning of this season.

Childcare will be provided for ages 6 weeks - 2 years old. The service will be family-friendly, and should last about 45 minutes.

This is a small part of a citywide collaboration of like-minded churches in the Harbor Network, seeking to partner together to launch, lead, and multiply thriving churches.

### **Holiday Gathering Schedule**

At the end of December, our schedule will change just slightly. Please note the following schedule updates:

- December 22 - Lessons and Carols - 6pm @ Matthews Playhouse
- December 24 - No Gathering
- December 31 - Prayer and Worship - 9:30am @ Dowd
- January 7 - Citizens 3rd Birthday! - 9:30am @ Dowd

## REVIEW THE MISSION

Take some time to review who various people are building relationships with and seeking to share the gospel with. **Pray for these individuals - that God would open their eyes to the good news of the gospel.**

## PRAYER + SCRIPTURE

**Open with a brief word of prayer:** “God, we thank you for this time together. We open our hearts to how you might want to meet with us. Come Holy Spirit.”

**1-2 minutes of silent reflection.**

### **Read Matthew 1:18-23 + Isaiah 7:10-17**

*18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:*

*23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall call his name Immanuel”  
(which means, God with us).*

*Matthew 1:18-23*

*10 Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz: 11 “Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” 12 But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test.” 13 And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. 15 He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. 16 For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. 17 The Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria!”*

*Isaiah 7:10-17*

**1-2 minutes of silent reflection.**

**Close with this short prayer:** “Lord, in our daily lives, it can feel as if we need to seek you for you to be near. Help us see in your power and grace, how you are with us always, which we know is promised by Jesus, and sealed in the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**As you reflect on Matthew 1:18-23 + Isaiah 7:10-17, what is the Holy Spirit showing or teaching you?**

## SERMON DISCUSSION

### GOD IS WITH US

As we have learned in this series, Matthew is showing how the gifts of the Magi say something about Jesus by drawing connections to the Old Testament. So when he highlights – one of the gifts is frankincense – what he's alerting his Jewish audience to is this child is God with us.

And through Isaiah 7, Matthew shows his audience that through a virgin birth, Immanuel (God is with us) shall be born and God will follow through on His promise, both to Israel, and to mankind 700 years later.

**How is this story of God's faithfulness and sureness of His promises good news to you right now?**

### THE BEAUTY OF IMMANUEL

In the sermon, we heard three particular ways God being with us is beautiful.

The wonder of condescension - That God who made all things for His glory. Who is infinite (no limits) and transcendent (no boundaries) would take on flesh.

The awesomeness of God's power -

Jesus doesn't cease to be God. He doesn't give up his divinity. He comes fully God and dwells with us fully man.

And

The magnificence of grace - That even though we do not deserve God to be with us, Jesus coming down from heaven is the pledge that God is going to redeem what is broken.

**How do these beautiful truths about God's presence with us draw you into worshipping Him?**

### WORSHIP KING JESUS

The reality for many of us, despite what the songs on the radio say, Christmas can be more of a reminder that life hasn't turned out how you hoped it would more than anything else... it's far more monotonous, lonely or painful... or there's a lot more sin and struggle that you thought would be there...

The Lord's invitation is not to run from these troubles, but to run to Him, and know that He is with us in the midst of these pains and struggles.

***Take some time to discuss how God being with us this Advent Season is good news for you in the midst of current day struggles.***

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Pray over what was shared in the discussion, for your group to be united in the gospel, and for help from the Holy Spirit to be shaped to be more like Jesus as we put God's ways into practice.