

“Christmas Eve”

A Thrill of Hope

Introduction

Christmas, as a season, offers many things to enjoy. But behind the songs and gifts and twinkling lights we often find the reality of a less than perfect Christmas. One filled with the challenges of finances, health issues and relationships that make it difficult to reconcile our everyday lives with the joy of Christmas we want to feel. The good news is that Jesus’ birth is about God stepping into our everyday not so perfect lives and offering us hope. If we look once again at the birth of Jesus, and what it meant to the world He entered, we will find real hope for our own imperfect lives.

Ice Breaker (Optional): Do you remember how you found out there was no Santa Claus?

Study Questions (45 MIN)

Things that confront hope

Q1. Read Luke 1:6-7, 36-37; Luke 2:4-7; Matthew 2:22-23; John 1:46

Throughout Luke’s gospel we find many people facing situations that would challenge their faith. What were the challenges of Elizabeth and Zechariah (Luke 1:6-7), and Mary and Joseph (Luke 2:4-7)? God didn’t prevent those challenges in their lives, but what hope did He offer Mary through the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:37)?

Not only was Jesus born in a stable, his parents fled to Egypt to hide him from a murderous king. When the threat to his life had passed, where did Mary and Joseph settle to raise their child (Matthew 2:22-23)? This was not a great or prominent city by any means. What kind of reputation did Nazareth have (John 1:46)? How do you think growing up in a small village with a poor reputation influenced Jesus? What kinds of personal situations have made it challenging for you to hold on to the hope God has promised?

Reflecting on God’s Hope

Q2. Read Luke 2:16-19; Psalm 17:7-8; Deuteronomy 31:6; Romans 8:31

If God’s hope for us were as fleeting as the Christmas season, it would not offer us an anchor in the continuing storms of our lives. But how

did Mary respond to all that transpired around Jesus’ birth (Luke 2:19)? Mary gave birth in a stable far from home then ran for her life. In those circumstances it would be easy to disregard the declaration that you are “favored of God”. In Psalm 17:7-8 David remembers how God views him in the midst of threatening circumstances. What further encouragement do we find in Deuteronomy 31:6 and Romans 8:31? If there is a situation in your life that causes you to feel overwhelmed, or fearful, pray together with your group that you can apply these truths about God to that situation.

God’s Message of Hope

Q3. Read John 8:12; 1 Peter 2:9; 1 Peter 1:3, 21; Romans 15:13

God was willing to send Jesus to illuminate hope during our darkest most imperfect moments. What hope does God’s light bring us in John 8:12 and 1 Peter 2:9? What gift of hope did God give us through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (1 Peter 1:3, 21)? What is it we must do (Romans 15:13) that allows the God of hope to fill us with all joy and peace? What might it look like to be filled with God’s hope?

Wrap-Up

Our hope is not only in our eternal future, it is in a God who is with us, and for us and sees us lovingly as the apple of His eye. There are circumstances in our lives that will challenge our hope. But if we continue to bring to mind the promises and truths of God, as Mary did, we do not need to be overwhelmed or fearful. The God of hope can dispel the darkness in your life and fill you with joy and peace.

Memory Verse

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Romans 15:13 NIV

Prayer (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life and other needs (see space to write on back).

Challenge:

This week spend time recalling the promises of God that bring you hope, joy and peace, and consider how you can share God’s hope.

Q1.

Luke 1:6-7, 36-37 ESV - 6 And they [Zechariah and Elizbeth] were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. ... 36 [Angel to Mary]And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God."

Luke 2:4-7 ESV - 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Matthew 2:22-23 NASB - 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee, 23 and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: "He shall be called a Nazarene."

John 1:46 NASB - 46 Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Q2

Luke 2:16-19 NLT - 16 They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. 17 After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. 18 All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, 19 but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often.

Psalms 17:7-8 NIV - 7 Show me the wonders of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes. 8 Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings

Deuteronomy 31:6 NIV - 6 Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

Romans 8:31 NIV - 31 What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Q3

John 8:12 NIV - 12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

1 Peter 2:9 NIV - 9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

1 Peter 1:3, 21 NIV - 3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ... 21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Romans 15:13 NIV - 13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer Notes cont.
