

A SMALL-GROUP GATHERING DURING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON



Environment:

Suggestion: Gather a Bible, a candle, some evergreens, and some symbol of the incarnation of Christ – either the creche or just the baby Jesus from the creche or an icon of the Nativity.

Gathering:

Invite everyone to take a moment to enter the silence and still of this winter night and reflect on the great humility of Christ, who, though he is fully God, humbled himself to become fully human.

Song: "O Holy Night" (or another sacred Christmas carol)

Opening Prayer:

Father God,
We gather tonight to once again
contemplate the unfathomable
mystery of the Incarnation of Christ.
We stand in awe before the profound
love you show for all of creation,
revealed in the coming of your Word
in the flesh.

Into the darkness that often
shadows our world, you sent
your eternal light.

At his birth, Jesus entered fully into this world of joy and hope and sorrow and misery. He accepted it all and filled it all with his love and grace.

We praise you for this unimaginable gift, which brings hope, healing, and peace to our hearts. May we always be mindful of his presence with us, embracing his love in every season of life. We ask this through Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever.

Amen.

Sharing the Season: (10 mins)

What was one way that this celebration of Christmas has filled your heart with love and grace? What was one difficulty or challenge you faced this Christmas?

Gospel: (Luke 2:1-14)

(Suggestion: since this gospel passage is long, you might want to have members of the group proclaim a paragraph each)

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke:

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled.

This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town.

And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear.

The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who

is Christ and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

The Gospel of the Lord
(Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ)

Reflection:

This reflection may be read silently by the members of the group. Then, after a time for silent contemplation, a member of the group may read the questions for consideration.

The Church has been contemplating the mystery of the Incarnation for 2,000 years, and we are filled with as much awe and wonder today as those shepherds were so long ago. Many great theologians and saints have made feeble attempts to figure out the why and how of the Incarnation. No one will ever really understand. Maybe we are not called to understand how God did it or even why God did it. Maybe we are just supposed to stand dumbstruck by the incalculable love revealed in the fact of the Incarnation. The Son of God really, truly became one of us when he became the son of Mary. The Creator of the fiery stars that fill the sky shivered in the cold of a winter night. The Almighty who set in motion the entire universe was made immobile by humble swaddling clothes. The very Word of the Father was not yet able to form human speech.

What words can we give to the awe this inspires within us?

What kind of world was the Savior born into? It was our world: a world of poverty and injustice, a world of sickness and disabilities, a world where bombs kill children and guns proliferate, and violence is ever present. But it's also a world of heroic love, fierce saints, of beauty and peace.

Before he could utter a single word, by his very presence in the flesh in this world, the Son of God proclaimed, "I love this world." Christ loves us completely. He loves us in our brokenness, in our messiness, in our pain, our tragedy, and even when we sin. He loves us and announces, "You are worth saving!"

What the Resurrection would complete in glory was already begun the moment Christ was born. Our salvation had arrived, in the beating heart of an infant who came to remind us that God indeed loves us all.



Sharing Questions:

(Allow these questions to spark your conversation. They are not meant to all be answered)

- What word, phrase, or image strikes you tonight in the gospel of midnight Mass? Why?
- What does Christmas mean to you? How does the incarnation of the Son of God impact the way you understand God or see the world?
- How does Christ's being born as one of us affect the way you act or treat others or how you make decisions?



Closing Prayer:

Let us pray to Christ, the High Priest, who is like us in all things but sin: Lord, for the Church, may we always proclaim God's love for the world with our deeds even more than with our words. We pray:

O Emmanuel, remain with us.

For the leaders of the nations of the world, may they create systems of justice that lead to that peace that the angels announced at your birth. We pray:

O Emmanuel, remain with us.

For our communities, that everyone may be included, valued, and honored as children of the one God and Father of us all. We pray:

O Emmanuel, remain with us.

For the sick whom you came to heal, that they may feel the warmth of your loving embrace. We pray:

O Emmanuel, remain with us.

For those who are mourning in this Christmas season, that they may know that the shadow of the cross that can darken the twinkling lights of Christmas will be dispelled by the glorious light of the Resurrection. We pray:

O Emmanuel, remain with us.

And for our own intentions tonight (pause to announce them out loud or take a moment for people to pray them in silence). We pray:

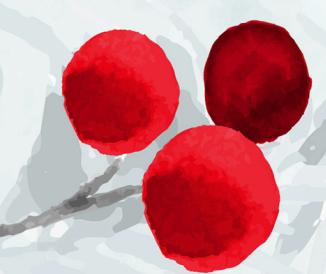
O Emmanuel, remain with us.

O Emmanuel, we bring our prayers to you, for you know our weaknesses. We ask you to bring our petitions to the Father with the prayer you taught us...

Our Father, who art in heaven...

Amen.

**Have a Blessed Christmas Season!
From the staff of RENEW International.**



The gospel passage is taken from the *New American Bible*, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC.
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