



Small Group Ministry

Winter 2024 – Week 1

Opening Prayer: (Common to all Groups)

Lord, we thank you for today and for this time to gather as friends in faith. We pray for our church and our community. Guide us and help us to deepen friendships and seek to grow in faith together. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Opening Discussion

1. How is everyone? Highs and lows from the week?
2. Have you made any resolutions that you would like to share with the group?

What is a Small Group?

- Faith Exercise - Intentionally deepening our relationship with God.
- Building Community - Intentionally deepening our relationship with others in faith.
- Common Interest – Intentionally celebrating common ground.

Group Parameters:

- Gatherings will begin with Prayer & Scripture to unify this ministry across the groups.
- Members will remain courteous and ensure that everyone is given the opportunity to share.
- Thoughts and feelings shared are private and should remain confidential.
- You are encouraged to share news but cautioned about crossing into the territory of gossip.
- Grow in friendship, faith, and community with one another through this experience.

Matthew 2:1-12

The Visit of the Magi

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi^[a] from the east came to Jerusalem, **2** asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east^[b] and have come to pay him homage.” **3** When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him, **4** and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah^[c] was to be born. **5** They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet:

6 ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd^[d] my people Israel.’ ”

7 Then Herod secretly called for the magi^[e] and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. **8** Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” **9** When they had heard the king, they set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen in the east,^[f] until it stopped over the place where the child was. **10** When they saw that the star had stopped,^[g] they were overwhelmed with joy. **11** On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12** And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Acts 19:1-7

Paul in Ephesus

19 While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. **2** He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They replied, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” **3** Then he said, “Into what, then, were you baptized?” They answered, “Into John’s baptism.” **4** Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.” **5** On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. **6** When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied,⁷ altogether there were about twelve of them.

Y W A Y L X P H C H H M Q D H
 K N N T Y I G R Q V O E G M B
 W I U A W C N N I R U W R Y R
 O V N R T E A C H E R S R O G
 R W Q G X T R V E K S A O M D
 S O M C H R I S T N M T E K E
 H R O V B G H V L M S H S O H
 I S T Y L O O U G I E E H C Q
 P H H U A D U O B L E B R Y J
 E I E Y Z V S E H N M A G I D
 D P R O N Y E T V A E G H L Q
 G B O R N H E E A S T R I B T
 T P B K F B G A V E R H W C E
 P M W I C I N E J Y C S T A R
 M M B Q D D L V M V T X L X Y

PRIESTS	MYRRH	BETHLEHEM	KING	CHRIST
GOD	CHILD	HOUSE	INCENSE	MARY
STAR	MAGI	TEACHERS	WORSHIP	MOTHER
WORSHIPED	EAST	SEARCH	BORN	HEROD

The Voice of God in a Great Storm

A Psalm of David.

- ¹ Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
- ² Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name;
worship the Lord in holy splendor.
- ³ The voice of the Lord is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the Lord, over mighty waters.
- ⁴ The voice of the Lord is powerful;
the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.
- ⁵ The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars;
the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.
- ⁶ He makes Lebanon skip like a calf
and Sirion like a young wild ox.
- ⁷ The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire.
- ⁸ The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness;
the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
- ⁹ The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl
and strips the forest bare,
and in his temple all say, "Glory!"
- ¹⁰ The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;
the Lord sits enthroned as king forever.
- ¹¹ May the Lord give strength to his people!
May the Lord bless his people with peace!

Mark 1:4-11

⁴ so John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And the whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."



The Baptism of Jesus

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. ¹¹ And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Scripture focus - Matthew 2:1-12

This Sunday (January 7th) we will be celebrating two ancient parts of the liturgical year; Epiphany (always celebrated on January 6th – in which we acknowledge the story of the magi) and the Baptism of our Lord. Epiphany inaugurates the next part of the liturgical calendar and is the time between Christmas and Lent. One source points out that the word "epiphany," is from the Greek word epiphania, and means appearance or manifestation. The arrival of the Magi was a sign that the incarnation of God in Christ had been made known and was recognized by the heavens to the whole world, so that even Gentile wise men from the East came to pay him homage. This is an observance of great majesty, solemnity and awe.

One scholar notes, "Epiphany is a promise that God is here, whether or not we notice the signs. After Jesus is born, according to Matthew, it is not the local folk to whom God-with-us is first revealed, but rather to Magi from the East. Foreigners. Strangers. Outsiders who interpret dreams and interrogate the night sky for signs. Nor is it in the grand holy city of Jerusalem, with its magnificent temple at the center of religious, political, and economic power, where God chooses to come close, but rather in Bethlehem, a lowly village up the road a piece. And it is not the great and powerful King Herod on whom God's anointing rests, but on this vulnerable child-Messiah who "will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21)."

Epiphany begins with strangers arriving from afar, come to bear witness to this miraculous event of "God with us". They go where anyone would go, to the seat of power and the centre of authority, Jerusalem. But the newborn king is not there. Then they are directed to go to the little nothing of a town (in the view of the world power of Rome) called Bethlehem and they follow the star "until it stopped over the place where the child was." The first witnesses in the gospel of Matthew are in fact these strangers from a strange land. God goes to all kinds of strange lengths to get our attention. In Epiphany we remember how God was made manifest in Jesus Christ, and, by this we are reminded to look for God's ongoing revealing through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in our lives today.

How has the presence of "Emmanuel – God with us" been manifested in your life? How significant is it that these 'strangers from a strange land' are the very first people (in the gospel of Matthew) to acknowledge this new king and to pay him homage (some translations say 'worshipped him')? They are overwhelmed with joy when the star stops over the place where the child was. Can you share a moment when you have been 'overwhelmed with joy' at knowing the presence of God in Christ?

How can the group pray for you this week?

Musical Reflection:

Praise Him - Crowder

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9VomNXhKj4>

