

Date: *December 2024*



Advent Special

Simplicity, Contentment & Generosity

Bible Readings: [Luke 1:39-56](#)

and [Luke 2:1-20](#)

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PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

Due to Christmas holidays and celebrations, most groups will only manage one meeting during the season of Advent. Try to make it a special occasion, perhaps with some festive treats. The following material can be spread over two sessions if needed, but also remember that you don't have to cover everything! Take from this what may be useful, and make it an enjoyable session for all.

PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS (before the session)

The Methodist Church this year has an Advent theme of '*Hush the noise*', taken from the carol, *It came upon the midnight clear* (*Singing the Faith* **205**, verse 3). [You can find out more about this online](#). We are being encouraged to find times away from the busyness and stress of 'Christmas', to discover again the peace God wants to give us, and 'join the love song'.

If you can, take some time at home to sit and reflect on the things that you would like to 'hush' during this season, or any aspects of Christmas that make you feel stressed or overwhelmed.

Would you like to reduce your load in Advent? What two or three things could you do without? Can you find the courage to make time for more peace, quiet, or prayer? Or what else would you like to do?

If you have time, read the story of the birth of Jesus in [Luke 1:39-56](#) and [Luke 2:1-20](#).

What do you think our society can learn from the Christian faith when it comes to true happiness?

STARTING THE SESSION: A PRAYER

Holy God, giver of life, bringer of light and hope,

In this time of preparation and waiting, prepare our hearts to meet with you today.

Bless us with your Holy Spirit, to encourage and inspire,

and grant us your peace in the name of our Lord Jesus, the Prince of Peace. **Amen.**

FINDING OUR ROOTS

Opening discussions (either in smaller groups, or in the group as a whole):

What would you like to share from your thinking and reflection before the session?

What would make Christmas better or easier for you? And what can we learn from the Nativity story?

READING THE SCRIPTURES

Read together the Bible passages: [Luke 1:39-56](#) and [Luke 2:1-20](#)

These familiar passages form part of the 'infancy narrative' of Jesus, and are unique to Luke's Gospel. There is an 'Old Testament' feel to them, perhaps offering continuity between the Old and the New. The song of Mary (the 'Magnificat') is a **canticle** in the style of many Hebrew songs or psalms, and is connected with the visit to Elizabeth, who was herself miraculously pregnant. This is reminiscent of the story of Hannah ([1 Samuel: chapters 1-2](#)), and Mary's song is very similar to Hannah's prayer.

Note also the *simplicity* of the 'Nativity' story in **Luke 2**. Notice what it includes and what it does not.

THEME 1: SIMPLICITY

Mother Teresa apparently once said: *“The more you have, the more you are occupied, the less you give. The less you have, the more free you are.”* **Simplicity** is often about getting rid of all that hinders, ‘laying aside every weight’ (**Hebrews 12:1**) in order to find greater freedom or peace. In the Magnificat, Mary speaks of her ‘lowliness’, and of God lifting the lowly and filling the hungry (**Luke 1, verses 48, 52, 53**), implying that she and her people are in poverty. The journey to Bethlehem and the makeshift accommodation strips away any home comforts they had, and leaves the family totally reliant on God.

Have Christmas celebrations in our society have become over-complicated, or just too much? How does this affect people mentally or financially in what is supposed to be a time of joy and peace?

What does the simplicity of the first Christmas teach us about how to discover or encounter God?

What gives you the most joy at Christmas time? What are the things that money can't buy?

THEME 2: CONTENTMENT

Mahatma Gandhi said something like this: *“Human happiness really lies in contentment. He who is discontented, however much he possesses, becomes a slave to his desires.”* **Contentment** means to be happy with what we have, and should overflow to thankfulness. Discontentment (on the other hand) means to always want something else, and happiness is then always just out of reach. The characters in the Nativity did not have it easy, and yet the story rings with songs of praise and overflowing joy.

*Where in **Luke chapters 1 and 2** is joy expressed in the midst of difficult circumstances?*

Can constant adverts and Christmas wish-lists (or letters to Santa) produce a habit of discontent, always wanting the next thing? How do we learn to grow out of this mindset?

Do you find it helpful to ‘count your blessings’? Is being thankful for what we have a key to happiness?

THEME 3: GENEROSITY

Queen Elizabeth II said in a Christmas broadcast (2008): *“Over the years, those who have seemed to me to be the most happy, contented and fulfilled have always been the people who have lived the most outgoing and **unselfish** lives”.* **Matthew 2** tells of the Magi bringing lavish gifts to Jesus. Nativity plays usually have the shepherds bringing a lamb too! Most of all, Jesus is God’s gift to the world. **Generosity** is at the heart of Christmas, and giving to those in need can often lead to feelings of deep satisfaction.

Does contentment lead to generosity, or does generosity produce contentment?

What does it mean to be generous people? What gifts can we offer; and how can we do it generously?

FESTIVE FUN! – CHRISTMAS AND ADVENT CAROL QUIZ

Without looking in a hymnbook, can you identify these ten carols from the lines given?

1. Bless all the dear children in thy tender care... 2. Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above...
3. Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.
4. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.
5. And with the treasures of his grace, to enrich the humble poor.
6. Risen with healing in his wings. 7. Disperse the gloomy clouds of night...
8. ‘God is with us,’ round the world the message bring...
9. God with us is now residing, yonder shines the infant Light.
10. O hush the noise, ye men of strife, and hear the angels sing!

PRAYING AND SINGING TOGETHER

In silence or out loud, praise God for what we have received in Jesus Christ and in our Christian faith. Pray for the ability to find simplicity, contentment and generosity. And give thanks for what you have. Pray for the needs known to you, of the world, your community and the church, including those who are troubled in mind or spirit, or overburdened with much responsibility, and those who are denied life’s essentials and live in poverty. Say **the Lord’s Prayer** together. Finally, **sing a carol or two!**