



northchurch

Group Discussion Guide

Found in the Extraordinary

Sunday, December 18, 2011

Read

Read aloud through the story found in Luke 2:1-20. Go around the circle in the group with each person reading a verse until you're done.

Discuss

When Jesus was born, it was an extraordinary event. God did something entirely new – He didn't just interact with mankind like He had done in the past, He actually *became* one of us! God marked the event with extraordinary signs – a star (see Matthew 2:1-12), and the angels' declaration (see Luke 2:8-15). Do you think God still speaks today through extraordinary means? If so, how have you experienced it?

If we use the metaphor of a radio for hearing God's voice, the first step is to **turn it on**. We won't hear much with the radio off: are we open to the idea that God wants to communicate with us? God is a personality (not a mute force), and he communicates relationally (Luke 2:11 records "for unto you a child is born." God goes to crazy extremes to relate to us on our terms, personally, even becoming a human Himself.) Have you ever sensed God speaking to you? Was it through a circumstance, another person, something you read, a feeling or a thought? How did you sense it was God speaking?

The second step in using a radio is to **tune it in**. There's a lot of bandwidth that's just noise – and many radio stations that are not what you're looking for. It takes some patience and adjustment to find the right station and dial in a clear signal (...okay, think about the days before satellite radio.) One way you'll know you're listening to the right station is that God always speaks redemptively: His messages will draw us toward Jesus. Can you think of a time of personal struggle in your life, when you sensed God spoke to you redemptively? What did you sense God spoke to you? What did it feel like?

When you find the radio station you're looking for, you **turn it up!** When we hear God's voice speaking to us personally, we should respond. In Luke 2, the shepherds respond by going to see what the angels had spoken of. When God speaks, it always invites a response from us. Can you think of a time you sensed God speaking to you and you responded? What happened?

Pray

Reserve at least the last 15 minutes of group time to pray for the things that came up during your discussion and any other prayer needs.

Here's some background information:

Luke 2:1-20 English Standard Version (ESV)

1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. **2** This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. **3** And all went to be registered, each to his own town. **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.

8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. **10** And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

***14** "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those
with whom he is pleased!"*

15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." **16** And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. **17** And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. **18** And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. **19** But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. **20** And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

About Luke 2:1-20

(from IVP NT Commentaries)

Joy comes with an angelic proclamation of good news (*euangelizomai*). The message is for *all the people*. Though in the original context such a messianic announcement would have been understood as being for the people of Israel, the development of Jesus' ministry shows that Jesus' work reaches beyond such national boundaries. The two volumes of Luke-Acts tell the story of how Jesus, the Savior, Lord and Christ, brought salvation to all people regardless of nationality. They need only turn to him (Acts 10:34-43).

As with other incidents in the infancy material, the angel describes a sign: the shepherds will know this announcement is true when they see the child in a manger. The angelic announcement does not come in mystical isolation; it connects to

concrete events.

The praise of the heavenly host offers honor to God and peace to *men on whom his favor rests*. This last phrase is not a declaration of universal salvation but refers to those who are the special objects of God's grace. They are the "saved," those on whom God has bestowed the favor of his grace.

In this account each set of characters plays a major role. The angels present the commentary of heaven on the events of Luke 2:1-7. They identify the child and reflect the heavens' excitement that this child has come to do God's work. The shepherds have the type of response any of us should have as we contemplate these events. Their curiosity leads them to *go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has*

happened. As they see God's word honored in the presence of the sign, they come to testify to God's work and tell the story of the child. Mary depicts the wonder of experiencing the inbreaking of God in her life. She *pondered* these things *in her heart*. The audience to the shepherds' report *were amazed*. Their response exemplifies the awe that should fill anyone who hears Jesus' story.

This birth has value because of whose birth it is. The shepherds have found that the angel's words were true, that events have transpired *just as they had been told*. God's word is coming to pass; his plan is again strategically at work. They break out in praise to God because he has sent Jesus, the Savior, Lord and Christ.