



RECAPTURE the Wonder

Join us for Advent Sundays
November 27 - December 18

northchurch

Group Discussion Guide

Found in the Ordinary

Sunday, December 11, 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, God chose to announce it to very ordinary people – shepherds. These shepherds did not have power, wealth or social status. They had the same weaknesses, limits and fears that most ordinary people do. Why do you think God made the announcement of Jesus' birth to shepherds instead of people in positions of power and influence?

Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. In this letter by Paul to the church at Corinth, he describes how he has embraced weakness as a means of knowing and experiencing God's power. It's the very places we feel inadequate and weak where God shows himself to be strong in us and for us. Paul experienced this and said, "For when I am weak, then I am strong." Have you ever experienced God's presence and power in your weakness? If you're comfortable, share an example of this with your group.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. Paul reminds the church that they were ordinary people – not wise, not influential, not of noble birth. And yet they were *chosen* by God, just as the shepherds were chosen to witness Jesus' birth. How do you feel about being called "ordinary" or "average"? Do you feel a need or internal drive to become something more than simply "chosen"? Imagine yourself standing before God: do you think He is impressed by your aspirations of who you would rather be or become? Conversely, what do you think it would feel like to be at rest simply in who God created you to be?

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)

Jesus' birth sparks joy, surprise and wonder. All these emotions flow from the experience of the shepherds, who observe with amazement as heaven confesses the child's identity (vv. 10-11). The major offices of Jesus are confessed in one sentence: he is *Savior, Lord* and *Christ*--that is, deliverer, master and anointed king. As unbelievable as it may seem, the one with authority over salvation spends his first nights not in a palace but in the open air among simple people like the shepherds. All the imagery shows God's concern for people regardless of their social status or vocation. He cares for all and identifies with all.

Joy comes with an angelic proclamation of good news (*euangelizomai*). The message is for *all the people*. 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.

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.

In addition, there is the shepherds' *glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen*. This birth is no mere arrival of a new life, as poignant as each such event is. The story is not told so that hearers can identify with the new mother and father or enjoy a story of hope, of a touching birth in humble surroundings. 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.