

CHRISTMAS PRESENCE | Present to Those Who Seek | Week 5 | December 30, 2018

Matt 2:1-16

Opening: “Christmas Presence”, Immanuel—God with us, is a presence highlighted in this season because God’s promised redemption, Jesus the Christ, is what we celebrate. With Jesus presence came an awareness and an understanding of a “spirit presence” not widely known before. Jesus, near the end of his time on earth, explains the coming of the Helper, the Spirit. (Jn 14:16) We now understand that Helper as one of the hallmarks of our faith as disciples. Our DEPENDENCE on that help is the attitude of living in the presence.

Context: We have seen Jesus’ coming through several perspectives: old Zechariah & Elizabeth and John’s miraculous birth, the lowly shepherds with the anthems of Angels in the sky, expectant Simeon and Anna identifying Jesus in the temple and today the Magi from afar who saw the signs from another land. Each of these perspectives were illustrations of God’s PRESENCE authored into ordinary lives in extraordinary ways.

Looking Back: Think back over the stories of the past few weeks. *What impressions do you remember? How has your awareness of the PRESENCE changed? Prayer? Meditation on Scripture? Journaling? “What’s going on here God” thoughts? Talk about that with the group.*

The Stage is Set: Read Matt 2: 1-6. The characters are clear and we will soon learn the plot. Try to remove yourself from knowing what happens and just look at the words in the text. *Who are the characters? How do you describe them based on the text? What are they doing? What are they feeling? What does it appear they want?*

The PRESENCE comes: We know the story revolves around the first Character, “born in Bethlehem”. And the priests clarify the character’s significance. *Given the information reported, how do the other characters respond? What do they each believe in this scene?*

A Deeper Look at Herod: Aaron Foster gives us historic background into Herod’s character. *What is most surprising to you regarding Herod? What qualities would you ascribe to him as a man? As a politician? Was he regarded as successful?*

Chief Priests and Scribes: The text reports that Herod called “all the chief priests and scribes of the people”. This is like calling all the former Secretaries of State. *What are the priests and scribes thinking as they are called in to the king? What do you suppose their objective would be in this meeting?*

The Magi seek: Read vs. 7-12. In the same way of looking at the text we see the Magi as characters in the story but much more as drawn in from the outside. *What are the Magi looking for? What do they know? What do they believe? How do you picture this attitude?*

The Contrasts of the Story: Consider the differences between the three character sets around Jesus: Herod, chief priests of the people & Magi from another land. Contrast them along:

- Control at all costs vs. Truth
- Status quo vs. New change
- Morality vs. Self-preservation
- god of my throne vs. God of the universe

Inside vs Outside: Our personal world can be characterized in simple terms as where we have control and where we don't. We can become so comfortable in our area of control that we cannot see new things—we don't need them, we are in control. Consider Herod and the chief priests for a minute, using the description of living in control. *Where could you be maintaining control when outside forces are trying to get your attention? Where could you be "sitting on your throne" and the PRESENCE is just outside, knocking? Talk about what comes to mind.*

Practice of the Week: Opening the Future

Physically, we are in control of part of our life—by necessity. If that were not true, we would be overwhelmed. But we also live outside of that limited space and as a consequence grow. Likewise, spiritually, we open ourselves to "something bigger" than our own understanding—we open ourselves to the PRESENCE. Aaron counselled us to begin "where we are confident in His presence"—scripture, prayer, worship & Christ centered community. How will you seek to stay mindful of the PRESENCE in the coming year? Journal with God over that. Set a plan you can look back on as a reminder in the days ahead.

Family Formation: Seeking and Finding

Revisit prayers..... Read Matt 2:10-12. Describe the Magi's attitudes: seeking, rejoicing, worshipping, offering gifts from their treasure. Turn that progression into a story of growing in relationship to Jesus. It can be your own story of coming to faith! Do they know your story?

Additional Resources: [Jesus Calling: Enjoying Peace in His Presence](#) by Sarah Young

We'd love to hear from you!

If you have thoughts questions, comments, ideas on how to make these study guides more meaningful for you and your group, please let us know.

We also enjoy hearing how God is using these scriptures and study guides in your lives.

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