Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Focus: Christmas Day


Gathering
Welcome

Prayer for Peace

*Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.*
*Light the peace candle.*

Dear Lord God,

After a year’s journey we again have gathered before you to celebrate the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ.

As we look back at this passing year, the joy and thanksgiving overflow from our hearts. Some of us may have come through pain and grief. Some may have had a year better than past years. Others may have had the happiest and most fulfilling year. Regardless of the journey, we are grateful you have had us gather before you in this beautiful place to experience your presence.

Today a joyful noise is being heard in many parts of the world. The children are singing carols in choirs. The youths are giving the Christmas pageant in their churches. We see the joy and twinkle in the children’s eyes and happiness glowing in their parents’ faces as all gather by the Christmas tree.

O Lord, we are so grateful for this joy, happiness, and peace. We pray the children’s eyes will not be clouded by fears of wars, and that tears of sadness will not be shed on their parents’ faces. Our memories are so vivid that we cannot forget—the tears of innocent children crying for hunger and thirst, the pains in mothers’ faces with no milk to feed the babies. We have seen scarcity amid affluence, tragedy amid peace.

We shall remember, O Lord, these cries as those of our own children and these pains as those of our own companions, even during our celebration. You sent us your Son, because you loved the world. You loved us all that we all would have life and not perish. So today, O Lord, we return our thanks to you in our commitment and service to those who are bruised and afflicted so that they may be freed from bondage.
Bless and guide us as we continue our journey into the new year. We pray these things in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

—Hiroshi Yamada

**Spiritual Practice**

**Praying the Psalms**

Light all the Advent candles and the Christ candle in the center of the wreath. I will read Psalm 100:1–4 NRSV, adapted, pausing after each verse. When I pause and open my hand toward you, we will say aloud together: “The Lord is good. God’s love endures forever.”

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into God’s presence with singing.

(Open hand toward the group)

**All: The Lord is good. God’s love endures forever.**

Know that the Lord is God. It is God who made us, and we are God’s; we are God’s people, and the sheep of God’s pasture.

(Open hand toward the group)

**All: The Lord is good. God’s love endures forever.**

Enter God’s gates with thanksgiving, and God’s courts with praise. Give thanks to God, bless God’s name.

(Open hand toward the group)

**All: The Lord is good. God’s love endures forever.**

Amen.

**Sharing Around the Table**

**Luke 2:1–20 NRSV**

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped
him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in
the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by
night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone
around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for
see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day
in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you
will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there
was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one
another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the
Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and
the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told
them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told
them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The
shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it
had been told them.

Jesus was born in a stable to poor, unmarried parents in an overcrowded village far from
home. The angelic proclamation of Jesus’ birth was not to the rich and powerful, but to
shepherds, lowly field hands. Certainly not the obvious choice for such an important message.
Yet Luke tells how the shepherds rejoiced and shared this good news with others.

God surprises us by choosing humble people and circumstances to deliver the Messiah to
the world. Through the ministry and message of Jesus, it is made clear that God cares for the
poor, the immigrant, the outcast, and the marginalized. The Christmas story reminds us that God
acts in unexpected ways.

Questions

1. How does the Christmas story speak hope to the outcast and marginalized of our world?
2. How has God acted unexpectedly in your life?

Sending

Generosity Statement

“Faithful disciples respond to an increasing awareness of the abundant generosity of God
by sharing according to the desires of their hearts; not by commandment or constraint” (Doctrine
and Covenants 163:9). The offering basket is available if you would like to support ongoing
small-group ministries as part of your generous response.

God of love and light,
In this season of hope, love, and joy, may the peace of your Son, Jesus, be made real in the world. May our hearts, minds, hands, and resources be useful in the cause of bringing your light where there is darkness and your love where there is despair, anger, fear, and suffering. May our offerings be used toward your purposes, we pray. Amen.

Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn

CCS 424, “The First Noël”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group

• The Lord’s Supper
• Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

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Communion Statement

Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us, was born today, leading the walk in the way of truth, showing us how to love and serve one another. In the birth of Jesus we recognize God’s great love. In the sacramental act of sharing Communion we remember the gift of Jesus Christ to our world.

All committed followers of Christ are invited to partake, but no one should feel pressured to receive the emblems.

On this Christmas Day, our experience of being together as we share in Communion is an expression of blessing, healing, peace, and community.

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them saying, “Drink from it all, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

—Matthew 26:26–29 NRSV

In preparation let’s sing from Community of Christ Sings 527, “Bread of the World.”
Thoughts for Children

Materials: Nativity set or pictures, paper, crayons.
As you tell the story, hold up or point to each Nativity figure to illustrate the story.
At the conclusion, ask the group and children to sing CCS 426, “Away in a Manger.”
Hand out paper and crayons for the children to take back to their seats. Ask the children to draw pictures of the Nativity scene (Mary, Joseph, Baby Jesus, an angel, shepherds, etc.)