



## A Guide for Spiritual Formation

Theme for Advent:	The First Christmas
Text for the Week:	Luke 2:1-5; Matthew 2:1-7; 13-18
Message for the Week:	The First Christmas: The Politics
Theme for the Week:	Making the choice

## Week 2

### Opening:

What is one low (a bad thing) and one high (a good thing) that happened to you this past week? Write them down and take turns sharing them with the others in your group.

Where have you seen the work of the Holy Spirit in your life this past week?

Share a time when you had to make a difficult/tough choice.

### Preparation:

Spend 1-2 minutes in silence with God to center and prepare yourself for your time with God today.

### Read:

Read / Have two people in your group read [Luke 2:1-5; Matthew 2:1-7; 13-18](#) out loud.

(Clicking this link will bring you to multiple translations.)

As you read and/or listen to the text being read, circle, take note of, highlight, or underline what words, phrases, or ideas grabbed your attention and heart in these verses?

Write them down below and/or share them with those who are with you.

## Respond / Reflect:

We are in the season of Advent. What does the season of Advent mean to you? How do you distinguish it from Christmas?

What types of power does the world covet? What types of power does Jesus have? How are these similar?

Why is the political background in the Christmas story included? Why is it important to know?

How does/should the social and political circumstances into which Jesus was born impact our understanding of the Christmas story?

Why do you think the verses in [Luke 21:25-36](#) are included in the Advent readings of the church calendar?

Wondering questions spark our desire to learn more. What do you wonder about regarding the story for this week?

## “Try It!”

Read a different minor prophet (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) this week than you did last week and see what connections you can make to the Christmas story.

## Prayer:

Spend time in prayer with/for the other people who are with you.

*King of Glory, you are God. You are powerful. Your rule the entire world. We praise you because you are so great. But you became a baby. You were tiny and weak. You were just like us. We praise you because you came, and we look forward to when you will come again. In your name we pray. AMEN.*

## Missional/Spiritual Practice for the Month: Intentional Conversations

During the month of December, practice Intentional Conversations. [Intentional Conversations](#) challenge us to slow down and go much deeper than transactional conversations. This approach to conversation invites us to connect with others at a deeply personal and authentic level – to understand this practice as deeply spiritual where we begin to encounter the presence of Christ that dwells within the soul of each person we meet. As you engage in conversations throughout the day imagine you are greeting the risen Christ during each conversation. Listen deeply and seek to be fully awake to the presence of Christ that dwells deep with the soul of each person you meet. This way of living begins to profoundly impact the care and thoughtfulness with which we approach each conversation as though we were in conversation with God.

Luke 2:1-5

New International Version

The Birth of Jesus

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census that took place while <sup>[a]</sup> Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> And everyone went to their own town to register.

<sup>4</sup> So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

Matthew 2:1-7

New International Version

The Magi Visit the Messiah

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi <sup>[a]</sup> from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

<sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup> "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

<sup>6</sup> "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for out of you will come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel."<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.

Matthew 2:13-18

New International Version

The Escape to Egypt

<sup>13</sup> When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

<sup>14</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, <sup>15</sup> where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>16</sup> When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. <sup>17</sup> Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

<sup>18</sup> "A voice is heard in Ramah,  
weeping and great mourning,  
Rachel weeping for her children  
and refusing to be comforted,  
because they are no more."<sup>[b]</sup>

Luke 2:1-5

The Message

The Birth of Jesus

<sup>1-5</sup> About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So, Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David's town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant.

Matthew 2:1-8

The Message

Scholars from the East

<sup>1-2</sup> After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory—this was during Herod's kingship—a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East. They asked around, "Where can we find and pay homage to the newborn King of the Jews? We observed a star in the eastern sky that signaled his birth. We're on pilgrimage to worship him."

<sup>3-4</sup> When word of their inquiry got to Herod, he was terrified—and not Herod alone, but most of Jerusalem as well. Herod lost no time. He gathered all the high priests and religion scholars in the city together and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?"

<sup>5-6</sup> They told him, "Bethlehem, Judah territory. The prophet Micah wrote it plainly:

It's you, Bethlehem, in Judah's land,

no longer bringing up the rear.

From you will come the leader

who will shepherd-rule my people, my Israel."

<sup>7-8</sup> Herod then arranged a secret meeting with the scholars from the East. Pretending to be as devout as they were, he got them to tell him exactly when the birth-announcement star appeared. Then he told them the prophecy about Bethlehem, and said, "Go find this child. Leave no stone unturned. As soon as you find him, send word and I'll join you at once in your worship."

Matthew 2:13-18

The Message

<sup>13</sup> After the scholars were gone, God's angel showed up again in Joseph's dream and commanded, "Get up. Take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt. Stay until further notice. Herod is on the hunt for this child and wants to kill him."

<sup>14-15</sup> Joseph obeyed. He got up, took the child and his mother under cover of darkness. They were out of town and well on their way by daylight. They lived in Egypt until Herod's death. This Egyptian exile fulfilled what Hosea had preached: "I called my son out of Egypt."

<sup>16-18</sup> Herod, when he realized that the scholars had tricked him, flew into a rage. He commanded the murder of every little boy two years old and under who lived in Bethlehem and its surrounding hills. (He determined that age from information he'd gotten from the scholars.) That's when Jeremiah's revelation was fulfilled:

A sound was heard in Ramah,

weeping and much lament.

Rachel weeping for her children,

Rachel refusing all solace,

Her children gone,

dead and buried.