

Gathering Guide

for Communities and Friends

God is Stranger: Mary and the Stranger, June 16, 2019

The Big Idea

After making various cameo appearances in the Old Testament, God finally turns up to stay in the form of a human baby. Jesus arrived and lived among the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed. He ministered to those ignored by society and criticized the religious leaders who piously considered themselves superior to those Jesus came to serve. The question we must face is this - are we more like Jesus or the religious leaders he opposed?

Where we are in the Bible

The passages of Jesus coming to earth as a baby are very familiar to most Christians. They are found in the early chapters of Matthew and Luke. Matthew 1 and 2 inform us of the ancestry of Jesus, the angel's visit to Joseph, and the appearance of the Magi leading to the trip by Jesus and his family into Egypt. Luke 1 and 2 record the angel's appearance to Mary and to the shepherds on the Bethlehem hillside as the story of the birth of the Christ-child unfolds.

Other scriptures to consider

John 1:1-18

(God "turns up" in the person Jesus)

I John 1:1-4

(The evidence for Jesus)

Philippians 2:1-8

(The humble sacrificial attitude of Jesus)

Luke 4:14-30

Finding a bit of ourselves

- What is your favorite part of the Christmas story as told in Matthew and Luke? Why? What first comes to your mind with you hear the phrase "God with us"? How has God been with you this week?
- Jesus was apparently from a poor family and became a refugee in his early years on earth. What judgements do we sometimes jump to when we see the poor and foreigners in our communities? How do you think God looks at these same people?
- Do we tend to only associate with people in our own social-economic status? When was the last time you showed true hospitality to someone who could not reciprocate? How was it received?

Where do we go from here?

- In Luke 1:52-53 Mary, the mother of Jesus, is praising God and reflecting on his lifting up of the humble and hungry while noting his affliction upon the rulers and rich. Compared to much of the world we live in a powerful and rich society. How can we conduct ourselves in a manner to receive the blessings of God when we are already so rich? What can we learn from the way the rulers and religious leaders reacted to Jesus?
- On page 241 of *God is Stranger* Kandiah says that in the life of Jesus "We see God's identification with the outsider, and we see his invitation to the outsider." Who are the outsiders in our local communities? How about in our country? How have they generally been treated by the church (the church in general)? How have you viewed these outsiders?
- This chapter of *God is Stranger* ends with the question "Where will our hospitality be most costly, most effective, and most appreciated?" Where would this be in your life personally? How about for our church - what opportunities do we have to minister to the poor, the prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed (Luke 4:18)?

Prayer focus

Remember the mind of Christ, who would leave heaven to come to earth to suffer and die for us, as you in prayer:

- Give praise and worship to God for his great immeasurable love for us.
- Open yourself to allowing the Lord to give you the same mind that Jesus himself had to humbly serve others and forego your own rights for the good of others.
- Ask God to lead you to someone this next week who needs your hospitality, and for the courage to risk and the will to sacrifice in order to bring the love of Jesus to them.