



A Family
Christmas



MCCOOK
E • F R E E



Hello McCook E-Free Family!

This Christmas season we invite everyone to gather together and celebrate the promise of Immanuel: God with us. This year we are celebrating Christmas as a family. Family includes those closest to you, and the ones whom you share in life with daily. Whoever you consider your family, we invite you to gather together and dive deeper into the wonder of the incarnation in anticipation of Jesus' arrival as infant child and coming king. Let's come together as family this Christmas and be with one another, just as He is WITH us.

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

This Christmas we encourage you to capture your family moments by taking a pictures. Then share it using **#McCookEFreeFamilyXMas**, or email your photos to communications@mccookefree.org. We would love to be able to share all of the things you and your family are doing this holiday season and share a few photos during our Christmas Eve service.



Purpose of the Christmas Journal:

Christmas is the most celebrated and marketed holiday in our culture. Everyone recognizes Christmas as a season full of celebrations, gifts, Hallmark channel, and holiday hecticness. In contrast to the norm and as disciples of Jesus, Christmas draws our attention to the Son's incarnation and the anticipation of His return. Christmas holds a special place in the Christian calendar, because of who is at the center: Jesus. Jesus calls His disciples to make disciples. This is our mission: *cultivate followers of Jesus to impact the world*. Think of this journal as our Christmas gift to know Jesus, to follow Jesus, to be transformed by Jesus, and be on mission with Jesus in the context of family.

How to Use This Christmas Journal:

The Christmas journal is designed for families, friends, LifeTeams, and LifeStudies. It is for everyone gathering in groups. It includes opportunities and examples to gather together in the family room and in the neighborhood to grow and go together in celebration of God's promise through Jesus.

The Christmas journal is broken down into three gathering types (Family/Friends, LifeTeam, & LifeStudy) choose which type fits your gathering the best, or pick and choose some from all three. These are opportunities and examples, not rules or laws. So take advantage of this Christmas season and spend time together knowing, following, being transformed by, and on mission with Jesus.

As a Family... We encourage everyone to follow along with the sermon series. Plan ahead, designate time daily or weekly, in the morning or evening to gather and participate. Pick a Christmas or Advent devotional (examples are on the back page of this journal). Read, write, ask, discuss and act. Eat a meal around the table together. Plan and invite another family over for supper, lunch, or a weekend gathering. Invite someone to LifeTeam or LifeStudy. Visit someone and bring a dessert to share. Host a LifeStudy at one of the assisted living centers. Share with others the importance of fellowship and Christmas, and enjoy one another's company. Plan a time to serve together, this could be a chore for a neighbor, as a bell ringer for the Salvation Army, during a worship service, at a Christmas event, or in the McCook community.

As a LifeTeam... follow along the sermon series, read scripture, journal your thoughts, share and discuss them with one another. Consider picking a time outside of your regular gathering to celebrate around a meal and encourage one another, or pick a time to serve together at a worship service, at a Christmas event, or with an organization in the McCook community.

As a LifeStudy... continue in your regular topical study and/or follow along with the sermon series. Consider meeting outside of regular time share in a meal or dessert together. serve together help someone in the community, visit someone or somebodies, host your life study at one of the care centers, or senior centers.





Intentional Families
not
Christmas Chaos

Week 1

Scripture: Assorted Scripture



Families:

Review your family's Christmas calendar. What are the most important events on your calendar? What are your commitments and where is your time is spent?

Start today and write out when and how you want to spend time together during Christmas. Set time aside. Included in the back of this Christmas Journal are lists of devotionals and activities for serving, celebrating, and participating. Pick one and begin reading it together.

Plan to decorate your home together. Consider including promises and fulfillments that your family members have experienced over time. Share these stories with one another, or write them down and place them in a gift box, or string them together and wrap them around your Christmas tree.

Object Lesson: Beforehand, wrap an individual piece of candy (i.e. Snickers, Twix, Little Debbie, or Tootsie Pop) in a box. Include a bow and ribbon as part of your wrapping. Talk to your kids or family members about the anticipation for presents on Christmas Day. Next bring out the completely wrapped gift with the individual wrapped candy inside. Take off the bow and make a big deal about how pretty the bow is, completely ignoring the gift. Then, take the ribbon off, continuing to draw attention to wrapping while ignoring the gift. Finally, unwrapping and opening the box, and take off the candy wrapper (remember to over emphasis the extravagance of the process). By now, your family members will all think you are nuts!! Now, pick up the opened candy bar and say, "Oh, this is what this is all about!" Explain, that just like bow, the ribbon, wrapping paper, and even the candy wrapper, our attention and time is taken up by concerts, parties, presents, decorations, and lights that are fun but the real significance of Christmas is the incarnation of the Son, Jesus.

Notes/Reflection:



LifeTeam:

Follow along the sermon series. Reread all the Scripture referenced in the Sunday sermon.

Reflect and write: How do you react to Christmas and the holidays? Do you have any margin for relationships and reflection during the holidays, why? Reflect on the season from Thanksgiving to New Years day. Does it create feelings of anticipation, dread, hope, or frustration? Why? What is the significance of Christmas, and why is it significant? Hint: it is not a single verse, or in a single book.

What is it about the Christmas season that feels out of your control? What needs to happen in your life to create margin to participate in the wonder of the incarnation?

Who will you celebrate this Christmas season with? How will you celebrate with them?

Plan: Set a specific time to gather with your LifeTeam to serve or participate in an activity. We have included a list of options in the back of the Christmas journal.

Pray: Is there someone you should invite to celebrate Christmas with your LifeTeam? A guest, a stranger, an outcast? Read Luke 10:25-37, ask God, "Who is my neighbor?"

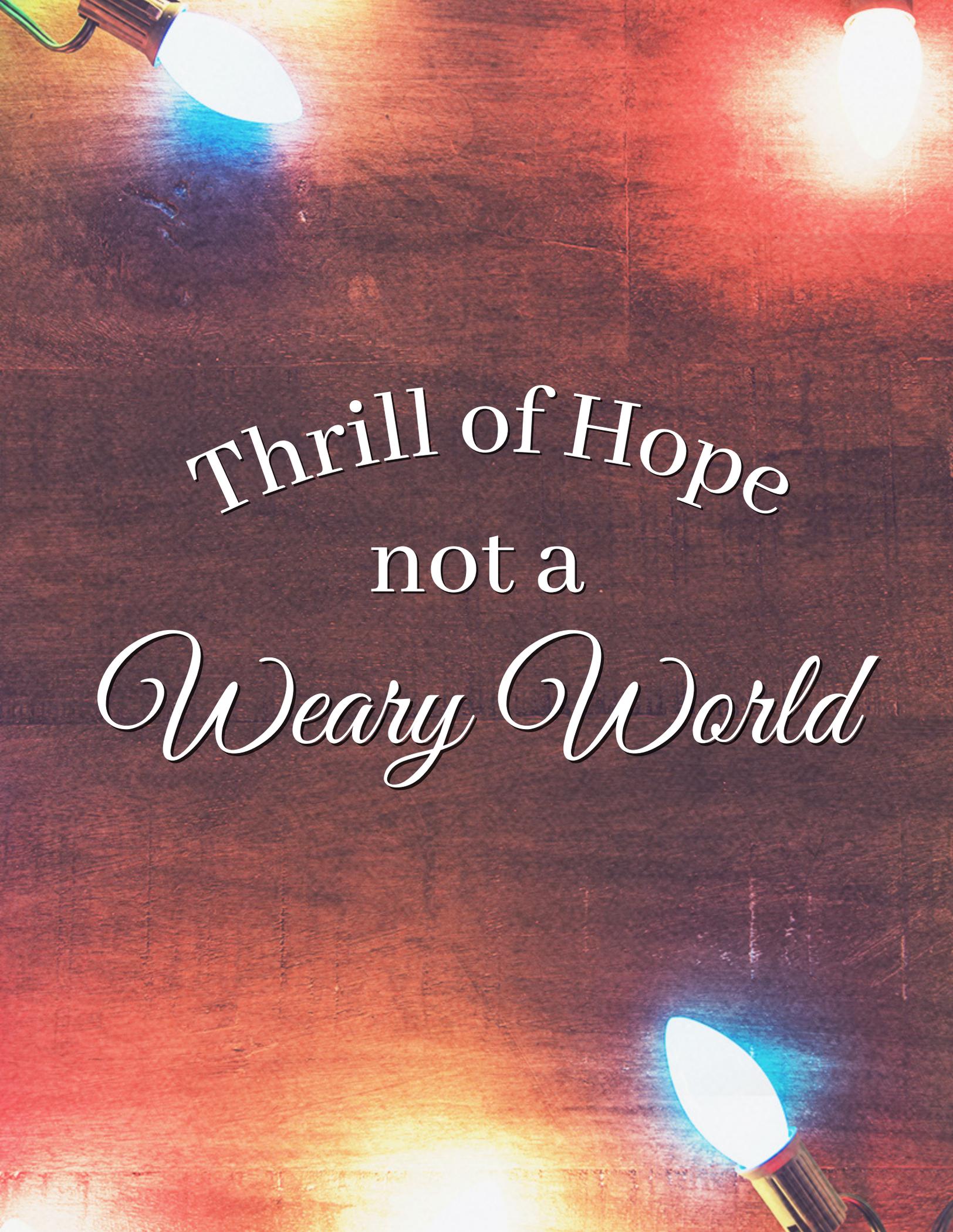


LifeStudy:

Discuss: Reflect on the incarnation. What part of the incarnation brings you the most joy? What part of the incarnation causes you the most wonder? Why is the incarnation so important for a disciple of Jesus? How is Advent/Christmas both a celebration of the Son's incarnation and a promise of Jesus' return?

Plan: Who could you invite to your next LifeStudy? Who could you visit this week? Could your LifeStudy move offsite and gather at one of the assisted living communities?

Pray: For wisdom and discernment during the Christmas hustle. For new perspective, awe and wonder in your reflection on the incarnation. That Jesus would reveal someone you should invite over or reach out to? Read Luke 10:25-37, ask God, "Who is my neighbor?"

The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly wood or stone, with a warm, reddish-brown hue. Several glowing string lights are visible, casting a soft, warm light. One light is in the top left, another in the top right, and a third in the bottom right. The text is centered and reads:

Thrill of Hope
not a

Weary World

Week 2

Scripture: Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-7; Isaiah 9:7; Psalm 89; 2 Samuel 7:16



Families:

Share with each other, what are you excited for this Christmas season, and what causes you stress? Read through the Christmas Story in Luke? Listen to Mary's Song? Why is she hopeful? Why is she nervous? Think about Joseph and Mary's circumstance, how would you feel if you were in a similar circumstance as Joseph and Mary?

Make a plan. Who in your neighborhood could use some hope? How can your family participate in bringing hope to someone in your community?

Object Lesson: Materials needed: Construction paper, paper doilies, glue stick. Enough for each person in your family. Cut triangles and circles out of the construction paper. One for each family member. Fold paper doilies, enough for each family member. Using the glue stick, glue the paper doilies (angel wings) to the cut out triangle (angel body) and to the cut out circle (angel head). Decorate the angels using colors, glitter, etc. Finally, tape a piece of yarn in a hoop and hang on your Christmas tree or around your home. Discuss as family. If you were Mary how would have responded to the "Angel of the Lord" visiting you?

Continue to gather as a family at your designated time reading, discussing and praying through your Christmas devotional. Remember to capture your family moments by taking a pictures. Then share them using **#McCookEFreeFamilyXMas**, or email your photos to communications@mccookefree.org.

Notes/Reflection:



LifeTeam:

Reflect and Write: Follow along the sermon series. Reread all the Scripture from the Sunday sermon and listed in the journal. Think over your past Christmases, share about a time that was full of hope. Now, share of a time that was full of weary or dread? What are the major differences and circumstances. What are the roots of hope and weary? Describe how you have experienced God's presence in both times of hope and times of weariness. (Your description could be described in spiritual, physical, emotional, or relational terms)

Plan: How can your LifeTeam bring hope to someone? Share your ideas, and choose one to participate in.

Pray: Read Matthew 25:31-46. Ask God, "How can we be the same hope we experience through Jesus to our neighbors?" Pray for courage and boldness to act as God reveals names and relationships to your LifeTeam.



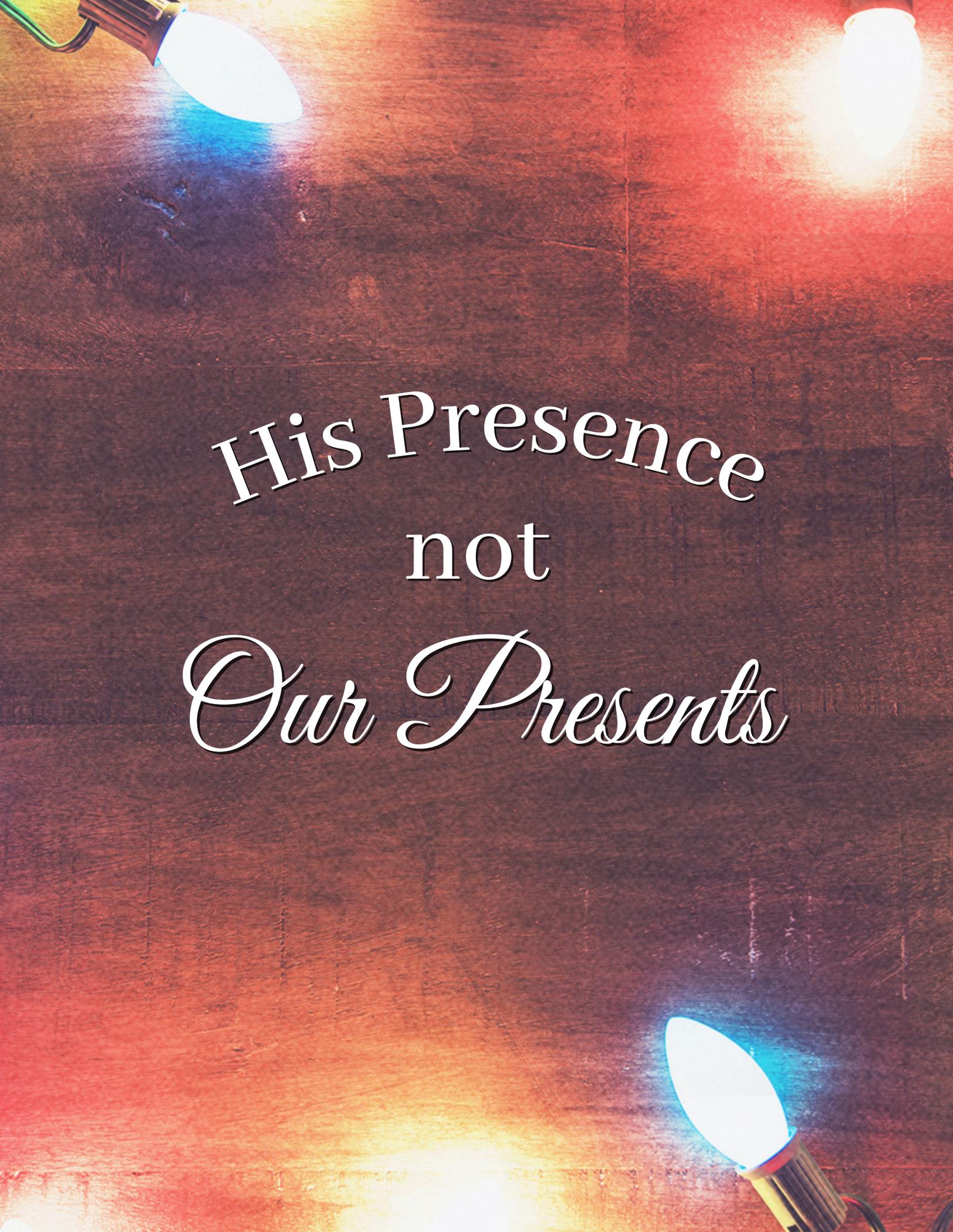
LifeStudy:

Discuss: Look up Webster's definition of hope and weary. Using a concordance, google, or any word search tool find other occurrences where hope and weariness occur in the Bible. Read through the context and the audience from Luke 1 and 2, what stands out to you and why? Are hope, joy, peace and love the same as happiness, cheer, and fun? Why or why not? Can we experience hope while at the same time suffering in our personal circumstances, why or why not? What is the relationship between hope, persevering and suffering?

As disciples of Jesus, how do we bear witness to others the hope we have from following Jesus?

Plan: Who needs to hear, see, or feel the hope of Jesus this week, and how can your LifeStudy bring hope?

Pray: Reread Matthew 7:7-8 Pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit. Pray to be a witness of the hope you know and found by following Jesus.



His Presence
not
Our Presents

Week 3

Scripture: Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23; John 1:14-18



Families:

Immanuel means God with us. Immanuel draws our attention to His presence in creation, our community, and our lives. Take time and go around the room describe how God is with you individually and with your family. This week spend time with each other, designate a meal together, talk about your day, pray. Be with each other. Spend this week together and do an activity together. Decorate your home, serve. Sit with each other at the end of the day, reflect on the time together. What did you enjoy, what did you struggle with, and how did you get through it together? Pray for one another. Go around the room and share with one another a word of encouragement and a word of growth, then take turns praying.

When we celebrate Christmas, are we like Herod and feel that Christmas is all about the gifts we receive, or are we like the wisemen, pursuing Jesus while offering gifts of thanksgiving?

Object Lesson: If your family has not yet put up a Nativity pick a time this week to put it up. Leave Jesus aside and wrap Him in a gift and place the gift the under the tree. While you do this, ask, "If you were the wisemen, what types of gifts would bring to Jesus?" Christmas morning, unwrap Jesus and place Him in the Nativity set.

Continue to gather as a family at your designated time reading, discussing and praying through your Christmas devotional. Remember to capture your family moments by taking a pictures. Then share them using **#McCookEFreeFamilyXMas**, or email your photos to communications@mccookeefree.org.

Notes/Reflection:



LifeTeam:

Reflect and Write: Disciples of Jesus have been referred to as “the hands and feet of Jesus,” emphasizing His felt presence through His disciples in relationships with their neighbors. Think of a time when someone was present with you in a time of joy, sorrow, suffering, or achievement. What about their presence stands out to you? Why did it make a difference or what was its significance? Now, think about a time when no one was present. What about absence stands out to you? Why can being present with others be easy or relaxed, and difficult or uncomfortable? Search your heart, where is the excitement and the hesitation regarding our presence with others? Share your responses with one another.

Plan: Who and how can your LifeTeam be present for one another or someone in need of Jesus? Remember this activity centers on “With” not “For” you should be physically present in it.

Pray: Reread Matthew 7:7-8 Pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit. Pray that His presence would be known in you and through your LifeTeam.



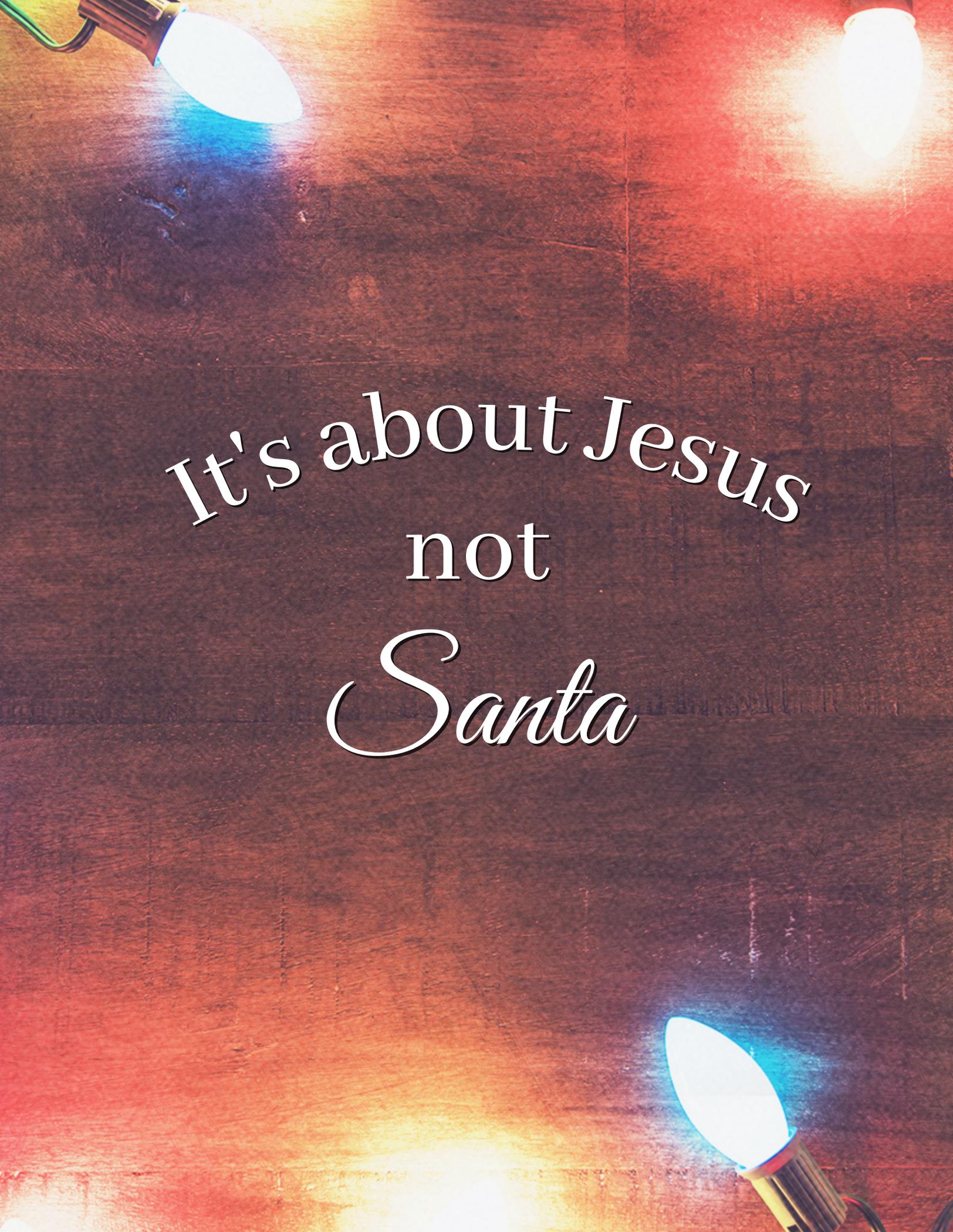
LifeStudy:

Discuss: Look up the word Theophany. Find other examples in the Bible where theophany takes place. What are the differences between the events, and how does the incarnation stand out from the rest? “With” is a preposition. What are other prepositions used in relationship to Jesus, and how do they impact our understanding of God.

Plan: How can your LifeStudy spend time “with” one another outside of your regular meeting time.

Pray: As you have walk through this Christmas season with one another take time to pray for each other, the people you have met with, and the community around you. Pray for relationships and impact. Prepare for your hearts, minds and bodies to celebrate the incarnation.

Notes/Reflection:

The background is a dark, textured wooden surface. It is illuminated by several warm white Christmas lights. One light is in the top left corner, another in the top right, and a third in the bottom right. The lighting creates a warm, golden glow across the wood grain.

It's about Jesus
not
Santa

The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly wood or stone, with a warm, reddish-brown hue. Four glowing light bulbs are positioned at the corners: top-left, top-right, bottom-left, and bottom-right. The light from the bulbs creates a soft, warm glow on the surrounding surface.

Go and Tell
not

Clean up & Move On

Week 4

Scripture: Luke 2:8-20; Matthew 2:1-12; Acts 1:6-11; Romans 10:8-15



Families:

Back in the day, Christmas began on the 25th and continued for 12 days until the Epiphany, which was the celebration of the wisemen who received the good news of the incarnation and took it to the world. Reread the story of the shepherds found in Luke. Reread the story of the wisemen in Matt, what stands out to you? Why do you think God chose to tell the shepherds and the wisemen about Jesus, and not the Pharisees or people of influence and prominence? Who is God leading you to go, show, and tell about Jesus? Who will you disciple in 2022? Who will disciple you in 2022?



LifeTeam:

Take time this week to plan and be intentional for 2022. Who can your LifeTeam invite to join? How can you be involved in the community and be a witness of Jesus to the people around your LifeTeam? Make notes, think of ideas, and be in prayer. Whenever you plan to meet regularly, share with one another your thoughts and the excitement around discipling and making disciples. If you have rest time, choose a good book to read. One that challenges and encourages your relationship with God and with others.



LifeStudy:

Think about how and who your LifeStudy can invite and invest in during 2022. What are those books you want to dive deeper into? Who are the authors you would like to learn from? Write down ideas and thoughts you would like to share with your LifeStudy for 2022. Make a list of books you would like to read, podcasts you would like to listen to, and people you would like to share in conversation with. How has LifeStudy equipped and encouraged you to go, show, and tell the people around about following Jesus?

Notes/Reflection:



Christmas Resources

Devotional Options Available on Amazon

Unwrapping the Greatest Gift, "Ann Voskamp"

Come Let Us Adore Him, "Paul David Tripp"

Tidings of Comfort and Joy, "Mark Yarbrough"

Jesus Calling for Christmas, "Sarah Young"

Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus, "Nancy Guthrie"

The Dawning of Indestructible Joy, "John Piper"

The First Songs of Christmas, "Nancy Demoss Wolgemuth"

Our Daily Bread: Celebrating Jesus - Pick up at the Next Step Center

Family Advent Guide 2021 - Or pick up at the Next Step Center

Online Options

YouVersion: Download App and Search "Christmas"

RightNow Media: Download, Sign Up, and Search "Christmas"

<https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Account/Invite/McCookEfree>





Christmas Activities

McCook Community:

Friday, Dec. 3: Hayrack Ride at 5p

Saturday, Dec. 4: Noel at Norris Park at 4:00p - 6:00p

Saturday, Dec. 4: Christmas Light Parade at 6:30p - 7:30p

Sunday, Dec. 5: LAFF Cookies and Caroling following second service

Dec. 4-5: Living Nativity at Peace Lutheran at 4p-7p

Saturday, Dec. 18: Reindeer Run at 11a

Sunday, Dec 19: Wear an Ugly Sweater to church

Nov 27th - Dec 30th: Free Family movies at Carver Cinemas on Saturdays at 10:30a & 12:15p and Sundays at 12:15p

Cambridge Community:

Nov-Dec: Shop Chamber and play BINGO to win \$100 in Chamber Bucks, Bingo cards at participating businesses, 10 winners

Tuesday, Nov. 30: Downtown Light Pole Decorating at 4PM

Thursday, Dec. 9: Winter Night Market from 4-8PM downtown

Sunday, Dec. 19: "The Star" movie matinee 3PM at school auditorium

Oberlin Community:



The Christmas Story:

The Incarnation through the Gospels

[1] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

[2] He was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. [4] In him was life, and the life was the light of men. [5] The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

[14] And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

[18] Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, [26] In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, [28] And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" [29] But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. [30] And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. [31] And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. [32] He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, [33] and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

[34] And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" [35] And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. [36] And behold, your relative Elizabeth, in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. [37] For nothing will be impossible with God." [38] And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.



46] And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, [47] and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, [48] for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; [49] for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. [50] And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. [51] He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; [52] he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; [53] he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. [54] He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, [55] as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

So before Mary and Joseph came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

[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 great 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.

[1] Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, [2] saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." [3] When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; [4] and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. [5] They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: [6] "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." [7] Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. [8] And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." [9] After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. [10] When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. [11] And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. [16] From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another. [17] For the law was given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. [18] No one has ever seen God. But only the Son, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us.





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