## Breaking In Advent Study Week 4

Below is a guide for your group to dig deeper into this week's advent sermon. I recommend following each step but also allowing for your group to explore what comes to your hearts and minds and allow space for God to Break In.

Pastor John

Opening Prayer

When we gather together, the best way to begin is with a word of prayer. As a group, please choose someone to lead your opening prayer.

Introductions

Please go around the group and introduce yourself by name and then answer this icebreaker question:

What is your family's can't-miss Christmas activity?



## Group Promise

We value this time together and want to ensure that all feel safe and heard. Below are your promises to each other. Please read each one individually and ask for a group consensus that all are in agreement.

- 1. We will do our best to attend each meeting and to be on time.
- 2. We will listen with open hearts.
- 3. We will be compassionate and affirming to others.
- 4. We will share time equally amongst each other.
- 5. Anyone has the right to pass on any question.
- 6. We will not give advice.
- 7. Each individual will speak only for themselves.
- 8. We will all engage as much as possible, and not just be observers.
- 9. Each individual is accountable for their own growth.
- 10. We will all keep each other in our prayers
- 11. We will respect the confidentiality of each other. This is strictly required. What is said in the group stays in the group. If you want to tell someone outside of the group what you said in the group, that's up to you, but do not tell what anyone else says. We will extend this respect to one another.





Give the group a minute to reflect before inviting responses to the following questions and then give everyone a chance to respond.

## How is it with your soul?

- Given the ups and downs that life throws at everyone,
   what is the state of your inner being today?
- Think back over the past week. What was your highest high (the time you felt most encouraged / closest to God) and your lowest low (felt most discouraged / distant from God)? And how are you feeling right now (encouraged/discouraged/somewhere in between)?





Read Matthew 1:1-25 (I am using the NRSVue translation.)

A good portion of Joseph's story in the Nativity revolves around his betrothal to Mary. In the ancient near east, betrothal was a much more formal covenant or contract than in the modern world. A couple would often be betrothed for the period of a year or more and during that time they would not be living as husband and wife, but would still be considered part of an unbreakable relationship. That is, if one or other party was to break the betrothal covenant, it would be considered adultery by law. It would also have significant legal consequences. Within the Hebrew Bible there were two specific responses to perceived adultery on the part of a betrothed woman: the betrothed man could "put her aside quietly," or could bring legal charges and have her executed by the community (Deuteronomy 22:22; Numbers 5:22-27). This is all significant because of Joseph's response to God's call in the midst of this very difficult situation. "Biblically" speaking, Joseph only had two options; God, however, had other plans, and Joseph responded to God's call.

We don't often pay much attention to the genealogies in scripture; which makes sense, because if we don't know what to look for, they can seem terribly boring! Here are a couple of things to look for in Matthew's genealogy: first, notice that Matthew divides the genealogy into three groups of 14 names. This is significant because numbers were often highly symbolic in Hebrew literature, and the number 14 was often related to the name David. Each letter in the Hebrew alphabet had a corresponding number, and the corresponding numbers for the consonants in David's name were four, six, and four (D, V, D=David); and this is





important because one of the primary ways that Matthew talks about who Jesus is, is as the son of David, the one who would become the new "king like David." Here, Matthew notes that Jesus is a descendent of David through the line of his earthly father, Joseph.

One interesting note about this passage that often gets lost is the identification of Mary as fulfilling prophecy by being a virgin. Matthew's gospel connects this to Isaiah 7:14, which says "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel." (NRSVue) You may note that in this translation, the woman in question is not called a virgin, but just a "young woman." This has become a center for debate in modern times, about whether or not this passage truly teaches the virgin birth. I don't think, however, that we need to be terribly worried about that debate. Isaiah's prophecy was originally about a child that was going to be born in Isaiah's time. Matthew, however, in writing his gospel, saw intended this passage to be taken up into the purposes of God to foreshadow the miraculous birth of Immanuel, God with us, Jesus.



- 1. What do you think Joseph's plans might have been before this?
- 1. How has God moved us forward in terms of how we relate to sin? The Law?
- 1. How has God broken in to your plans? How have you responded?

## Drayer Regnests

Please share with the group any prayer requests you may have this week. These could be things you are grateful for, people in your life you are praying for, or places in your own life that you desire God's presence. It is not a requirement to share a prayer request.

And then ask someone to close in prayer.

