

BLUEPRINT

4 SEASONAL  
GUIDE

ADVENT

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NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2018



## THE CHURCH'S LITURGICAL CYCLE

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*“The church year has seasons of darkness, of light, of sorrow, of rejoicing, of just getting through. Our lives have such seasons too. By incorporating these experiences, the church year hallows them, reminding us that all time is sacred because God is present in it.”*

- Kimberlee Conway Ireton, The Circle of  
Seasons: Meeting God in the Church Year

Kimberlee Conway Ireton speaks of the cyclical, circular nature of the church year which provides us with repeated opportunities to live out various aspects of our faith and to see life through the lens of the Christ-story.

She says; “We can grow in, with and through the seasons of the church year. Some years those seasons will align with

what is happening in our lives. Other years, they will not. But the invitation to wait, prepare, repent, celebrate, receive and rejoice is always extended.”

The invitation for us is to opt into this new way of marking time. So this year, Blueprint is preparing seasonal guides to provoke and accompany us as we journey together.

# ADVENT

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## A TIME FOR PREPARATION

The fourth seasonal guide for 2018 journeys through Advent. Advent is all about waiting, and preparing to celebrate the fact that Jesus came to earth to be with us. It's about expectant hope, and remembering that we should be ready to celebrate the return of Jesus at the second coming.

While we wait for Christ to come again and bring all things to completion, we are to be alert and active. At this time of the year, the kind of activity that the world invites us to is frenzied shopping and overconsumption.

We can be filled with a longing to shut ourselves off from normal life, to consume our way to joy and peace. To have hope in the new year that our discipline and personal resolve will make things better.

But this is not the kind of activity Jesus calls us to. Jesus calls us to find hope, peace and joy in him and to share that with others in loving action. Certainly, Jesus loved to eat and drink. He himself received gifts both as a baby and as an adult. He also stole away to spend time alone and with his close friends.

Food and gifts and times of rest may be blessings from God that you can look forward to receiving this season. But as you anticipate Christmas, we hope this guide will help you to wait and watch for Christ, and will

direct you to a deeper knowing of the goodness and love of God for you. May you be reminded of the wonder of God's love this season, and be filled anew with peace, joy, hope and love through Christ Jesus the Lord!

4 NOVEMBER

# WEEK ONE

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PEACE

———— JEREMIAH 33: 14-16 ————

*‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.*

*‘In those days and at that time*

*I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line;  
he will do what is just and right in the land.*

*In those days Judah will be saved  
and Jerusalem will live in safety.*

*This is the name by which it will be called:*

*The Lord Our Righteous Saviour.’*



The Israelites anticipated the coming of Jesus as a military leader, to deliver them from the superpower empires of the time, interpreting safety as freedom from oppression. And yet, the promise of Jesus' arrival was described in Isaiah as the coming of the Prince of Peace.

Throughout Jeremiah 33 the promise of restoration is repeated - a Righteous Saviour who will bring justice, rightness, safety. Both prophets speak of Jesus as the one who both brings shalom and is shalom. Shalom is the Hebrew word for peace, but it encapsulates much more than an absence of conflict. It means completion, full and permanent, which takes what is broken and puts something better in its place.

We see that Jesus brings completion to these promises of God, and as we look back, we watch the people of the Old Testament waiting expectantly for the person we now recognise as Jesus. However, they did not have the same luxury. To His chosen people, God had dropped off the radar; after these words from people like Isaiah and Jeremiah, for 400 years there were no prophecies, no prophets, just static. So they held their breath, waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled for them, and for the shalom of God to be seen amongst them.

In Jesus, this deep desire for restoration was met in ways no one could have predicted. Jesus, as God incarnate, came to earth to rebuilds us, to make us whole and complete, drawing us back to God for good.



## RESPONSE

- 01** Think about a relationship that you have which is strained.. What is it like to imagine Jesus coming as both a humble child and the Prince of Peace into those situations?

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- 02** Is there a person, place or situation that you could continue to pray for God's shalom to restore this advent?

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- 03** What has God been speaking to you about? What will you do to respond to this in the coming week?

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11 NOVEMBER

## WEEK TWO

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HOPE

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ISAIAH 9 1:7

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*Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan —*

*The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of deep darkness  
a light has dawned.  
You have enlarged the nation  
and increased their joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as people rejoice at the harvest,  
as warriors rejoice  
when dividing the plunder.  
For as in the day of Midian's defeat,  
you have shattered  
the yoke that burdens them,*

*the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor.  
Every warrior's boot used in battle  
and every garment rolled in blood  
will be destined for burning,  
will be fuel for the fire.  
For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the greatness of his government and peace  
there will be no end.  
He will reign on David's throne  
and over his kingdom,  
establishing and upholding it  
with justice and righteousness  
from that time on and forever.  
The zeal of the Lord Almighty  
will accomplish this.*

**I**saiah was written in a time of real suffering, when empires were invading and ruling over Israel.

In this passage, the people are given promises of a new leader, one that will rule like the great kings of the past. Israel are implored to trust in promises without seeing, they are implored to wait expectantly, they are implored to hope.

The description of the child may have been hard to comprehend at the time. In hindsight though we know these promises were fulfilled in the person of Jesus.

In this season of advent, we too are called to hope in the not yet seen; to continue to expect the promises of God will be fulfilled. How do we do that? We have the promises of what will come in the Bible already- it's a map that marks where we are going, but we still have to complete the journey through both joy and suffering.

Lighting a candle each night in advent can be a reminder to us that we are guided through the darkness on this journey. Hope can be the Christ-given light that allows us to believe and live into the joy of the promise already, despite the darkness.

**RESPONSE**

**01** Where do I need to believe in the promises of God in my life?

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**02** What lies are stopping me from remembering hope in the darkness?

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**03** What has God been speaking to you about? What will you do to respond to this in the coming week?

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18 NOVEMBER

## WEEK THREE

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JOY

— ISAIAH 51: 4-8 —

*“Listen to me, my people;  
hear me, my nation:  
Instruction will go out from me;  
my justice will become a light to the nations.  
My righteousness draws near speedily,  
my salvation is on the way,  
and my arm will bring justice to the  
nations.  
The islands will look to me  
and wait in hope for my arm.  
Lift up your eyes to the heavens,  
look at the earth beneath;  
the heavens will vanish like smoke,  
the earth will wear out like a garment  
and its inhabitants die like flies.  
But my salvation will last forever,  
my righteousness will never fail.*

*“Hear me, you who know what is right,  
you people who have taken my instruction to heart:  
Do not fear the reproach of mere mortals  
or be terrified by their insults.  
For the moth will eat them up like a garment;  
the worm will devour them like wool.  
But my righteousness will last forever,  
my salvation through all generations.”*



Whether by choice or not, all of us experience disorientation in our lives: transitioning between jobs, finishing school or study, moving cities, experiencing loss and change that throws us out of routine. The prophet Isaiah speaks to a disoriented people in this scripture, reminding them of who they are – God’s chosen people – and reminding them of God’s promises to them. Isaiah calls God’s people to be rooted in truth.

Joy is the heart-knowledge of the freedom born of this good news. It’s not the stiff-upper-lip denial of the darkness of the world or the struggles of life.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul refers to being ‘full of sorrow and yet rejoicing’. Joy is a posture, acknowledging the ebb and flow and the grief of life, while choosing to live into God’s promises. Joy is the embodiment of the freedom of the gospel, a choice to live in to redemption, restoration and reconciliation.

Jesus came to embody God’s character for us, assuring us that redemption, restoration and reconciliation are not just empty words but our current and coming reality. We can live as a forgiven and forgiving people, loved and loving, living lives of longing for and belonging in the Kingdom.



**RESPONSE**

**01** Where are you experiencing disorientation that you need God to speak into?

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**02** What is the heart-knowledge that can speak joy into this situation?

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**03** What has God been speaking to you about? What will you do to respond to this in the coming week?

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25 NOVEMBER

## WEEK FOUR

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LOVE

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1 JOHN 4:9-11

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*This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*



**H**ow do we know the depth of someone's love for us? The psychologist M. Scott Peck says "our love becomes...real only through exertion - through the fact that for someone (or for oneself) we take an extra step or walk an extra mile. Love is not effortless. To the contrary, love is effortful." In other words, love is defined by what someone is willing to give or exert to express it.

In this passage John says that God's expression of love was the gift of his **ONLY** son. Not one son of many, but his most precious and only one. John challenges us with the kind of God that would surrender something so precious in order that we would know his love for us.

Further to this, John says this wasn't given to us because we loved God, but in spite of all of our attempts to avoid and deny him. Jesus is the extraordinarily generous and precious Christmas gift given to your most apathetic and distant friend. We are the beneficiaries of an absurd and scandalous injustice.

Romans 5:8 says that God proved his love to us while we still hated him. This is Grace: a free and generous gift regardless of our response. At the end of this passage, John challenges us that this is the same kind of love God asks us to show one another.

**RESPONSE**

**01** When is a time you have been struck with the gravity or power of God's great love for us expressed in sending his son?

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**02** Where have you seen this kind of generous love lived out between people today?

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**03** What has God been speaking to you about? What will you do to respond to this in the coming week?

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2 DECEMBER

## WEEK FIVE

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ELIZABETH &  
ZECHARIAH

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LUKE 1:5-17

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*In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.*

*Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshippers were praying outside.*

*Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been*

*heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”*



This passage begins with Elizabeth, a woman who can't conceive a child. She refers to this as her disgrace (v. 25), but to an audience familiar with the scriptures they know God is about to move.

As with Sarah in Genesis 18, Rebekah in Genesis 25, and Rachel in Genesis 29, God has always been in the business of crafting redemption stories out of narratives of disgrace, and creating life where there was none.

Elizabeth's husband, Zechariah was one of thousands of priests who worked in the temple. Only once in his life would he be the one who got to serve in the Holy

Place where God's presence dwelled, and this is that moment. This would have been the highlight of his priestly 'career'. As Zechariah is lighting incense an angel appears alongside him and declares that Elizabeth will have a child. This will be John the Baptist, the one who will announce that the Messiah is coming.

Luke tells us that John's role was "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." In John's ministry he called people to repentance for their sins through baptism. He declared: "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" (John 1:23)



**RESPONSE**

**01** What strikes you as powerful about this passage?

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**02** John came asking the people to get their hearts right with God. How might God be asking you to get right with him and to prepare a way for Christ in your heart?

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**03** What has God been speaking to you about? What will you do to respond to this in the coming week?

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9 DECEMBER

## WEEK SIX

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MARY AND  
THE ANGEL

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LUKE 1:26-38

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*In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."*

*Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."*

*“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”*

*The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.”*

*“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.*



Within the small space of time Mary's world has been turned upside down. She is an ordinary girl, engaged to be married. As a Jew she would have been living as a minority under Roman occupation, but suddenly finds herself called to serve in God's miraculous plan.

The angel greets Mary and assures her that God is doing something good, she does not need to be afraid. Mary moves from fear, surprise and uncertainty to a humble proclamation of her willingness to partner with God. Mary desires to be faithful to God's call despite the possibility that being found pregnant might cost her the reputation of her family and marriage.

A beautiful part of this story is that Mary is given a companion to celebrate the miraculous work of God – her cousin Elizabeth. Mary's faith is emboldened knowing that God has been at work in the life of another. Mary and Elizabeth can testify together to the work of God.

Here we see the goodness of God at; providing a confidant to share and celebrate with. Here we see part of God's heart – that we could co-labour with Him in bringing about his plans on earth, and that we would alongside us in faith as we humbly submit ourselves to God's purposes and plans.

**RESPONSE**

**01** How do you think it would have been for Mary to tell her family about this encounter with the angel?

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**02** What does reading this scripture tell you about the Character of God?  
How have you been encouraged or challenged in your faith by other Christians?

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**03** What has God been speaking to you about? What will you do to respond to this in the coming week?

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16 DECEMBER

## WEEK SEVEN

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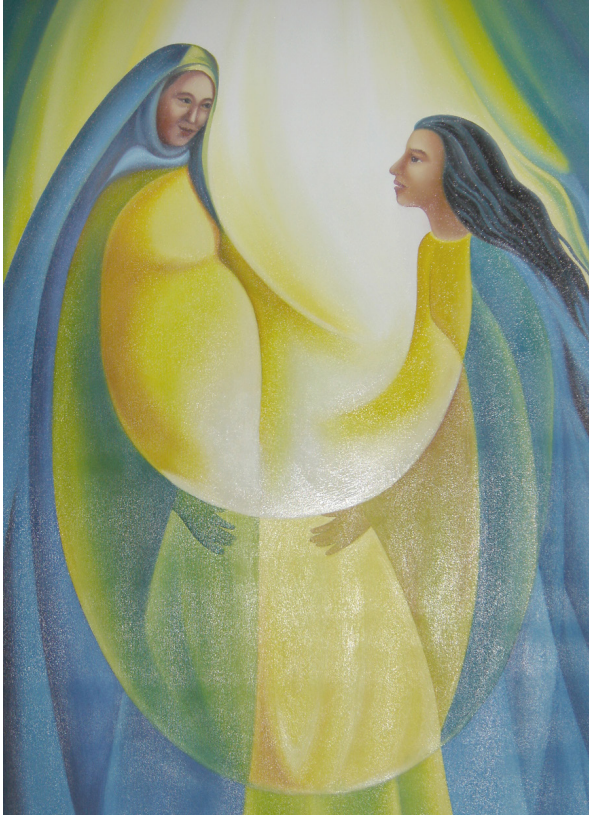
### THE SONG OF MARY

LUKE 1:46-56

*And Mary said:*

*“My soul glorifies the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant.  
From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me —  
holy is his name.  
His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.  
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost  
thoughts.  
He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.  
He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.*

*He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering to be merciful  
to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
just as he promised our ancestors.”*



**M**ary has just been greeted by her cousin Elizabeth with a word of prophecy and suddenly she brims over in song. Imagine her arriving in Elizabeth's door, dusty and weary from the travel to see her cousin pregnant, and then have this miraculous work of God in her life confirmed by another. What a gift!

Mary testifies to the long story that God has been writing with His people. She remembers his covenant with Abraham and how he has saved his humble people from the proud. Mary speaks of how in God, those who are hungry are made full. Mary speaks of the heart of God, and of the nature of his

kingdom, which is about to be established in her son. Mary's song calls for us to remember the wisdom and mystery of a God who is working out his purposes on a scale much larger than us, and yet cares deeply for us, his humble servants.

Mary is no doubt deeply blessed by spending time with Elizabeth. Imagine the conversations Mary and Elizabeth must have had during those three months; two pregnant women, anticipating a prophet and a messiah who would arrive as helpless babies. Here we see God doing miraculous things through ordinary people, and providing for them as he calls them into greater sacrifice.



**RESPONSE**

- 01** Spend some time imagining all the people who have passed down their faith so that you might know Jesus today. How does it feel to think about this bigger story of God?

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- 02** Both Mary and Elizabeth were humble enough to trust God's leading. Where has God been leading you this year? Spend some time reflecting upon where you have seen God's provision.

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- 03** What has God been speaking to you about? What will you do to respond to this in the coming week?

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23 DECEMBER

## WEEK EIGHT

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CHRISTMAS DAY

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LUKE 2:6-21

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*While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.*

*And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”*

*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,  
“Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.”*

*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”*

*So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*

*On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.*



Jesus is born! Lying cosily in a feeding trough, the miraculous saviour of Israel, the king, is born in a barn. Meanwhile, some shepherds are doing what they do every night, watching over their sheep when they receive a miraculous announcement.

The extraordinary breaks into the ordinary. Majesty appears in the mundane. The story of Israel, the story of humankind is changed forever.

God came to earth, fully human, in Jesus. Born into the humblest circumstances, at Christmas time we celebrate that God came to be with his people in a powerful new way. In Jesus the fullness of God was revealed - God came fully into

the experience of his people by becoming one of them. The people of Israel had seen fragments of God's character but now in Jesus they would see, (and indeed all the world would see) the full revelation of truth and love of God.

The good news of Jesus birth is proclaimed to some ordinary shepherds, who then share this good news of what they've seen and heard to others. At the other end of Jesus life he commissions his disciples to share the story of the good news with all peoples, everywhere. What is this good news? That a saviour has come to make a way for all people to be at peace with God, and for this peace to reign in all the earth. The good news is Jesus - Emmanuel, God is with us!

**RESPONSE**

**01** What has the good news of Jesus meant in your life?

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**02** How can you communicate the joy of this good news to your friends and family today?

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**03** What has God been speaking to you about? What will you do to respond to this in the coming week?

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