

Christmas Round The World - Discussion questions

Advent 2018 (2-29 December)

This Advent we are celebrating Christmas round the world - exploring the various traditions that bring us together across oceans, across languages, and across time.

We want to highlight the global aspect of Christmas, a festival celebrated all over the world in a number of different ways. What can we learn from how others celebrate? Are there traditions we would like to bring into our home or our local community to help us see this familiar story in a new light?

We live in an interconnected world, 'a global village', a noisy, colourful, vibrant place. How can the story of Christmas - of God's journey to our world as a vulnerable refugee with a message of hope - inspire us in new ways to address inequality, conflict and suffering in our world?

The following discussion questions are designed to accompany the [Christmas Round The World Resource Pack](#) to help adapt the material for small group work. They are divided into 4 parts to correspond with the 4 weeks of the Daily Worship theme.

These questions are just a guideline and there is no need to go through all questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose what interests your group.

Part 1: Expectation, longing and anticipation		
<p>Conversation starters:</p> <p>Is Christmas something you look forward to, or something you dread? Something you long for, or something you'd sooner miss?</p> <p>Do you have favourite Christmas traditions which you like to do each year?</p> <p>In what ways does your Christmas link you to other countries? We live in an increasingly interconnected world. Perhaps you have a tree from Norway, a turkey from Brazil, a playlist from India and you're posting a card to Tanzania?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What countries does your food connect you to? • Are you travelling somewhere or welcoming guests from anywhere this Christmas? • Are you sending or receiving cards or presents from round the world? 	<p>Read Isaiah 2: 2-5</p> <p>This reading anticipates the coming of the Messiah who will set things right and it ends with an appeal to "come, let us walk in the light of the Lord."</p> <p>In the Northern hemisphere, December is a time when the metaphors of light coming into a world of darkness are made literal by the need for light during shortening days and lengthening nights.</p> <p>Many Christmas traditions around the world centre around light such as lighting weekly advent candles or the 'Christingle' tradition from Germany (brightly decorated oranges with a candle in them).</p> <p>How does the darkness of this time of year make you feel? (Or if you live in the southern hemisphere how does the long light make you feel?) Many people report their mood and energy being negatively affected by long periods of low light.</p> <p>Where are the dark places in our world (literal and metaphorical) where we would like to see more light?</p>	<p>Read Romans 13: 11-14</p> <p>What would the 'armour of light' look like? It's a strange and intriguing metaphor.</p> <p>What are practical everyday ways we could "lay aside the works of darkness" and put on "the armour of light"?</p> <p>Think of specific examples of things you could do this Advent to make a difference, to bring more light into the world around you.</p>

Part 2: Messengers and messages		
<p>Conversation starters:</p> <p><i>If you are organising a group you could bring along some example Christmas cards to prompt discussion.</i></p> <p>Do you enjoy sending Christmas cards?</p> <p>Why do we send cards to one another at this time of year?</p> <p>Mini Christmas Card Reflection</p> <p>Cards are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an image • a message • a gesture • a relationship <p>What images do we want to share with one another this Christmas?</p> <p>What do we want to say to our friends, loved ones, and the wider world this Christmas?</p> <p>What little gestures can we do to let others know we are thinking of them?</p> <p>What relationships do we want to care for this Christmas? Perhaps people we have lost touch with, or that we would like to know better.</p>	<p>Read Luke 1: 68-79</p> <p>This Christmas we are celebrating Christmas Round the World. We are remembering that the message of Christmas - of joy, peace and love in the midst of darkness, turmoil, and oppression - is a message for the entire world. In the words of Zechariah's prophecy "By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."</p> <p>Many forces in our contemporary world try to divide us - for political ends or to maximise profit margins. But Christmas shouldn't divide us - it is for everyone and reminds us of how we are united - God came to earth for the love of us all - not just some of us.</p> <p>As we have already considered, we live in an interconnected world where our actions and the choices we make - such as what we eat and what we buy - have an impact on others.</p> <p>Where in our lives do we ask for guidance so that we can walk 'into the way of peace'?</p>	<p>Read Matthew 3: 1-6</p> <p>If you met John the Baptist today - standing on Buchanan Street in Glasgow, or another busy centre - what would you make of him?</p> <p>How much are we affected by what a messenger looks like?</p> <p>Have you ever missed an important message because you discounted the messenger?</p> <p>Or, conversely, been drawn to listen to a message because the messenger was especially compelling?</p> <p>What message do we want to send to the world this Christmas?</p>

Part 3: Rejoice, rejoice!		
<p>Conversation Starters:</p> <p><i>If you are organising a group you could consider bringing some food to this meeting, in consultation with the group participants.</i></p> <p>Many Christmas traditions centre around food - it makes sense that in what can be dark, cold times people celebrate with hearty food. Is there any food you particularly associate with Christmas?</p> <p>Food can bring people together but it can also drive them apart. Excessive consumption puts this into sharp contrast. Differences in wealth become even sharper when some splash out on fancy feasts while others struggle to get enough to eat. Especially on a global scale.</p> <p>How can we do both - celebrating heartily while also feeding those who are hungry?</p>	<p>Read Zephaniah 3: 14-20</p> <p>This song of joy is sweeping and evocative with themes of rescue, social justice and homecoming. But how easy you find it to respond to Zephaniah's call to rejoice could depend on your emotional state at the time.</p> <p>Christmas is a time for rejoicing but the way it is observed today can put enormous pressure on people to live up to certain standards, both financially and emotionally.</p> <p>It can pile the normal pressure of a holiday season with expectations of family closeness, workplace frivolity, culinary excellence, costly gifts and spiritual epiphany!</p> <p>Imagine combining the potential disapproval of parents, the disappointment of children, the depression of your bank balance and the despair of a holiday gone wrong? And then being told to rejoice!</p> <p>Even if you love this time of year, many don't and actually find it a real struggle. How can we rejoice in a meaningful way that includes everyone no matter their emotional state?</p>	<p>Read Luke 1: 8-23</p> <p>Zechariah is given amazing news that leaves him speechless... literally speechless... unable to rejoice out loud.</p> <p>It is easy to doubt good things like Zechariah does here - to assume that things are too good to be true.</p> <p>Have you ever found yourself not able to enjoy something because of your reservations about it?</p>

Part 4: The World's Shepherd		
<p>Conversation starters:</p> <p><i>If you are organising a group, you might want to bring example Christmas decorations or nativity scenes to this meeting, or to invite the participants to each bring some with them.</i></p> <p>Do you decorate your home at Christmas time?</p> <p>Do you have any favourite decorations? Do any of them connect you to a different time or place?</p> <p>All over the world people decorate their homes with nativity scenes. These usually assemble a cast of characters around Jesus in a stable or byre. Shepherds often feature prominently. In Mexico <i>Pastorelas</i> are popular comic plays that imagine what it was like for the Shepherds heading to Bethlehem and depicts the devil trying to stop them but the Angel Michael intervenes on their behalf.</p> <p>Why are the shepherds such popular characters?</p>	<p>Read Luke 2: 8-20</p> <p>Most cultures around the world have a role like a shepherd - people whose job it is to work diligently in the background, perhaps to stand outside on cold nights to keep an eye on things, with little fanfare or fuss.</p> <p>What is the significance of it being ordinary shepherds who get the dazzling invitation to greet Jesus?</p> <p>High status 'wise men' would later come seeking Jesus and in his life he would meet politicians, civil servants, scholars, soldiers, beggars, criminals - a whole range of people across society, but it is the Shepherds who get a special early invitation to witness the baby Jesus. Why is this?</p>	<p>Read John 10: 7-18</p> <p>One flock. One shepherd.</p> <p>A love so big that it can overcome death. A love that will always come back.</p> <p>God is bigger than any one community, one society, one culture.</p> <p>We should watch becoming complacent - thinking there's only one way of doing things and we have got it sorted.</p> <p>There is a fantastic explosion of divinely inspired culture out there in the world at our disposal.</p> <p>What can we learn from how other people do Christmas? From their songs? Their food? Their traditions?</p> <p>What do we risk losing if we turn our back on the world?</p>