

GRACE COMES TO TOWN

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

December 2019 (1-28 December)



If you are in marketing or retail you will be familiar with the mindset that asks the question, “So what is the big idea this Christmas?” Human nature is somehow always looking to find something that is new and shiny. Often it is to distract us from all that is happening around us. The marketing strategists knows this, so they go looking for something: an idea, a longing, an emotion, even an experience, something to which they can attach the commodity they are selling. Christmas is the time to sell — so they need ideas and feelings that they know will tug at our heart strings. Their skill is to link their commodity to our emotional attachments.

If there is one big idea that the true meaning of Christmas expresses, it must surely be that God is with us in the midst of all our struggles and fears. When we strip all our emotions away there are perhaps just two left: love and fear. And it is these two emotions that in the end shape our lives and destiny. The big idea that Christmas celebrates is God’s amazing grace. In other words: love can conquer fear. Grace comes to town.

From the set reading in the lectionary we have tried to weave the story of God’s grace into the context of our lives and show how it has been experienced and encountered in the history of the world. While it highlights the role and significance of one nation Israel, it does so in order to explain and reveal the grace of God to the whole of humanity. God has an ultimate plan to bring about peace in our hearts and peace on earth. So this Christmas we are running with the mind-blowing idea that we are being invited to live in the power of Grace.

*The following discussion questions are designed to accompany the [Grace Comes to Town 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 the given questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose, or adapt to what interests your group.***

GRACE COMES TO TOWN DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Part 1: Signs of GRACE

Conversation Starter

This advent we are looking around for signs of grace... Whispers of peace, of promise, of welcome, of hope.

What does 'grace' look like to you? In your home? In your street? In your town? In your country? In your world?

Read Isaiah 54:1-10

Inspired by the extending of the tent (in verse 2) — how can we make room for others in our lives? How can we think more broadly and expansively as we stretch out our definitions of who is 'in' and who is 'out'?

How can we prepare for times of renewal and revival in our own lives and in our communities?

Read Isaiah 30:19-22

What helps you to listen to God?

When you are at the crossroads of a decision, weighing up what action to take or what direction to go in — how do you ignore 'the silver covered idols' and 'the gold plated images' and pay attention to the whisper that says 'This is the way; walk in it'?

Read Isaiah 40:1-11

This advent who are we praying for? Who is it that we want to know God's hope, and God's comfort, *God's grace* — this Christmas?

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Part 2: GRACE comes to where we are

Read Luke 2: 8-20

One of the most famous parts of the Christmas Story — and the Bible as a whole — this memorable passage shows us that grace comes to **where we are**. Shepherds may often have a starring role in our nativity plays but at the time they were not held in high regard. But it is to those on the edges, the marginalised, or outcast, or poor, to the untouchables of the community — to such as these the Good News comes. Hearing the news the shepherds respond by going to see; the coming of the Saviour draws people to him.

We don't hear about the shepherds again. What do you think the rest of their lives were like after witnessing this wondrous thing?

Read Ruth 1: 6-18

Loyalty and faithfulness in the midst of a desperate situation — two grieving women form a partnership against adversity. A pocket of grace in hard times.

How can we be agents of grace in difficult and turbulent times?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4: 9-12

We are urged in the Bible to love our neighbours. Here the Thessalonians are commended for loving their brothers and sisters but they are urged to do so 'more and more'!

How can we love our neighbours 'more and more' this advent? What things could we do in our neighbourhoods to demonstrate 'more and more' of our love?

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Part 3: Unexpected GRACE

We are going to spend this week in the company of Mary...

Read Luke 1: 26-38

Mary is favoured by God; his grace is upon her. She is frightened by the news the angel brings, however she is able to respond to it courageously and faithfully.

How do you think Mary felt once the angel had departed?

When we hear the news of God's grace, how do we respond?

Read Luke 1: 46– 56

Grace turns the world upside down. Mary sings a song of God's grace changing the lives of all people. Those who have been overlooked, rejected, ignored, abused, the hungry and poor, the marginalised and the victims are lifted up, welcomed and receive good things.

As we receive God's grace how do our lives transform the world around us?

Read Luke 2:1–7

Grace in a stable, not a palace. The view which the powerful have from the palace window is at best partial, at worst skewed in their favour. The view of the Bethlehem stable is wide open, God comes to the unexpected place and makes his palace there.

Where are we looking for God's grace? What is skewing our vision?

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Part 4: GRACE with us

Last week we considered Mary's story and this week we start by thinking about Joseph's story and the bigger story that we are part of.. that grace is **with us**...

Read Matthew 1:18–25

Grace is with us to set us free from fear. The angel tells Joseph not to be afraid to marry a pregnant woman, not to be afraid to raise a son not his own, not to be afraid to call a baby Jesus. The victory over fear is *Immanuel* ('God with us'), not that the cause of fear is removed but Joseph learns to live in that situation without fear.

How does grace undermine fear?

Read John 1:35–42

Grace is before us. The grace of God is with us, we celebrate this Good News. But we do not imagine that we are the first to have God's grace with us, we celebrate the Good News that God's grace has been with generations, mothers and fathers before us.

How, in our living in God's grace, will we celebrate God's gift of grace with others?

Read John 1: 14

Grace has moved into our neighbourhood. At the right time — Hallelujah — our God has the right time for Christ to be born among us, to be born for us. Our Jesus is not found far from us but in our home, our street, our town and city. Grace is with us where we are.

As a group you may wish to say a prayer of gratitude together.

One person could start by saying: "**Immanuel, thank you for coming to live among us.**" Then you could have a time of open prayer where people in the group have an opportunity to share things they are grateful to God for. Then someone could draw the time of prayer to a close by saying "**Immanuel we give you thanks and praise and invite you to show us how to walk in your grace in this new year coming round the corner.**" And everyone who wants to could respond: "**Amen.**"