

It's Time To Open Up Christmas

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

December 2020 (29 November - 26 December)



Advent is the time when the Christian church really begins anew as we “Open up Christmas.”

I guess the fact is that many of us have literally placed Christmas in a box. We tidy it away from year to year and bring it out displaying it in lights and decorations. Christmas however, as we know, is much more than something that can be contained in a box of decorations.

This year we have chosen the theme *It's Time To Open Up Christmas* to help us all begin to marvel at the sheer magnificence of the plan of God's salvation for the whole of his creation — to think about the open hearted people who have received and believed the plan as it has been unfolded. And to ask where will we find our open heart this Christmas? To journey further and encounter the mystery of Christmas that is beyond magic — leaving us with our mouths wide open in awe and wonder and surprise. And finally to consider that we have been created to live in an open world. The skies above us openly declare the vast extensive majesty of the creator. During the Christmas week we will be considering the part the skies have played in opening up a new understanding of God with us.

The following discussion questions are designed to accompany and adapt the monthly theme material (see the [It's Time To Open Up Christmas Resource Pack](#)) 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.

It's Time To Open Up Christmas

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Advent 1: It's time to open up Christmas... and discover God's open plan through the prophets

Conversation starter:

Prophets have played an invaluable role in God's salvation history and they continue to do so. Who are today's prophets? Do they give us hints about the nature and significance of God's plans in a world of pandemic and recession? Do they help us feel secure — or challenge us to live from day to day? Where are the prophets today pointing us to meet the Messiah?

Read Micah 5: 1-4 and Luke 2: 1-7

Oh little town of Bethlehem... What are the little towns, the wee villages, the small out of the way places — that are often undervalued or appreciated round about where you live? We are often guilty of writing off such places — “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (as Nathaniel asks in John 1: 46). But wonderful life-changing things can and do happen in wee towns with repercussions for the wider world.

What places, what streets, what wee hamlets in your part of the world is God calling you to look at again with the eye of a prophet?

Read Isaiah 53: 2-3 and John 1: 10-11

None of us are immune from rejection — even Jesus. Jesus wasn't born a dashing, well-connected prince with a team of stylists and personal assistants to manage his brand. He was an extraordinary man who grew up in very ordinary circumstances. He was rejected many times in many ways by people who missed his glory. Imagine standing right in front of Jesus Christ and barging past him as you wanted to get to the market before all the good fish was gone!

God's plan through Jesus was a very openhearted plan indeed — open to pain and rejection, celebration and delight, anguish and victory.

As we look to the future are our own plans in our church communities openhearted enough? Are we willing to risk rejection?

Read Isaiah 61: 1-3 and Luke 4: 16-22

How can we tell if we are still following God's open plan for the world today...

Let's ask ourselves — do our lives (as individuals and as communities) live up to these standards? Are we working to help the vulnerable, the isolated, the destitute, the lonely, the hurting? Are we working for liberation, for dignity, for restoration? If not — how can we start?

It's Time To Open Up Christmas

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Advent 2: It's time to open up... and discover the open heart of Christmas

Read Luke 1: 26-38

Mary had a tremendously open heart.

How must she have felt in that moment? As a group — list as many different emotions as you can that Mary might have been feeling right then...

Read Ezekiel 36: 26

This arresting verse describing God's open heart surgery on his people comes in the middle of a rich sequence in Ezekiel about cleansing, honour and restoration.

A 'heart of stone' has no rhythm. It has no pulse, no lifeblood. When God gives us a new heart — one pulsing with the spirit — how do we 'rediscover the beat'? What do we need to do in order to get back 'in time' with God?

Read Philippians 4: 7

As this turbulent year starts to draw to a close what are our prayers of peace to guard one another's hearts in the new year ahead?

It's Time To Open Up Christmas

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Advent 3: Mouths wide open... when you truly open up Christmas

Read Luke 1: 5-23 and 57-80

It was part of God's unfolding plan for Zechariah to stop talking. For this man of the priesthood to fall silent, to build tension for nine months before dramatically starting speaking again!

Part of knowing the value of when to speak is recognising when it is important not to.

Are there times in our lives where it better or us to fall silent like Zechariah so that our words — when they do come, have real impact?

Read Psalm 81: 10

This Advent what are we praying for our mouths to be filled with? Kindness? Wisdom? Turkey...?

What are we going to say this Christmas time — to loved ones, colleagues, and neighbours? What do they need to hear?

Read Ephesians 4: 29

What words of grace can we say to one another right here — right now?

Go!

It's Time To Open Up Christmas

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Advent 4: Skies wide open to let in Christmas

Read Psalm 19: 1-6

The sky on a clear night can be breathtaking.

How do you feel when you look up at the stars?

How does contemplating the night sky make you feel about God?

Read Luke 2: 8-20

In the middle of an ordinary nightshift for the shepherds the wonder of Christmas blazes across the sky!

If you were one of the shepherds on that hillside that night what would you have done next? Would you have galloped off to Bethlehem? Or would you have hung back and kept your head low (after all there's the sheep to think of...)?

As a group imagine yourself into the story and think what might have happened between verses 14 and 15. **Verse 14 ½** if you like...

Read Matthew 2: 1-2

We can take from this reading two important things about wise people **A)** They know to look up and **B)** They know to set out.

Draw open a curtain, throw open a window, stand at the door, look up from your desk — what do you see?

What do you think God might be calling you to notice? What could God be calling you to do?