

*And the Word  
became  
Flesh...*



Pleasant Valley Baptist Church

**Group Study  
through December**

*And the Word became flesh...*

**PV Adult Group Life Curriculum • Christmas 2008**

**Week 1: *Redefining the Relationship***

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**Key Biblical Texts:** Luke 1:46-55, 67-79; 2:25-32

**Main Idea:** The coming of Jesus redefined how God would relate to His people.

**CONNECT:**

Describe your favorite Christmas present you received when growing up. Did you know you were going to get it? How was your anticipation for the gift built up?

{**Leader Note:** Encourage your group members to have fun with this question as it will lead well into the central idea of the lesson later on. If you lead a larger group, consider having your group members share their answers around their table clusters.}

In a sentence or two, how would you summarize the significance of Jesus' coming? Why is Christmas such a big deal?

{**Leader Note:** Don't allow your group members to go into mini-sermons, hold them to a sentence or two only. When they are forced to only share that much without preparation, what comes out is what they really believe.}

**GROW:**

Sometimes the familiarity of the Christmas story can rob us of recognizing the depth of what occurred when God came down to earth in humanly form. Not only can we be distracted with all of the trappings of the Christmas season (lights, ornaments, gifts, parties, etc.), we can also begin to limit the significance of what happened in Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago as just a great story and a fine model of generosity, simplicity, and humility. Yet, if we examine the response of those closest to Jesus' birth, we'll find that the coming of Jesus marked a long anticipated shift in how God would relate to His people. No longer would God seem distant and silent, but instead He would be present and accessible. Ultimately, through the incarnation of God through Jesus the Christ, a new way of relating to God would be ushered in – He would take on flesh and actually dwell amongst us. To help us understand this perspective on the coming of Jesus, we will look at three characters that Luke highlights in his gospel narrative. As we examine Mary's song, Zechariah's prophecy, and Simeon's prayer, we'll be challenged to rethink the eternal AND the daily significance of the Christmas story.

the accolades. John's sentiment in the above referenced passage gives us insight as to the selfless attitude and humility of heart with which we are called to be a witness to God. Given this reality, answer these couple of questions as they relate to your motive in being on mission with God...

Is there a ministry you are involved in right now where you might need to "decrease," so that Christ can "increase" in that person's life? If so, explain. What steps will you take to adjust your place in God's mission?

What kinds of safeguards will you, personally, put in place to ensure that you are always pointing people "to the light", instead of assuming the role of the Light?

**Prayer Time:**

*Have group members spend some time alone in prayer initially repenting for where they have not fully engaged in being a "witness to the light of Christ". Then, after several minutes have them gather in groups of 2-3 to lift up the names they wrote down earlier in the lesson to whom they will more intentionally become a witness. Have the group members pray for each other in this, as opposed to praying for themselves.*

Read *Mary's Song of Praise*, Luke 1:46 – 55...

**46** *And Mary said,  
"My soul magnifies the Lord,  
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.  
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
50 And his mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
51 He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;  
52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones  
and exalted those of humble estate;  
53 he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty.  
54 He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
55 as he spoke to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his offspring forever."*

What stands out to you about this song of Mary? What is she communicating?

Does this song remind you of anything else you have seen in Scripture in terms of form or tone? Why is that important?

How does Mary view the significance of the coming Messiah? What examples from the text can you give of how she explains the shift that will now take place because of the arrival of Jesus?

{**Leader Note:** Allow the people in your group to wrestle with the text...let them get their hands dirty in trying to explain this passage. If no one mentions it, explain how Mary's song is very similar to one of the Old Testament Psalms, and the significance of that detail is that the coming of Jesus is not just a creedal truth, but it is the very source of worship for Mary. Through all of her references, Mary is explaining through her song the personal aspect of how grateful and humbled she is to be God's servant, but also the global aspect of how Jesus' arrival will now correct injustice and restore the faithful. Generations have been anticipating this movement of God, but she gets to experience first hand, and that is a cause to worship. She is seeing the promise to Abraham finally fulfilled.}

Read *Zechariah's Prophecy*, Luke 1:67 – 79...

**67** *And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,*

**68** *“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,*

*for he has visited and redeemed his people*

**69** *and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,*

**70** *as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,*

**71** *that we should be saved from our enemies*

*and from the hand of all who hate us;*

**72** *to show the mercy promised to our fathers*

*and to remember his holy covenant,*

**73** *the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us*

**74** *that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,*

*might serve him without fear,*

**75** *in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*

**76** *And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;*

*for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,*

**77** *to give knowledge of salvation to his people*

*in the forgiveness of their sins,*

**78** *because of the tender mercy of our God,*

*whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high*

**79** *to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,*

*to guide our feet into the way of peace.”*

Does the language used in this prophecy sound familiar to you? Where else in Scripture have you read some of the phrases or ideas that Zechariah uses?

{**Leader Note:** If you have a reference Bible cite a sampling of the various Old Testament references that Zechariah uses. Examples would include Genesis, Leviticus, Psalm 18, 105, 106, 107, 132, 1 Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekial, Micah, Zephaniah, and Malachi.}

Summarize how Zechariah views the coming of Jesus? Why do you believe this would be significant to a priest, like Zechariah?

{**Leader Note:** Point out that Zechariah is not highlighting fulfilled prophecies, he is pointing out that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises as a whole. The unveiling of all God's redemptive activity is manifested in Jesus. This isn't just another chapter in the story, this IS the story. As a priest, Zechariah would see this more clearly than most because of his familiarity with the Old Testament Scriptures.}

Read *Simeon's Blessing*, Luke 2:25 – 32...

Explain how you believe God has been preparing you to join Him in His mission as you have grown in your relationship with Him, and subsequent personal transformation.

As you have considered the status of your own witness to the Light, who has God brought to your mind during this lesson that you need to become more intentional about being a witness??

{**Leader note:** Have group members write this name down on an index card you pass out.}

Being a witness to the light isn't just geared toward those who are far from God...Who is a Christ-follower that God is leading you to engage more in a discipling relationship, so they might see the light more clearly??

{**Leader note:** Have group members write this name down on the other side of their index card they used for the previous question.}

Read John 3:25 – 30...

**25** *Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. 26* *And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” 27* *John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. 28* *You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ 29* *The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. 30* *He must increase, but I must decrease.”*

Those of us who have been serving God for a while are quite aware that there is a very fine line between being God's instrument for His glory, versus being God ourselves to someone we are ministering to, so that we get the recognition and

Read John 1:6 – 8, 15...

*6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.*

*8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.*

*15 (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”)*

When you read these verses in the context of the whole of verses 1 – 18, they seem somewhat haphazardly misplaced...why do you believe it was important for John, the Apostle to make these notes about John, the Witness?

What is significant about how John characterizes John, the Witness?

{Leader note: The important truth to surface within this discussion is that John, the Witness, did not come to bring attention to himself...his ministry was not to make much of himself...it was to bring attention to and draw people to the only person that could save them, the Lord Jesus. The Apostle John wants his readers to know that our role isn't to be someone's light, but to point them to the light. For our group members, this can be both humbling and freeing. We remember we are not the ones that save people, but are only responsible for being the messengers. And at the same time, when someone turns to Christ or is drawn closer to Christ because of our witness, we have to remember that we are not their savior.}

### **SURRENDER:**

As we have been discussing the ministry of John *the Witness*, how can you express gratitude and thanks to those individuals that you wrote down on your index cards as the most influential person(s) in your journey with Christ?

{Leader note: Have members commit to contact their special messenger within the next couple of weeks.}

*25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, 28 he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,*

*29 “Lord, now you are letting your servant [\[1\]](#) depart in peace, according to your word;*

*30 for my eyes have seen your salvation*

*31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,*

*32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”*

How is the focus of Simeon's prayer different from Mary's song or Zechariah's prophecy?

What is the significance of Simeon's prayer to the New Testament church?

{Leader Note: Simeon summarizes very well the significance of Jesus' coming as he states that his “eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all the peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and for the glory to your people, Israel.” Simeon shows that this good news of Jesus is global, and no part of the earth will be untouched by this movement of God. Simeon also explains well that salvation is a person, not a prayer, not a set of rituals, not a religion, but a person – Jesus Christ.}

What are the commonalities between all of these messengers? What was it about Jesus' birth that so gripped them?

{Leader Note: After receiving responses from group members, highlight the fact that they all had 1) expectant hope, 2) their prayers were answered, and 3) they realized that God's kingdom was coming down to earth like never before and that would change forever how they would relate to God.}

## **SURRENDER:**

All of these characters we have just discussed embody how the apostle John describes the coming of the Word in the prologue to his gospel account. John writes in chapter one,

**9** *The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Think about how you responded to the question earlier, ‘Summarize the significance of why Jesus came?’ How would you change or revise your answer after examining more closely Mary, Zechariah, Simeon, and John? How has His birth gripped you afresh during this lesson?

What current circumstance do you have in your life that you are “waiting” on God to show up? Be specific!

How would you evaluate the condition of your relationship with Jesus right now? Where is your life not reflecting the ‘true light’ of Jesus and the salvation that He came to bring?

All relationships are dynamic...they are always moving forward or moving backward. What in your life tends to cultivate and build your relationship with Jesus the most? What in your life tends to suffocate and stifle your relationship with Jesus the most?...Given your answers, what’s your next step?

## **Week 3: Invitation to a Mission**

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**Key Biblical Texts:** John 1:6-8; Matthew 28:18-20

**Main Idea:** Our personal transformation prepares us to join God in His Kingdom mission.

### **CONNECT:**

Describe one of the most memorable occasions when you sensed that God worked powerfully through you...a unique task, teaching His Word, providing a friend wise counsel... Something where you knew it was not of you.

What did God working through you in that way do for your relationship with God? Your knowledge of Him? Your obedience or devotion to Him?

### **GROW:**

Often when we become followers of Jesus, we immediately begin “doing” ministry that we believe to be in keeping with being a “Christian”. Some of us even involve ourselves in good works to somehow “make up” for all of the years lost in not following Christ fervently. And yet, there is a stark contrast between serving God out of obligation and answering *God’s call* to serve Him as a messenger or a witness to what He has done through Jesus Christ. For the last two weeks, we have examined how Jesus’ coming ushered in a new way for us to think about our relationship with God, and how Jesus coming in the flesh represented the key to life transformation in this idea of incarnational truth. This week, we will see how this *relationship* and subsequent life *transformation* prepares us to join God in His *mission*. To explore this idea further let’s look at God’s sending of John, the Witness, and how He was prepared for and sent out to fulfill his unique mission.

Before reading the text have group members respond to the question – How would you summarize the ministry of John the Baptist??

How do you sense God's presence in your life right now?? What are you doing now to cultivate more of a sense of His "dwelling" with you?

Discuss any areas in your life where you might be distancing yourself from God, and therefore is leading you to make some foolish decisions.

Understanding that God uses other people to allow His Word to take on flesh in that relationship, who do you need to get closer to in order to increase your awareness of God's presence, and therefore grow in spiritual transformation?

*Prayer Time:*

*Let this time of prayer be more personally reflective...Have group members close their eyes, and you begin this time with reading aloud John 1:1-18. You might even consider encouraging group members to get in a different prayer posture than they normally would. Then allow them silence to pray through how God might be prompting their heart to closer to Him. End their prayer time with another reading of John 1:1-18, and close in prayer for the group.*

Prayer time:

*Divide your group into sub-groups of 3-4 and spend some time praying about those areas that are most robbing us of the joy and blessing of our salvation in Jesus Christ. Allow people time to pray for themselves and where God might be convicting them during this lesson, rather than spending all of the time in prayer requests for others.*

## **Week 2: Hands-on Transformation**

**Key Biblical Texts:      John 1:1 - 18**

**Main Idea:              Our spiritual transformation is directly dependent upon how much we pursue the presence of God in us.**

**CONNECT:**

**{Leader Note: Pass out an index card to everyone in the group and give them a minute to respond to this question...}**

Write down the name(s) of the one or two most influential people in your spiritual journey with Jesus Christ?

Why did you write that person's name...How did they impact your life so much?

**GROW:**

When we think of the Christmas narrative, we most often think of 'no room at the inn', the 'manger scene', and the angels appearing to the shepherds. There are abundant lessons in both Matthew's account, as well as in Luke's account of Jesus' coming into the world. However, John's Christmas narrative is often overlooked...at least in the sense of it being a Christmas narrative. In chapter one, the apostle John presents the coming of Jesus in a more eternal sense. Beyond being a strong apologetic for the deity of Jesus, John chapter one explains how God's revelation of Himself shifted from only words on a page and through specially ordained servants to being physically present amongst His people. There are two very significant aspects of this shift in God's revelation. First, God establishes His special presence amongst His people; granting access to a saving relationship with His creation. Jesus the completion of the redemptive work God had begun with His people, Israel. Second, God provides through Jesus the

perfect model for us as to what it looks like to live out God's will in our physical lives - Jesus demonstrates to us the perfect balance between grace and truth as the Word took on human flesh. As we explore the idea of the incarnation, consider how Jesus modeled for us the way in which we should live transformed lives.

Read *John's prologue*, John 1:1-5-...

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it.*

What other passage in Scripture is John linking his ideas? Why is this important to present Jesus as the eternal Word, that is God?

{Leader Note: John is striking on the same language as Genesis, chapter 1 and the creation narrative – in fact, this is the only other place in the Bible that the phrase, “in the beginning” is used. John wants us to grasp the enormity of Jesus from the very start of his gospel account. Jesus isn't just a miracle worker...Jesus isn't just a great teacher, or a good model...Jesus isn't even just our sacrifice...Jesus is God Himself who created and gave life to the entire universe.}

What is so significant about John's usage of the terms “life” and “light” to describe Jesus? What difference does this truth make to the world? What difference does this truth make to you, personally?

{Leader Note: It will be easier for your group to answer this question from the ‘global’ sense, i.e., ‘he came to give the world salvation, and to conquer darkness...but push your members to answer the question also from their own life, personally. This might be hard for them to articulate, but help them to wrestle with this question.}

Read John 1:14, 18...

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth... No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

As you wrestle with the idea of God “dwelling with us”, or “being in our presence”...what kinds of images does that surface for you?

How do you think this idea of the Lord and Creator of the universe taking on human flesh would have struck John's original audience? Why is God's “dwelling amongst us” so important to our understanding of our own relationship with God?

{Leader Note: Not only is John showing that Jesus is God, and therefore Creator, giver of life, and ultimate good. John also wants to show how God came down to meet His creation where they were. Using language that would shock the orthodox Jews and the Greek pagan, John describes Jesus as “dwelling with” or “tabernacled with” His people. And His presence with His people signified His nearness to them...His accessibility...His relationship with them. This idea of God's dwelling place with man is a theme repeatedly seen throughout the Prophets, cf.; Joel 3:17, Zechariah 2:10, and Ezekiel 43:7. The prophets are clear that God's eternal dwelling with His people would mark a turn from their wicked ways, and a more faithful devotion to Him as their one, true God and Father.}

### **SURRENDER:**

As God came to earth in the form of a man, our relationship with Him was not only redefined, the way we spiritually grow took a shift also. For God to be present, it meant that He was near...for God to “dwell with His people” implied intimate relationship, not distant law-giver and judge. For Israel, it was going to be God's ongoing dwelling amongst them that eventually help them turn from their wicked ways and idolatrous worship and embrace faithful devotion to their one, true God. Understanding the relationship between “nearness” and obedience, or “proximity” and transformation...respond to the following questions...

Recall a time when you considered yourself to be in rebellion from God... how did you sense His presence in your life at that time? Did He seem distant?