



We all love to add some extra decorations at the Christmas season. This series wants to add some extra characters to the Christmas story who can add some needed “extras” to our own faith journey.

These questions are designed to extend the impact of the weekend message. Use them to go deeper in your personal study time, with your family and/or with a group.

1 What do you enjoy the most and the least about the Christmas season? What is your favorite part of how scripture tells the story of the first Christmas?

2 THEIR STORY... This message introduces us to Zechariah and Elizabeth. Their story will bless those of us who could use a little extra faith. **Read Luke 1:5-7.** What are some things that stand out to you about this couple? Why do you think they stayed faithful and obedient to God all those years even though they weren't getting the answer they wanted to their deepest desire?

3 After centuries of silence, God was about to make the most important move in redemptive history to date, and Zechariah was the first to hear about it. **Read Luke 1:8-20.** What surprises you about their story? Put yourself in the place of Zechariah. What would you think and feel as you listened to the angel? Why do you think God waited so long to answer their prayers?

4 Read Luke 1:21-25. Put yourself in the place of Elizabeth (in a culture where few burdens were harder to bear than barrenness). How do you think all of those years hearing “no” had impacted her life? Follow up discussion: In what ways can you relate to their struggle of wrestling with the silence of God? How is your relationship with God affected in those spaces and places? How does this point of the message (**You can be faithful yet not always be full of faith**) parallel your faith journey?

5 EXTRA FAITH BELIEVES... God will answer every prayer at the right time in the right way. Rick reminded us that “*The Bible says faith involves believing that God exists and that He rewards those who sincerely seek Him*” (see **Hebrews 11:6**). How should this impact our prayer life especially when we don't get a clear “no” to what we are asking for? Follow up discussion: Rick went on to say, “*Sometimes we give up on our prayers before God does.*” Share an example of how this has been true in your life. What can we learn from Zechariah and Elizabeth about God in times like this?

6 EXTRA FAITH BELIEVES... God still surprises us with the ways He demonstrates His faithfulness. What are some of the ways the Christmas story reveals a God that is full of surprises? With that in mind, how does Christmas remind you that God will not remain inside “the boxes” we build for Him. Share an example of how you've been surprised by the way God has demonstrated His faithfulness to you recently.

7 Christmas is the answer when you wonder if your faithfulness has mattered. Close by reading **Hebrews 10:23** and praying for those you know who are wrestling with the silence of God (ask God to give us all some extra faith).





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1 What’s your favorite “unexpected” detail in the Christmas story? What is one “unexpected” way God has worked in your life lately?

2 A RIGHTEOUS DILEMMA. Joseph’s story gives us a new understanding of extra righteousness. **Read Matthew 1:18-19.** What do you learn about Joseph from these verses? How did Joseph’s desire to put Mary away secretly speak to his personal righteousness?

3 Joseph reminds us that doing right does not mean life always goes right. Read Matthew 1:20-25. Joseph is clearly wrestling with his understanding of what the law expects and his understanding of what Mary needs. Why do you think God gave Joseph some space to wrestle with this tension? When have you been convicted to do the right thing when life wasn’t going right? What did you learn from that experience?

4 REAL RIGHTEOUSNESS... Obeys God when it costs. Joseph was not responsible for Mary’s pregnancy, but he took on the responsibility of caring for her and her son. In what ways did Joseph’s obedience cost him? Follow up discussion: Rick said that “Joseph lost his life for Jesus.” **Read Mark 8:34.** As you reflect on your life what is one thing your obedience to God has cost you? How has that been a good thing?

5 REAL RIGHTEOUSNESS... Loves people when it’s hard. Rick noted that “Loving people is hard, because people can be very unrighteous. But Joseph was wrestling with how to be full of grace and truth.” How have you experienced that in your life recently? Share some examples from Jesus’ life of how he responded to unrighteous people with grace and truth. Who might God be calling you to love in a similar way this Christmas?

6 A RIGHTEOUS ANSWER. Rick said, “At the core of the Christmas message is the truth that being good will never be good enough. Joseph was one of the first to realize this.” **Read Matthew 1:21 and 2 Corinthians 5:21.** In what ways does Christmas remind us that **Jesus is our true righteousness**?

7 So what are we going to take away from this lesson? Consider the three options Rick mentioned as he closed and talk about what God might be calling you to do in response: (1) *Maybe God is calling you to be more courageous when it comes to an area of obedience.* (2) *Maybe God is calling you to do what is right even when life does you wrong.* (3) *Maybe this Christmas God is calling you to love someone more than they deserve because this is how He loves you.* What is one thing you can do this week as a result of what you’ve learned from this message? Pray for each other as you close.





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1 What has been your experience with “waiting” (is it easy or hard for you)? Follow up: In what ways is waiting a critical part of our relationship with God?

2 LIFE REMINDS US THAT... hope is hard. Rick said, “When God makes a promise it usually doesn’t come with a timeline.” How have you experienced this to be true and what happened during the waiting period? Follow up: **Read Luke 2:25-38.** What stands out to you about how Luke describes Simeon and Anna? What else did you notice in their story?

3 KEEP HOPE ALIVE! Meet regularly with other waiters. Rick reminded us that “Hope cannot survive on just a ‘personal relationship with Jesus.’ It is sustained through the practice of gathering with others to recall God’s track record of faithfulness.” **Read Hebrews 10:23-25.** What motivation do you find in these verses to place a greater emphasis on the next step *Worship Regularly* as we move into a new year?

4 KEEP HOPE ALIVE! Listen to the Holy Spirit. Simeon and Anna were very attentive to the Holy Spirit. Rick said, “No one is able to see Jesus for who he is apart from the work of the Holy Spirit.” How attentive have you been in listening to the Holy Spirit in your life recently? Follow up: **Read Romans 5:5** In what ways does an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit fill us with hope? How has that worked for you?

5 KEEP HOPE ALIVE! Put your hope to praise.

The first response of both Simeon and Anna was to praise. The same should be true of us. **Read Psalm 33:20-22.** With this in mind, share some of the lyrics to the Christmas songs that provide hope for you during this season of life. What role does praise play in your relationship with God? What could you do to make it more prominent?

6 KEEP HOPE ALIVE! Remember what God is doing in Jesus. Read Luke 2:29-32. Rick pointed out that “The great temptation of Christmas is to reduce the King to a baby. But Simeon and Anna placed their hope in the promise of a coming Messiah who was going to make everything new.” What are some of the ways you’ve seen and are seeing Jesus make everything new even in this “in-between” time? Share some stories of how you’ve seen this in the lives of the people in your group or family.

7 CHRISTMAS REMINDS US THAT hope is real! Rick said, “Fear exists when what you have set your hope on is threatened.” In what ways does Christmas announce the coming of a salvation that cannot be threatened? **Read Psalm 27:14.** What is one thing you can do this week to continually remind yourself that hope is real?

