



CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

ICEBREAKER |

What is your greatest Christmas memory, something that always makes you feel warm and fuzzy inside?

INTRODUCTION |

The Holidays are full of all kinds of emotions – some of them good, some of them bad. We all come to Christmas from a different perspective and with different expectations. We all have baggage that we carry with us, along with the presents and the dishes and the hugs. Some of us have big family gatherings, while others are just gathering with a few close people. Most of us will remember this year with fondness, while others are full of despair and dejection. There is exhaustion, contentment, sadness, and joy. No matter where you are or what you've been through – or what the holidays mean to you – there is a way to focus on Jesus this year and get through all the emotions of the season. In this lesson, we will learn some basic ways to do that.

READ I

Put yourself in Mary and Joseph's shoes for just a moment. That night, at the first Christmas, they are traveling to Bethlehem. Mary is nine months pregnant. Her feet hurt and she's tired. Joseph's probably not very happy and maybe a little worried. They get into Bethlehem late because it's taken longer than they planned. And when they get there – there's no room for them.

That was really the conclusion of a long series of events, ups and downs for the young couple. In fact, at the very beginning of the story, when the angel Gabriel visits Mary to give her the great news, this was her response:

Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean.

Luke 1:29 (NLT)

Confusion. Disruption. Bewilderment. She's a little hazy on the details. She knows that something great is happening...but it's also full of danger and stress. She figures that she'll be the mother of the Savior of the world! But she will also likely be an outcast for getting pregnant out of wedlock. What's going to happen?

When was the last time you felt “confused and disturbed?” How did you handle the situation? If it's already resolved, how did you feel afterwards?

READ I

How would you have handled that situation? It's hard to grasp because it was literally a once-in-history moment. No other person in the entire world would ever go through what Mary did. Out of all the people in history, though, God chose her. And it's likely because of her response to her confusion:

*Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true."
Luke 1:38 (NLT)*

The answer to our confusion and stress, to our exhaustion and baggage, is not always to resolve the issue. Sometimes we have to just give God the trust He deserves. We can courageously say, "I am Your servant, Lord. Whatever you have in mind, I will accept it."

That may mean there is trouble ahead. It could require a lot of work on our part. And it may not all be smooth sailing. But we can be sure that the end is well worth it.

How do you lean into trust when things are difficult? During times of exhaustion and stress, how do you regain your trust and remain true to God's word?

READ I

Now imagine that it's that night. Mary has given birth, and the only place to lay the baby is in the manger – a feeding trough for animals. But then there's a soft knock on the door. It's the shepherds who have heard the great news. How? They were visited by angels who told them.

All the exhaustion and pain and emotions are now melting away. She has just received confirmation that her child is indeed the Son of God. How happy must she be! And here's what the scripture tells us she did:

Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often.

Luke 2:19 (NLT)

Mary could have chosen to remember anything about that night. She could have thought about the late night's out in the wilderness on the donkey, traveling while nine-months pregnant. She could have dredged up all the mean stares and hushed whispers about her pregnancy out of wedlock. But instead, she chose to remember the good, not the bad. She stored up the words of angels and of God. She thought about how this little baby would grow into the Messiah often.

When things are going bad, what do you focus on most? It's natural and normal to focus on the bad, but how can focus on the good change your perspective?

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

This holiday season, you will probably go through a whole range of emotions. From exhaustion and stress to joy and surprise. From sadness and anger to thankfulness and rest. How you respond in those moments could be a factor in how you continue to live into the new year. This Christmas, make sure you:

- Keep On Walking
- Take Time to Rest
- Remember the Reason - Jesus

ADDITIONAL ACTION STEPS (Optional):

- Do at least one (1) SOAP Devotions this week
- Share with your group one of your SOAP Devotions from this past week
- Invite a friend to your small group

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You so much for sending Your Son into our lives. His birth was full of joy and gladness, but also surrounded by stress and exhaustion. Just like what we experience, not only at the Holidays but every season of the year. Because Your Son came to earth as a human, You understand that completely. Help us to have a peaceful Christmas this year, full of love and joy. And that can only happen because of all You've done throughout the year. We love You and we celebrate Your Son Jesus who is our Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, and Prince of Peace.

SCRIPTURES FOR S.O.A.P.

Day 1: *“Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name Him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His ancestor David.* Luke 1:30-32 (NLT)

Day 2: *As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”* Matthew 1:20-21 (NLT)

Day 3: *At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped Him snugly in strips of cloth and laid Him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.* Luke 2:1, 3, 6-7 (NLT)

Day 4: *That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!* Luke 2:8-11 (NLT)

Day 5: *Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.” When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”* Luke 2:13-15 (NLT)