



Group Curriculum Leaders Guide



MARINERSCHURCH

Songs of Christmas:

Group Discussion Guide

Do you want or need something to sing about? Then remember the Christmas story—the good news that God is with us and He came to know us. In Luke’s gospel account, we see four songs of people celebrating after they learned that the Savior of the world had finally come. Mary, Zechariah, the angels, and Simeon all sang with joy. You can sing too! In this new series, we’ll discuss four of the world’s first Christmas songs. Christmas should make us sing! Each lesson contains the following sections:

MAIN POINT

Discussions often take on a life of their own, but they typically lack power when they lack focus. The Discussion Leader ought to use the Main Point to keep everyone on the same page. To do this, you might say something like, *"That is very interesting and a good topic for another discussion, but today's study is about..."* and ask a question that brings people back to the topic of discussion.

There will be times when it makes sense to ignore the Main Point, for example, when someone in your group experiences a significant crisis. If you decide to move away from the lesson’s Main Point, you want to do so on purpose and not by accident.

LEAN IN | BREAK THE ICE

These questions will help kick-start your discussion time. The main goal for this time is to get everyone talking and prepare them for the more focused conversation to follow.

LOOK DOWN | LOOK AT GOD’S WORD

The goal for this section is to let the passage speak for itself and stand on its own. This isn’t easy! During this time, you will read the passage out loud (twice) and answer questions focused on the details of the biblical text.

LOOK IN | APPLY GOD’S WORD TO YOUR LIFE

Transformation comes from renewing your mind (Romans 12:2). The goal for this section is to look inward to allow God’s Word to change you from the inside out. Use this time to discuss how your thoughts and feelings are affirmed and/or challenged.

LOOK OUT | IDENTIFY THE RELEVANCE OF GOD’S WORD IN THE WORLD

Jesus calls us to love others, just as He loved us. Based on your understanding of the text and how God is transforming your heart, how will you treat others? How will you apply this teaching to all of your relationships, to everyone you will see this week and beyond?

LEADER NOTES

Where needed, each lesson may have several Leader Notes. This material will provide insight on how to steer the conversation and care for your people. Additionally, these notes will provide greater context to help you understand a difficult word, phrase, or verse.

PRAYER

Be sure to close your time together in prayer. You can take requests from the group, invite others to lead, and bring God the needs that stood out to you in your group time.

SOME THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

Remember that you aren't in this alone! God will help you prepare and lead your group discussion. Make it your goal to keep in step with the Holy Spirit!

Pray and read the passage a few times on your own. Take a few minutes to identify what makes an impression for you and how the passage might impact your group.

Once you've taken some time to read the passage on your own, read through the entire Discussion Guide. Make sure you understand the Main Point. Identify which questions you want to use in your group time and rewrite them in your own words.

Once your group time is over, take a few minutes to evaluate the discussion. What went well? What could have been different? If you had a "bad night," DON'T GIVE UP! Everyone has tough nights. There were times that even the disciples didn't get what Jesus was talking about!

Week 1: Mary's Song

Group Discussion Guide for: SONGS OF CHRISTMAS

Luke 1:46–55

MAIN POINT

- We sing with joy because He is merciful to us.

LEAN IN | BREAK THE ICE

- When is it OK to start listening to Christmas music?
 - Before Thanksgiving
 - After Thanksgiving
 - All year
 - When the decorations go up
- If you could erase one Christmas song from the world's memory, what would it be?
- What is your favorite Christmas song? Why is it your favorite?
- Why do you think songs are written down in the Bible?

Leader Note: Not only do songs express a range of human emotions, they are memorable ways to pass on historical and theological truth from person to person and generation to generation. Songs also unify us in shared experiences of prayer and worship.

LOOK DOWN | LOOK AT GOD'S WORD

Read Luke 1:46–55. Choose two people to read the passage out loud (46–50, 51–55).

46 And Mary said:
My soul magnifies the Lord,
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 because he has looked with favor
on the humble condition of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations
will call me blessed,
49 because the Mighty One
has done great things for me,
and his name is holy.
50 His mercy is from generation to generation
on those who fear him.
51 He has done a mighty deed with his arm;
he has scattered the proud
because of the thoughts of their hearts;
52 he has toppled the mighty from their thrones
and exalted the lowly.
53 He has satisfied the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
54 He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering his mercy
55 to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he spoke to our ancestors.

- In Mary's song, how is God described? What do these characteristics and actions tell us about how God relates to people?

Leader Note: Help people see universal truths about God that apply to all people, not just Mary's unique experience. Most significantly, God shows favor and mercy to the humble in any generation. Other answers may include His faithfulness to keep promises, His care for the hungry and needy, or the way He blesses people to be a blessing to many other people.

- How does Mary's description of herself (in verse 46) and of Israel (in verse 54) give us a clue into the identity and purpose of God's people?
- How can she be humble yet also say that every generation will remember her (in verse 48)?

Leader Note: Mary does not assume any greatness of her own, only that God has graciously chosen to include her in His story of blessing the world.

Consider reading aloud Genesis 1:26–31. In the beginning, God desired men and women to be in personal relationship with Him and to join His work in the world. His desire for humanity is a “very good” life of flourishing generation after generation. To be His “servant” is a positive, life-giving, and joyful identity and purpose.

- What does it mean for Mary to “magnify the Lord”?

Leader Note: God is infinitely good, so He cannot be made greater, but we can draw attention to and help others see His goodness.

- Some of Mary’s descriptions may seem strange to us in a “Christmas” song—what two, distinct groups of people are contrasted in this passage? What does that reveal about Mary’s perspective on the meaning of Christmas?

Leader Note: Emphasize that possessing wealth and having high positions of influence are not inherently wrong—God blessed Abraham and Israel, at times, with tremendous status and material wealth. The coming of Christ, or “Savior,” was an act of God’s mercy to restore a world broken by sin. His salvation was not only spiritual in the sense of our eternal souls, it was tangible in the sense of our earthly needs and relationships.

LOOK IN | APPLY GOD’S WORD TO YOUR LIFE

- What can we learn from God’s choice to first reveal the good news of salvation through Christ to a poor, young girl in Israel?

Leader Note: This question is intended to be reflective. Help people consider things like:

- God works in unexpected ways and through unexpected people.
- God’s timing is not always our own.
- God sees me, even if I feel insignificant.
- God will take care of me.
- Everyone has value.

Remind people of the context of this passage. Mary has been visited by an angel and told that she would give birth to the Son of God even though she is an unmarried virgin. She is also informed of her relative’s miraculous conception, though Elizabeth’s pregnancy was in old age. When the two women meet, Elizabeth’s baby (John the Baptist) leaps for joy in the womb and Mary breaks into this song. (See Luke 1:26–40.)

- What stands out most to you about Mary’s view of God? Can you relate to her feelings? If so, how? If not, why not?
- How has God shown you favor and mercy?
- What causes you to rejoice? (or what should?)

Leader Note: Consider helping people articulate their own praise in a single sentence or two. For example: “I rejoice because the Lord has shown me favor by _____.” Or “I had not considered your mercy in this way, so I rejoice in _____.”

LOOK OUT | IDENTIFY THE RELEVANCE OF GOD’S WORD IN THE WORLD

- Who do you know that may be struggling to find joy right now?
- What can we do this week to magnify the Lord?
- How can we bless others as His servant?

Leader Note: Be specific in identifying ways to share the joy of Christ.

Week 2: Zechariah's Song

Group Discussion Guide for: SONGS OF CHRISTMAS

Luke 1:67-79

MAIN POINT

We sing because He remembers and loves us.

LEAN IN | BREAK THE ICE

Do you sing when you're alone (car, shower, kitchen, etc.)? If so, are you a subtle background singer or a secret rock star?

Leader Note: Consider opening with a clip of Kevin singing "White Christmas" from 1990's Home Alone. Ask for any volunteers to sing a line related to the next question.

What song do you catch yourself singing without thinking about it?

What was the last song you sang privately or in public?

LOOK DOWN | LOOK AT GOD'S WORD

Read Luke 1:67–79. Choose two people to read the passage out loud (67–75, 76–79).

67 Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:
68 Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has visited
and provided redemption for his people.
69 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
70 just as he spoke by the mouth
of his holy prophets in ancient times;
71 salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of those who hate us.
72 He has dealt mercifully with our ancestors
and remembered his holy covenant—
73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham,
to grant that we,
74 having been rescued
from the hand of our enemies,
would serve him without fear
75 in holiness and righteousness
in his presence all our days.
76 And you, child, will be called
a prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord
to prepare his ways,
77 to give his people knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins.
78 Because of our God's merciful compassion,
the dawn from on high will visit us
79 to shine on those who live in darkness
and the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.

- What is significant about the introduction to this song in verse 67?
- How would you summarize the main theme of Zechariah's song?

Leader Note: Point out that the words of Scripture, including this song, are the inspired words of God, written down for us so that we too can know Him personally.

Remind everyone of this passage's context: Jesus' earthly uncle, the father of John the Baptist, celebrated that Christ was coming into the world. He celebrated that God has remembered His people (verse 72) and has been compassionate to them (verse 78). This song is the first recorded words after Zechariah had regained his ability to speak following the birth of his own son, John the Baptist. Not only had Zechariah's silence been a consequence of not believing the angel's news regarding Elizabeth's pregnancy in their old age, but it also drew people's attention to God's work and to these words.

- In verses 67–75, what reasons does Zechariah give for looking back and praising God?
- In verses 76–79, what reasons does Zechariah give for looking to the present and future and praising God?

Leader Note: “Blessed,” the opening word of this song, is also translated as “praised.” We obviously don’t bless God in the same way that He blesses us. God is praised for His goodness—the source of all blessings. In the first part of the song, Zechariah looks back at Scripture, declaring God’s goodness historically. Then Zechariah praises God’s goodness for what He is doing and will do through his son, John the Baptist, and ultimately through Christ, our Redeemer and Savior.

The word for “blessed” or “praised” is also related to the word “gospel.” The gospel of redemption and salvation, peace instead of death, is good news worthy of singing about!

LOOK IN | APPLY GOD’S WORD TO YOUR LIFE

- Reread verses 69–70. Zechariah’s song is filled with references to prophecies that God was fulfilling—what does that mean for us today?

Leader Note: Among many possible answers, be sure to emphasize these two:
God is faithful to keep promises—we can, therefore, trust Him completely.
All of Scripture, including the Old Testament, is valuable in knowing God personally.

- How have you personally experienced God’s faithfulness?
- What other Scriptures, songs, or things remind you of God’s mercy and love?

Leader Note: Lead by example. Brainstorm some real-life examples of God’s faithfulness to you and some favorite Scriptures, song lyrics, or other practices that remind you of God’s love.

Take time to share stories. Like Zechariah’s song after his season of silence, God wants to bless others through our testimonies of God’s faithfulness and love.

LOOK OUT | IDENTIFY THE RELEVANCE OF GOD'S WORD IN THE WORLD

- Reread verses 78–79. How have you experienced the “shadow of death”?
- What darkness do you see in our culture today? How does that darkness feel overwhelming at times, even as believers in Christ?
- Where might people feel forgotten, lonely, or even in the shadow of death?
- How can we show them that God has not forgotten them and neither have we?
- How can we continue shining light into the darkness that God revealed to us last week? Does anyone have stories to share from ways God used them to show the joy of Christ since we last met?

Leader Note: Don't just forget about people, circumstances, or applications from previous weeks. Follow up with encouragement and accountability. Continue to build on foundations that the Holy Spirit may have laid in past discussions.

Week 3: The Angels' Song

Group Discussion Guide for: SONGS OF CHRISTMAS

Luke 2:13-14

MAIN POINT

- We sing because He brings us peace.

LEAN IN | BREAK THE ICE

- Can you summarize the plot of your favorite Christmas movie in five words or less?

Leader Note: Have everyone take a turn summarizing classic Christmas movies while group members call out movie titles.

- Today's passage of Scripture was quoted by Linus in reply to Charlie Brown's question: "Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?" How would you summarize the meaning of Christmas in five words or less?

Leader Note: Assure people that you aren't looking to critique answers, but rather to help everyone think about the meaning of Christmas that so often gets lost in the busyness and expectations of the holiday season. Point out that Linus and today's text will use more than five words. Then show the **clip from this link** to introduce and provide context for today's passage of Scripture.

LOOK DOWN | LOOK AT GOD'S WORD

Read Luke 2:13-14. Choose someone to read the passage out loud.

- 13 Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:
- 14 Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to people he favors!

- As the first song following the birth of Jesus, how would you summarize the angels' message?
- Why is it significant that the angels were praising God with this song, not just saying something to the shepherds? How does that influence the way you visualize this scene and hear this song?

Leader Note: Encourage group members to slow down and focus on these few short verses which are possibly overly familiar to them. Try to help everyone consider the scene from a fresh perspective, no matter how many times they've previously read or heard the verses. As an angel announced the arrival of Christ to shepherds in a field, a massive choir appeared to praise God. They sang that peace had come as a favorable gift of God for people to receive in relationship to Him through Jesus. Even in this moment that would forever change human history, the excitement was focused on God and giving Him all of the glory. The shepherds witnessed the celebratory worship of the heavens.

- How does this scene change in your mind knowing that the phrase “heavenly host” literally means “heavenly army”? What emotions must the shepherds have felt?

Leader Note: Although we may have modest renditions of “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” in mind, this was no cartoon children’s choir. It was an innumerable army of heavenly messengers suddenly filling the night sky. We know that they were initially “terrified” by just the one angel (see verse 9). Any person must have felt a rush of conflicting emotions at the appearance of “a multitude of the heavenly host,” who sang of “glory to God” and “peace on earth.”

- What does this Christmas song say about true authority and peace?

Leader Note: In a culture where Caesar was the highest authority and known as the bringer of peace to the world through Rome’s military power, this message was revolutionary. This was more than a sweet birth announcement. It was the declaration of a new King and Kingdom.

LOOK IN | APPLY GOD’S WORD TO YOUR LIFE

- Have you ever been “terrified” of God or scared of what He was saying to you? If so, when, what, and why?
- What gave you peace in that moment or season of your life to overcome your natural fear and uncertainty?
- Honestly, what is your figurative “security blanket;” what do you look to most often for comfort when you are unsure of how to feel or of what to do? How do you react when you are scared or feel threatened?

Leader Note: Remind people of Linus’ famous blanket in the Charlie Brown cartoons. Assure everyone that we all have things that we naturally cling to or hide behind for security and a sense of peace. Take a minute to show the **clip from this link** again, instructing the group to pay attention to Linus’ blanket.

- How is Linus dropping his blanket a picture of what Christmas is really all about?

- Is there an area of your life that you haven't given God full authority? In other words, are there some things that you still don't fully trust Him with?

LOOK OUT | IDENTIFY THE RELEVANCE OF GOD'S WORD IN THE WORLD

- How would life be different if God was honored as the highest authority in our lives?
- What peace might God bring to you? Family? Friends? Neighbors? Coworkers? Even strangers?
- Have you been able to share the joy and love of God with the people or in the circumstances you've identified in previous weeks?
- Who can you invite to experience the good news of Christ by celebrating with you in worship (in person, in the neighborhood, in your home, or even online)?

Leader Note: Remind people of the discussions from Mary's and Zechariah's songs. Don't forget about people, circumstances, or applications from previous weeks. Follow up with encouragement and accountability. Continue to build on foundations that the Holy Spirit may have laid in past discussions.

Week 4: Simeon's Song

Group Discussion Guide for: SONGS OF CHRISTMAS

Luke 2:29–32

MAIN POINT

We sing because the salvation we hoped for has arrived.

LEAN IN | BREAK THE ICE

- What is your Christmas light preference for indoor and outdoor decorations?
 - White lights or color?
 - Small bulbs or big?
 - Blinking or steady?
 - Pre-lit tree or hand-wrapped?
- Is your lighting preference the same as or different than how you grew up?
- Growing up did you have one thing that you most looked forward to at Christmas—maybe a recurring tradition or a specific gift? What was it? How did it make you feel?

Leader Note: For the final song of this series, we'll see how a man named Simeon praised God. He felt like his life was complete once he saw baby Jesus—the glorious light of the world for whom he'd eagerly waited.

LOOK DOWN | LOOK AT GOD'S WORD

Read Luke 2:29–32. Choose someone to read the passage out loud.

29 Now, Master,
you can dismiss your servant in peace,
as you promised.
30 For my eyes have seen your salvation.
31 You have prepared it
in the presence of all peoples—
32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and glory to your people Israel.

- Similar to other songs, how does Simeon describe himself and God? What does this recurring theme emphasize about a personal relationship with God?
- What other similarities do you see between Simeon's song and previous songs?

Leader Note: Remind everyone that each song in the series has explicitly or implicitly highlighted God's good authority and the singers as His willing servants. Other themes have included peace, keeping promises, Israel, salvation, and glory.

Provide some context for Simeon's song by reading verses 25–28.

Point out that in each story from this series, God has made His will known to people through angels and the Holy Spirit. Mary was visited by an angel and conceived by the Holy Spirit. Zechariah was visited by an angel and was filled by the Holy Spirit. The shepherds were visited by an angel and witnessed the song of an uncountable army of angels. Now Simeon has patiently waited after the Holy Spirit revealed that he would live to see the Messiah (the Christ, the promised Savior).

- Did anybody notice something new and unique in Simeon's song? How does it clarify why Christmas is such good news for more than just Israel?

Leader Note: Direct attention to the first explicit mention of “Gentiles” in the songs of Christmas. Until now, Jesus has been celebrated as the Savior promised to Israel. Help everyone recognize the significance of salvation extending to all nations and peace with God being made possible to “whoever believes in him” (see John 3:16), regardless of ethnic, social, political, cultural, or religious backgrounds.

To illustrate the joy we should feel, ask for a show of hands for people born into Jewish families. Chances are that most, if not everyone in your group, would be considered a “Gentile,” meaning they don't belong to the people of Israel.

LOOK IN | APPLY GOD'S WORD TO YOUR LIFE

- Which of the themes covered during this series has been most timely for you? Why was that truth especially meaningful?
- How else has the Holy Spirit been at work in your life during this series (or in general)?
- What blessings or steps of faith can we celebrate?
- If you had a promise like Simeon's, that you would live to see God do something else, what would your heart desire to witness?
- Like Simeon served faithfully, guided by the Spirit, how might you put yourself in a position to experience God's great work of salvation in people's lives?

Leader Note: The purpose of these questions is to spark thoughtful reflection, not necessarily pinpoint “right answers.” Lead by example, coming prepared to share ways that God has been working in and through you during this Christmas season. Identify truths that

have been timely and meaningful from the series.

Don't forget about things other people have shared during conversations. The Spirit may have helped you see something in a fresh light thanks to someone else's comment, question, or story. Be sure to encourage and affirm group members with the reality of Christian community together.

LOOK OUT | IDENTIFY THE RELEVANCE OF GOD'S WORD IN THE WORLD

- Reread verse 31. What undeniable truth do you hope people will recognize? Why might they fail to see the truth of salvation that is available and right in front of them, so to speak?
- If the Holy Spirit has brought someone new to mind, whose salvation can we pray for, that God would open their eyes to the glorious truth of salvation in Christ Jesus?
- Does anyone have any updates regarding the people or circumstance that God has put on their hearts during previous discussions?

Leader Note: Don't forget about people, circumstances, or applications from previous weeks. Follow up with encouragement and accountability. Continue to build on foundations that the Holy Spirit may have laid in past discussions.

Be sure to communicate any plans for the new year.