

**The Community of St Cuthbert:
*Spiritual Growth Group Study Guide***

Jan 2023



January Sessions

These studies were prepared for us by Grace Aciro, a Cranmer ordinand who is on placement with us in 2022-23.

They allow you – if you wish – to follow the lectionary Advent readings through the month, which are close to our Sunday morning sermon passages. However you can do the studies at any speed. If you decide to follow the Sunday sermons at St Nics, then the dates work out like this:

Week of:

2 – 6 Jan	Luke 2:15-21 = study
9 – 13 Jan	Matt 2:1-12 = prayer and praise
16 – 20 Jan	John 1:29-42 = study
23 – 27 Jan	Matt 4:12-23 = acts of service
30 Jan – 3 Feb	Luke 2:22-40 = study

Richard Briggs, Prior, CSC

Week One – Luke 2:15-21

Bible Study

The shepherds in Jewish Culture were one of the least important groups of people – they were viewed as outcasts and unclean. They spent most of their time outside rearing animals. This is not the first time God chose those those who society deemed unimportant. Jesse forgot about his son David when Samuel came to his house to anoint the next king; he presented all the sons he thought worthy of being king, and only when Samuel prompted him did he remember David. God chose David, the shepherd boy, as king (1 Samuel 16). Now the shepherds have been given the good news and are the first to see the newborn king Jesus.

‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and thing that has taken place, Which the Lord has made known to us’ (v.15)

1. What did the shepherds think as they travelled to Bethlehem? Were they excited, scared, or confused?

If you have time, I recommend watching a short video. I found it helpful to look at the shepherds’ story through a different interpretation. It is a YouTube video, so you might have a few adverts unless you have a subscription. Just click this link and watch till about 18:45 mins: <https://youtu.be/paOjgZZDads>

What did you find encouraging about the video, and what challenged you?

2. What message do you think God was trying to say by choosing the shepherds as the first people to see Jesus and then tell others about the good news?
3. What does it mean, ‘Mary treasured all these words and pondered it in her heart’ v.19?
4. What can we learn from this Bible passage? What is God saying to us through the story of the shepherds?
5. How can we apply the message of this passage to our lives as Christians and how we relate to others?

Since it is still the Christmas season, you could end the session by praying together and singing ‘While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks’.

In preparation for next week, please read Matthew 2:1-12

Week Two – Matthew 2:1-12

Prayer and Praise

Start the session by singing a praise or worship song, e.g. Way maker ([552](#))
[SINACH | WAY MAKER - OFFICIAL VIDEO - YouTube](#)

This is such a famous story. The school nativity play would have seen the wise men bring Jesus the gifts of Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. Similarly, many families will have exchanged gifts with each other this Christmas. This Bible passage tells us that the wise men brought these gifts to worship Jesus. Giving is one of the ways we show our reverence and thankfulness to God the Father. The wise men offered the most expensive gifts available to them in worship of the baby Jesus; it shows how much they value him. When we love someone, we want to give them our best, to show them how much we treasure them.

1. What is your most treasured possession?

What we treasure most may not be tangible; it may be our heart – Jesus said in Matthew 22:37, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’

2. Could you offer your most treasured possession to God in worship?

The wise men saw a castle and thought that would be the most fitting place for a king to be born in, only to find him in the least expected place. It reminds us that Jesus Christ came to seek those that are lowly. Last week we read how the shepherds were the first to be given the message of his birth. Jesus said in Matthew 20:16, ‘so the last will be first and the first will be last.’

The Psalms call us to come before the Lord and bow down in worship, to kneel before the Lord our maker (Psalm 95:6). The shepherds bowed down and worshipped, and the wise men knelt and worshipped.

3. What is your preferred posture of worship?

The wise men were met by an obstacle on their way to worship Jesus. They had followed the star, but for a moment they got distracted and relied on their own knowledge. Only when they began following the star again were they led to Jesus.

4. What obstacles do we find stop us from worshipping God wholeheartedly?

5. What other ways can we show our adoration to God?

As we come to a time of worship, come before him with a thankful heart and praise; bring before him all that prevents you from fully surrendering to him, what troubles you. Continue in worship, singing [\(552\) Hillsong - I Surrender \(with lyrics\) - YouTube](#)

Spend time in prayer for one another and the world around us.

In preparation for next week, please read John 1:29-42

Week Three – John 1:29-42

Bible Study

This passage in John's gospel focuses on John the Baptist presenting Jesus as the Messiah, the lamb of God. It does not detail the baptism of Jesus but speaks with the assumption that we already know the whole story. John the Baptist had been preparing the way for Jesus's coming, and now he presents Jesus as the lamb, the son of God and the one for whom he was telling everyone. Here we see John step back, and Jesus comes forward. John's job was done, and Jesus' began.

1. What jumps out at you in this Bible passage?
2. What is different about how John narrates this story compared to Luke 3:21-22?

John testified of what he saw when he baptised Jesus saying, 'I saw the spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one you who will baptise with the Holy Spirit' (vv. 32b-33)

3. What does it mean to be baptised by the Holy Spirit?
4. Can you think of a time when you saw God at work in you?
5. What do we learn from John as he humbly stepped back and exalted Jesus?
6. What challenges does this passage present to us as Christians?

Finish the session by praying for each other

In preparation for next week, please read Matthew 4:13-23

Week Four – Matthew 4:12-23

Acts of Service

John had finished his mission of proclaiming and preparing the way for Jesus. John the Baptist would not come out of prison – the Bible tells us he met his demise there. The good news is he went to be with the Lord. We read that Jesus, on hearing the news about John's arrest, withdrew to Galilee and positioned himself by the lake in Capernaum. He thus fulfilled the prophecy from Isaiah.

1. Read v.16. What does it mean to live in darkness and to see the light?

Jesus began preaching with a call to repentance.

2. What did Jesus mean by 'Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven has come near'? (v.17)

Jesus called his disciples, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew, who were fishermen. Now, instead of fish, they would be fishing for men. Then he called James and John brothers as well – to follow him.

3. What ministry/mission do you believe God is calling you?

The disciples had to leave their lives as fishermen and follow Jesus. This decision no doubt would not have been easy.

4. What steps would you need to take to answer God's call to mission/ministry?

The arrest of John the Baptist marked the end of his ministry, which he obediently did to his death.

Action

Please take time as a group to pray and discern what action God is calling you to take in ministry together.

- e.g. Could it be supporting and praying for prisoners? Low Newton women's prison and Frankland men's prison ask for donations of socks, especially in winter. People could write anonymous letters of encouragement too, as a reminder to those in prison that God Loves them.

Like John, many innocent people are arrested and imprisoned, especially in dictatorial countries. We hear so much of this in the news. Could you pray for them or support them in some other way?

You may already be doing something as a group; could you add one more thing to what you are already doing? Please pray together and ask God to show you, for we are all called into ministry, to make disciples and pray for one another.

The apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:10, urges us, in the name of Christ, to be in agreement and united in the same mind and purpose. What is going to be that purpose for you as a group?

5. Read Matthew 4:13-23 again slowly together, perhaps pausing every often.

In preparation for next week, please read Luke 2:22-40

Week Five – Luke 2:22-40

Bible Study

It was a tradition in Jewish culture to consecrate every male firstborn as stated in the law of Moses. Also, all women were required to be purified after giving birth by bringing an offering to the temple. Mary and Joseph went to the temple in Jerusalem for two significant events: the purification of Mary; and to present baby Jesus to the Lord. By doing this, they fulfilled the requirements of the law.

The Holy Spirit told Simeon that he would not die before he met the Messiah. Simeon is introduced as a righteous and devout man waiting for the consolation of Israel, on whom the Holy Spirit rested. Likewise, Anna is described as a devout prophetess who spoke about Jesus 'to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem'. At the entrance of the temple, Simeon met the Lord Jesus. He held him in his hands and praised God. Both Simeon and Anna praised God.

1. What surprised you about this story?
2. What one thing will you take from it?

Please finish the session by saying the song of Simeon together.

Read Luke 2.29–32 together