

# A Different Kind of *Christmas*

## Group Discussion Guide

*Thinking about what Matthew tells us*

As we enter into the Christmas season, we want to reflect on what some of the Gospel writers have to tell us about what Christmas is all about. We begin with Matthew. Read Matthew 1:1-25.

Why would Matthew begin with a genealogy? What might he be underscoring?

What help does his opening verse provide you in clarifying what he wants to say?

As you read through the “family tree” of Jesus? What stands out to you? Why?

When Matthew does tell us some of the details of the birth of Jesus, what does he highlight? What does he find important to tell you?

*Thinking about what this means for Christmas*

He didn't have a perfect pedigree. Jesus' family tree included some notable “black sheep.” What does this mean for the way you think about His coming into the world?

Because of our familiarity with the “Christmas story,” we might easily minimize what Matthew maximizes. As he reports Jesus' birth, he underscores the Holy Spirit's active participation and God's purposeful presence. How could the awareness of this dimension of what Christmas is all about shape the way you relate to others throughout the Christmas season?



December 6, 2009  
Christmas Through Matthew's Eyes

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Leader's Guide for Discussion

*Thinking about what Matthew tells us*

So many of us have heard the Christmas story so many times, that it can be hard to find any real meaning or any substantial joy when it is retold. As we look at Matthew's account this week, we want to underscore what is unique and surprising in his account.

As you read the genealogy, what should stand out is the mention of the women. We might not think too much of that, but typically a family lineage would have been traced from father through son. In Matthew's account, there are four women mentioned—and they are notable.

Tamar (Matthew 1:3) ended up sleeping with her father-in-law (see Genesis 38). Rahab (Matthew 1:5) was a prostitute spared from judgment when Israel invaded the land (as recorded in Joshua 2 ). Ruth (Matthew 1:5) has her story told in the book named after her, but she was a foreigner and not an Israelite woman. And then there's Mary (Matthew 1:18), who was "with child" before she was married. What are we supposed to make of all of this? Well, minimally, we have to conclude that God pursues His intended ends in radically unexpected and surprising ways!

When we get to Matthew's short account of the birth, he tells us very little. So, what he does tell us warrants our close attention. What gets repeated in his few sentences? First, notice that the Spirit is mentioned repeatedly. Also, notice that what this birth is all about is the breaking in of God into our world (1:23). What are we supposed to make of this? Well, minimally, we would have to conclude that however else we think about Christmas we should not lose sight of the truth that it is not simply about "the birth of a baby" as much as it is about an invasion into our world of the one true and living God through the enablement of the Spirit. That's a life-altering and world-shaking idea.

*Thinking about what this means for Christmas*

As you reflect on Matthew's account with your group, try and call attention to these two big ideas: *God was pursuing His ends in totally unexpected and surprising ways, and what He was intending was nothing less than to personally invade our world.* Those thoughts could radically impact our thinking about Christmas. As we celebrate and prepare, are we thinking about God doing the unexpected and the surprising for the purpose of invading *our personal world*? Christmas, and the birth of Jesus, was not out of line with how God does stuff! So, this Christmas, it might be helpful to keep these ideas, drawn from Matthew, in mind and heart.

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