

# Silent Night

## ADVENT STUDY GUIDE



### STUDY #1: MARY'S VOICE

Read / Listen to Luke 1:26-38

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Mary's voice is a powerful response. In a commentary on this passage Dr. Amy Orr-Ewing says, "An ordinary, young, poor, oppressed woman gets to play a significant, breakthrough role in the redemption of the world. Evil will be crushed and defeated through her seed. Her body will play a part in showing the world that Jesus really is Immanuel – God with us."

In many countries across the MENA, women are much the same as Mary – young and oppressed. Through His choice of a woman like this, we can learn a lot about how God continues to work today: all He needs is faith and obedience.

We can be encouraged that God uses people of all ages, genders and backgrounds to bring about his Kingdom. Let's remember women and young girls just like Mary in the MENA as we reflect on this passage and pray for God to speak to them today.

### QUESTIONS

- 1 Mary responds to the Angel with such willingness and obedience. What can we learn from Mary's voice? How can we respond with faith like she did?
- 2 Mary is encouraged by God's work in her cousin Elizabeth's life. Can you think of a time when seeing or hearing of how God had acted in someone else's life helped you to trust Him more?
- 3 Is God calling you to something that seems impossible in your life right now, something that deserves a Mary-like response?

### PRAY

Father, we thank you for Mary's faithfulness and obedience to your call upon her life. Help me to respond to You with the same faith. I pray for women in the MENA region who are just like Mary. I pray that they will hear your voice and respond to the love you have lavished on them. May they seek you, find you, serve you and love you this Advent season. In Jesus' Name, Amen.



## STUDY #2: JOSEPH'S SILENCE

Read / Listen to Matthew 1:18-25

Silence can feel pointless, empty and sometimes inescapable. But, as we learn throughout the Bible, God is often in the silence as a “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12). In the story of Jesus’ birth, Joseph is silent; we never hear him speak in the Gospels, but his actions speak louder than words.

Joseph wants to live in accordance with God’s law but his situation becomes complex. His wife is pregnant and it’s not by him so he decides to quietly divorce her. Here, Joseph could have made a real noise about the situation he finds himself in, publicly divorce Mary and shame her. But out of his love for her and reverence for God, he considers the matter quietly and carefully. In Joseph’s turmoil, we discover that he goes into the deepest silence: he sleeps. As Joseph drifts off, God speaks to him in a dream and his heart is ready for God to show him what He has in store through the birth of Jesus.

When Joseph wakes his response is compelling. He acts and serves God through his commitment to Mary and Jesus. Joseph reminds us of those in situations that seem hopelessly complex and impossible, unable to speak out, get help or escape. But God’s purpose is fulfilled through one silent, willing man.

### QUESTIONS

- 1 Joseph is an honorable man but he finds himself in a scandalous situation. How do you think he felt about what was happening?
- 2 Joseph becomes silent through his troubling situation. When has God spoken clarity to you at a time when you felt confused or uncertain about something that was happening?
- 3 At this busy Advent time, how could you set aside some time to be silent and ready your heart to hear from God?

### PRAY

Father God, speak to those who are silent today, overwhelmed by their situation. Men and women across the MENA region much like Joseph: poor, oppressed, unable to speak up. We ask that you reveal your purposes to them and raise up your children to serve you whole-heartedly, through your son Jesus, today.



## STUDY #3: THE SHEPHERD'S CALL

Read / Listen to Luke 2:8-20

The shepherds were met by a whole host of angels – what a terrifying and exciting experience! What would be your first instinct? Run away? Faint? Join in the worship?

The shepherds were not at the centre of society; they were outsiders, on the fringes, just going about their work. No one else would have thought to share important news with them but, here, we see they were valued by God. He chose to share the good news with them. Their reaction is so immediate, so compelling. They go to Bethlehem to see Jesus and when they return, they are in awe, called to worship and share all that they had seen and heard.

There are many things that hold us back from sharing the good news of Jesus. Remember that first time you encountered Jesus; perhaps you immediately wanted to share what you had experienced. But the pressures and judgement from those around us can fill us with fear, quietening our response. For Christians in the MENA region, sharing the Gospel can be incredibly challenging and even illegal in some places. They risk being ostracised from their families and communities; arrest and imprisonment; violence and even death.

Nevertheless, God calls us, as he did the shepherds, to share His son Jesus with the world. This season, ask God to help you become like the shepherds. Praise Him, glorify Him, and share all that He has done for you.

### QUESTIONS

- 1 What are you most inspired by in this part of the Christmas story?
- 2 The shepherds respond to what they see and hear by praising God. What are you praising God for today?
- 3 How could you share the good news of Jesus this Advent season? Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit and give you boldness and confidence to do this.

### PRAY

Loving Heavenly Father, give us a fresh perspective on all that you have done for us through your son Jesus. Help us, and your people in the MENA, to share the Gospel with those around us this Advent season. In Jesus’ name, Amen.



## **STUDY #4: THE WISE MEN'S WORSHIP**

**Read / Listen to Matthew 2:1-12**

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Expectant, excited and extravagant worship. This sums up the wise men's worship and what we can learn from their response to seeking and finding the Messiah. Firstly, they were expectant. These men were awaiting something; they were ready to seek the truth. They travelled many miles because they were hopeful of finding something incredible at the end of their journey.

They were excited. When they met Jesus, they "rejoiced exceedingly with great joy." They were overcome with excitement about meeting the King Jesus. The account also tells us they "fell down and worshiped Him." Scholarly men, known throughout the land for being well educated, impressive people, fell to their knees in worship – showing us how powerful Jesus' presence is.

And finally, they were extravagant in their worship. They brought with them three marvelous gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. They brought their very best, leaving all else behind to worship Jesus. Does our worship look like this? Worship can come at such a cost for many who raise their voices in praise across the Middle East. Thank God for the freedom we have to worship this Advent and pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ who long to worship expectantly, excitedly and extravagantly.

### **QUESTIONS**

- 1** When was the last time you came to worship expectant of Jesus?
- 2** What does your worship look like? Have you surrendered yourself in praise of Jesus, the King?
- 3** How could you be extravagant in what you give to God this season? Are you willing to give Him the worship and praise He deserves?

### **PRAY**

Father God, thank you for these wise men that remind us that we can come to you totally surrendered and give you all our praise. Help us to be expectant, excited and extravagant in our worship. We give you all the praise for your Son Jesus and we worship you with our very best. Amen.