



**DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS
18 & 19 DECEMBER 2021
FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT**

**“O EMMANUEL, GOD WITH US”
MATTHEW 1.18-25**

- **Begin by reading the Scripture passage together.**
- **Review the video of the sermon if needed (see <http://www.brnc.org.sg/category/resources/sermons>).**
- **Feel free to discuss as few or as many questions as best fits your group’s current context and present stage in life.**
- **Remember to budget some time (15-20 min) to pray with and for one another, before ending your group session.**

***O EMMANUEL, our King and Lawgiver,
the Expected of the nations and their Savior:
Come and save us, O Lord, our God.***

***O come, O come Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel.
Which mourns in lonely Exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.***

Discussion Questions

- 1. “Emmanuel” means “God with us.” In Matthew 1:23, the Bible explains that Mary’s son, Jesus, is the fulfilment of the promise that God made in Isaiah 7:14. The world will call Jesus “Emmanuel” because He fulfils God’s promise to be with us. What comes to mind when you think of the idea of God being with us?**
 - This introductory question is an opportunity for group members to share their own personal thoughts or opinions of what comes to mind when they think of God being with us. There is no “right” response as it is more an opportunity to allow group members to share, learn and encourage one another.
 - Some responses could talk about the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, God sending Jesus to be on Earth to be with us during His years of ministry, etc.
 - You may also encourage group members to share personal experiences of God’s presence in their lives, of God’s provision and help in times of need.
 - In subsequent discussion questions, we will observe how God’s provision for the pregnant Mary serves as a case study for “God being with us.” God’s provision for Mary as she faced challenges bearing Jesus is evidence of His presence and His involvement in Mary (and our) lives, showing that He is with us in our time of need.

- 2. In 1:18-19, what were some of the challenges that Mary and Joseph were facing during Mary’s pregnancy with Jesus? What do you think Mary and Joseph felt during this time?**
 - When Mary was pregnant with Jesus, she was betrothed (engaged) to Joseph but they were not yet officially married. Mary was still a virgin.
 - Her pregnancy with Jesus would have encouraged rumours among Jewish society. Her neighbours and passers-bys could see that she was pregnant before she had gotten married, and people would naturally have thought that she had pre-martial sexual relations with Joseph - or worse, with another man.

- Such pre-marital sexual relations were taboo in Jewish society and would have led to much condemnation. Hence, Mary would have felt much shame. She also would have experienced loneliness as the people around her shunned her, gossiped about her, or simply shot her those looks of disdainful judgement. This loneliness would have been made even worse if Joseph had gone ahead with his plans to divorce her. While divorcing her would have saved himself from further public shame, Mary would have to bear the pregnancy and her struggles on her own.
- Joseph must have felt terribly cheated and disappointed that his bride-to-be would have slept with another man behind his back. Yet, despite his own hurt, he planned to break off the engagement quietly to spare Mary further shame (v.19).
- However, after the angel's announcement, Joseph decided to continue the engagement and wed Mary. This act would have brought shame upon himself. He would have been called a 'cuckold' by the neighbours, a loser who could not command the full affections of his bride-to-be, a weak man who was unable to manage his own family.
- This was for Mary, an unsought pregnancy. And for Joseph, this was an unwanted situation which now made Mary an undesirable fiancé.

3. How was God with Mary and Joseph in their time of need?

- In v.20, God intervened by sending his angel to Joseph to stop Joseph's plans to divorce Mary. When the angel appeared to Joseph, the angel told Joseph that he need not be afraid to take Mary as his wife.
- God reassured Joseph that he did not need to fear the personal shame of marrying Mary or of Mary's public disgrace. Mary's pregnancy was a result of the Holy Spirit's work. God was with them, and He would take care of them and see the pregnancy through the end, bringing His work to completion.
- Through reassuring Joseph, God provided for Mary in her struggles of shame and loneliness. While Mary still had to bear the struggles of her pregnancy, God provided Joseph to support and care for her through the pregnancy. Through Joseph, God provided for her.

4. How does Jesus fulfil God's promise of Emmanuel?

- God provided for Mary and Joseph throughout the pregnancy. Just as God was with Mary and Joseph in their time of need, God is with us in the midst of life's struggles and anxieties. Jesus was born as a human being. He walked the paths that we walked and he understands our struggles and our anxieties as we navigate the challenges of life. While life's struggles may cause us to question God's presence, we can always look to Jesus as evidence that God is with us – Emmanuel.
- Most importantly, Jesus has already provided for us and our greatest needs. In v.21, the angel of the Lord told Joseph to call Mary's son "Jesus," which means, 'God saves'. Jesus came to save us from our sins. Just as we discussed in our series on 1 John at

the start of the year, Jesus came to draw us from the darkness of sin and into the light. He was born as a human to take the punishment for the sins of humans – our sins.

- Sin's consequence is the very opposite of 'God with us' – that is, separation from God's presence. But by bearing our sin and experiencing a sense of separation from the Father on the Cross (Matt 27:46), Jesus saved us from this separation, allowing us to be united with God for eternity. This is the fullness of 'God with us'.

Response, Application, Prayer

5. Consider Mary's story and what it says about how God is faithful to us. Have there been times when you were uncertain whether God was truly with you? Looking back, how did that experience shape your faith?

- If time permits and your group members are willing to be vulnerable, encourage them to share how their current recollection of the experience differs from how they experienced it in the moment. We often only see God's hand in events after the fact.

6. How does Jesus' embodiment of 'God with us' comfort you or bring you hope? In what ways have you experienced this comfort and hope in the past weeks? Would you pray for each other to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's working of God's presence, God's comfort, and God's hope in your lives?