



THE JOURNEY

Walking the Road to Bethlehem

Youth Edition







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THE JOURNEY: WALKING THE ROAD TO BETHLEHEM
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Introduction



The story of Jesus' birth is one of western civilization's best-known stories. It has been immortalized in popular songs, children's Christmas pageants, figurines and lawn ornaments, and great works of art. Even people outside of the church know about the story's setting (a manger in Bethlehem), major players (Mary and Joseph and the shepherds and angels), and overall plot.

But when we take a closer look at this beloved story, we see details that we may have missed. The purpose of this study is to take a fresh look at the story of Jesus' birth by retracing the steps of those who were involved. As you work through the five sessions in this book, you'll take a trip to the Holy Land as it was two millennia ago and examine the key events leading up to and including the first Christmas. Along the way you'll consider what the story of Jesus' birth teaches us about God and our relationship with God. You'll also reflect on how the truths and lessons of Christ's Nativity apply to your life today.





THE JOURNEY: WALKING THE ROAD TO BETHLEHEM

The Purpose of This Study

This 5-session study for teens is inspired by and based on Adam Hamilton's book *The Journey: Walking the Road to Bethlehem*. This study, like the book that inspired it, looks at the events leading up to Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and draws lessons from these events that you can apply to your day-to-day life.

Also Available

- *The Journey: Walking the Road to Bethlehem*, by Adam Hamilton (ISBN 9781426714252)
- *The Journey: Walking the Road to Bethlehem* DVD, including a leader guide (ISBN 9781426719998)
- *The Journey: A Season of Reflections*, a devotional companion (ISBN 9781426714269)

Although this resource is intended for teens, the book itself is set up like an adult Bible study. Whether a leader or a participant, everyone has the same book and literally is on the same page. Leaders should review the material in advance to determine which activities and discussion questions the group will use.

The Journey: Walking the Road to Bethlehem Youth Edition includes five sessions, making it ideal for the season of Advent (one session for each Sunday during Advent, plus one session for Christmas Sunday). But the impact of the Nativity story is not limited to a certain time of year. Regardless of the season, this study is a great way for youth Sunday school classes or Bible study groups to gain a better understanding of what Mary, Joseph, and the other persons in the story experienced in the days leading up to Jesus' birth.



Each of the five sessions includes the following parts:

Getting Started—Each session identifies a few goals for that session. These goals give leaders some clear teaching objectives and participants something to focus on as they journey with Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Each session also provides definitions of key words and place-names that may be unfamiliar to many participants.

Introduction—While none of us have been told by an angel that we will give birth to or parent the Messiah, we can still draw from our experiences to gain a better sense of what Mary, Joseph, and the other players in the story of Jesus' birth were experiencing. Every session's introduction makes a connection between an event leading up to Christ's birth and a situation that most young people today find familiar. Participants can read the introduction prior to each session, or groups can spend time reading the information during each session.

Testimonial—Every session includes an interview with a young person whose personal experience mirrors what is going on in that session's Scripture passage.

Video Presentation and Discussion—An optional, but recommended resource, Adam Hamilton's *The Journey* DVD takes viewers to the Holy Land, where he visits sites that are traditionally associated with the events leading up to Jesus' birth. Each of the segments runs about 10 minutes. Each session provides a list of sights (what viewers will see on the DVD) and key insights (what viewers should take away) for that session's video segment. The session also provides a list of discussion questions that groups can use to debrief the video.



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Book Study and Discussion—This part of the session is also optional. Because this study is based on Adam Hamilton’s *The Journey*, participants would benefit from reading and reflecting on that book. Every chapter in the book corresponds to a session in this study, and each session provides questions for groups wanting to discuss and debrief what they have read.

Bringing the Scripture to My Life—One of the main objectives of this study is to help participants make connections between the events leading up to Jesus’ birth and their lives today. This part of each session provides discussion questions that help participants make these connections.

Going Deeper in Truth—While the primary Scripture for every session is a Gospel text related to Jesus’ birth and promised coming, other Scriptures give us insight into the significance of who Jesus is, why Jesus came to live among us, and what we can learn from the events surrounding his birth.

Experience Life in Community—Jesus and his closest followers were a tight-knit community. They traveled together, ate together, learned together, and forgave one another. Jesus’ followers throughout history have maintained this emphasis on community, and life in community is an important part of each session.

Making It Personal—Belonging to a community of believers is an essential part of the Christian life, but the gospel also has an impact on us as individuals. Every session gives individual participants instructions for putting what they’ve learned into action during the coming week.

Closing: Listening for God—Every session concludes with a time of prayer and reflection, lifting up what the participants have learned and asking God’s guidance as everyone goes forth.



INTRODUCTION

What we really hunger for will not be found under the tree on Christmas morning. We hunger for meaning, for joy, for hope in the face of despair. We hunger to know that we can be forgiven and start anew after things we regret. We hunger for a love that will not let us go and for life and triumph in the face of death. These come through a baby born in a stable, laid to sleep in a feeding trough, visited by night-shift shepherds. He is for us the bread of life. And we must come to the stable to satisfy the deepest desires of our hearts.

I invite you to come to the manger this Christmas and to eat of this bread. I invite you to choose to become Christ's follower and to put your trust in him. John tells us that "all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (1:12, NRSV).

Christmas is the perfect time to call out to God and to his son Jesus Christ and to pray, "Jesus, I come to you, like the shepherds and the magi did so long ago. I accept you as my King, my Savior, and my Lord. Forgive me for the ways I've turned from God's path, and help me to follow you. Save me from myself, and help me to live for you. I receive you, Jesus Christ, and believe in your name. Make me your child, and bring me your joy. Help me to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with you. In your name I pray, Jesus my Christ. Amen."

—Adam Hamilton, *The Journey: Walking the Road to Bethlehem*



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