

Unexpected Christmas — Joseph Small Group Guide

Warm-up Question: (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part all together, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. Do you like surprises?
2. Is there anything you are looking forward to in the midst of an unusual Christmas season?

Read the following passage: Matthew 1:18 - 2:23.

During the months before and the first few years after Jesus' birth Joseph had to deal with a wide variety of unexpected circumstances: a nearly unbelievable story from his fiancé; responding to a (probably intense) message from God in the form of a dream; handling the reactions of friends and family members concerning Mary's pregnancy; traveling to another town late in Mary's pregnancy (during which time she gave birth); fleeing as a refugee to Egypt to save his family; moving back to Israel and settling down somewhere other than his planned place of residence (again to protect his family); and navigating the pressure of parenting a child with an unimaginably significant destiny. He never would have imagined he would live this kind of life. But God provided for Joseph, and he will provide for us in the middle of life's unexpected turns.

Questions for Discussion (Choose several that are relevant for your group):

1. Which parts of Joseph's story do you think would have been the most difficult for you to manage?
2. What are some ways you are prone to respond when things don't go how you hope? What helps you move forward?
3. What are some indications in this passage that Joseph had admirable character? How do we develop character in our lives? What are some ways unexpected outcomes reveal our character?
4. God directed Joseph at key moments during these significant years. Have you ever sensed God directing you at key moments in your own life? Explain. How do you practically pursue direction from God?
5. The Magi provided expensive gifts that surely would have been helpful to Joseph and his family while they were refugees in Egypt. Can you think of times in your life in which God has provided for you? Are you confident that God will provide for you in the future? How is this confidence manifested in your life?

6. What is one way you would like to respond better when things don't go how you expect in life?

7. What is one way you can see God working in your life in this unusual season?

Pray