SERMON STUDY GUIDE
“Finding the Wonder”
For the sermon preached on 12/1:
“What Happened to Wonder?”
From the text:
Isaiah 9:1-7

How to use the Groups Study Guide
Hello Leaders! Thank you for your ongoing commitment to pursue Christian community and the study of Scripture—study that leads to life transformation in Christ and strives to serve “the other.”

These studies have been designed with the following aspects in mind:

1. To facilitate a discussion on the passage of Scripture that was preached that particular Sunday using the Inductive Bible Study Method. In summary, this method stresses “Observation” (what the reader can see from the text), “Interpretation” (what we can learn when we study the text with various tools, commentaries, and resources), and “Application” (how we can apply the Scripture to our lives).

2. Groups using this study range from the new leader to the highly experienced. Groups themselves have their own context. This study attempts to hit the middle. The stronger studies require about an hour of leader preparation to contextualize this resource to the needs and personalities of your group. It’s recommended that you rephrase the questions to match your voice and have an understanding of the interpretive questions as you prepare to lead and facilitate.

3. In addition to prep time, please spend time in prayer during preparation and before and after the study. It’s the power of the Holy Spirit that illuminates the Word of Scripture and we are humbled that He uses our combined efforts as part of this work. (For more tips on using this study, please see the endnotes.)

As always, we are so grateful for you, your gifting, your servant leadership, and all that you do for the cause of Christ. Please let us know if we can help you in any way.

Grace and peace,
Pastor Tim, on behalf of the Group Life Team

Arriving to the time of Advent is always bittersweet. Another year is rapidly coming to a close and we wonder how did that happen so quickly? Yet, before we get to the dawn of a new year, we get to experience the beauty and joy of Christmas – the story of Jesus coming near.

“Advent” means “expectant” and throughout the ages, followers of Jesus would use this time to prepare their hearts for Christmas with spiritual practices including various readings, different forms of fasting, focused prayer, spiritual reflection, and of course, the study of Scripture.
Our new Advent series is called, “Follow the Wonder” and it’s our desire that our hearts become reawakened to our child-like wonder and to ponder anew God’s glory and also the nearness of Jesus as we celebrate his coming. Throughout this series, we will examine and discuss passages of Scripture, tuck it in our hearts, open wide our eyes, and invite each other to follow the wonder.

Let’s take a moment now and invite the Lord to speak into our hearts as we begin in our journey through Advent and as we look at this text in Isaiah 9.

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9 Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—

2 The people walking in darkness
   have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
   a light has dawned.
3 You have enlarged the nation
   and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you
   as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice
   when dividing the plunder.
4 For as in the day of Midian’s defeat,
you have shattered
the yoke that burdens them,
   the bar across their shoulders,
   the rod of their oppressor.
5 Every warrior’s boot used in battle
   and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
   will be fuel for the fire.
6 For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
   and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  

7 Of the greatness of his government and peace  
    there will be no end.  
He will reign on David’s throne  
    and over his kingdom,  
establishing and upholding it  
    with justice and righteousness  
    from that time on and forever.  
The zeal of the L ORD Almighty  
    will accomplish this.

Isaiah 9:1-7

O – Slowly re-read the poetry of these seven verses, feel the cadence, lean into the details, and take a step back and try to capture the big picture. What speaks to you and is there anything here that stirs your heart to wonder?

O – This is ancient victory song. God has delivered them not only from the Midians (vs 4) but the ancient Israelites are looking ahead at a promise that one day a Messiah from David’s line will create a righteous kingdom without end. Look back at the passage one more time, and pick out the descriptors of this never-ending, righteous kingdom.  
( Help your group identify descriptors like joyful [v. 3-4], the picturesque end to violence where the soldier’s gear is kindle for the celebration fire [v. 5], and the promise of a child that will make all things new and just forever [v. 7]).

O – In Adam’s sermon, he defined wonder as:  
“a complex emotion involving elements of surprise, curiosity, contemplation, and joy. It is perhaps best defined as a heightened state of consciousness and emotion brought about by something singularly beautiful, rare, or unexpected—that is, by a marvel.”  
Answer either question that speaks to you: what did you wonder about in your earlier years and what do you wonder about now?  
(A note to your group, avoid the temptation of attempting to answer each other’s wonders, either affirm it or add your own :)

I – The defeat of the Midians was an actual historical event in Israel’s early history.  
If you are familiar with the battle of Gideon, you will remember that he takes 300 men and fights against the Midians (Judges 6-8). Of all of Israel’s battles, why do you think Isaiah highlights this one here in this section?
(No one can know for sure but it is fascinating to think about it. Perhaps Isaiah fixates on this particular battle because it highlighted two features in Israel’s early history into the Promised Land. First, Gideon and his outnumbered 300 men needed to trust that God would help them defeat the larger army. And second, it was this victory that allowed the children of Israel to gain a strategic foothold and create community in their new home.)

A – How can we as worshippers experience wonder on the other side of God’s deliverance in our everyday battles and struggles? Remember, this passage is selecting a victory where they believed God fought through and for them. Though thankfully our battles are metaphorically less violent, how does God fight and work in and through us today?

I – To begin to understand this passage, we have to appreciate the idea of the end of violence. Isaiah is “wondering out loud” saying that the soldiers’ boots will no longer be needed, or their swords for that matter, and then points to a birth of a child-king deliverer. Imagine together or wonder out loud what it must have been like for an ancient Israelite soldier to throw his gear away because it won’t be needed. (It starts to make even more sense why the prophesied Jesus is often referred to the “Prince of Peace”).

A – In addition to the “Prince of Peace,” Isaiah uses other great descriptors in vs. 6 including “Wonderful Counselor,” “Mighty God,” and “Everlasting Father.” As you think of these names for Jesus, where do you need Jesus to meet you today and what might you wonder about this Advent season?

a. Please note that not all these questions might be able to be asked in a single meeting. Take some time to prayerfully discern what will serve your group the best. Select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your group.
b. Complement these questions with “process questions” (what else? what more? what do others think?).
c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don’t rush people but encourage participation. Avoid answering your own questions!
d. Application: Pace the study to conclude with difference-making application.
e. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into “teaching” rather than facilitating, causing people to feel distracted or de-powered.