

## Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

### Advent Week 2—Peace? Kingdoms in Conflict

- Q. What is your favorite Christmas song? Why do you like that song (or what about that song do you like)?**
- Q. When you think of Christmas, what images, sentiments, descriptions, adjectives would you use to paint the picture of what Christmas means to you? To our culture/society?**

On one level it seems ironic that one of the words/ideas we focus on at Advent is “peace”. In many ways, the arrival of Jesus is anything but “peaceful”. Better words might be “chaos”, “conflict”, and “crisis”. It’s a paradox, really. In fact, Jesus understood this very well.

In Matthew 10:32 we read, *“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”* Likewise, in Luke 12:51 we read, *“Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.”* Well that doesn’t sound very “Christmas-y” now does it? Especially when the prophetic passages around the birth of the Messiah say, *“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. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.”* (Isaiah 9:6-7a NIV) Moreover, when the angels announced the birth of the Christ-child they declared, *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”* (Luke 2:14 NIV) So what gives? Well, that’s the interesting thing about a paradox, isn’t it? Two contradictory things both being true at the same time.

The key to understanding all of this is by viewing the Christ-event (which includes everything about Jesus—the incarnation, teachings, miracles, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension...all of it—through a political lens as opposed to a “spiritual” lens.

Notice a key word in the Isaiah prophesy...“government”. That’s a political term. In Matthew’s Christmas narrative, we see the Magi from the east coming to Jerusalem looking for *“the king of the Jews”* (Matthew 2:2) Also a political term. Fast forward to when Jesus began His ministry; the overarching theme of everything He said (teachings) or did (miracles) was couched in the understanding the *“the Kingdom of God is at hand”* (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:43; John 3:3) Again, a political term. Then, of course, we have the titles Lord, Christ, and Messiah...yep, you guessed it, political terminology. Oh, and while we’re at it, the Greek word “ekklesia” which is the word translated into English as “church” is a socio-political term, NOT a religious or spiritual term as we are accustomed to thinking of it.

The problem is that there are already governments in place. There are already kings, rulers, leaders, authorities operating in this world. None of them take too kindly to someone moving in on their action. King Herod, as we read of him in Matthew chapter 2, simply epitomizes all earthly kings and kingdoms with his “distress” of the birth/arrival of a new King. Fast-forward again to Jesus’ trial before Pilate. Pilate point-blank asked Jesus, *“Are you the king of the Jews?”*

(John 18:33 NIV) This was the only point in which Pilate cared. Was there a rival King to Caesar that needed to be dealt with? I cannot overstate it enough: Jesus is not so much a “spiritual” figure as He is a “political” figure...always has been, always will be. People who simply go around telling people to love each other and how to go to heaven when they die are of no threat or consequence to Rome, and do not end up on crucified on a Roman cross. (Keep in mind the sign on the cross that stated Jesus’ crime: “The King of the Jews.”

All that to say, for people who have their own political interests in mind, Jesus is a threat and brings anything but peace. BUT, for those who are willing to accept His Kingship and offer their allegiance and loyalty, He is their peace.

Contextually, practically, on a day to day level, there is only, really, one competitor/rival to the Kingship of Jesus in our lives. That is King or Queen Self. You and I are the tyrant that needs to be displaced in order for King Jesus to reign effectively in our lives. He will not force the issue...at least not yet. More dangerous, is that we can fool ourselves into thinking that He reigns in our lives, when in fact we are securely on the throne, calling the shots. Additionally, we have the tendency to “domesticate” Jesus by categorizing Him as a spiritual or ethereal figure, as opposed to the rightful King, to Whom our ultimate allegiance and loyalty lies...far above any nation, culture, race, tribe, or any other distinction we could categorize ourselves a part of.

You and I may not have all the trappings of King Herod (money, power, etc.) but we do have some control and authority...even if it’s only over our own little lives. So, the level of chaos, conflict, and crisis may not be of the same magnitude as Herod had to face, but it is nevertheless real.

I specifically want to focus on the word “crisis”...which comes from the Greek word “krisis”...which is typically translated “judgment” in English translations. Technically, it means to separate or divide in order to compare, then to conclude...or judge. So, Christmas, properly understood, isn’t so much a time of sentimental serenity, but an invitation/challenge to compare kings and kingdoms, and to choose between kings and kingdoms...and perhaps to reassess where our loyalty lies. The peace only comes for those who have solidly given themselves to King Jesus. Then, the celebration of His birth is a time of glad-tidings.

Biblically, the word “peace” (Shalom in Hebrew; Eirene in Greek) carries within it the idea of completeness, wholeness, the fixing of what is broken. Our lives will only be complete, whole, fixed when the rightful Ruler runs our lives, and we joyfully submit to His good reign.

**Q. How do you compete with Jesus for rulership of your life?**

**Q. As you consider/reflect on how you celebrate Christmas, what would give the casual observer the idea that you are celebrating the birth of your King? What would give the casual observer the idea that you are celebrating the birth of the King of the World?**

- Q. The Magi (pagan astrologers) responded to the birth of Jesus by coming a long way, bowing down, worshipping, and presenting Him with costly gifts (Matthew 2:11). Herod responded by slaughtering children (Matthew 2:16). It seems that many people today respond to Jesus with indifference and apathy. How do you/we account for such wide and diverse responses to Jesus?**
- Q. If someone were to ask you for a good and proper way to respond to Jesus as King, what would you tell them?**
- Q. What does having Jesus as your King look like in your life? How does His reign play itself out in your life? Now think communally...what does having Jesus as OUR King look like in our lives together?**
- Q. How have you experienced "peace" because of Jesus.**