

FILM DISCUSSION GUIDE

Immanuel (Hope has Answered)

EVE'S THIRD SON: Seth, who was born to Adam and Eve after Cain killed Abel was seen by Eve as reinstating the promise that God would bring Messiah through her lineage.

HOPE WHISPERED: It is speculated that Eve may have expected Seth himself to be the Messiah that would fulfill the "protoevangelium," the promise that her offspring would "crush" the serpent's head. This is considered by many to be the first messianic prophecy. (Gen. 3-4).

TAMAR, RAHAB, RUTH, BATHSHEEBA: This poem focuses on four women in Christ's lineage, all of whom are singled out in Matthew's genealogy (Matt. 1:3,5,6). Tamar, the first mentioned, was the daughter-in-law of Judah, one of the founding fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel. When her husband died, leaving her childless, she seduced her father-in-law, Judah, by disguising herself as a prostitute. From this union, she became pregnant and her child, Perez, was the next step in the progression toward Christ (Gen. 38).

Rahab, a prostitute from Jericho, is best known for hiding the two Jewish spies from Joshua's army (Joshua 2). When Jericho fell, she and her family were saved because of her faith. She married Salmon, of the tribe of Judah, and she is thereby included in Matthew's genealogy.

Rahab and Salmon's son, Boaz married Ruth, the Moabitess. The Moabites were sworn enemies of Israel, and this marriage represented a departure from family norms at the time (see book of Ruth).

The last woman to be mentioned in Matthew's lineage is Bathsheeba, the women with whom King David committed his infamous adultery. It is through this union, however, that Solomon was conceived, the next movement towards Israel's Messiah.

Certainly, Matthew includes these sordid stories in his history for a reason. Christ did not show up on earth sterilized, wearing rubber gloves and a haz-mat suit. Rather, he inherited the complex and messy history of a family, and furthermore, the history of humanity as a whole. Truly, "God with Us," extends not just to Christ's singular presence on earth, but also to that thread that is inextricably woven into our bloodlines.

And **Eve's** third son kicks in his blood—
her hope is whispered
into a world of blood spilt guiltiness **Tamar**
seduces her father
in desperation **Rahab**
hangs her ribbon red with hope **Ruth**
lays on the threshing floor in fear **Bathsheeba's**
guilt is born in promise
and **Mary** is greatly afraid.

IMAGES



(00:20) Juxtaposition: One of the things that most struck us about the Advent narrative was the consistent juxtaposition: A virgin accused of infidelity, a prostitute made a mother, a barren womb giving birth, the Holy God being made into a weak a squalid baby. As part of our visual exploration of the topic, we chose to do several split-screens with varied angles or focus depths on the same subject in an effort to express the complexity inherent in the narrative: there's more than one angle on to every "scene" in the long plot lines leading up to the birth of the Messiah.

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ELIZABETH'S SHRIVELLED WOMB: Elizabeth, the sister of Mary, was an old woman at the beginning of Luke's account. She had never had children and was beyond the age of possibility. In a consistently arising theme, God took the impossibility of Elizabeth's womb and from that barrenness, brought hope (Luke 1).

A VOICE CRYING OUT: Elizabeth's son was John the Baptist, the final prophet to fulfill Christ's birth. His importance and role was described by Isaiah as a "voice of one crying out in the wilderness; prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths's straight." (Matt. 3.:3)

ZECHARIAH CANNOT SPEAK: In Luke's account of the advent narrative, Elizabeth's husband (a priest) is told by the angel Gabriel that his wife will be with child. Though he has waited for this day all his life, he is incredulous that such an outlandish promise could actually be fulfilled. When he questions Gabriel, he is made mute until the day of John's birth. (Luke 1)

SARAH TOO HAS LAUGHED: In a similar reaction to Zechariah, Sarah could not believe that God could actually turn her barren womb into a place of hope. When she overheard the messengers of the LORD tell Abraham that she would be with child, she laughed to herself in disbelief (Gen. 17). In answer to her lack of faith, She and Abraham named their child Isaac, which translates "laughter." It was through Isaac (through Sarah's laughter and disbelief) that God brought Christ to the world.

From Elizabeth's shriveled womb, there is a wailing hope—
a voice of one crying out in the wilderness—
and Zechariah so full of wonder he cannot speak,
cannot speak for disbelief
that hope is born from such great barrenness.

And Sarah too has laughed,
Laughed but now believes that laughter is the name
That fills her child's promised mouth.

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(00:30) STORK: The stork is a popular early Christian symbol that has recently fallen out of usage. Symbolic of good news and foretelling, it was often associated with Mary and the advent.

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PROPHETS: One of the most compelling threads of the advent narrative is that of prophecy. Hundreds of years before Christ's birth, prophets were waiting in expectation, and even though they never saw the Messiah, that longing and desperate yearning for Messiah's coming is apparent in their writing. (See Isaiah 7, Micah 5 and 2 Samuel 7 among many, many others).

ANIMAL SACRIFICE: In our sterile church services, it's a bit difficult to picture the violence of these sacrifices, but the Jewish people had to do more than give up some of their best livestock for sacrifice. In certain circumstances, they would be required to hold onto the horns of the bull while it was being sacrificed. This visceral, violent connection between the people of God and their sin was a constant reminder of their need for atonement. It was a physical manifestation of their longing for Messiah. (For more on the sacrificial system, see book of Deuteronomy).

ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION: In 168 BC, Antiochus Epiphanes committed what many theologians consider to be the first of two great "abominations of desolation" (the second to be committed by the Antichrist). After murdering thousands of Jews and destroying much of Jerusalem, he committed the ultimate act of disrespect for the people of Israel and their God - he sacrificed a pig on the altar and destroyed much of the temple. This is the Israel Christ enters, torn apart by a series of ruthless dictators, wandering without a sacrificial system and fundamentally disgraced. The climate is undoubtedly one of unrest and fear. (See prophecies in Daniel 12).

SON, PRINCE, GOVERNOR: In the midst of this darkness, it's easy to laugh, like Sarah, at the prophecies of Isaiah "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

Oh, our prophets have been crying out for centuries—
For centuries we have let the blood of our goats
We have been slitting the throats of our bulls
in expectation—
And our prophets crying out in the unassailable night,
Unending wickedness,
the dark gravitation of our idolatry.

To us a son? A prince? A governor?
Upon whose shoulders came this government—
This terror, this abomination of desolation?

IMAGES



(00:50, 01:05) BLOOD & VIOLENCE: It's easy to forget about sin and death at Christmas, but this total darkness casts the backdrop for the brilliant light of the Advent. The hot, glowing white images on a dark background help communicate the disparity between our condition and the brilliance of "God Among Us."

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TO US A GREAT LIGHT: “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned” (Isaiah 9:3).

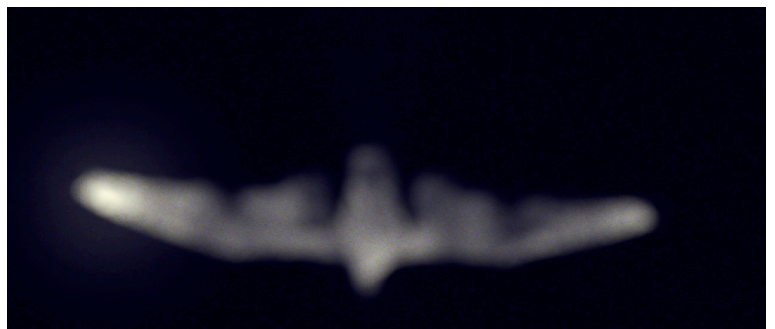
WOMBS ARE CLOSED: In Genesis 1, God created the world out of what the Hebrew describes as “tohu” and “vobohu,” translated “formless and void.” From the very opening of scripture, we see God taking the chaos and disorder of our surroundings and creating order. Just as Sarah and Elizabeth were well beyond the ability to create life, we experience a spiritual barrenness, one beyond repair. Into this void, this “tohu and vobohu,” God sends his incarnate son, his son who declares in Revelation that he “makes all things new” (Rev. 21:9).

BLOOD AND STRAW: Perhaps the most shocking juxtaposition in the entire “Christmas Story” is that of the all-powerful Creator of the universe reduced to a helpless infant, kicking wildly in a stall. Though this image has been sanitized again and again in nativity scenes, there is no doubt that a first-century birth in an animal stall wouldn’t have been a very pretty scene. What we lose in sugar-coating this account is the true nature of Christ’s incarnation - his incredible and complete enrobing of himself with humanity, all our blood and tears and dirt included.

And we are people living in darkness,
A land of deep darkness,
To us a great light.
And we are a people whose eyes are dim,
Whose wombs are closed,
To us a child.

To the barren, a **Son**
In the ash black of this night
To the broken, a **Counselor**
From the filth at Mary’s feet
To the abandoned, a **Father**
Whose infant cries bleat in confusion
The **Mighty God** of whose kingdom there is no end,
Whose forehead is clotted with blood and straw

IMAGES



(01:36) OUT OF FOCUS: When introducing the dove, a Biblical symbol for the Holy Spirit and his work in the incarnation, we decided that a slow revelation of mystery would be fitting.

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IMMANUEL (THE BIG PICTURE): The name Immanuel translates “God with us.” Though this phrase is common during the Christmas season, it is often relegated to the realm of Christmas cliches, never to be thought about again.

But our hope in making this short film is to communicate a fragment just how complex and powerful the truths that are conveyed by that one word really are. If the idea of God (the same God whom Moses was told no one can see without certain death [Ex. 33]), becoming a human, a baby, an infant wholly dependent on his mother doesn't floor you, I don't know what will. Though we often spend time in penitence thinking about the sacrifice of the cross, we too rarely think about the sacrifice of the cradle.

Our Messiah is not only God, he is one of us. He is inextricably woven into our history. He has come into our chaos, our addictions, our barrenness and our impossibilities and has created hope. The very God who hovered over the chaotic waters before the creation of the world has declared, “Behold I make all things new.”

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

What does the inclusion of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheeba mean to you personally?

Why would God choose to come to earth in this way... as an infant and as part of a family?

How does Israel's longing for a Messiah under the sacrificial system parallel our own longing for the return of Christ?

How is the message of “Hope from Barrenness” and “Order from Chaos” relevant in your life?

Which characters in the advent narrative resonate with you most deeply?

God here,
in our filth, our violence, our lust, our apathy

God among us,
A hope from barrenness.

Immanuel,
God, our hope, has answered

IMAGES



(01:50) INCARNATION: We used a blend of CG and live action footage here to represent the mystery surrounding the incarnation; God's beautiful and shocking descent to human form.



(02:07) SPIRIT ON THE WATERS: We designed this shot to represent Genesis' description of the Spirit hovering over the deep. It ties us back to the central theme of the piece; God brings order out of chaos and hope from barrenness.