

THE WORD MADE FLESH



WEEK 1:
Bread of Life



WEEK 2:
*Salt of
the Earth*



WEEK 3:
Rock of Ages



WEEK 4:
*Light of
the World*



A 4-SESSION **BIBLE STUDY**
FOR ADVENT

LEADER'S GUIDE

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Introduction

And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the Father's only son, full of grace and truth.

JOHN 1:14

The great miracle of Christmas is that Christ took on human flesh and became fully part of our earthly existence, even though he was at the same time fully God. In order for us to understand more completely the meaning of his Incarnation and its impact on our lives, Jesus spoke of himself and his work through earthly substances so familiar to us as human beings. Infused with this holy meaning, the earthly substances themselves have taken on an added significance for us us Christians.

In this Bible study for Advent, we will explore the biblical background and impact of the earthly substances of bread, salt, rock and light. As we welcome the Baby Jesus during this season, our understanding of who he is and what he has done for us will undoubtedly expand through the study of these four earthly substances.

The truths of Christ as our provider, preserver, protector and pathfinder will be revealed in these pages, as well as many other characteristics of our Savior, which in turn will make our celebration of his birth in Bethlehem on Christmas even richer and more tangible for us and our faith. God bless you in this season of discovery!

—Mark Zimmermann, editor

Leader's Guide for Session 1

BEFORE CLASS: Read through this session yourself. Examine the Bible readings listed and become acquainted with them.

READ: Have a member of the group read the Introduction on page 4 aloud.

READ: Read or have someone read the Opening Prayer.

SESSION 1

Bread of Life

*I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger,
and whoever believes in me will never thirst.*

JOHN 6:35



OPENING PRAYER

Dear Jesus, you were born in Bethlehem, which means “House of Bread,” and you have become living bread for us in the living of our faith. Nourish us through the words of Scripture. Strengthen us by your Holy Spirit to serve you and others wholeheartedly. And may we continue to be filled to the fullest with your blessings from heaven. Amen.

DISCUSSION

What is your favorite kind of bread? Why?

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the Bible, bread was presented as a staple for mealtimes to satisfy our appetites and to be a sign of welcome to greet visitors to your table. Jesus, who is the Bread of Life, wants to satisfy our hungry souls and welcome us into his presence with open arms. Advent is a time for us to say, “We are ready to taste and see that the Lord is good.”

THREE CAKES

1. **Read Genesis 18:1-5.** Why did Abraham offer God’s three messengers bread?
2. **Read Genesis 18:6-8.** What was involved in making the three cakes of bread? Why are these factors significant? Why do you think Abraham wanted everything to be done quickly?
3. **Read Genesis 18:9-14.** What was the message that the three visitors had to share with Abraham and Sarah while they were eating bread together? **Read Luke 1:26-38.** How is their message like the message the angel Gabriel shared with Mary? How is Sarah’s response different from Mary’s?
4. **Read Hebrews 13:2.** Bread was Abraham and Sarah’s way of showing hospitality to God messengers. What are some ways in which we can show hospitality to strangers or unexpected visitors? Why is showing hospitality to such people so important for the Christian believer, according to this verse? Who have been the “angels” in your life who have come to see you and changed your life for the better?

4. **Read Hebrews 13:2.** We show hospitality by greeting our visitors at the front door, by hugging them, by serving them snacks or something to drink, by serving them a fancy meal, by sitting down to talk with them and by providing them with a place to sleep at night. For Christians, visitors may be angels sent from God, unbeknownst to us. Answers will vary but may include grandparents, cousins, roommates, friends or neighbors who have become forever friends.

DISCUSS: Discuss different types of bread that people like and why.

READ: Read or have someone read the Introduction.

Three Cakes

1. **Read Genesis 18:1-5.** He offered his three visitors cakes because he wanted to be welcoming and hospitable to them.
2. **Read Genesis 18:6-8.** Sarah is the one who finds the flour, kneads the dough and makes the cakes at Abraham’s direction. It is an interesting point because Sarah showed hospitality by making the cakes, and Abraham showed hospitality by presenting the cakes to the visitors. Answers may vary but it seems Abraham wants the cakes made quickly to make a good impression on his visitors, or it could simply be that he is showing how excited he is about the visitors’ arrival by wanting the cakes done quickly.
3. **Read Genesis 18:9-14.** The message that the visitors have to share with their hosts as eat bread together is that Sarah will give birth to a son in a year’s time. **Read Luke 1:26-38.** The message that Gabriel shares with Mary is similar because he also is announcing the upcoming birth of a son. While Mary was accepting of the news, Sarah responded by laughing.

Manna for the Masses

1. **Read Exodus 16:1-3.** They remembered that they had bread to the full. They craved it now because they did not have the same or any bread to eat out in the wilderness.
2. **Read Exodus 16:4-8.** God responded by raining bread down from heaven each morning for them to have enough for each day and twice as much on the sixth day, so they could have some to eat on the Sabbath without working to gather it. We find “to the full” in both places. This says to us that God was completely answering the people’s prayer. The bread from heaven came in the morning to remind the people of the glory of God (as the sun rose). God reacts to grumbling by listening to people’s complaints and solving their problems.
3. **Read Exodus 16:9-12.** Seeing the bread from heaven told the people that the Lord was their God. Answers may vary but may include that it made the Israelites happy and grateful to God.
4. **Read Exodus 16:13-21.** Manna means “portion, dose or ration.” The Israelites’ response is “What is it?” which seems very real and human to us because it sounds like something we would say today. Answers may vary but may include “Wow!” or “Amazing!” or “I can’t believe it.” Answers may vary but may include that God wants everyone to get an equal share, and he doesn’t want any fighting over the manna or people taking more than they should. He wants it to be a calm and orderly process. It reminds us to live for today and not worry about tomorrow, and it also reminds us that God takes care of us each and every day.
5. **Read Exodus 16:22-30.** God wanted the Israelites to honor the Sabbath by not working to gather the manna because the Sabbath was a day of rest. This reminds us to honor God by resting on Sundays in honor of him.
6. **Read Exodus 16:31-35.** Answers may vary but the Bible seems to indicate that it tasted like a cracker with honey. Preserving an omer of manna was a way for future generations to remember the goodness of God to their people.

MANNA FOR THE MASSES

1. **Read Exodus 16:1-3.** What did the Israelites remember about the bread that they had when they were slaves in Egypt? Why do you think they craved that bread so much now?
2. **Read Exodus 16:4-8.** How did God respond to the Israelites’ craving? What does this say about God? What exact phrase do we find both in verse 3 and verse 8? What does that tell us? What is indicated by the fact that the bread from heaven comes in the morning? How does God react to grumbling?
3. **Read Exodus 16:9-12.** What did seeing the bread from heaven on the ground in the wilderness tell the Israelites? How do you think seeing the bread on the ground made the Israelites feel?
4. **Read Exodus 16:13-21.** What does the word *manna* literally mean? How does the Israelites’ response to the bread from heaven here strike us as very human and real? What do you think you would say when you first saw the manna? What is Moses’ answer to the Israelites’ question? Why do you think there are very specific instructions about how much manna to gather for each person for each day? What does it say to you that the manna only lasted for the day and was only enough for one day for each person?
5. **Read Exodus 16:22-30.** How did God want the Israelites to honor the Sabbath day in the way they collected the manna? What does that say to us today about how to approach the Sabbath day in our own lives?
6. **Read Exodus 16:31-35.** What do you think manna tasted like? Why was it important that an omer of manna was preserved for future generations?

FEEDING OF THE 5,000

1. **Read Matthew 14:14-15.** What words in these verses call to mind the Israelites in the wilderness? How is Jesus' feeling toward the crowd like God's feeling toward the Israelites? What is the disciples' suggested solution to the problem of the hungry masses? What are the disciples forgetting about?
2. **Read Matthew 14:16-21.** What is Jesus' solution to the problem at hand? How are the disciples involved? How is Jesus involved? Why do you think Jesus had the people sit down on the grass? How much bread did they have to begin with? What specifically did Jesus do with the bread before it was given to the people? How well were the people fed? How does this remind us of the manna in the wilderness? How many were fed? How many baskets of leftovers were there? How is this related to the Children in Israel?

BREAD AND CUP

1. **Read Luke 22:14-19.** What does the Feast of Unleavened Bread commemorate? Why is the bread unleavened? What is sacrificed as part of this festival? What does Jesus do with the bread at this particular meal with his disciples? What does Jesus say we should do whenever we break the bread and drink the cup in this manner? What sacrifice are we remembering when we partake of bread and wine in this sacred meal?
2. **Read 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.** What is the one bread? What is the Body of Christ? How are we all members of it?

Feeding of the 5,000

1. **Read Matthew 14:14-15.** Some words in these verses that remind us of the Israelites are: "great crowd" and "desolate place." Jesus had compassion on them like God had compassion on the Israelites. The disciples suggest the people go to the villages to buy food for themselves. The disciples are forgetting that Jesus worked through them to provide the people with what they need.
2. **Read Matthew 14:16-21.** Jesus tells the disciples to give the people something to eat. The disciples bring the food they have to Jesus. Jesus takes the food, blesses it and breaks it into pieces for the disciples to pass around to the people. Having people sit down most likely brought order and built community among the people as they sat down together. They had five loaves of bread and two fish to begin with. Jesus blesses and breaks the food into pieces. All the people were satisfied. This reminds us that the Israelites were full, too, when they ate the manna. Five thousand men were fed, besides women and children, This means there could have easily been 15,000-20,000 people present. There were twelve baskets of leftovers, which reminds us of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Bread and Cup

1. **Read Luke 22:14-19.** It commemorates when the angel of death "passed over" the homes of the Israelite slaves, whose doorposts were painted with the blood of a spotless sacrificial lamb. The bread was unleavened because the Israelites had to make it in a hurry so they could escape quickly when the time came. This reminds us that Abraham asked Sarah to make the three cakes quickly to have them ready for the visitors before they left. Jesus blessed the bread, broke it and gave it to his disciples. Jesus says we should remember him when we break bread and drink the cup of Holy Communion. We are remembering the sacrifice of the holy Lamb of God, who died on the cross to save us from death.

2. **Read 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.** The one bread is the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is the Church. We through faith in him, are members of the Body of Christ.

Living Bread

1. **Read John 6:31-40.** They were craving eternal life. He is teaching them that he is the bread from heaven who will give them eternal life. He is proclaiming that everything he is saying is coming from God the Father, and only he is the way to the Father.
2. **Read John 6:41-51.** They were grumbling because they knew Jesus as Joseph's son and not the Son of God, so they were having a hard time accepting what Jesus was saying to them. This reminds us of the Israelites grumbling against God in the wilderness because they thought he was not helping them. God and Jesus both said not to grumble, and they both promise to help the people. The manna kept people alive for a time, but the bread from heaven will keep people alive forever. He does this by giving his body up to death for us on the cross and then rising to life in his body on Easter morning for our eternal life with him.
3. **Read John 6:52-58.** It refers to Holy Communion. Holy Communion is a foretaste of the feast to come when Jesus returns to take us home to be with him and dine at his heavenly banquet table with him. The eating of the living bread is the difference between life and death.

The Word of God

1. **Read Ezekiel 3:1-4.** Ezekiel ate the scroll of God's Word.
2. We "eat" the Word of God by reading it, studying it and meditating on it.
3. We savor it and take it into ourselves to nourish our souls.
4. The Word of God is sweet like honey to Ezekiel (and to us) because it brings joy with its message. Manna also tasted like honey and brought joy to the Israelites

LIVING BREAD

1. **Read John 6:31-40.** What were the people in Jesus' day craving? How is Jesus satisfying their hunger? How does Jesus show that what he is saying about himself is true?
2. **Read John 6:41-51.** Why were people grumbling? What does this grumbling remind us of? How is Jesus' response to them like the response God gave to the Israelites in the wilderness? How is the manna in the wilderness different from the bread that Jesus gives? How does he ultimately provide us with life through the Bread of himself?
3. **Read John 6:52-58.** What does eating the flesh of Jesus refer to? How is the eating of the flesh and blood of Jesus connected to the events of the Last Day? What is the distinguishing factor between life and death?

THE WORD OF GOD

1. **Read Ezekiel 3:1-4.** What does Ezekiel eat as if it were bread?
2. How do we "eat" Scripture, so to speak?
3. What do we do with the bread of the Word of God?
4. Why is the bread of God's Word sweet to us like honey? What else tasted like honey in the Bible?

RESPONSIVE READING..... PSALM 145:14-21

- L** *The LORD upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.*
- C** **The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.**
- L** *You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.*
- C** **The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works.**
- L** *The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.*
- C** **He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them.**
- L** *The LORD preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.*
- C** **My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever.**

READ: Read responsively the verses of the psalm.

SING: Sing (or speak) this hymn.

HYMN..... GUIDE ME, O THOU GREAT REDEEMER

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
Hold me with thy pow'rful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
Feed me now and evermore,
Feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain,
Whence the healing streams doth flow.
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliv'rer, strong Deliv'rer,
Ever be my strength and shield,
Ever be my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside.
Death of death, and hell's destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to thee,
I will ever give to thee.

CLOSING PRAYER

Thank you, dear Jesus, for being born into this world and for being our living bread. Help us to crave and savor the bread of your Holy Word so that we may be nourished and strengthened by the Good News we find there: that you lived, died and rose again in your flesh so that our bodies might be raised on the Last Day to be with you in the glory of heaven. Amen.

BREAD FOR THE JOURNEY

Pick up leftover bread from sandwich shops or bakeries to distribute to homeless shelters or food pantries in your community.

READ: Have someone read the Closing Prayer, or read the prayer in unison.

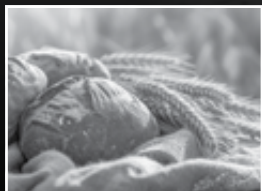
SHARE: Suggest that participants hand out leftover bread to the hungry or homeless.

THE WORD MADE FLESH



In this leader's guide for *The Word Made Flesh Bible* study for Advent, participants focus on the concept of Jesus as the Word Made Flesh. Study and discussion questions, prayers and reflections highlight the earthly substances of bread, salt, rock and light in relation to the qualities of Christ.

Included are all answers, helpful notes and session directions.



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