

MESSENGER STUDYGUIDE

Food for thought, questions for discussion, and activities to help individuals, classes, and small groups use Messenger as a focus for study and reflection.

December 2005

Food for Thought: An Overview of the Issue

“**Are we still a peace church?**” asks the December *Messenger*. Two authors answer that question in “A Peace Church in the World” by Scott Holland (pp. 8-10) and “Following God’s Script” by Tim McElwee (pp. 11-13).

“What Child Is This?” by Ken Gible (pp. 14-15) focuses on **the true gift** of Christmas.

Allen Hansell writes of **Wilmington Church of the Brethren** in “It’s in Their DNA” (pp. 16-17).

The December Bible study on **1 Kings** is by Kim McDowell (pp. 18-19).

Activities: Connecting with the Content

Read Luke 24:13-35, the encounter with Christ on the road to Emmaus. Holland writes that “as we work for peace in a broken world we need to be especially attentive to the times when Jesus comes to us as the stranger” (p. 9). **Remember** your own encounters with strangers. **Choose** one memory of such an encounter and **write a brief journal** of the event, including your first impression of the stranger, what happened in the encounter, and how you remember the stranger today. **Think about** how your memory of the stranger now differs from your first impression.

Read the story of the birth of Jesus from Luke 2:1-19. **Memorize** this passage as a special way of commemorating Christmas this year.

Read Jeremiah 1:5 and Romans 8:29. Consider the following questions, then **draw a picture, write a poem, or write a song** describing your own “faith DNA”—the persistent orientations and characteristics of your personal faith: What does your faith look like? Where has it come from? What calling has God given you? What “faith DNA” did you inherit from your biological family, or adopted family, church family, or mentors? How has your “faith DNA” played out in the events of your life? How has it affected choices you have made?

Read 1 Kings 3:9, 18:21, and 19:11-12. **Then read** a current book on faith and politics such as *Our Endangered Values: America’s Moral Crisis* by Jimmy Carter, *God’s Politics* by Jim Wallis, or another book of your choice.

Questions for Discussion

1. Holland answers the question, “Are we still a peace church?” with the story of the Church of the Brethren’s involvement in international and ecumenical peacemaking. Why is our heritage of peacemaking “one of the greatest gifts we Brethren can offer not only to the world but also to

contemporary Christian ethics and evangelism”? If you are studying with a group, discuss what the Brethren heritage of peacemaking has to offer to contemporary Christian ethics. Discuss what it has to offer to contemporary Christian evangelism.

2. What stories can you tell of Church of the Brethren involvements that answer, “Are we still a peace church?” How do the stories give affirmative or negative answers? How does your congregation answer the question, with words and actions? How do you answer the question personally, in your actions and lifestyle?

3. Holland writes of the need to pay attention when Jesus comes to us as a stranger. What biblical stories does he cite? To what activities and lifestyle choices do these stories lead us? To what does this “prophetic vocation” (p. 9) call us?

4. Why do “so few of us (Brethren) faithfully adhere to our peace witness” (p. 12)? Answer using examples of faithfulness and unfaithfulness to the peace witness from your own life and the life of your congregation. What pulls us away from the peace witness, according to McElwee? Describe the “dominant social script” that affects us. What signs of hope—or countering “scripts”—does the Church of the Brethren offer? What undergirds peacemaking?

5. Gibble’s hope this Christmas is “that we will watch and listen for God in the common places” (p. 14). When and how have you encountered God in common places? If you are studying with a group, tell stories of such encounters. What have learned about God from the commonplaces of life? What do you hope for this Christmas?

6. What’s in the DNA of your congregation? Read about Wilmington Church of the Brethren (pp. 16-17) and then reflect on the positive and negative orientations or characteristics—what Hansell calls “DNA”—that have persisted in your congregation. For example, has your church always been service-minded or always had financial difficulty? If the DNA of your church has changed significantly, how did that happen? Was there a significant event in your congregation’s history? What aspect of this DNA would you change, and why? How could such a change come about?

8. 1 Kings is “laced with issues of faith and politics” writes McDowell (p. 18). Make a list of the issues of faith and politics you find in her Bible study, for example how to administer justice (1 Kings 3), the question of what is wisdom, the clash of human ambition and divine intent, etc.

9. “The scope of Kings is contemporary in many ways,” McDowell continues. How are the issues you listed contemporary? Which are still “live” today? Connect each issue to a current political situation. How can Christians deal with these issues? Which issue is most pressing? What “political warning notes” (p. 19), does 1 Kings sound? What affirmation and encouragement does it give?

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