



MARY'S STORY

AN ADVENT BIBLE STUDY GUIDE ON US MATERNAL HEALTH

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First Sunday in Advent

God in a Mother's Womb: The Importance of Maternal Health to Christians

Opening Prayer

Opening Activity

Introduce yourselves by sharing a "birth story"—nearly every family or group of friends has a story about a remarkable, funny, or difficult birth. As participants feel comfortable, ask if they are willing to share these stories.

Matthew 1:18-25 (NRSV)

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel',

which means, 'God is with us.' ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Discussion Questions

- [1] The Christian tradition has placed much importance on Jesus' mother's unmarried status because of the fulfillment of prophecy regarding a virgin conceiving. What else does God teach us about the significance of maternal health through this teenage unwed mother?
- [2] If Mary walked into our church, how would we treat her? If Mary walked into a hospital, how might she be treated?
- [3] In John 1:14 we read that "The word became flesh and dwelt among us." Is this significant to your personal faith? In what ways?
- [4] Does thinking about this impact the way you think about maternal health?

Closing Prayer

For Next Time

Print out articles or direct members of the study to (<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=36054&Cr=global+health&Cr1=>) on Global Maternal Health and the Millennium Development Goals. Link directly to this article at www.fistulastories.org/USMaternalHealth.

Second Sunday in Advent

No Room at the Inn: Maternal Health in our Country and World

Opening Prayer

Opening Discussion

Have members of the group discuss what they read about Maternal Health in relation to the Millennium Development Goals. Did anything they read surprise them? Move them? Make them angry or sad?

Luke 2:1-7 NRSV

¹In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Discussion Questions

- [1] How does the story of Mary giving birth to Jesus in a stable, because there was no room in the inn, relate to the story of global maternal health?
- [2] What feelings do you have about this birth story? Does it make you angry that Mary lacked comforts and care while in labor?
- [3] Do your feelings about Jesus birth relate to the feelings you have about global maternal health? How are they the same or different?

Closing Prayer

For Next Time

Print out articles or direct members of the study to (<http://www.amnestyusa.org/demand-dignity/maternal-health-is-a-human-right/the-united-states/page.do?id=1351091>) on Maternal Health in the US, especially relating to Race. Link directly to this article at www.fistulaSTORIES.org/USMaternalHealth.

Third Sunday in Advent

Rachel Weeping for her Children: US Maternal Health and Race

Opening Prayer

Opening Discussion

Have members of the group discuss what they read about Maternal Health and Race in the US. Did anything they read surprise them? Move them? Make them angry or sad?

Matthew 2:1-18 NRSV

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel!"

⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." ⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

¹³Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." ¹⁴Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

¹⁶When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸"A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."

Discussion Questions

- [1] What did you feel when reading about Herod ordering the deaths of all children under 2?
- [2] How is Herod's action the same or different from allowing poor maternal health and high infant mortality rates among certain U.S. communities? Who should be held accountable?
- [3] Rachel herself died giving birth (see Genesis 35:16-21). The image of her weeping and refusing to be comforted is invoked in Jeremiah (31:15-17) where it expresses the trauma of the captivity and exile of the tribes of Israel. Whose voices cry out for maternal health in our world? In your community?

Closing Prayer

For Next Time

Read more of the Amnesty International Report "Demand Dignity" (<http://www.amnestyusa.org/dignity/pdf/DeadlyDelivery.pdf>) **OR** Send a letter or email to the Secretary of Health and Human Services calling for the creation of an Office of Maternal Health. **OR** Do your own investigating into the state of maternal health in your city or town. Talk to nurses, doctors and midwives you may know to get their opinion.

Fourth Sunday in Advent

God, look with favor! Calling for action on US Maternal Health

Opening Prayer

Opening Discussion

Ask if anyone in the group did one of the actions listed at the end of the last session. How did it feel to take action? For those who did not take action, what questions do they still have? The group can brainstorm ways to find out the answers to any remaining questions. What kinds of actions would the group like to take?

Luke 1:46-55*

My soul magnifies the Sovereign [or Lord],
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior;
48 who has regarded the low estate of God's handmaiden.
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;
49 for the one who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is God's name.
50 And God's mercy is on those who fear God
from generation to generation.
51 God has shown strength with God's arm,
and has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,
52 God has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and exalted those of low degree;
53 God has filled the hungry with good things,
and has sent the rich away empty.
54 God has helped God's servant Israel,
in remembrance of God's mercy,
55 as God spoke to our ancestors,
to Abraham [, Sarah,] and their posterity for ever.

*Translation from *An Inclusive-Language Lectionary; Readings for Year C* (1985, (C), Division of Education and Ministry, National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.)

Discussion Questions

- [1] In this passage, known as "The Magnificat," Mary finds hope in what could have been a hopeless situation as a young unwed mother. Where does her hope come from? Can we draw on this hope?
- [2] The hope in Mary's Magnificat is not only for herself. What parts of her song pertain to others in the world?
- [3] How might God use us to continue the work Mary outlines? How does this work relate directly to Maternal Health?

Closing Prayer

MORE RESOURCES AND IDEAS
available at www.fistulastories.org

COMING SOON

In depth resources to help your congregation explore the intersections of race, poverty, and maternal health. Stay tuned to www.fistulastories.org/USMaternalHealth!

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