

**reason
for the
season**



t.b.d.
think. believe. do.

You are on a faith journey.

You might be thinking, “Who? Me?”

Yes. You.

Your faith journey started before you were born and it connects you to a family of believers—and questioners and deep thinkers and the occasional troublemaker. As a part of this long line of disciples, you have work to do.

Because this faith journey is yours. You own it. Not your parents, your pastor, or even the nice lady in the front pew who always gives you gum before worship.

It’s all yours.

T.B.D. is here to help you claim it.

That means the questions you ask, the answers you discover, the deeply held opinions you claim—they all matter. How you think about theology and faith is important.

T.B.D. starts with a simple premise: You are ready not only to own your faith, but to recognize that faith is constantly *in process*. It is always to be determined. Who you are, what you believe, and how you live your life are all growing, changing, and evolving. They are constantly being determined with every new thing you experience and learn. When you have the tools to articulate, investigate, and test out your beliefs in the face of real-life challenges, you can think deeply. You can believe thoughtfully. And you can act faithfully.

The goal isn’t for you to come away from this lesson with a settled idea about the topic—although you might feel more settled than you did before. Instead, T.B.D. focuses on *how* you think, not just *what* you think.

So get ready.

Ask tough questions. Have strong opinions. Listen well. Think big.

Everybody knows the **reason for the season** is Jesus, right?

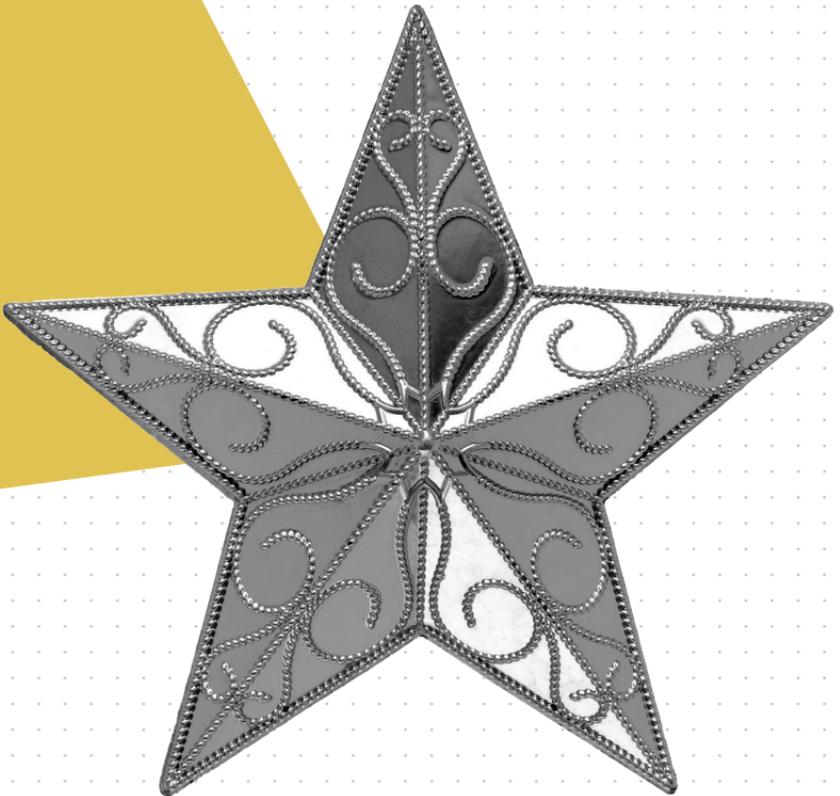
For such a simple answer, there sure is a lot of confusion. Small stuff, like whether Jesus was actually born on December 25. And then there's Advent, that four-week period we sprint through to get to the presents and the tree and the eggnog by the fire, none of which are actually in the Bible.

And does the Bible matter at Christmas? And if it does, what about non-Christians? Are they bound to the religious aspects of the holiday, or has Christmas become something that's more cultural than it is faithful?

One thing is certain: this is either the happiest time of year or an all-out war.

It just depends on who you ask.

+ Give yourself a gift. Turn the page.



think.

reason for the season



What's the reason for the season? Stuff this page full of ideas. Wrap up the perfect argument. Let your ideas merry-nate.

Does it matter if you say "Happy Holidays" or "Merry Christmas"? What are the benefits to each? The drawbacks?

Advent is a time of “joyous expectation” when we wait for the coming of Jesus on Christmas. What does joy look like to you? What does expectation look like?

When does it start to feel like Christmas?
What do you see? Smell? Hear?

+ When you're ready, pick the ideas you want to share with the group and add them to the wall.



+ Video

- + Advent is considered a time of expectation and preparation—both of the world and of us as individuals. How does Jesus' birth change the world? How does it change you?

- + Robert Barclay says, "All days are alike, holy in the sight of God." Is the feeling and importance of Christmas limited to a single day, or can we access it at other times of the year?

- + Catholic theologian John Shea said, "Christmas is a mighty mess of experience, tradition, Bible, and imagination..." What does that mean?



You've got more information. So let's revisit the wall.

- + Put an "X" next to three ideas you can no longer leave on the wall.
- + Put a check mark next to the three you most agree with.
- + What's not on the wall, but should be? Add it now.



+ Bible

Read Isaiah 40:9-11 with a partner. Discuss:

- This is a passage that is meant to comfort its readers. We're told to raise our voices without fear. How does Christmas help us to do that in our lives and in the world?
- The theologian John Calvin said, "This passage comprehends the whole gospel in a few words." What do you think he meant by that?

+ The doctrine of the Incarnation reminds us that Jesus is fully God and fully human.



Now read Luke 2:1-7 together. Then discuss:

- Jesus is born to modest beginnings. Why is that a major part of this story? What does that tell us about God?
- Jesus' birth is referred to as the "Incarnation," meaning that God took on human flesh and was born a human baby. What difference does it make that Jesus came to earth like one of us?

Now that you've discussed the Bible passages, what needs to be on the wall?

- + **With your partner, come up with two or three new ideas to share with the group.**
- + **When you're ready, put them on the wall. Extra points for dramatic, mic-drop reveals.**

believe.

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+ Take a look at all the information on the wall. What are some common themes? Connections? Write two or three in the space provided.

+ Is there anything you'd add to the wall? Anything you'd take away? Write those here.

+ So... what's the reason for the season? How would you rewrite the provocative statement? As a group, figure out what you can now say about Advent and Christmas.

do.

+ Big Action

You've spent a lot of time thinking about Advent and Christmas. Now it's time to put your ideas to the test. As a group, think about the reason for the season—about what it means to celebrate at this time of year. Use the tools on the next page to come up with one thing you can do this week.

How will you understand Advent and Christmas better this week?



+ Joy to the World

Singing Christmas hymns and carols is a practice that goes beyond the walls of the church. This week, get a group of friends and go out into the world to sing. In the space below, write some of your favorite hymns and think about the meanings they bring to this season.

+ Give a Gift

When Jesus was born, the entire world changed. It was a reminder that God desires to be close to us in ways we cannot imagine. This week, give that gift of being seen to another person. It could be a family member, a friend, or a stranger. In the space below, brainstorm a few ways you can make a difference in a person's life this week.

+ This week, take some time to think about your beliefs and questions about Advent and Christmas.

+ What I discovered...

+ What I'm still questioning...

+ And now I can honestly say...