



## **Into the Mess & Other Jesus Stories: Reflections on the Life of Christ by Debi Thomas— Week 2 Chapters 2-6**

**Check in Question:** Describe your family, are there any misfits?

### **Opening Prayer**

**Loving God,**

You enter our world not in perfection but in the middle of our confusion, our fears, and our mess.

Open our hearts today as we reflect on Your presence in unexpected

places—

in Joseph's courage, in Mary's vulnerability,

in the wilderness that tests us,

and in the quiet invitations to "come and see."

Give us eyes to see as Jesus sees,

and the courage to follow wherever Your Spirit leads.

Amen.

### **Reflection questions:**

#### **Based on Chapter 2: *Into the Mess***

1. Do you think we have "sanitized" Joseph over time, or was he simply a genuinely good and righteous man?
2. What kind of God brings salvation through a young woman whose explanation of her pregnancy is not believed? What does that say about how God enters human history?
3. Have you ever felt God whisper, "Do not be afraid"? If so, what were the circumstances?
4. Have you ever loved someone who was far from perfect? What did that love require of you?

#### **Based on Chapter 3: *What Kind of Story Is This?***

1. Are all sorrows bearable? Why or why not?
2. What if the Gospel gives us John's story so we can prepare for a Messiah who rejects transactional religion—religion that promises comfort, prosperity, or blessings in exchange for faith?
3. We live in a world where powerful people still exploit the vulnerable—think of the Epstein story. What is the Church called to do in the face of such injustice?
4. When has Jesus come to you in subtle, quiet, or gradual ways—over "layered stretches of time"?
5. John's death is followed immediately by the feeding of the multitudes. What might Mark be suggesting by placing those stories side by side?

#### **Based on Chapter 4: *Tempted***

1. Where in today's world do we encounter the "wilderness"—places of danger, chaos, evil, or desolation?

2. Thomas describes the Spirit “grabbing Jesus by the scruff of the neck” and pushing Him into the wilderness. Have you ever felt led—reluctantly—into a place of testing or difficulty?
3. How have you experienced temptation in your own life?
4. Suffering from abuse, trauma, injustice, misogyny, homophobia, or illness is *not* God’s will. How do you respond when someone suggests otherwise?
5. Has a wilderness experience ever helped you deepen your understanding of your own belovedness?
6. Thomas names lust for power, abuse, neglect, depression, spiritual failure, and shame as temptations. Are there others you would add?
7. Thomas wonders why the angels didn’t “medevac” Jesus out of the desert. Instead, they stayed and tended to Him. Who are the angels in your life—the ones who accompany you in hardship?
8. Thomas tells of a religious woman who handed her a crucifix and said, “Only a suffering God can help.” Has that been true in your experience?

**Based on Chapter 5: *Come and See***

1. Thomas suggests changing WWJD (“What Would Jesus Do?”) to WWJS (What would Jesus See?). Do you like that idea? Why or why not?
2. What might change in our relationships, our parish, or our world if we routinely tried to see as Jesus sees?
3. When we have been loved all the way to the core of who we are, we gain the capacity to love others the same way. How can we help one another experience that kind of love?

**Based on Chapter 6: *A House Divided***

1. Who do you consider your family—biological, chosen, spiritual?
2. Where are the “misfits” in your family, and how do they shape your understanding of belonging?

**Closing Prayer**

For whom and what shall we pray...

**God of mercy and compassion,**

You stay with us as the angels stayed with Jesus—  
 not rescuing us from every struggle,  
 but walking beside us so we can bear what must be borne.  
 Send us out with deeper trust in our belovedness,  
 greater tenderness for every imperfect person we meet,  
 and a clearer vision of the family You are forming among us.  
 Strengthen us to confront injustice,  
 to love boldly,  
 and to carry the light of Christ into every wilderness.  
 Amen.