
Lesson Overview

Biblical Passage	Luke 2:1-20
Supporting Passages	Matthew 1:1-17, Luke 3:23-38, John 1:1-18
Memory Verse	Luke 2:11
Biblical Truth	Jesus' coming was a gracious gift that expressed God's love for humanity.
Context	<p>In the first few lessons of this series, students have learned about the prophecies and the announcement of the coming Christ. In this week's lesson, students will read about the actual birth of Christ. God Himself came to Earth as an infant to show His incredible love for people. The world has not been the same since this life-changing event.</p>
Learning Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students will examine the circumstances of Jesus' birth and His saving mission for all people.• Students will reflect on one aspect of God's gracious gift of love in Jesus' birth.
Prayer Suggestions	<p>As you prepare to teach this lesson, pray for your students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pray that students will be curious about the circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth.• Pray that students will understand the meaning of Jesus' birth for the entire world.• Pray that students will respond to God's presence in their lives.

Biblical Commentary

Investigation

The circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus have been retold for centuries. Yet the story continues to be told because it is so incredible: how God would send His Son to earth in the form of a baby with the mission of saving humanity from sin.

Jesus' coming was described slightly differently by each of the Gospel writers. Luke described the birth of Jesus in great detail, including His ancestry, the circumstances of His birth, and the miracles surrounding His coming. Matthew placed a heavy emphasis on Jesus' royal lineage. John showed Jesus as the preexistent Logos, the Word of God, present at Creation and having come to earth as a man. (Mark did not mention Jesus' birth at all.)

This lesson will consider Luke's account of the familiar Christmas story, probing the depth of love that God showed through His glorious gift. An important part of hearing the story is the compelling call to share the message of salvation and peace with others.

Importance

This passage teaches that **Jesus is God and Savior**. It shows that Jesus is fully human, having been linked to the royal lineage of David and born of a woman. At the same time, the passage shows that Jesus is fully God. The announcement of the angel and the host of angels that appeared to the shepherds magnify the miraculous circumstances of His birth. This passage clearly demonstrates both Christ's divinity and humanity.

This passage also touches on other Essential Truths: **The Bible is God's Word** and **Salvation is by Faith Alone**.

Interpretation

Luke 2:1-3 In his gospel, Luke provided much of the historical evidence of Jesus' ministry. That evidence is especially significant in his account of Jesus' birth. Historical documents that are not connected to the church affirm the accuracy of the names and places mentioned in Luke 2:1-7. The Roman emperor (or "Caesar") Augustus reigned from 31 B.C. to A.D. 14. During his reign, an order was given for a census to be taken throughout "all the inhabited world." In this context, the "world" literally meant the inhabited land and referred to those areas ruled by Rome. The census was taken for purposes of taxation, an action that angered Jews, most of whom despised Roman rule and the requirement to pay heavy taxes to Rome.

King Herod sought to avoid further problems from the Jews by requiring that the census registration be based on the original tribes of Israel (Gen. 49). Therefore, Jews were required to go to the town where the registry for

their family tribe was kept. The census probably took place sometime between 6 and 4 B.C., a couple of years after Rome sent out the decree.

Luke 2:4 Joseph and his wife Mary left their home in **Nazareth** in Galilee and traveled to **Bethlehem** in the region of Judea, his ancestral home as a descendant of David and a member of the tribe of Judah. Scholars do not agree on whether Mary (or any woman) was required to register.

The direct travel route would have taken them through **Samaria**, about a 90-mile uphill journey. The Jews, however, preferred to avoid Samaria, as most Jews despised the Samaritans. Therefore, they normally took an indirect route, crossing the Jordan River to the east and traveling on the east side until they could cross back again into the Jordan region.

Luke 2:5 Mary may have accompanied Joseph to avoid the talk of the townspeople who realized she was pregnant before their marriage was official, or she may have gone with Joseph because she had already been away from him several months earlier while she visited Elizabeth (Lk. 1:56). She possibly went to Bethlehem because she knew it would be the birthplace of Messiah, as prophesied in Micah 5:2. Regardless of the reason, the journey would have been difficult for any pregnant woman, especially for one who would soon give birth. The trip would normally take most of a week, but it could have been extended considerably because of her condition. Mary and Joseph had “pledged to be married,” meaning they were legally married and considered husband and wife. However, they did not have sexual relations until after Jesus’ birth (Mt. 1:18-25).

Luke 2:6-7 During the census, Bethlehem would have been crowded. This was probably the reason “there was no room for them in the inn.” Apparently the only available accommodations they could find were in a stable where animals were kept. While in Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to her Son and she named Him *Jesus* in obedience to God’s command (Mt. 1:21, 1:25; Lk. 1:31). Luke recorded the details that Mary used a “manger,” or feeding trough, as a bed for her newborn baby, once again documenting the historical details of the birth.

Jesus’ birth in a stable suggests Mary and Joseph’s poverty and emphasizes Jesus’ humble beginning on earth. Mary had to wrap Jesus in “cloths,” or long strips of fabric to keep Him warm. God allowed His Son to be born in lowly circumstances to show His special concern for and connection with the poor. God allowed even the first moments of the birth of His Son to demonstrate the presence of His love for the poor and the needy.

Luke 2:8-9 In the fields outside Bethlehem, shepherds were guarding their flocks during the night. Ordinarily, sheep would be in the fields from March to November. Because of the nearness of the sheep to the temple mount in Jerusalem, these may have belonged to the temple priests to be used for holy sacrifices. If so, the sheep would have been in this field all year.

As a whole, shepherds were despised. People often scorned them because they failed to keep or ignored much of the Mosaic Law. Since most people were suspicious of them because some shepherds were thieves, they were not allowed to serve as witnesses in court because their testimony was thought to be unreliable. But whether they deserved this reputation or not, God chose to honor them by revealing to them the birth of His Son, a fact that would have surprised and astonished many Jews. God used the announcement to share the presence of His love for those who were outcasts or needed salvation.

In the midst of what was an otherwise typical night, the darkness was suddenly shattered by “the glory of the Lord.” An angel appeared in the shepherds’ midst and sent waves of fear throughout the camp. Though these men were used to fighting wild animals that threatened their sheep, the angel’s presence terrified them. After calming their fears, the angel shared God’s incredible message: God was fulfilling His promise to send Messiah into the world.

Luke 2:10 This news brought “great joy,” especially for the Jews. “The people” was traditionally a specific reference to the descendants of Israel. In Jesus, God’s salvation is made available to all people regardless of their heritage (Ro. 1:16). Still, Jesus was sent initially to the “lost sheep of Israel” (Mt. 10:6, 15:24). For centuries, they had awaited the promised Messiah. They erroneously thought He would lead them out of bondage from foreign oppressors and restore the prestige and honor Israel had once known under kings David and Solomon.

Luke 2:11-12 The angel told the shepherds where and how they could find the baby. They identified Him as “Savior,” the One who would “save his people from their sins” (Mt. 1:21); “Christ” (the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Messiah*, which means “anointed one;” and “Lord,” a term usually used in reference to Almighty God. These terms clearly pointed to the deity of Jesus—not only was He fully human, He was fully God.

Luke 2:13-14 In response to the angel’s announcement, a large group of angels—the word “host” literally means army—suddenly appeared and voiced praises to God for what He had done. The heavenly army also pronounced a blessing of “peace among men with whom He is pleased.” The angels’ words are a reminder of the enmity that existed between a holy God and sinful humanity (Ro. 5:10, Col. 1:21). Jesus had come to earth to pay the penalty for humanity’s sin. Only through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ could that hostility be eliminated and the peace with God that the first humans experienced in the Garden of Eden be restored. Yet this peace does not come automatically to everyone; it only comes to those who have accepted the gift of salvation God offers to all people through faith in His Son.

Luke 2:16 After the angels departed, the shepherds acted on what they had heard. They obediently went to Bethlehem and searched for the child, finding the newborn just as the angels had told them.

Luke 2:17-20 After they saw the Christ child, the shepherds were ecstatic. In their excitement they shared “what had been told them” with others, most likely with anyone they encountered. Those who heard the story “wondered at the things” the shepherds told. Luke recorded four powerful events in this passage: the vision of angels, the announcement of the coming Christ, the appearance of a newborn in a manger, and the testimony of the shepherds who witnessed it. Each were singularly incredible occasions; when considered together, these document the unmistakably miraculous event of the birth of God’s one and only Son. Regardless of the response they received, the shepherds still shared the message wherever they went.

Interestingly, Luke added what seems to be a footnote, but actually ties the circumstances of Jesus’ birth to His future ministry. Luke recorded that Mary responded to the events with continued amazement at what God had done through and for her. She “treasured” what she had experienced and **pondered** the memories throughout her lifetime.

Implications

The events related to the birth of Christ are reminders of how much God loves people. Though the majority of society considered the shepherds to be outcasts, they were so important to God that He shared the message of Christ’s birth with them first. It was not only an incredible message, but the message had incredible messengers to deliver it! Teenagers often have questions about their value or importance in the world. How can God’s concern for lowly shepherds help you encourage your students about how important they are to Him?

After hearing from angels and seeing the Christ child firsthand, the shepherds were filled with joy and excitement. They could not wait to share their experience. Not only did they tell the story to those they

encountered, but they could not stop praising God because of what He had done. How has your experience with Christ impacted your worship? How has it impacted the way you share with others what you have experienced?

Teaching Plan

Connect

Review Questions

(5-8 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will answer five review questions from the previous lesson.

Print one copy of the "Review Questions" activity sheet for your use.

After greeting students, use the review questions to test what they can recall from the previous lesson as well as to provide the context for today's lesson.

Master Teacher Option: Know Your Family

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will discuss their family genealogies.

Instruct all students to raise their hands. Say: **Keep your hands raised only if you have four or more aunts and uncles.** After a moment, ask: **Who has five or more?** After another moment, ask: **Six or more?** Continue until only one or two students have their hands raised. Direct those remaining students to name as many of their aunts and uncles as they can.

Afterward, prompt students to raise their hands if they know the names of their grandparents. Then ask: **How many of you know the names of your great-grandparents?** (A few might raise their hands.) Then ask: **Who knows their great-great-grandparents?** (Instruct students who raise their hands to tell the group the names of their great-great-grandparents.)

Ask: **If you were to go to the country or countries where your ancestors are from, where would you go?** Allow students to briefly answer. Say: **Jesus' lineage played an important role in where He was born.** Explain that because of their ancestors, Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem to take part in a census. Emphasize that the prophets foretold that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem, and because of His ancestry, He was indeed born there. Then conclude the activity by saying: **As we discuss Jesus' birth, think about how Jesus' lineage brought Him to a humble place for His birth.**

Explore

Master Teacher Key Study: He Is the Gift

(15-20 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will study Luke 2:1-20 to examine the circumstances of Jesus' birth and His saving mission for all people.

Print one copy of the Master Teacher Key Study for your use. Provide a copy of the Student Worksheet and a pen for each student.

Learning Goal: Students will examine the circumstances of Jesus' birth and His saving mission for all people.

Pass out pens and copies of the Master Teacher Student Worksheet. Then, use the Master Teacher Key Study to teach Luke 2:1-20.

Transform

Deeper Discussion

(5-8 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will discuss the consequences related to Jesus' birth.

Learning Goal: Students will reflect on one aspect of God's gracious gift of love in Jesus' birth.

Use the following questions to lead students to discuss the circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth:

- **How do you experience a sense of wonder about the holy night of Jesus' birth?**
- **Do you think it was necessary for God to send His Son to earth in the form of a baby?**
- **If Jesus had come to us as a grown man, how could that change our understanding of who He is?**

Divide students into twos or threes and encourage them to discuss how the birth of Christ shows the depth of God's love. Then, encourage students to discuss how the birth of Christ affects their lives today. Lead students in prayer, thanking God for the birth of His son.

Master Teacher Option: Respond to Jesus' Birth

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will consider how God is calling them to respond to the story of Jesus' birth.

Provide a dry erase board and marker.

Learning Goal: Students will reflect on one aspect of God's gracious gift of love in Jesus' birth.

On the board, create two columns labeled "Shepherds' Responses" and "Our Responses." Lead students to identify ways the shepherds responded to the angel's announcement and write responses under the

first column. *(They went to Bethlehem to see the baby for themselves and then spread the word about what they had seen, glorifying and praising God.)* Then, lead students to list choices people today have in responding to the good news of Christ's birth. *(They can accept Him and follow Him; they can ignore Him; they can reject Him.)*

Discuss:

- **Could it have been easy for the shepherds to ignore or reject Christ? Why?** *(No, because the evidence was overwhelming.)*
- **Why is it easy for people to ignore Christ?**
- **Why is it easy for people to reject Christ?**
- **What new response is God calling you to make today in light of the good news of Jesus' birth?**

After discussion, divide students into groups of four or five and lead them in a time of silent prayer as they consider what new response God is calling them to make now as they think about the good news of Jesus' birth. Conclude in prayer, thanking God for the gift of His Son.

Take Home Activity

Family Devotion

(10-15 minutes at home, easy set-up)

Distribute copies of the Family Devotion to students and encourage them to share the devotion with their family.

A copy of the Family Devotion will be included in your lesson PDF download.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

(5-8 minutes, easy set-up)

Use these questions to review the content from Lesson 3: "Mary's Reaction of Praise"
The correct answer for each question is printed in bold, italic font.

1. Who was Elizabeth's husband?
 - a. John the Baptist
 - b. Zechariah**
 - c. Joseph
 - d. Pontius Pilate

2. Elizabeth was Mary's _____.
 - a. friend
 - b. neighbor
 - c. relative**
 - d. caregiver

3. Who was the baby that Elizabeth was carrying?
 - a. Simon the Zealot
 - b. John the Baptist**
 - c. the apostle Paul
 - d. Herod Antipas

4. After Mary received the news that she would give birth to the Christ, to whose home did she travel?
 - a. Elizabeth**
 - b. Mary and Martha
 - c. Lydia
 - d. Peter's mother

5. What did the baby in Elizabeth's womb do when he heard Mary's voice?
 - a. cried out
 - b. fell into a trance
 - c. worshipped the Lord
 - d. leaped with joy**

LESSON 4

HE IS THE GIFT

Biblical Passage: Luke 2:1-20

Memory Verse: Luke 2:11 “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”

1. For many, Jesus’ birth goes _____ (Luke 2:1-7).
2. For others, Jesus’ birth offers the promise of _____ (Luke 2:8-14).
3. For all, Jesus’ birth demands a personal _____ (Luke 2:15-20).

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do you experience a sense of wonder about the holy night of Jesus’ birth?
 - Do you think it was necessary for God to send His Son to earth in the form of a baby?
 - If Jesus had come to us as a grown man, how could that change our understanding of who He is?
-

Answer the following questions as they are discussed:

- In which verse are the prophecies from Micah 5:2 and Isaiah 11:10 fulfilled?
 - Why do you think that God might have chosen to announce the birth of His Son to the shepherds?
 - Why was it important whom the angels said He was?
 - What emotions did the shepherds feel upon the news of Christ?
 - After the shepherds had seen baby Jesus with their own eyes, how did they respond?
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SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT . . .

“The hinge of history is on the door of a Bethlehem stable.”—*Ralph W. Sockman*

HE IS THE GIFT

(15–20 minutes, easy set-up)

Use this outline and any of the corresponding activities to share the Biblical Truth with students.

Introduction: The birth of a child is heralded with special preparations and announcements. The room is prepared in advance, supplies are purchased, and gifts are presented as the parents await the birth. The birth itself is announced with special ribbons and wreaths and yard signs to share the good news. Jesus' birth also had centuries of special preparations and was announced through unusual means.

1. For many, Jesus' birth goes unnoticed (Luke 2:1–7).

Description: Because the Roman authorities conducted a census of all people under Roman rule for taxation (vv. 1–3), all of David's descendants had to return to David's hometown of Bethlehem for the census. This included Joseph and Mary, who was nearing the final days of her pregnancy (v. 4). The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem was more than 90 miles and would have been difficult (v. 5). When the couple arrived in Bethlehem, they found no lodging in the town, but were allowed to stay in the innkeeper's stable. These humble circumstances of Jesus' birth foreshadowed His concern for the poor (vv. 6–7).

Illustration: When soldiers return from overseas assignments, families are notified of when to gather and greet them. Invitations are sent out to attend welcome-home parties. Sometimes, even parades are conducted, all in honor of these who have been gone so long.

Application: Despite all the prophecies that pointed to the birth of Christ, no one in Bethlehem was looking for Him. There was no room at the inn; there were no special preparations made in advance; there was no one watching for His arrival. But His birth was not unnoticed by God as He rejoiced in the coming of His Son to His world.

2. For others, Jesus' birth offers the promise of peace (Luke 2:8–14).

Description: God sent the message of the birth of His Son to people who were looked down upon by society. The shepherds represented the world's need for a Savior (vv. 8-9). The angels announced the news that **Jesus is God and Savior**, the long-awaited Messiah (vv.10-11), and offered the shepherds a sign to confirm their divine message (v. 12). Jesus' birth prompted the angels' highest praise to God (vv. 13–14).

Illustration: Mike Rowe has carved out a career by exploring dangerous and dirty jobs. In his television series, *Dirty Jobs*, Rowe explores some of the jobs that most people would not be willing to do. In so doing, Rowe has discovered the value of every job and every person who shows up to work to do these jobs.

Application: The job of a shepherd was viewed as a dirty job, and those who took on that job were not valued. Yet, God saw them as worthy, and sent His angels to them intentionally. What a picture of the unconditional love of God who sees us and values us for who we are, not for what we do.

3. For all, Jesus' birth demands a personal response (Luke 2:15–20).

Description: The angels announced that the Savior had come! The shepherds immediately traveled to Bethlehem and found the baby just as the angels had described (vv. 15-16). This sight solidified the shepherd's belief that the Messiah had, indeed, arrived. This newborn baby was the Christ. When convinced of the identity of the baby, the shepherds praised God for the arrival of the baby and His message to them of His coming (vv.17-18). Mary recognized that God was at work through Jesus' birth (v. 19). The shepherds, like the angels, glorified God for Jesus' birth (v. 20).

Illustration: In the courts of Israel, shepherds were not allowed to serve as witnesses because they were thought to be untrustworthy. Yet God intentionally chose shepherds to be the first witnesses of Jesus' birth.

Application: When the shepherds saw the baby Jesus, they had to decide for themselves who He was. From the evidence they saw, they affirmed this child was the long-awaited Christ. In response, they went immediately to share that news throughout the town.

Conclusion: The story of Jesus' birth is a joyous proclamation that continues to transform lives around the world. As we reflect on the birth of Jesus, we should respond like the angels and shepherds did that night long ago in Bethlehem. The Savior of the world was born in a manger, and we can find eternal peace through Him. Glory to God in the highest!

LESSON 4

HE IS THE GIFT

CHRISTOS
STUDENT EDITION

Biblical Passage: Luke 2:1-20

Do you recall *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, the holiday hit film from 1965? In it, Linus tells the story of Christ's birth from the Book of Luke, helping Charlie Brown refocus on the real message of Christmas. By hearing the story, Charlie Brown is finally able to turn away from the commercialism and hype that Christmas has become.

Certainly, part of the Christmas season includes gifts and giving; we spend our time choosing gifts for those we love. With this in mind, read Luke 2:1–20. God the Father did the same thing. God sent His Son that He might redeem His beloved creation through the life and death of Jesus.

Grace is defined as God's love and protection given freely to people. Grace is a vital attribute of God's character. Because of God's grace, He set forth to provide a way to reconcile all humanity to Himself. Sending His Son Jesus was the absolute expression of His grace.

At Christmas, we celebrate the greatest gift ever given. What does it mean to live each day in celebration of this gift? Why do we reserve such celebration for one specific time of year? Teach your teenager, through your actions and words, to express worship and praise to God all year long for His amazing gift of Jesus Christ.

CONNECTION QUESTIONS:

- What television Christmas specials, characters, situations, and scenes do you remember the most? What do you remember about them?
- How can our family talk about what we see God doing in our lives so that we may, like the shepherds, glorify and praise God?
- How can our family be like Mary, and treasure and ponder His presence with us?