

SESSION 3

The Savior Who Came to Us

THE POINT

Jesus came for our salvation.

THE PASSAGE

Luke 2:4-12,16-20

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Life is filled with decisions that can impact the rest of our lives, such as a job change or a move to another city. After serving one church for many years, my family and I answered God's call on our lives to plant a church in another city. We struggled leaving a place where God had blessed our lives with an incredible church family, friends, ministry, and life. Leaving all this was hard.

Even as we answered God's call, a pastor friend reached out to me. The Lord had called him years before to leave his hometown to plant a church. He told me how he had battled with the decision to move, but then he also shared an amazing perspective. God called his entire family, not just him. Years later, all his kids had come to faith in Jesus and were serving Jesus in that same city. I, too, can now say I have also seen my kids come to faith in Christ in our new city.

Jesus made a move too. He moved from heaven to earth, coming to us as a baby. His decision impacts all of us—for eternity!

THE SETTING

From Luke 1:26-56 we learn how God chose a young woman named Mary to be the mother of His Son. From Matthew 1:18-25 we learn that God selected "a righteous man" named Joseph to be her husband. However, both Luke's and Matthew's accounts make clear that this child named Jesus was not conceived in the ordinary way but by the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit so that He could be the Savior of the world.

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GUIDE: Direct group members to

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking God to help the group understand how Jesus came for our salvation. Thank the Father for being willing to send His one and only Son.

STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

LUKE 2:4-7

⁴ Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, ⁵ to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Luke 2:4-7 on page 31 of the PSG.

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 3**, the “Jesus’ Birth and Early Childhood” poster, to provide context for where these events were taking place. Identify the town of Bethlehem.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to help explain the background for tax registration.

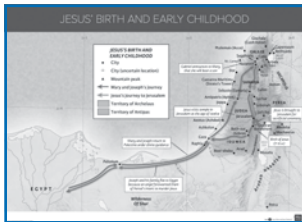
RECAP: Anticipation of the coming Messiah had been steadily growing among the Jewish people. Living under the oppressive rule of the Romans only fueled that expectation. God had promised King David that “your house and kingdom will endure before me forever, and your throne will be established forever” (2 Sam. 7:16). Luke would later show how Jesus was in the lineage of David (Luke 3:23-38). God fulfilled His promise to David when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, although it was not the royal event most people would have expected, and few people knew of His birth.

LEADER PACK: In advance, make copies of **Pack Item 2**, the “Prophecies” handout, and distribute them to your group members. Use this handout to help group members understand the relevant prophecies related to Jesus. Invite one group member to read the “Born in Bethlehem” prophecy and ask a second member to read the fulfillment.

DISCUSS: **Question #2** on page 31 of the PSG: “What details about Jesus’ birth story are different than what you would have expected for a king?”

RECAP: We should recognize the powerful picture of humility that surrounded the birth of God’s Son. However, even if Jesus had been born in grand fashion in a palace with birth announcements going throughout the countryside, it still would have been a humbling thing for God to leave the majesty and glory of heaven to become like one of us.

TRANSITION: Jesus’ humble birth in Bethlehem fulfilled the promise of God to David. In the next verses, we see that angels proclaimed the good news that the Savior was born.



ALTERNATE QUESTION:

When have God’s plans for your life differed from your expectations?

LUKE 2:4-7 COMMENTARY

[VERSE 4] As the Jewish religious leaders told King Herod (Matt. 2:4-6), the birth of Mary's **firstborn Son** had to occur in Bethlehem in order to fulfill the prophecy of Micah 5:2. His birth through the ancestries of both Joseph and Mary (Matt. 1:16) also fulfilled God's promise to David that his "house and kingdom will endure before me forever" (2 Sam. 7:16).

In those days, the Roman Empire regularly called for all the people in its realm to register in order to make sure everyone paid their taxes and to have a list of men able to serve in the military. Since the Jews were exempt from military service because of their Sabbath law, their registration was only for the purpose of taxation.

Since Joseph was a descendant of King David, by Jewish custom he was required to return to Bethlehem, known as the city of David, because that was where David was born and reared (1 Sam. 16:1-13). Luke used two Greek words of similar meaning, **house and family line**, to stress Joseph's relationship to David. Apparently, Joseph was also born there. The Gospels do not explain why Joseph had moved to Nazareth. Nazareth was about eighty miles north of Bethlehem and would require three to four days of travel. Since Bethlehem's elevation was more than a thousand feet higher than that of Nazareth, the journey would be especially tiring.

[VERSE 5] Why Mary had to go with Joseph is not clear. Perhaps, as his wife, she had to be present for the registration. Maybe they were concerned that the baby would be born before Joseph could return. Though the Greek word translated **engaged** is the same word used of their relationship in 1:27, some scholars believe that in light of Matthew 1:24, they had already taken their marriage vows. Some believe their traveling together was also evidence they were married.

[VERSES 6-7] On arriving in the little village of Bethlehem they found large crowds since all of David's descendants had to go there to be

registered. They probably had only a short window of time to comply with the Roman edict. (Think of the crowds in a college town on a football weekend.) As a result of the crush of people, **there was no guest room available for them**. Maybe the small village only had only one place to lodge. In that era, innkeepers often also provided a shelter for the animals that accompanied their guests. This space may have been nothing more than a walled courtyard with some type of roof along the walls or perhaps an outcropping of rock. This was the only shelter Joseph and Mary could find.

Perhaps they had registered and were waiting to return to Nazareth when they realized the baby was coming. Luke simply says Mary **gave birth to her firstborn Son**. Those who have given birth or who have been present at such an event know something of what Mary and Joseph experienced. The songwriter Andrew Peterson has attempted to capture the intensity of those moments in the first line of his song "Labor of Love," which says, "It Was Not a Silent Night."

After her Son was born, Mary did what all Jewish mothers did for their babies: **she wrapped him tightly in cloth**. Surely Mary came prepared. She would have had a large piece of cloth that she used to wrap around her Son to keep Him warm. Then she pulled a strip that extended from one corner of the material and tied it around the cloth to keep His body straight. After wrapping Him in this fashion she **laid him in a manger**. This was the only kind of cradle they could find. That is how we are led to believe they were staying in a shelter for animals.

When we hear the term *firstborn*, we usually assume it means Mary and Joseph later had other children. Though this term can be used of an only child, we know from Matthew 13:55-56 that other children were born to Mary and Joseph. Also, Paul referred to James, one of the early leaders of the church in Jerusalem, as "the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19).

STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

LUKE 2:8-12

⁸ In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: ¹¹ Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger.”

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Luke 2:8-12 on page 32 of the PSG.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Use the Linus option on page 45 of this Leader Guide to reinforce the passage.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to help explain the background of the shepherds.

RECAP: Although the world might have missed the significance of the birth of Jesus, the angels in heaven certainly didn’t—and they made sure a small group of shepherds didn’t miss it either. An angel of the Lord appeared and told the shepherds, “Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord” (v. 11). As he made this announcement, the angel was joined by more angels: “a multitude of the heavenly host” (v. 13). What an incredible experience for these shepherds to see and hear the skies filled with the praise of angels.

LEADER PACK: In advance, make copies of **Pack Item 2**, the “Prophecies” handout, and distribute them to your group members. Use this handout to help group members understand the relevant prophecies related to Jesus. Invite one group member to read the “Worshipped by shepherds” prophecy and ask a second member to read the fulfillment.

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from page 33 of the PSG. A few things stand out about this angelic announcement:

- ▶ The announcement was terrifying.
- ▶ The announcement was comforting.
- ▶ The announcement was inspiring.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 33 of the PSG: “What does it mean that Jesus’ birth would be good news of great joy for all the people?”

TRANSITION: In the next verses, we see that people rejoice when they recognize the truth of salvation.



ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What are the implications of God choosing to first reveal Christ’s birth to shepherds?

LUKE 2:8-12 COMMENTARY

[VERSE 8] Because Jesus' birth was a unique event with eternal significance, God sent an angel to announce the good news that the Savior was born. This group of shepherds and their sheep were staying near Bethlehem. The shepherds had to stay with their sheep at night to protect them against wild animals and thieves. Ancient Jewish records show the sheep used for sacrifices at the temple were raised in this area since it was near Jerusalem (within about five miles). The sheep had to be only the best in order to be sold for temple sacrifices. Perhaps God intended that the connection of these sheep to the Jewish sacrificial system should help us remember that Jesus came to be His "Lamb . . . who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

[VERSE 9] Several surprises interrupted the shepherds' "silent night." The first was when God's angel came and stood near where they were resting. Apparently, a bright light (**the glory of the Lord**) revealed his presence. Of course, none of these men had ever seen such a sight, so naturally **they were terrified**. Apparently, they realized this person was an angel from God, which only added to their fear. Luke used the same imagery of a bright light in describing the angel who came to Peter when he was imprisoned in Jerusalem (Acts 12:7). Likewise, Paul's description of the Lord's appearance to him on the road to Damascus also included "an intense light" (22:6). Although the coming of an angel surrounded by a bright light surely would have been a surprise, so was the audience to whom he was appearing. Most Jews considered shepherds to be dirty and in a lower class group. Of course they were usually dirty since tending sheep was a filthy job. Also, many Jews probably considered them to be ritually unclean and thus unable to go the synagogue or temple. And yet, God chose these men of humble circumstances to hear the angel's glorious message.

[VERSE 10] The angel quickly spoke to calm the men's fears, urging them, **"Don't be afraid."** Then he delivered his message. The two Greek words translated **proclaim to you good news** could be

translated, I evangelize you. The root meaning of this verb is "to bring good news." Its primary use in the New Testament is to announce the gospel of Jesus Christ. Though the *good news* about the birth of Jesus would have eternal significance for the entire world, these Jewish men probably understood the phrase **for all the people** to apply only to them and their fellow Jews.

[VERSE 11] This "good news . . . for all the people" was that **a Savior** had been born that very day. These Jewish men understood that God had always been the Savior of His people. God's angel, of course, knew the fuller meaning of this title for Jesus. The angel went on to use another title for this unique child: **Messiah**. The words *Messiah* (from the Hebrew) and *Christ* (from the Greek) refer to the "anointed one" with the sense of one chosen and empowered by God. Jesus claimed this title and role for Himself (John 4:25-26). Only He could perfectly combine all these roles—prophet, priest, and king. The final title used by the angel was **the Lord**. Both Martha and Mary called Jesus "Lord" in recognition of His divinity (11:21,27,32). Jesus referred to Himself as the "Lord of the Sabbath" (Luke 6:5). Paul especially emphasized Jesus' lordship (Rom. 10:9; Phil. 2:11) and often combined both titles with His name, "Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:3; 1 Cor. 1:9). The angel made clear this was no ordinary child born in the city of David. Notice two other interesting words: for you. This unique and glorious child had come even for the sake of humble shepherds.

[VERSE 12] Since Bethlehem was full of travelers who had come to register, it was possible that another young woman had given birth that day. To enable the shepherds to find this particular child, the angel provided a **sign**. Finding a baby swaddled in typical Jewish fashion would not really help that much. However, finding a newborn **lying in a manger** would provide a definite way of being sure He was the one.

STUDY THE BIBLE



15 MINUTES

LUKE 2:16-20

¹⁶ They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ After seeing them, they reported the message they were told about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard, which were just as they had been told.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Luke 2:16-20 on page 34 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 34 of the PSG: “How has Jesus’ birth been good news in your life?”

RECAP: After such a once-in-a-lifetime experience, no wonder the shepherds exclaimed, “Let’s go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us” (Luke 2:15). It’s also no surprise that “they hurried off” to see the very thing the angel proclaimed.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to help explain the urgency of the shepherds.

RECAP: This peace is peace with God, and though the people then did not know the full details of that peace, years later that peace would come through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therein lies our hope.

Peace grounded in faith. The only way to receive this peace is by grace, through faith, in Christ alone. This peace cannot be earned (Eph. 2:8-9). Instead, we receive this peace as we trust in the death and resurrection of Christ. His work of salvation for us was the reason He came to earth as a baby!

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 34 of the PSG: “What are some ways we can help others know that the gospel message is true?”

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Use the Ornament option on page 45 of this Leader Guide to illustrate to group members a means of sharing Christ this week.

DO: Direct group members to **Engage** with “A Nativity of Praise” on page 35 of the PSG (page 45 in this Leader Guide) to help group members offer praise to the Lord.

GUIDE: Refer back to “The Point” for this session: “Jesus came for our salvation.”

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

How has salvation brought joy to your life?

LUKE 2:16-20 COMMENTARY

[VERSE 16] People tend to celebrate when they find the truth for which they have been searching. Finding and participating in the truth about God's salvation always brings joy and a desire to praise God.

After the angel finished delivering his message to the shepherds, many other angels joined him in either speaking or singing a short hymn of praise to God (Luke 2:13-14). The shepherds had seen and heard enough. While they could not comprehend the full significance of the angel's words, they did understand that the long-awaited Messiah had finally come. Though they may have wondered why God had chosen them to be the first to hear this "good news of great joy," they did not stop to discuss such questions. Instead, they immediately **hurried off** to Bethlehem to begin their search for the baby described by the angel. Soon they found the one for whom they were looking. There in a place meant for animals, they discovered **the baby . . . lying in the manger**, just as the angel had said. The baby's mother and her husband were with Him.

[VERSES 17-18] We don't know how long the shepherds stayed. In the coming days, they told their story about the angel's message and what they had found to any who would listen. Luke described how all those who heard the account **were amazed at what the shepherds said to them**.

[VERSE 19] Try to imagine what Mary and Joseph were thinking. Mary had just delivered her firstborn son. They both must have been physically and emotionally exhausted. Maybe they reflected on their own angel stories. Mary would have remembered when Gabriel had appeared and told her that though she was still a virgin, she would become pregnant by a miracle of the Holy Spirit (1:26-35) and that her child would "be called the Son of the Most High" (v. 32) and "the Son of God" (v. 35). Joseph would have recalled how the angel had spoken to him in a dream to explain what had happened to Mary, to encourage him not to be afraid to follow through on his marriage to Mary, and to let him know he was to name Mary's

Son "Jesus" as a sign of the saving work (Matt. 1:18-25). The shepherds must have told Mary and Joseph about the angel's message to them to explain why and how they knew to come see this baby.

Luke used two words to describe how Mary processed everything she had experienced that night. He said she **was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them**. The Greek word for *treasuring up* has the root idea of guarding or protecting as when a guard is overseeing a prisoner. The form of the verb indicates an ongoing action. Mary kept on thinking about the sum of her experiences: the birth, the shepherds, and everything that had happened since Gabriel had spoken to her. She kept on adding specific parts to her collection. Like the shepherds (v. 18), she too was no doubt "amazed" and probably still confused. She wanted to hold onto every detail so she could continue to bring them to mind and meditate on them. The phrase *in her heart* could refer to either Mary's treasuring or her meditating or perhaps to both. Mary carefully, privately, and regularly thought about the awesome works she had seen God do.

[VERSE 20] After the shepherds had seen for themselves and confirmed the angel's message, they went back to their sheep. In addition to telling the good news of what they had witnessed (v. 17), both the angels' appearance and the baby in the manger (v. 16), they also were **glorifying and praising God**. The basic sense of the word for *glory* is "brightness" or "splendor"; it is often associated with bright light (Luke 9:28-31; Acts 22:11). While we sometimes talk about praising other people for what they have done, in the New Testament the Greek word for *praise* is only used of God (for example, Luke 19:37; Heb. 13:15; Rev. 19:5). These shepherds were *glorifying and praising God* for sending His angels to them and for allowing them to confirm the location and existence of this Baby. But the ultimate reason for their joy was that this Child was the "Messiah, the Lord," the "Savior" (v. 11) who would "save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

LIVE IT OUT



5 MINUTES

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 36 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Surrender your life.** Now is the time to put your faith and trust in Christ. If you haven't already, make this the best Christmas ever; speak with a Christian friend or leader about your decision. [Refer to page 2 in this book for help.]
- ▶ **Seek God's plan.** God has a wonderful plan for your life. If you are placing your dreams above His plans, turn these expectations over to Him. Invite Him to make clear His path for your life.
- ▶ **Rest in your salvation.** Trust Jesus to cover your past, protect your present, and secure your eternity. If you are struggling to accept peace in one of these areas, pray about it and speak to a trusted Christian friend.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 36 of the PSG.

Moving places is not easy for any of us. Surely it mustn't have been for the Lord Jesus. Yet, He was willing to step from heaven to earth because of His great love for us. Let's share that with everyone we know!

PRAY: Thank God for the gift of His Son and the salvation He made possible. Ask Him to help group members spread the message of that salvation like the shepherds did.



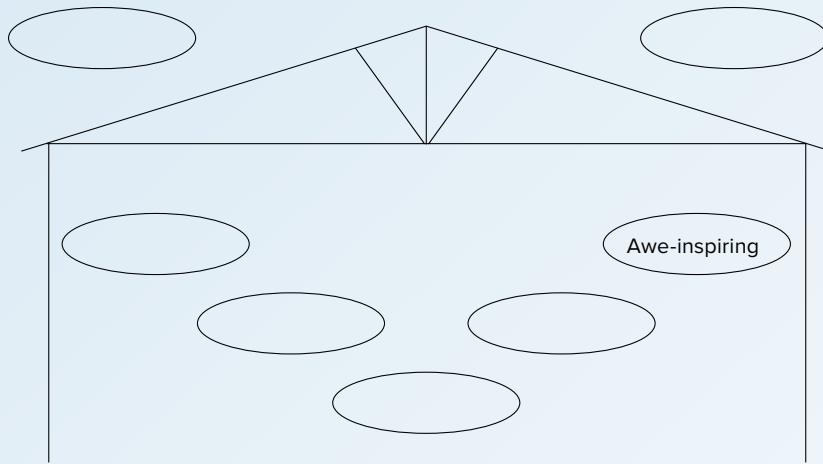
TIPS & TRAINING

Discover helpful teaching tips and leadership insights from Sunday School experts.

Lifeway.com/SundaySchool

ENGAGE

A Nativity of Praise. Create a kind of nativity set by writing words that describe that first Christmas night. One bubble has been filled in for you as an example. Then write a prayer thanking God for our first Christmas present: Jesus.



My Prayer:

BONUS CONTENT

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, play the classic scene from *A Charlie Brown Christmas* where Linus presents the story of Jesus' birth and quotes from Scripture. Invite volunteers to express their reactions and responses.

NOTE: A video option can be found at BibleStudiesForLife.com/AdultExtra.



ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, invite several group members to bring a favorite Christmas tree ornament that reflects the message of Christ or the message of Christmas and explain its significance. After sharing, ask members why few Christmas ornaments feature the cross. Invite them to reflect on the relationship between Jesus of the cradle and Jesus of the cross. Encourage group members to use one of their ornaments to share Christ this week.

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