

SESSION 4

THE ANGELS' ANNOUNCEMENT

▶ **The Point**

Jesus came for our salvation.

▶ **The Passage**

Luke 2:1-14

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

'Tis the season to be ... traveling. Some of us travel constantly, while others rarely leave our own communities. Wherever you fall in that spectrum, it's likely you have traveled during the Christmas season. Traveling for Christmas is nothing new. The reason we even have Christmas started with a journey—Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem. I doubt it was an easy trip, either. When my wife and I were expecting our first child, she read a book about pregnancy that validated her extreme exhaustion. The book claimed the energy of a woman's pregnant body at rest exerted more energy than a nonpregnant mountain climber.¹ On several occasions, I heard my exhausted wife declare, "I was just climbing mountains."

The story of Jesus' birth is one of a journey. Joseph and Mary may have felt like their trip included "climbing mountains!" But the story includes an even greater journey. Jesus, the Son of God, left the glories of His throne in heaven to journey to earth. He came as an infant with one sole purpose: to bring us salvation.

▶ **The Setting**

After the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would have a child, Mary visited Elizabeth. Then Elizabeth completed her pregnancy and gave birth to John, the forerunner of Jesus. Mary returned to Nazareth to prepare for the arrival of her baby, but political events happening in the region of Israel would shape the next chapter of her life. She and her husband would have to make a journey to Joseph's ancestral home—Bethlehem.

What does the Bible say?

Quirinius (2:2)—The governor of Syria during the time of Jesus' birth when a census was ordered to be taken in the areas surrounding all of Israel.

Luke 2:1-14

¹ In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered.

² This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria.

³ So everyone went to be registered, each to his own town.

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.

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."

¹³ Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: ¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

Notes



DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 41 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): **“What’s the most interesting road trip you’ve taken?”** Allow time for each person to respond.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, hang a large map of the United States or the world on the wall and provide pushpins or sticky notes to group members. Ask them to place the pins or sticky notes in the places on the

map where they have traveled. Give a small prize to the person who has traveled the furthest. Make the point that though Mary and Joseph’s journey wasn’t very long, it would certainly have been grueling.

GUIDE: Direct group members to **“The Bible Meets Life”** on page 42 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of responding to Jesus for salvation by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 3**, the “Map” poster, to refer to the setting for this particular session.

GUIDE: Call attention to **“The Point”** on page 42 of the PSG: **“Jesus came for our salvation.”**

PRAY: Transition into the study by thanking God for taking that incredible journey from heaven to earth for our sake. Ask Him to help group members seek Jesus for their salvation.



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Luke 2:1-7 Commentary

[Verses 1-2] Jesus was born according to God's intent while **Caesar Augustus** ruled Rome (31 BC to AD 14). Luke emphasized this took place when **Quirinius** was governing Syria. It is possible Quirinius served two terms as the governor of Syria. From 6-4 BC, during the time Jesus was born, he conducted the initial process requiring people to register for a census. During his second term, AD 6-9, he finished the census. The only external record of Quirinius's reign is the latter one, which would not work with the dating of Jesus' birth. Herod died in 4 BC and Jesus was born before the death of Herod. However, if Quirinius served two terms, that would explain the presence of the first registration mentioned in Luke as opposed to the one he conducted during his second term. Some evidence points to Quirinius being governor in the first decade BC as well as the verified date of AD 6-9.

[Verses 3-4] Luke 2:39 identifies Nazareth as Joseph and Mary's hometown. However, they left Nazareth to go to Bethlehem to register. The intention of the decree was most likely for them to travel to their ancestral home. As a descendant of David, Bethlehem would have been that place for Joseph and Mary. **Nazareth** was a small town in Galilee about eighty-five to ninety miles from Bethlehem. **Bethlehem** was called the **city of David** because that was his ancestral home. The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem had more than logistical or political reasons for happening. The census was the vehicle that moved Joseph and Mary from Nazareth of Galilee to Bethlehem of Judea. It enabled the prophecy of Micah 5:2 to come to fruition. God can use anything or anyone to further His purposes. After Herod died, Joseph was going to move back to Bethlehem, but he was warned in a dream to return to Nazareth, fulfilling the words of the prophets that He was a Nazarene. (See Matt. 2:23.) Thus, both streams of prophecy found their fulfillment in Jesus.

[Verses 5-7] Joseph and Mary went **to be registered** for the census issued by Augustus. Mary had stayed with Elizabeth three months during her pregnancy. (See Luke 1:56.) Additional time probably elapsed before their journey to Bethlehem. It is likely Mary was in her last trimester of pregnancy when they began the trip to Bethlehem. They could not have been in Bethlehem long because there still was no room for them. The time came for Mary to give birth, and she gave birth to her firstborn Son. This implied she later had other children. Jesus, the long awaited Messiah, had finally entered the world He came to save. Mary wrapped Him tightly in cloth, the normal practice of a mother with her child. They swaddled the child in order to keep its limbs straight. (See Ezek. 16:4.) This extraordinary child arrived in such an ordinary, humble way. Mary placed Jesus **in a manger**, a feeding trough for animals. Luke noted that there was no guest room available for them. Thus they settled in a space reserved for animals. Even in those circumstances, Jesus came in God's way, demonstrating the great humility this special Child would display throughout His time on earth.



STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

Luke 2:8-11

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.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Luke 2:8-11 on page 46 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 46 of the PSG: **"What's so good about the news the angels delivered?"**

SUMMARIZE: The source of this joy was the birth of Jesus, whom the angel described using several important terms. Highlight the main points from page 47 of the PSG.

- ▶ **A Savior.** The name *Jesus* is tied to the name *Joshua*, which means God is Salvation. It is a most fitting name, because our salvation is the very reason God came to earth.
- ▶ **The Messiah.** The Greek word is *Christos*, and we often translate this as "Christ." It means the Anointed One, the One God chose for the task of our salvation.
- ▶ **The Lord.** *Lord* is the title Luke used most often for Jesus. He is the Master, the Supreme Authority in all things. This baby in the manger was God Himself.

LEADER PACK: In advance, make enough copies of **Pack Item 4**, the "Angels in the Bible" handout, for your group members. Lead them to form smaller groups of three to four members to read and discuss the significance of these verses concerning angels. After several minutes, invite each smaller group to share their best observation with the larger group.

TRANSITION: The next verses continue the angels' important announcement.

ANGELS IN THE BIBLE

Created beings without primary function is to serve and worship God. Unlike God they are not eternal or co-eternal. The Hebrew word in the Old Testament is malak, and the Greek word in the New Testament is angelos. They both mean "messengers."

- ▶ Genesis 24:70 Angels visit Lot in Sodom.
- ▶ Genesis 28:12 Angels dream "Jacob's staircase?"
- ▶ Job 1:6 Angels gather to present observations before the Lord.
- ▶ Psalm 91:11 Angels obey the Lord's command.
- ▶ Luke 2:13-15 Angels announce salvation to the shepherds.
- ▶ Matthew 4:11 Angels minister to Jesus after the temptation in the wilderness.
- ▶ John 20:13 Angels sit at the empty tomb after the Resurrection.
- ▶ Acts 12:7 An Angel releases Peter from prison.
- ▶ Hebrews 1:2 Angels are ministered to by spirits without us knowing.
- ▶ Revelation 8:2 Angels announce judgment.
- ▶ Revelation 15:1 Angels bring judgment.

Luke 2:8-11 Commentary

[Verse 8] Somewhere in the fields near Bethlehem where King David had kept his sheep, a small group of shepherds were doing their duty guarding their sheep. The shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night. Nighttime was one of the most dangerous times for sheep. Both thieves and predators could take advantage of the cover of darkness. The text does not give a month this took place. With relatively mild winters, it could have been about any time of the year. These shepherds were most likely devout men. It was not unlike most other nights they had been in the fields. But that was about to change. Not far away lay the Son of God.

[Verse 9] Suddenly an **angel of the Lord** interrupted the shepherds. Unlike other times in the Book of Luke (see Luke 1:11,19,26), this angel remains unnamed. How did they know it was an angel if he did not identify himself? Obviously they noticed that **the glory of the Lord shone around them**. This was the manifest presence of God among them. Though the glory of God often was manifested in such ways as fire or clouds, on this occasion His glory shone like a beam of light on a darkened night. The shepherds **were terrified**. Those who had an encounter with God or His angels often needed reassurance for their fear. (See Luke 1:30; 2:10; 8:50.)

[Verse 10] As the shepherds shrunk in terror, the angel spoke words of reassurance. First, the angel encouraged the shepherds with the words, **“Don’t be afraid.”** This was an oft-used expression of angels. (See Gen. 21:17; Acts 27:24.) Those who were afraid were in danger of missing the greatest birth announcement of all time. They needed to calm down and hear the gospel. The angel told the shepherds he came to proclaim **good news of great joy**. *Good news* is the Greek word from which we get the word *gospel*. The angel preached the gospel for the first time to a group of shepherds on a hillside keeping their sheep at night.

[Verse 11] The good news the angel announced was not a program but a person. The gospel is not a religion but a relationship with the Messiah who came into the world to save sinners. Luke identified the beginning of this new Messianic age with the word **today**. From that day forward, all people had a new hope of salvation based upon God’s sending His Messiah into the world. The event took place in the **city of David**. Bethlehem, the home of the shepherd David, was also the first home of the shepherd Messiah. The angel used three lofty terms for this special child. First, he identified Jesus as **Savior**. The only other time this term is used in Luke’s Gospel is in reference to God in Mary’s song known as the Magnificat. (See Luke 1:47.) The angel also referred to Jesus as **Messiah**. This is the Hebrew word that corresponds to the Greek word *Christ*. Literally it meant anointed one and was a reference to the One God promised would come and deliver His people. The final reference to Jesus was as **Lord**. This was the usual word for secular rulers, but it was also the standard translation for *Yahweh*, the primary name used for God in the Old Testament. God the **Messiah** came to be the Savior of the world. That was good news indeed.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Luke 2:12-14

12 This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger. ***13 Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:*** ***14 Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!***

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Luke 2:12-14 on page 46 of the PSG.

SUMMARIZE: In verse 13, we see the word *suddenly*. Biblical writers often used this word to describe the unexpected nature of God’s acts—especially events that involved life-changing circumstances. A “multitude” of angels—“the heavenly host”—“suddenly” appeared in the fields of Bethlehem. The angelic group was not addressing the shepherds; they were “praising God,” but the shepherds clearly heard their words of praise. And what climactic words they were! “Glory to God in the highest heaven.”

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 46 of the PSG: **“What are some ways our group can bring glory to God and peace to others?”**

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity “Peace and Joy” on page 45 of the PSG to help them relate to the peace and joy Christ has brought us.

Consider the level at which you are currently experiencing peace and joy. After circling the appropriate level based on how you feel, describe how that differs from what you know to be true.

[PSG has scales 1-5 for how group members are experiencing peace and joy as well as the following guided prayer]

Write a prayer to God asking Him to help your feelings align with the reality of what Jesus has done through salvation.

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

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What are some ways Jesus has brought joy and peace to your life?

Luke 2:12-14 Commentary

[Verse 12] While the titles of Jesus were exalted, the events of His birth were humble. The shepherds were supposed to look for a **sign**. If the shepherds found a **baby ... in a manger** in Bethlehem, it would point to the truthfulness and accuracy of the angel's message. Bethlehem was not a large town. They would not have to look far to find a baby laid in a manger on that particular night. The baby would have two humble qualities. First, he would be **wrapped tightly in cloth**. This referred to a process by which babies were wrapped in long strips of cloth and swaddled. It gave them warmth, security, and protection. And He would be lying **in a manger**. Think of the absurdity of the angel's words. God, the Messiah, the Savior, would be born, wrapped up like a little baby, and placed in a feeding trough for animals.

[Verse 13] The word **suddenly** often describes the unexpected nature of God's supernatural acts. Here it is a signal something unusual happened. As if a conversation with an angel were not sudden enough, the countryside filled with a **multitude of the heavenly host**. *Host* was a reference to an army. This, however, was not an army of war but an army announcing peace. (See 2:14.) The angel army joined together in two related actions. First, they were **praising God**. Praise was the expected response both of the believer (see 2:20; 19:37; 24:53; Acts 2:47; 3:8-9) and of creation itself (see Ps. 148:1-4), of which the angels would have been a part. The praise of the angels expressed itself in the second related action: speaking. They spoke the gospel, as the one angel had done. Proclaiming the gospel is not often thought of as an act of worship, but it should be!

[Verse 14] The birth of the Messiah, Savior, and Lord brought **glory to God**. The glory of God displayed His majesty and authority. The psalmist remarked, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the expanse proclaims the work of his hands" (Ps. 19:1). Another psalm declares, "The voice of the **LORD** is above the waters. The God of glory thunders—the **LORD**, above the vast water, the voice of the **LORD** in power, the voice of the **LORD** in splendor" (29:3-4). The coming of Messiah highlighted all the incredible qualities of God. The glory of God reached to the **highest heaven**. Jesus brought glory to God, and God brought peace on earth. **Peace** referred to more than mere absence of conflict. The peace God offered provided wholeness for those who received it. It was a peace that affected the entire person. The people **he favors** includes all those who have found God's grace through Jesus Christ. Through Jesus, people have the opportunity to have their sins forgiven and their lives made whole.

Read the article "Censuses: Purpose and Methods" in the Winter 2018–2019 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles "Nazareth in the First Century" (Spring 2017), "Where Was the Manger?" (Winter 2011-2012), "Caesar Augustus" (Winter 2009-2010), "Roads and Travel in the First Century" (Winter 2006-2007), and "The Angel's Song" (Winter 2002-2003) relate to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator. Look for Bundles: Bible Studies for Life.

