

YOU



IRREFUTABLE
PROPHECIES THAT
POINT US TO JESUS

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**HOW TO AVOID
LIFE'S PITFALLS**

ON THE COVER

The Senior Pastor of Galilee Baptist Church in Maryland, Lloyd T. McGriff, is on the cover of this issue of YOU. Pastor McGriff recently had what he termed a “health hurricane.” In March 2021 CT scans revealed a mass in his body that had spread. The doctor called this finding “unfortunate.” Pastor McGriff said, “But thanks be to God, the Divine Physician, interceded and the follow up procedure found no mass and no cancer.” He testifies that prayers and faith do work. Pastor McGriff has won numerous awards. He was featured in *Gospel Today* magazine as one of “America’s Most Loved Pastors.” Through his leadership, the Galilee Community Development Corporation (GCDC) was launched in 2003 to assist those in need of food and clothing. The GCDC has assisted over 150,000 people since its inception. And the pandemic did not stop the work God called the church to do. In 2020, over 23,000 were served through the committed service of volunteers of the Food Pantry. This year Pastor McGriff is leading his church to love God, love others, and love the Word. He is married to the former Monica Mackley, and they are the parents of three sons; Lloyd Trevar, Aaron Joseph, and Johnathan Paul.



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EDITORIAL

MARK CROSTON

“Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod, felt in the days when hope unborn had died ...” These are the words that describe the lives of black folk in the opening of the second verse of James Weldon Johnson’s “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” Life can be tough, and the issues of life can be tough too. But I am so glad the Bible gives us tools to help.

This issue of the *YOU* Bible Study will address some of the tough issues many of us are facing today. We will be studying “Irrefutable: Prophecies that Point Us to Jesus”; “Seeking Justice in an Unjust World”; and “How to Avoid Life’s Pitfalls.” In addition to these studies get extra insights and teaching tips from our *YOU* Blog at you.lifeway.com and listen to our Lifeway *YOU* Podcast on your favorite podcast app.

The Black Church Leadership and Family Conference is right around the corner. There is a full program for every member of the family! Join us for this all-in-one, equipping and energizing week, July 18-22, 2022. I’m sure this year’s event will feel like a family reunion as we see our Christian brothers and sisters face-to-face.

Learn more at lifeway.com/blackchurchconference.

Thanks for joining me in this season of study. Grab your Bible and allow God to speak through *YOU*!

Be Blessed!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping underline that loops back under the first letter.

Dr. Mark A. Croston, Sr.

YOU General Editor

National Director of Black Church Ministries

lifeway.com/BlackChurchLife

IRREFUTABLE:

PROPHECIES THAT POINT US TO JESUS

HOW THIS STUDY FITS YOUR DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

+ + +

Share Christ

The Christmas season is an ideal time to point others to Jesus Christ. We gain confidence in sharing His story as we see how His life is a part of God's grand design planned long ago. The birth of Jesus is not just a quaint story we tell at Christmas; it was prophesied centuries earlier.

Writer Bio

Rob Wilton

is a church planter in Pittsburgh and New Orleans. In these cities, Dr. Wilton serves as chaplain for the New Orleans Saints, city missionary for the Send Network, and founding pastor of Vintage Church.

Monique Brown

adapted this unit for the *YOU* audience. She is a physician with her own medical practice that focuses on spiritual, physical, and emotional health. She is an author and a leader for the Women's Ministry and the Adult Church at Study at Word Tabernacle Church in Rocky Mount, NC.



A BIBLE STUDY ABOUT THE PROPHECIES OF CHRIST

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The world is constantly searching for answers to the purpose and meaning of life. When people hope in the things of this world, they are left with broken promises and unmet expectations. What this world needs is a hope and promises that are irrefutable. When something is irrefutable it is impossible to prove it wrong. It cannot be denied, and it can be completely trusted.

Of course Jesus is our hope. And the prophecies that point to Him are irrefutable.

Each Christmas, we celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ. But hundreds of years before He was born of the virgin Mary, God revealed through His prophets that Jesus would come, live, and pay the price for our salvation. Our Father in heaven who cannot lie made many promises through prophets about Christ. These prophecies were proven to be true, and they strengthen our faith in our Savior.

In this study we will consider some of the prophecies about Christ. Without a doubt, Jesus was prophesied to be:

- God with us.
- The Light in the darkness.
- The Savior who came to us.
- The King who reigns forever.
- The Light and Glory of God.
- The Ruler who cares for His people.

This world is filled with unmet expectations and broken promises. But we have a heavenly Father who always keeps His promises. He made and fulfilled many prophecies that reveal the genuineness and authenticity of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

GOD WITH US

Leader pages on pp. 102-105

THE POINT:
JESUS IS IMMANUEL—
GOD WITH US.

ISAIAH 7:14; MATTHEW 1:18-25

MEMORY VERSE

Isa. 7:14 Therefore, the LORD himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel.

.....
Matt. 1:18 The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹ So her husband, Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.

.....
²⁰ But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel, which is translated “God is with us.”

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord’s angel had commanded him. He married her

²⁵ but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And he named him Jesus.

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KEYWORDS

Immanuel (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23)—(God with us) implies Jesus’ deity. Mary’s virgin-born Son would be God Himself, living among His people.

Engaged (Matt. 1:18)—Though Joseph and Mary were not yet married, the Jewish custom considered the engagement stage as

a relationship that would require a divorce in order to be ended.

Jesus (v. 21)—This name is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua which means “Yahweh saves.” Jesus’ name revealed His purpose: He would rescue sinners from deserved punishment.

WHY IS THE PROMISE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH SO IMPORTANT?

It was the biggest night of my senior basketball season. Our team wasn't great, but somehow we made the state semi-finals. Because this was unexpected, my dad had booked an event out of town that meant he would miss the game. I was crushed! I'll never forget my dad's words after he heard my pleas: "Son, I promise I'll be there."

The gym that night was filled with incredible anticipation. The place was packed with fans, but I was only concerned about one person. Would my dad be able to keep his promise? As I led my team onto the floor with our fight song filling the arena, I looked up into the stands, and there he was, cheering me on. My dad kept his promise!

In a world that is filled with broken promises, I am thankful for an earthly father who kept his. I am most thankful for our heavenly Father who always keeps His promises. In this God's grace and mercy abounds. Because God kept His promise given through the prophet Isaiah, we can celebrate Immanuel—God with us.

A Foretold Prophecy // Isaiah 7:14

The Bible is full of promises from God. He promised to send a Messiah who would save the world, and the fulfillment of this promise through the birth of Jesus Christ demonstrates the trustworthiness of our Lord. The specific details in this verse about a coming Messiah are what makes this prophecy a miracle of God.

Isaiah 7:14 is an exciting announcement. The Messiah would be born of a virgin and His name would be called Immanuel. Before we consider the importance of these two details, let's understand the context of this prophecy.

God called the prophet Isaiah, whose name means "Yahweh is salvation" during a time of struggle for God's people. Isaiah's words to the people pointed to the meaning of his name, which pointed to God as their salvation. In Isaiah 7, Ahaz was the king of Judah, the country was under attack, and his people were terrified (vv. 1-2). God offered to give Ahaz a sign that He was powerful enough to take care



THE POINT: JESUS IS IMMANUEL—GOD WITH US.

of their enemies, but Ahaz already may have been planning to ask Assyria for help and didn't think he needed God's help.

When King Ahaz refused to ask for a sign, Isaiah the prophet told the faithless house of David that God would give a sign anyway! The house of David's wickedness had tested God's patience, but God had a sign for them: "See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel" (v. 14).

WHY IS IT SIGNIFICANT THAT JESUS' BIRTH WAS FORETOLD HUNDREDS OF YEARS BEFORE IT HAPPENED?

The fulfillment in the Messiah, was a miraculous virgin birth. As Matthew was inspired to recount the birth of Jesus, he used this translation of Isaiah 7:14, wanting us to see the miraculous virgin birth of Christ. The virgin birth of Christ is an important truth; Jesus had to be one of us—human—to die in our place. He couldn't be the perfect sacrifice if He were like every other human with a sin nature. The virgin birth means Jesus had no human father—God is His Father—therefore, Jesus was born without a sin nature. Jesus is fully man, and He is fully God. God is with us!

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU APPRECIATE ABOUT THIS BIBLICAL PROPHECY?

A Fulfilled Sign // Matthew 1:18-19

The Messiah would be born of a virgin. From a human perspective, a virgin birth is impossible. Over the centuries, people have laughed at this idea. It's quite possible that Joseph and Mary's own people laughed when they explained the situation. But God makes the impossible possible!

WHAT ARE OTHER EXAMPLES OF THE IMPOSSIBLE WORK OF GOD IN THE BIBLE?

While Joseph and Mary were engaged, Mary became pregnant from the Holy Spirit. At that time, an engagement was a waiting season to prove faithfulness to God and each other in purity. The couple would be committed to each other as husband and wife although not yet living together. The marriage wouldn't be consummated until after this season. This engagement season was also the season of the miracle from God.



DIGGING DEEPER GOD'S SIGN

In Isaiah 7:10-11, God told Ahaz to ask for a sign because He wanted to strengthen Ahaz's faith in Him. Since Ahaz refused to ask for a sign (v. 12), the entire house of David was under the threat of destruction because of Ahaz's lack of faith. Therefore God gave the sign through Isaiah. God promised the house of David that "the" virgin would conceive (v. 14). Isaiah's use of the word "the" indicates that God had shown him a particular virgin (Mary) who would conceive. The word "virgin" is translated *almah* in Hebrew and *parthenos* in Greek. *Almah* usually means "a young woman who is not sexually active" (Gen. 24:43; Ex. 2:8). *Parthenos* means "a young woman," usually one who is sexually inexperienced. Isaiah 7 is referring to a young woman with no sexual experience. God gave a sign that only He could've done.

How does this sign from God continue to impact the lives of believers today?

Mary's divine pregnancy changed Joseph's plans, but Joseph's actions were commendable. He planned a respectful, secret divorce, thinking she has been unfaithful. Surely Joseph's heart was broken. But his love for Mary and his righteousness drove his actions (even though the Old Testament law allowed for a public stoning for adultery [Deut. 22:22-24]). Joseph chose not to create a public scandal by taking news of Mary's condition to the judges.

The situation had changed Joseph's plans, but didn't change his love for Mary or his desire to live righteously. Joseph took the righteous path and sought to quietly move on from this painful chapter of his life. Joseph thought that divorcing Mary quietly would be the most loving action he could take in this circumstance. But as we shall see, God intervened with a far greater and more righteous approach.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW THAT GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES?

Our Certainty of a Savior //
Matthew 1:20-25

As Joseph considered what he thought to be the best option—divorce— God sent an angel to give him a change in plans. Sometimes God tells us to adjust our plans, not because they are bad, but because they aren't the best. God often has a better plan that is known to Him, but not to us. That was the case for Joseph, "an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream" (v. 20) to reveal the truth of Mary's situation: "What has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (v. 20).

As Joseph listened to the description of the Messiah as the One who would "save his people from their sins" (v. 21), he must have realized that this was God's plan. As a faithful man from the house of David (Matt. 1:16), he knew and likely recalled the prophecy Matthew

now quoted from Isaiah 7:14: "See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel," which is translated "God is with us."

The last words of verse 23 stand out: "God is with us." While "Jesus" is the earthly name that was given to Christ (Luke 1:31), Immanuel is a better description. Immanuel describes what God did in sending Jesus. God's presence was intimately with His people. This name of Christ reminds us of the unfailing promise of God in Hebrews 13:5: "I will never leave you or abandon you."

WHAT FEELINGS DO YOU GET WHEN YOU READ THE MEANING OF THE NAME "IMMANUEL"?

By the time of Jesus' birth, the Jewish people had been longing for the Messiah. The coming Messiah would fulfill the promises made throughout the Scriptures: promises of a kingdom filled with victory, joy, prosperity, deliverance from enemies, hatred, and pain. God's promise embedded in the name Immanuel would take them—and us—far beyond things we would receive from His hand. It promises the gift of His presence. When Jesus is with us, He is all we need. Nothing is more powerful in our lives than the presence of God.



THE POINT: JESUS IS IMMANUEL—GOD WITH US.

“God with us” means that we will receive incredible blessings from God, but none will be greater than the blessing of God’s presence. In our trouble-filled world and trial-filled days, it’s a blessing to know that the One true God is right here with us. Sometimes, because of our circumstances, we may feel like God is not with us. That’s when we must take God at His word and trust His presence. Jesus’ birth proves that God is with us.

Joseph was probably concerned about the opinions of those around him and confused about how this pregnancy happened. He must’ve been overwhelmed by the responsibility that the Lord had given to him and Mary. Joseph was reassured that the Lord was with him, and more importantly, the long-awaited Messiah at last was now coming into the world. God kept His promise from centuries earlier, and Jesus was born of a virgin. When we place our faith in Jesus who came to us, God is with us—and He will be with us forever.

HOW DOES THE WAY GOD DEALT WITH JOSEPH MAKE YOU APPRECIATE THE FACT THAT GOD IS WITH YOU?

DID YOU KNOW?

The coming Messiah was mentioned in the Old Testament. These Old Testament prophecies point to Jesus. “I see him, but not now; I perceive him, but not near. A star will come from Jacob, and a scepter will arise from Israel” (Num. 24:17). Genesis 22:18 tells us that through Abraham’s offspring “all nations on earth will be blessed.” Jesus is the fulfillment of this promise. He is from the line of King David. “The days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land ... This is the name by which he will be called: the LORD our righteous savior” (Jer. 23:5-6). The New Testament revealed the fulfillment of the Deliverer. Despite all we endure, we are sure that God loves us because He provided His promised Messiah, and He will keep all of His promises.

What difference does it make knowing that the birth, life, and ministry of Jesus was foretold in the Old Testament?

LIVE IT

How has “God with us” changed your life?

The world’s religions attempt to explain God and how we can reach Him. But these religions fall short because humanity falls short; we can’t reach God on our own. Christianity reveals a wholly different approach: God reached out to us. In Jesus Christ, God came to earth to show us who God is and to provide a way back to our Creator. Because of Jesus, we’re confident that God is with us.

+ + +

- **Ask for strength.** This week, pray and reflect on your faith in God. When He tells you something, do you believe Him? If not, ask God to forgive you and to help you to have a stronger faith in Him.
- **Talk about God.** Share with others who are struggling with their faith what God’s presence in your life means to you.
- **Share the birth of Christ.** This week, pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal to you someone who needs to know that God is with them and then share the miracle of the birth of Jesus with them.

DAILY READINGS

1. READ THE SIGN // ISAIAH 7:14

My daughter is turning 16 and has to take her driver's license test. The test is going to include a road sign examination. She will have to look at various signs and tell the examiner what the signs mean. God offered Ahaz, the king of Judah, a sign of deliverance. Ahaz refused to accept the sign God was offering to him. God, as promised, gave a sign anyway that the Messiah (Jesus) would be born. As Christians, we are to recognize that Jesus was born of a virgin, was crucified, died, and was resurrected to save us from our sins and give us eternal life. God gave us a sign—Jesus—just as He promised.

Thanks to Jesus we have victory over sin.

2. BABY BLESSING // MATTHEW 1:18

The birth of a baby is one of the greatest blessings parents can have. The doctor told my husband and me that I was a high risk pregnancy due to being over 35. He explained that women are born with all the eggs they will ever need and as we get older so do the eggs. He asked me if I wanted to have a special test called an amniocentesis to see if our baby had any chromosomal abnormalities. We decided against the test because our baby was a blessing from God and her chromosomes were perfect in His sight. I give God praise for our daughter. Mary gave God praise for choosing her to be the mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

Praise God today for blessing us with Christ.

3. STONE SURVIVOR // DEUTERONOMY 22:23-24

According to the law of Moses, if a young virgin woman is engaged and has a sexual encounter with another man, both are guilty. The two of them must be taken out of the gate of the city and stoned to death. Thus according to the law, Joseph could have had Mary stoned to death. But even before the angel spoke to Joseph he did not choose the law over love. He chose the righteous and compassionate

route of a secret divorce. Most people would have wanted revenge against Mary because of what they perceived as betrayal. However, Mary did not betray Joseph. She was part of God's salvation plan for us.

We can trust God who did not allow the law to uproot His plan of salvation.

4. BLIND SIGHT // ISAIAH 9:1-3

Stevie Wonder was born six weeks premature with an eye disorder called retinopathy of prematurity caused by abnormal blood vessels throughout the retina. It worsened when he was overexposed to oxygen while in an incubator leaving him blind. Despite his blindness he had hope that he could be successful. As a child, he told his mother not to worry about his blindness because he was happy. Stevie taught himself to play multiple instruments before age ten. His blindness didn't cause him to lose hope. Judah was distressed in darkness. Isaiah prophesied about the light of Jesus that God promised Judah. God offered them hope in the darkness. Jesus is our hope, and no darkness can cause us to lose that hope.

When we see lights, let us remember Christ.

5. FOLLOW THE LIGHT // NUMBERS 9:15-23

During an eye exam the eye doctor tells his patients to follow the light to make sure their eyes can track the light properly and do not have any dysfunction in the eye muscles. God guided the Israelites by a cloud during their wilderness journey. It was a visual representation of God's presence. This is often referred to as the "Shekinah glory" (Ex. 40:35). The glory of God led the Israelites. The cloud continuously covered the tabernacle and had the appearance of fire. It lifted when the Israelites journeyed to a new location. It's movement was a visual sign of God's guidance. The Israelites moved in response to God's instruction. Jesus is the light of the world, and He desires that we follow Him.

Follow Jesus where He leads.

LEADER GUIDE

STUDY 1 IRREFUTABLE: PROPHECIES THAT POINT US TO JESUS

INTRODUCTION

Was Jesus of Nazareth simply a good man and an engaging speaker who was, unfortunately, misunderstood by both religious leaders and His own followers, or was He something more—much more? When we read the Old Testament in light of what the New Testament reveals about Jesus, we discover that the life, ministry, death, and resurrection

of Jesus were not events that just happened. The life and mission of the Messiah was planned long before Jesus was born. By looking at just those prophecies that point to His birth, we see irrefutable evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Writer Bio

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wrote the leader pages for this study. She is a writer, a teacher (both Bible and public school) and currently serves as the Christian Education Director at First Baptist Church Winchester, KY. For more information about Natasha, visit www.natashamenifee.com.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

Review the Study

This study will look at the prophecies made and fulfilled surrounding Christ. Take time to review all the Scripture passages and session points to gain context and depth before planning your first session. Do not take for granted that you automatically know the passages. Access the Leader Pack (p. 7) and other teaching resources available that will help you teach this study.

Advertise the Study

Promote the study by sending the unit title and a brief synopsis in an email to group members. Christmas is a great time to invite people who do not participate in Bible study to visit the group. It is also a good time to reconnect with members who have not attended in a while. Share the introduction of the unit (p. 10) with them. Encourage other class members to send communications as well.

LOOK BACK

Before diving into the new unit, take a few minutes to review the previous lesson. Invite volunteers to share the impact of the previous unit on their lives. Also guide them to share what they learned about God that they did not know. Share that this unit reflects the loving and faithful attributes of God that make Him trustworthy.

TEACHING PLAN

INTRODUCTION

SHARE: “Your children need your presence more than they need your presents”—author unknown.

EXPLAIN: This quote is directed to parents to encourage them to spend more time with their children. Because God is a loving Father and the ultimate role model for parenthood, He demonstrated to us what is most important. In Jesus, God gave us a two-fold gift. We have

a present, the gift of eternal life, and God’s presence, because Jesus is Immanuel—God with us. Through Jesus, God gave us a way to be in relationship with Him.

TRANSITION: Read **The Point: Jesus is Immanuel—God with us** and **The Question: “Why is the promise of the virgin birth so important?”** Share that the birth of Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise of God. When God says He will never leave or forsake us, He means it.

PACK ITEM: Focus attention on **Pack Item 1: “Irrefutable”** poster. Review the six sessions in this unit of study with the learners. Invite learners to identify any prophecies they have heard of.

DIG INTO THE TEXT

A Prophecy Foretold // Isaiah 7:14

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Isaiah 7:14.

GUIDE: Invite two learners to read the paragraphs that begin “The Bible is full ...” and “Isaiah 7:14 ...” (p. 12) to begin a discussion about the prophecy of Jesus.

DIGGING DEEPER: Use this feature to set the context of the passage (p. 13). Take time to go through the Scripture passages referenced. Discuss the question that follows.

GUIDE: Use the commentary (p. 104) to provide further context for this verse. Note the message that God is sending through His prophet.

READ: Invite learners to read the paragraphs that begin “God called the prophet ...” and “When King Ahaz ...” (pp. 12-13) to discuss more details of what was happening at the time the prophecy was made.

ASK: “How did Ahaz’s pride keep him from hearing from God? When has pride been a barrier for you and your ability to hear from God?”

GUIDE: Invite a volunteer to read the paragraph that begins “The fulfillment in the Messiah ...”

THE POINT: JESUS IS IMMANUEL—GOD WITH US.

(p. 13) and answer the question that follows regarding biblical prophecy.

DID YOU KNOW: Invite learners to read “Did You Know?” (p. 15) and ask the question that follows. Ask a follow-up question: “What promises from Old Testament Scriptures bring you comfort today?” Allow time for learners to share.

EMPHASIZE: Reread Isaiah 7:14. Remind learners that the prophecy of Jesus’ birth reveals God as gracious and merciful. His desire to be with us through His Son should cause us to return His love. He is faithful and true to His Word.

A Fulfilled Sign // Matthew 1:18-19

OBJECT LESSON: Use the “Object Lesson” (p. 104) to help learners understand how signs guide us and give us direction. Connect this to the sign the LORD gave Isaiah about the birth of Christ.

READ: Invite learners to read Matthew 1:18-19.

EXPLAIN: Engagement and marriage customs were different from our current traditions during Jesus’ time. According to Jewish custom, there were three stages to a marriage.

- **Engagement:** Often this was an arrangement made by the parents of the bride and groom when they were young.
- **Betrothal:** This was the next step after the engagement that made everything official. Even though the couple was known as man and wife, they did not live together or consummate their union.
- **Marriage:** It is at this stage that the bride and groom finalize the marriage, and live together after a year of betrothal.

ASK: “What difficulties would this type of arrangement cause in today’s world?”

DISCUSS: Use the commentary (p. 105) and the Key Words (p. 11) to discuss Jesus’ name and title as well as the stage at which Mary became pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

READ: Invite a learner to read the paragraphs that begin “Mary’s divine pregnancy ...” and “The situation had ...” (p. 14) to discuss Joseph’s response to Mary’s pregnancy. Use the commentary (p. 105) to add more insight.

ASK: “Why is the virgin birth important to Christians?”

SUMMARIZE: The conception and the birth of Jesus are impossible by human standards. But these events were not impossible for God. The birth of Christ by a virgin was prophesied 700 years in advance. The deep understanding of this should increase our faith in God.

Our Certainty of a Savior

// Matthew 1:20-25

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 1:20-25.

DISCUSS: Point out that scientists believe dreams during sleep are important for health. Dreams refresh our brains and offer first aid to damage caused by daily use. But God used Joseph’s dream to give Him a message. Lead learners to discuss what they believe about dreams.

GUIDE: Use the commentary (p. 105) to discuss the details of Joseph’s dream. Invite learners to discuss what caused Joseph to connect his dream to the prophecy about Christ’s birth.

READ: Invite a learner to read the paragraph that begins “As Joseph listened ...” (p. 14) to explain Joseph’s understanding of what was happening.

ASK: “What do we learn about God’s character when we see promises made in the Old Testament become promises kept in the New Testament?”



PACK ITEM 1

CLOSE THE SESSION

SUMMARIZE: Remind learners the birth of Christ was the fulfillment of an Old Testament promise (Isa. 7:14). An essential element of that promise was “God with us.” We have hope for our lives not only because of the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ, but because we have a God who will always be with us.

CHALLENGE: Tell learners that over the next week, be intentional to look for how Immanuel is with them. Also use “Live It” (p. 15) as a guide in this challenge.

PRAY: Thank God for being a Promise Keeper as evidenced by the birth of Jesus. Give Him praise that we are continually comforted by Immanuel—God with us.

OBJECT LESSON

DO: Bring a gift bag or a wrapped present and a clock to class. Display both items in front of the group. Ask what these items have in common. Allow time for group members to answer.

EXPLAIN: Share that both these items are a sign of something. Invite volunteers to share what each represents. Confirm that the gift bag is a sign that a present will be given. And the clock is a sign of the passing moments of our lives.

DISCUSS: God gave a sign to Isaiah. It was the sign of a virgin who would give birth to our Savior. Lead learners to identify other signs essential to our lives.



COMMENTARY

ISAIAH 7:14

Verse 14. One of the evidences for the uniqueness of Jesus’ birth was how it fulfilled a prophecy given over 700 years earlier by the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah announced God’s sign: the virgin will “conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel.” Though the words appear to be simple and clear, scholars have debated their meaning for centuries. The key question involves the Hebrew word translated in the Christian Standard Bible as “virgin”. This word could also be translated as “young woman”. However, the Hebrew scholars who translated the Old Testament into Greek (the Septuagint) around 200 BC used the Greek word for virgin. Clearly, these scholars understood that was the correct meaning. Most of today’s major Bible versions also translate it “virgin” (NIV, NASB, ESV). We find the most significant confirmation in Matthew’s Gospel where he quoted this verse using the word “virgin” (Matt. 1:23). The same Holy Spirit who inspired Isaiah to deliver God’s message to Ahaz also inspired Matthew’s account of the birth of Jesus.

Another question is the significance of the name Immanuel. Perhaps God was using this name to remind King Ahaz that he and his nation would always be dependent on God’s powerful, sustaining presence. The name Immanuel could also be a way of assuring King Ahaz that God would continue to provide for His people as they were faithful to Him.

God’s message through Isaiah was clearly intended to encourage and challenge King Ahaz to trust and obey God. However, this was not the only significance of this prophecy. Matthew’s gospel contains a much more significant meaning and application of Isaiah’s words. Isaiah and the other Old Testament prophets through whom God spoke could only see the near future (1 Pet. 1:10-12). Only later would the Holy Spirit reveal the full meaning of Isaiah’s message.

MATTHEW 1:18-19

Verse 18. Matthew opened his gospel by showing two ways in which God fulfilled His promise in Isaiah 7:14. Matthew began by providing “an account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1). The person who was the center of his account was “Jesus Christ”. While Jesus was a common name for Jewish boys, “Christ” was a unique title, the Greek version of the Hebrew word for “Messiah”. The Messiah was the One of whom the Old Testament prophets spoke, the One God would send to establish His new covenant with His people (Isa. 42:6; Jer. 31:31-34). Matthew was confirming Jesus’ claim that He and the Father were of the same essence, that they were one (John 10:30; 14:9-11). By outlining Jesus’ genealogical record and showing that He was a descendant of King David, Matthew was confirming that Jesus was God’s promised Messiah.

Matthew then proceeded to confirm that Jesus was the Christ by explaining the uniqueness of His birth. Mary, the young girl chosen by God to be Jesus’ earthly mother (Luke 1:26-38), was engaged to a man named Joseph. It was during this engagement period Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant. Matthew added what we know from Luke’s account, that this pregnancy was the miraculous result of the work of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). However, Joseph only knew she was pregnant and logically assumed that she had been unfaithful.

Verse 19. How would Joseph respond to this discovery? Matthew noted that Joseph was “a righteous man.” Joseph was righteous in God’s eyes because he also knew that God is compassionate (Ps. 103:2-4,11-13), and he patterned his life on God’s righteous character. Rather than choosing the legalistic, heartless way, Joseph chose the way of compassion. Because of his adherence to God’s righteous standard of purity, he felt he could not continue with his relationship with Mary. But because Joseph did not want to disgrace her publicly, Joseph decided to end their engagement in a private way.

MATTHEW 1:20-25

Verse 20. Because Joseph was a righteous man who lived by his faith in God, he was determined to keep trusting God though this difficult experience. Genuine, consistent faith in God will always lead to surprises. For Joseph, the surprise came in the form of a message delivered by an angel of the Lord through a dream. Joseph was only being realistic when he heard the angel say to “take Mary as your wife”. To help reassure Joseph and to challenge him to keep trusting, the angel explained why Joseph should take Mary as his wife. The reason was that the Child in her womb had been conceived in her “... from the Holy Spirit”.

Verse 21. The angel continued by informing Joseph that this Child would be a son and that they were “to name him Jesus.” The Child born to Mary and Joseph would be the true and complete Deliverer “because he will save his people from their sins.”

Verses 22-23. Matthew then quoted Isaiah 7:14 as another way to confirm that Jesus was God’s promised Messiah: “The virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son.” This virgin would be a young woman named Mary, and her son would be the Son of God. This Son would be more than a sign of God’s presence (Immanuel). He would be the very “Word” who “was God” (John 1:1), the “Word” who “became flesh and dwelt among us” (v. 14).

Verses 24-25. Joseph simply “did as the Lord’s angel had commanded him” to do. When Mary’s child was born, Joseph followed the angel’s direction: “he named him Jesus.” While all other religions urge their followers to reach up to their gods through good works, Christians worship the God who reached down to us by sending His Son to be our Immanuel—God with us.