

Lesson 3 | December 18, 2022

Our Savior Has Come

Study Text: Matthew 2:1–12; Luke 2:1–20

Central Truth: Jesus was born to be the Savior of the world.

Key Verse: Reference

She brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn (KJV).

She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to explain the circumstances and people surrounding Jesus' birth, then reflect on God's direction.
- Students will recognize and appreciate that through Jesus God provided salvation for all humanity and share this message with others.
- Students will wholeheartedly worship Jesus for who He is and what He has done.

Introducing the Study

Say: God's promise of a Savior in Genesis 3:15 was about to be fulfilled. The long-awaited Messiah was going to enter the world not as a conquering king, but as a baby born in a manger. The birth of the promised Immanuel—God with us—would go unnoticed except by a few shepherds, and later the Magi. But His coming would eventually impact the whole world.

Opening Activity—Birthplace

Ask. Can you describe the place you were born or where your children were born? (Most students will probably mention a hospital in a certain city, but others may have different answers. Listen for variety and comment appropriately.)

Say: The situations surrounding modern birth are quite different from what Mary and Joseph experienced. In biblical culture, the birthing process was one of the most critical parts of pregnancy. Yet God provided a safe place for the birth of His Son, as His plan of salvation was about to unfold. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The events surrounding Jesus' birth are familiar. Many people display manger scenes in their yards and homes. We rejoice that people want to celebrate our Savior's birth. It is important that we study the biblical account of Jesus' birth so we can be prepared to share the story of His birth during the Christmas season. This week's study focuses on Christ's birth and those who came to worship Him. May our study of this event encourage us to worship our Savior.

Part 1—The Savior Is Born

Governor's Decree

Luke 2:1–5

[Luk 2:1-5 KJV] 1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. 2 ([And] this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) 3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) 5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

[Luk 2:5 NLT] 5 He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was now obviously pregnant.

Say: It had been nine months since the angel had visited Mary. There were probably a lot of unknowns during that time. One of those unknowns was where Jesus would be born. Joseph and Mary may have thought He would be born in Nazareth. But God had other plans. And He used an unlikely source to fulfill His plan. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

What Good thing can come from Nazareth? Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth but the Christ child was to be born in Bethlehem according to prophecy.

God often used government officials to accomplish His plans (for example, Cyrus King of Persia; Isaiah 44:28; 45:1,13; 2 Chronicles 36:23; Ezra 1:1–3).

Mary and Joseph were sent to Bethlehem so Jesus' birth would fulfill the prophecy in Micah 5:2. God used Caesar Augustus's decree to bring this to pass.

“At that time” (Luke 2:1) references the birth of John the Baptist recorded in the previous chapter.

(Cyrus mentioned 150 years before his time.)

[Isa 44:28 KJV] 28 That saith of Cyrus, [He is] my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.

[Isa 45:1, 13 KJV] 1 Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; ...

13 I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts.

Luke was careful to put Jesus' birth into historical context. This seems to be the purpose here. Rome often required its citizens to register for tax purposes. This was probably the first of two censuses under Quirinius's rule. The second was in AD 6.

Luke was intentional in mentioning Joseph's lineage (verse 4). The One who would reign on David's throne was to be born in David's town. **As a descendant of David, Joseph would have been required to go there for the census.**

Joseph took Mary with him (verse 5). While she was not required to go to Bethlehem, there may have been several reasons why Joseph took her with him. Perhaps he did not want to leave her alone, possibly to face further ridicule, gossip, and stress from those in their village. Also, Mary was probably in her last trimester of pregnancy. The later they waited the more difficult it would have been for her to make the ninety-mile trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem. (probably a one week trip.)

Even though Joseph had taken Mary as his wife (Matthew 1:24), Luke still referred to them as being "engaged," another indication of the fact they had not had sexual relations. Some believe according to the customs of the day that their official marriage did not take place until after Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Resource Packet Item 1: Our Sovereign God

Distribute the work sheet. Divide the class into two groups. Assign one section of the work sheet to each group. After students have read the Scriptures and answered the questions, discuss their answers.

Discuss

? How did God use the course of history to fulfill His plan?

? How might God use the course of history today to fulfill His plan?

Jesus' Birth

Luke 2:6–7

[Luk 2:6-7 KJV] 6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

Say: The Savior of the world entered this world in the most humble manner. No one, except Mary and Joseph, knew who He was. They could not explain Mary's conception to anyone. To family and friends, Jesus was probably just another baby. But to us, He is our Savior.

(Share your highlights from the following text.)

Luke presented the simple facts surrounding Jesus' birth (Luke 2:6). He did not tell us when Joseph and Mary traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem. A careful study of the culture and language may challenge our traditional thinking on the place of Jesus' birth, but the biblical narrative is completely reliable and fits with the cultural norms of the day. Bethlehem was the home of Joseph's family, so most likely he and Mary stayed with them.

The phrase, "while they were there" simply indicates that Mary and Joseph had been in Bethlehem for an undisclosed period of time prior to Mary giving birth.

When Luke stated that Jesus was Mary's "firstborn son," he was probably indicating that Jesus had all the rights of the firstborn son and the benefits of inheritance (Exodus 13:2; Numbers 3:12–13; Luke 2:23–24). Mothers wrapped their newborn babies in "strips of cloth" (NLT; "swaddling clothes," KJV) to keep their limbs straight. The manger was the feeding trough for the animals. This trough separated the place where animals stayed from the remainder of the house.

People often kept their animals within their homes, often in caves at the back of their houses. In Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph may have been staying in a small marital chamber attached to his father's house.

The room where Mary and Joseph were staying in Bethlehem was too small to accommodate those who were helping Mary with the birth of Jesus. Jesus, therefore, was probably born in the area of the house that was close to where they kept the animals. The manger (feed trough) was a ready-made baby crib.

The word translated "inn" (Luke 2:7, KJV) refers to a "lodging, place to stay, accommodations." It also can refer to a guest room or dining room. In 22:11, Luke used this word to refer to the room where Jesus and His disciples celebrated the Passover. The usual word for "inn"—as in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, (10:34)—was different from what Luke used in 2:7. Bethlehem was a small village and probably did not have any public accommodations.

Discuss

? In what ways did God provide a place for Jesus to be born?

? Why did God plan for Jesus to be born in humble surroundings?

Part 2—The Shepherds Rejoice

Angelic Announcement

Luke 2:8–14

[Luk 2:8-14 KJV] 8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. 10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. 12 And this [shall be] a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

Say: Shepherding had been an honorable profession since the early days of Israel. Throughout Israel's history, there have been many notable shepherds, including King David. In Luke 2, the shepherds around Bethlehem supplied the lambs and sheep for sacrifices in the temple; they were in the fields tending to their flocks. So it is no coincidence that the angels appeared to the shepherds first announcing the birth of the Lamb of God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Luke 2:8 states that the shepherds were out in the field, guarding the sheep while they lambed. Nothing about the night was unusual; they were simply doing their job (Luke 2:8)—until the angel of the Lord appeared (verse 9). Naturally, the shepherds were terrified. The angel, however, had good news for them (verse 10). The good news was the Messiah had been born in Bethlehem (verse 11).

Jesus' birth in a lowly manger shows the contrast of the true Savior with those who only had earthly claim. The angel's announcement, however, would bring "great joy" to everyone. No one would be excluded from the salvation offered through Christ—especially these shepherds.

The angels used three titles to describe Jesus —“The Savior . . . the Messiah [Christ], the Lord” (Luke 2:11, NLT). The Old Testament often referred to God as Savior—the One who delivers from various kinds of perils. The title Messiah or Christ describes the One who would reign on David's throne. The title “Lord” stands in opposition to the emperors of that day. It also has eternal ramifications (see Revelation 11:15). The Baby in the manger was God's Savior. He is the Messiah and Lord. On this day, God had fulfilled the promise of the long-awaited Messiah. The angel then gave them a sign to prove his message was true (Luke 2:12). He told them they would find “a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger” (NLT).

Suddenly “a vast host of others—the armies of heaven” (verse 13, NLT) joined this angel. Here we get a glimpse of the praise that took place in heaven at the coming of the Messiah, the Redeemer sent from God (verse 14). “Those with whom God is pleased” (NLT) specifically points to Israel, but it applies to everyone who turns to this Savior and experiences peace (verse 10).

Discuss

? Why did God first reveal the birth of His Son to shepherds?

? What is significant about the titles used for Jesus?

Shepherd’s Response

Luke 2:15–20

[Luk 2:15-20 KJV] 15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. 16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. 17 And when they had seen [it], they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. 18 And all they that heard [it] wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered [them] in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

Say: After the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds, no doubt, had a lively discussion about what had just happened to them. They were amazed that God had revealed such wonderful news to them. They had an important decision to make. There was no question about what they would do with this good news! (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The shepherds believed the angel’s message. They wanted to see this newborn Baby (Luke 2:15). So they wasted no time in going into the city to find Him.

The angel did not tell them exactly where Jesus was born. Since Bethlehem was a small town, they searched until they found Jesus (verse 16). What they found confirmed the angel’s message. As the shepherds returned to their sheep, they became the first evangelists to tell everyone they met the good news of the birth of Jesus (verse 17).

Luke does not provide the conversation between Mary and Joseph and the shepherds. It would seem natural that the shepherds relayed to Mary and Joseph what the angel had said. **Whatever the shepherds said must have confirmed to this young couple that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.**

Mary's response revealed that she was still processing all that was taking place (verse 19; see verses 33,51). It would be later in Jesus' life, possibly even after His resurrection, when she would understand the full significance of who Jesus is and His place in God's redemptive plan.

The shepherds continued to rejoice that God had revealed himself to them (Luke 2:20). These men, who supplied the lambs for temple sacrifices were the first to hear of God's redemptive plan through Jesus, the Lamb of God.

Discuss

? Why is it important to act on the message God has given us through His Word?

? In what ways are the shepherds an example of why we should tell others about Jesus?

Resource Packet Item 2: Telling Others about Jesus

Distribute the case sheet. Have students read the case study and answer the questions. Discuss their answers.

Part 3—The Wise Men Worship

Seeking the King

Matthew 2:1–8

[Mat 2:1-8 KJV] 1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, 2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. 3 When Herod the king had heard [these things], he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. 5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, 6 And thou Bethlehem, [in] the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. 7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent

them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found [him], bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

Say: The angels suddenly appeared to the shepherds to tell them about Jesus' birth. But God used a star to draw the attention of the Magi to the birth of His Son. Their long journey led them to the place where Joseph and Mary were living with the young child Jesus. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Matthew was careful to note the place of Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:1). Herod was king from 37 BC until he died in 4 BC. Jesus was probably born about 6 BC.

Some believe the Magi were Gentile astrologers who thought that stars could predict the future. They interpreted this star as a sign of the birth of Israel's king (Matthew 2:2). Matthew made it clear that Jesus was "king of the Jews" from birth. Many have tried to figure out through astronomy how this star was formed. It was probably a supernatural creation by God.

We do not know how the Magi came to their conclusion. But verse 2 tells us that they had "seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him" (KJV).

The Magi's statement disturbed Herod (verse 3). He was paranoid and did away with anyone he perceived as a threat to his position. The people of Jerusalem also noticed the presence of these Magi and their entourage. They knew Herod's anger and they were concerned how he would react to the question from the Magi.

Herod consulted with the Jewish priests and scribes (verse 4). These leaders knew the Scriptures and knew where the Messiah was to be born (Micah 5:2), but did not know that He had been born. Instead, God had revealed the news to Jewish shepherds and wealthy Gentile Magi from far away.

Herod decided to use the Magi to find out where Jesus was (verses 7–8). He feigned his desire to worship Jesus. In reality, he was bent on destroying the One who he thought would usurp his throne.

Discuss

? In what ways does Jesus draw people to himself?

? Can we know about Jesus, but not have a heart that seeks Him? Explain.

Worshiping the King

Matthew 2:9–12

[Mat 2:9-12 KJV] 9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. 11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Say: With the new information provided by the leading priests and teachers of the Law, the Magi continued on their journey to find this newborn King. They kept searching until they found Him and worshipped Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As they continued their journey, the star the Magi had seen earlier reappeared (Matthew 2:9). At first this star was a sign; here it became their guide to lead them to the house where Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were staying (verse 10). Matthew describes the intensity of their joy in seeing this star. At last they would see this King of the Jews. By this time, Jesus would have been at least one year old.

At last these Magi accomplished their goal—to worship this King of the Jews. Bowing prostrate with their heads to the ground was a way of showing homage to a king.

In the ancient East, bringing gifts to one who was superior was a common practice (verse 11; see 1 Kings 10:2). Some have tried to find hidden meaning in these gifts. However, these gifts were simply expensive gifts that one would present to a king. Likely, the gifts provided Joseph and Mary with the funds they needed for the upcoming trip to Egypt to protect the Baby Jesus from Herod's wicked scheme. These gifts also fulfilled Old Testament prophecies (Psalm 72:10–11; Isaiah 60:6).

Having accomplished their mission, the Magi prepared to return home. God, however, warned them not to return to Jerusalem (Matthew 2:12). He knew Herod's wicked plan. The Sovereign God continues to reign over the affairs of men. In obedience to what they saw in the dream, the Magi took a longer route home.

Discuss

? What might it take to continue to pursue a relationship with Christ?

? What gifts can we bring when we worship Jesus?

Resource Packet Item 3: What Will You Do with Jesus?

Distribute the work sheet. You might divide the class into four groups to complete this work sheet. Assign one section to each group and ask them to pretend they are the people listed and respond to the questions accordingly. Discuss their answers, then discuss the application question.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The birth of Jesus reveals God's faithfulness to fulfill His promise of salvation for all humanity. During the Christmas season, however, people often become so busy they fail to take time to reflect on God's greatest gift— Jesus. This lesson reminds us that salvation only comes through Christ. This is the message that we are to share with family and friends this Christmas. Set aside time this week to reflect on God's plan of salvation through Christ and what this means for you. Think about how each person in the Christmas story reacted to Jesus' birth. Then ask yourself, How am I responding to Jesus? Spend time worshipping Him. Look for opportunities to tell others about Him and the salvation He provides.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Set aside extra time this week to worship Christ.
- Think about ways you can incorporate the message of salvation into your Christmas celebration.
- Pray for your unsaved family and friends. Ask God to give you opportunity to tell others about Jesus.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

A Promised Savior.
Isaiah 7:10–16

[Isa 7:10-16 KJV] 10 Moreover the LORD spake again unto Ahaz, saying, 11 Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. 12 But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD. 13 And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; [Is it] a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. 15 Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. 16 For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.

Tuesday:

An Eternal Kingdom.
Isaiah 9:1–7

[Isa 9:1-7 KJV] 1 Nevertheless the dimness [shall] not [be] such as [was] in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict [her by] the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. 2 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. 3 Thou hast multiplied the nation, [and] not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, [and] as [men] rejoice when they divide the spoil. 4 For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian. 5 For every battle of the warrior [is] with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but [this] shall be with burning [and] fuel of fire. 6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of [his] government and peace [there shall be] no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Wednesday:

John's Message Foretold.
Isaiah 40:1-5

[Isa 40:1-5 KJV] 1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. 2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins. 3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: 5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see [it] together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken [it].

Thursday:

Life and Light.
John 1:1-5

[Jhn 1:1-5 KJV] 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

Friday:

To All Who Received Him.
John 1:9-13

[Jhn 1:9-13 KJV] 9 [That] was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. 11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not. 12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, [even] to them that believe on his name: 13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Saturday:

The Word Became Flesh.

John 1:14–18

[Jhn 1:14-18 KJV] 14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. 15 John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. 16 And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. 17 For the law was given by Moses, [but] grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. 18 No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared [him].