

GOD IS WITH US

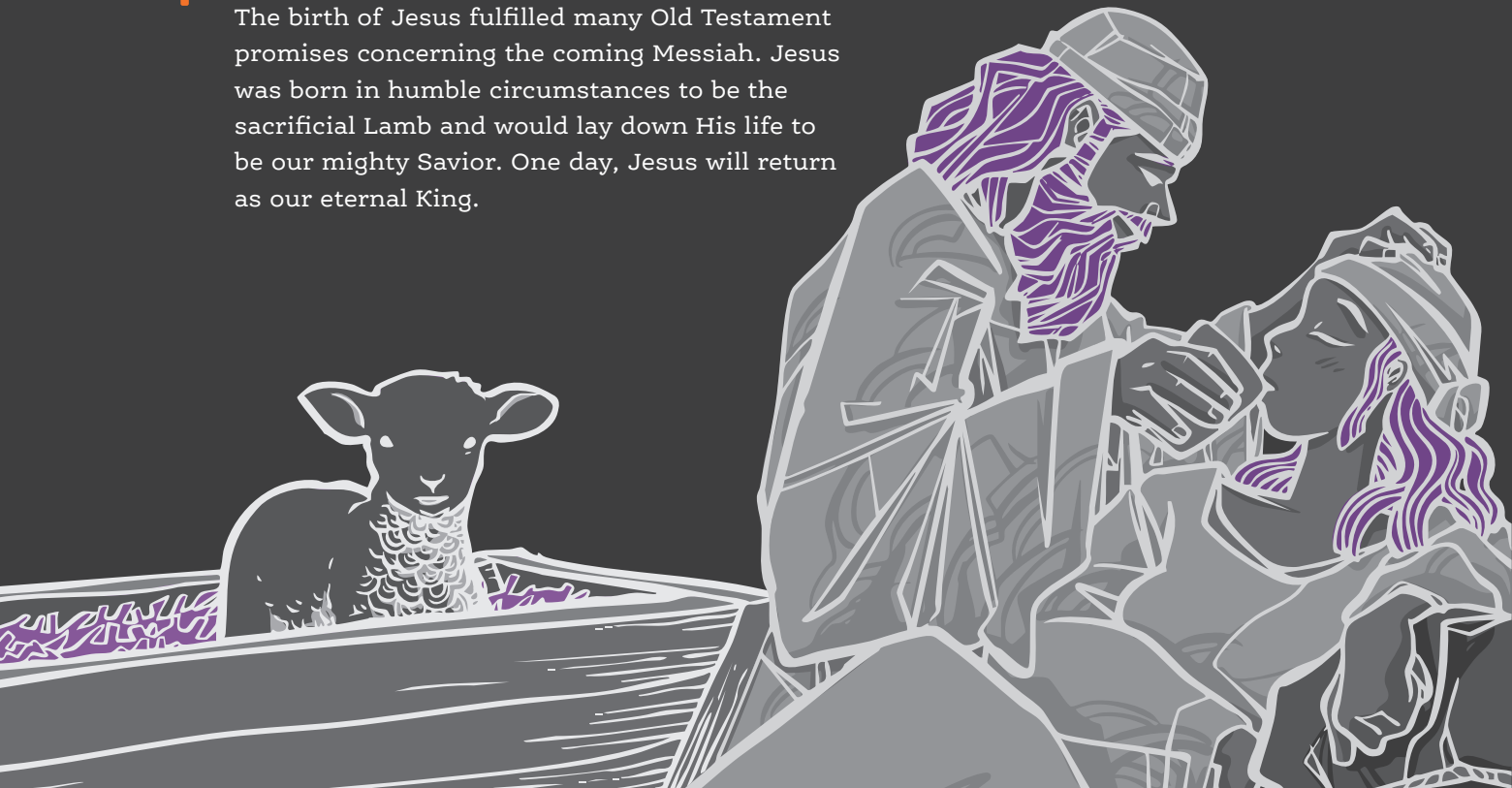
MAIN POINT.

Our Savior lowered Himself to save us, which should move us to worship.



CHRIST CONNECTION

The birth of Jesus fulfilled many Old Testament promises concerning the coming Messiah. Jesus was born in humble circumstances to be the sacrificial Lamb and would lay down His life to be our mighty Savior. One day, Jesus will return as our eternal King.



BENDING LOW

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

Matthew 1; Luke 1-2

THE MESSIAH WAS BORN INTO LOWLY CONDITIONS

LUKE 2:1-7

1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

THE MESSIAH IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP

LUKE 2:8-20

8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and 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 among those with whom he is pleased!" 15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Our Savior lowered Himself to save us, which should move us to worship.

Leaders: Spend time dwelling on the wonder of this moment in the biblical narrative: God came down. Worship Him with gratitude for bending low to save us from our sin.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

THE MESSIAH WAS BORN INTO LOWLY CONDITIONS

LUKE 2:1-7

“For Luke Christianity was not a new religion. It was not even a revised form of Judaism resulting in a new Israel. On the contrary the Christian church is the present-day expression of the religion of Abraham, Moses, and the prophets. It is the religion of the patriarchs and prophets now fulfilled. . . . In essence the early Christian proclamation was that ‘the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the Prophets have been fulfilled.’ It was not, Do you want to join a new religion? Thus in Luke we do not find a dichotomy of law, i.e., Judaism and the OT, versus grace, i.e. Christianity and the NT. Rather we see a complementary scheme of promise and fulfillment, a looking forward and an already realized, an expectation and the dawning of the new age.”¹

LUKE 2:7

“Tolbert sees this as theologically appropriate: ‘All the poor, insignificant, forgotten people of the world can gather around the manger and dare to believe that the Babe who lies there really belongs to them.’ This would fit in nicely with Luke’s presentation of a Savior for all people everywhere.”²

THE MESSIAH IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP

LUKE 2:8-11

“Shepherds had bad reputations. The nature of their work meant they could not observe Israel’s ceremonial laws. They were considered unreliable and could not give testimony in the law courts. They were a despised class of people. . . . To these lowly men, the angel gives the highest theology (vv. 10-12). These despised shepherds are the first to receive the announcement of the gospel. This is the only time in the Gospels this phrase is used. It’s the only time we see all the titles of Jesus brought together—Savior, Messiah, Lord. He will save his people from their sins. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah promised to Israel. And most staggeringly of all, he is Lord. He is God. He is Maker of all. He is Ruler of all. The angels not only give the gospel to the Shepherds; they give the true identity of Christ.”³

CONTEXT

Background: Each Gospel writer had specific purposes and audiences in mind when writing about Jesus’s life. Luke, a physician and historian, wrote his Gospel for Gentile believers. Luke wasn’t an apostle, but he traveled with Paul and received eye-witness accounts about Jesus’s life and ministry (Col. 4:14). In fact, Luke wrote the book of Acts as a sequel to the Gospel of Luke. One of Luke’s main purposes for compiling these organized accounts was for Theophilus to know the certainty of the knowledge he had received. In other words, Luke wanted to assure him—and all readers—that what he had been taught about Jesus was true (Luke 1:3-4). Luke’s consistent theme is that Jesus, the perfect Son of God, suffered, died, and rose again to offer sinners new life—both Jews and Gentiles. Luke also emphasized that the kingdom of God had arrived on earth with Jesus’s birth—at least partially. God Himself had “visited and redeemed his people” (1:68). Jesus brought the kingdom of heaven to earth, and one day, He will return to bring it fully.

Bethlehem: David’s birthplace, also called the “city of David”; prophesied as the Messiah’s birthplace (Mic. 5:2); means “house of bread”; breeding place for sacrificial lambs

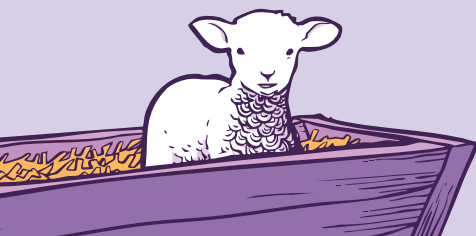
THEOLOGY CONNECTION

God the Son

Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ, He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with humans yet without sin.

LEADERS' PRAYER

GOD, MAY WE NEVER FORGET OR TAKE LIGHTLY THAT YOU CAME DOWN TO SAVE US. YOUR SON DESCENDED FROM A HEAVENLY THRONE TO WALK WITH US AND TO LIVE AMONG US. WE ARE IN AWE OF THE LENGTHS YOU WENT TO FOR OUR SALVATION. THANK YOU FOR THE GIFT OF YOUR SON, JESUS.





KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

Temple lambs used for sacrifices at Passover were born in **Bethlehem**. Shepherds often wrapped them in tight cloths to keep them safe because they wouldn't be eligible for temple use if they had injuries or defects. Piece this together: Jesus, our perfect Lamb, was born in this same town and wrapped in the same cloths, marking Him for death.⁴ How do these details deepen the way you see Jesus's purpose?

These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1

TOO GOOD

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN WHEN SOMEONE ACTS LIKE THEY'RE TOO GOOD FOR SOMETHING OR SOMEONE?**
- **HAVE YOU EVER REFUSED TO DO SOMETHING BECAUSE YOU FELT IT WAS BENEATH YOU? WHAT WAS IT?**
- **WHAT'S THE DANGER IN THINKING WE'RE TOO GOOD FOR SOMETHING OR FOR SOMEONE ELSE?**

Many of us consider certain jobs or situations as being beneath us. In other words, these things aren't good enough for us. We can even fall into a trap of treating people as if they're beneath us too. Today, we'll see that Jesus was born into lowly conditions, identifying with all people.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Have you ever wondered why Jesus was born as a baby? Why couldn't God just send Jesus here to wipe out sin and death without Him having to be like us—except for remaining sinless, of course? Well, God's plan for our salvation wasn't some superhero movie plot; it was so much better. Our salvation was always God's plan. Sin is like a credit card, constantly racking up debt and requiring payment. For Jesus to act as our faithful high priest and to pay for our sins, He had to be like us in every way (Heb. 2:17). Because Jesus suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help us when we are tempted (Heb. 2:18). The best part? Jesus chose to do this for us. He chose submission to the Father's will to come here—to leave a throne in heaven, to feel hunger and thirst, to feel grief, to experience temptation, to die a painful death. Why? So that He could pay our debt. So that we can be freed from sin. Jesus lived a sinless human life, and He alone was able to become our sacrifice, our substitute. Because He was born like us, Jesus was able to stand in our place.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Our Savior lowered Himself to save us, which should move us to worship.

THE MESSIAH WAS BORN INTO LOWLY CONDITIONS

READ LUKE 2:1-7

WHAT COMMON DETAILS OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY AREN'T IN THE TEXT? WHY HAVE WE ADDED TO THE STORY?

Many of us gather details of Jesus's birth from movies and plays. Mary often rides a donkey while in labor, and the couple races to find a room at an inn, which is, of course, run by a rude innkeeper. But the text doesn't show Mary in labor as they arrived or anyone refusing to house the family. We don't see an audience of barn animals either. **We do see God use a census to position the family in Bethlehem, fulfilling prophecy (Mic. 5:2).** Jesus was likely born in a cave or small room attached to a home, which housed animals at night. **We don't need to add to Jesus's birth; though simple, His arrival was extraordinary.**



WHAT SURPRISES YOU ABOUT JESUS'S BIRTH? WHY DO YOU THINK GOD CHOSE TO SEND HIS SON IN THIS WAY?

Think about it: The Son of God came to earth. **Instead of making a grand entrance and dazzling the entire world, He came in the silence, in a small town, humbly and lowly.** We might expect Jesus, our King, to come another way—in a palace with all eyes watching—but God the Father chose the specific time and place for Jesus's birth. God's promises pointed to this moment. Jesus could be our substitute and save us from our sin because He was like us in every way; He was human. **Jesus's birth reminds us that He knows us deeply and saves us completely.**

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:9. HOW DO YOU SEE THIS REFLECTED IN JESUS'S BIRTH? WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT JESUS MADE HIMSELF POOR FOR US TO BE RICH?

We easily become desensitized to Jesus's birth. We hear the story every year, celebrating it mostly at Christmastime and putting it in the back of our minds for the rest of the year. **Let's not miss this: Jesus lowered Himself for us. He willingly descended from heaven. He willingly stooped down. He willingly became poor, identifying with us in our poverty and in our human struggle against sin and pain. Jesus's birth reminds us that He was like us.** Though Jesus is the King of kings, He was born humbly. All things were created through Jesus (John 1:3), but God the Son entered into creation and wrapped Himself in flesh to dwell with us. Why? To save us from our sin. Even His name means "Yahweh saves!" Jesus was born lowly and humbly, and in exchange, we get to become rich—not in a worldly sense, but in a much better way. Because Jesus lowered Himself and conquered sin and death, we conquer sin and death too when we confess Him as Lord and call on Him for salvation. We are coheirs with Jesus, richer than we can imagine!

THE MESSIAH IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP

READ LUKE 2:8-20



HOW DOES THE ANGEL DESCRIBE JESUS (V. 11)? WHAT DO WE SEE ABOUT HIS PURPOSE?

Savior. Messiah. Lord. The angel's words to the shepherds made Jesus's purpose very clear: Jesus came to save us from our sin. Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah—the One from David's line who would rule over God's people forever, fulfilling God's promises (2 Sam. 7:16). **Even at birth, Jesus was Lord over all creation and worthy of worship. The multitude of angels erupted in praise at Jesus's arrival on earth because He already was—and always had been—the King of kings.**

WHAT DOES GOD FIRST ANNOUNCING JESUS'S BIRTH TO SHEPHERDS INSTEAD OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS SHOW ABOUT HIS KINGDOM?

Leaders: Share commentary about shepherds. If people in this time made an ordered list of who should hear first of the Messiah's arrival, the shepherds would've been toward the bottom of the list. Shepherds were generally part of the lower class in society, and because of their work, they weren't a part of important religious groups. **When God chose these shepherds to be the first to hear of the Savior's birth, He revealed something important about His kingdom and about His Son's purpose: God's kingdom is for all people—even the outcast, the poor, the sinner, those the world dismisses.** Jesus, the Messiah, was born to bring salvation for all people.



WHY DO WE EASILY LOSE THE AWE AND WONDER OF JESUS'S BIRTH? HOW CAN WE CELEBRATE IT MORE THAN JUST AT CHRISTMAS?

The more we experience something, the less effect it may have on us, right? We easily lose awe and wonder; the extraordinary becomes ordinary. For example, maybe you were amazed when you saw mountains or the ocean for the first time. But after a while, the scene became ordinary. The excitement faded. We confine celebrating Jesus's birth to Christmastime, and we often focus on presents and parties more than the real reason: **God came down to us to save us.** We let this miracle become ordinary! Now, we aren't designed to live on emotional highs; much of our walk with God is based in discipline, not emotion. But we should continuously express joy and gratitude for Jesus's birth by worshiping Him daily. **The more we seek God and know God through His Word, the more in awe we'll be that Jesus came to us to save us.**

WRAP-UP



THE SHEPHERDS RAN TO TELL OTHERS ABOUT JESUS. WHO IN YOUR LIFE NEEDS TO HEAR THE GOSPEL? WHY DO WE OFTEN HESITATE TO SHARE IT?

The shepherds didn't hesitate to act on what the angel told them to do: Go and see Jesus. They didn't wait until morning or for a more convenient time. They left immediately to find Jesus in the manger; then, they ran to tell others what they had seen. We can follow their example. As believers, we're called to share the gospel, to tell others about Jesus. But if we're honest, we make all sorts of excuses for not doing so: We're too busy; we're waiting for a better time; we're not "good" at talking to people; we're scared. We even say things like, "God hasn't called me to do that," but really, we just don't *want* to. And here's the deal: These are all valid feelings. **Sometimes, sharing the gospel is scary. Sometimes, we won't feel like we have the right words. Sometimes, sharing about Jesus won't be convenient.** But God can and will work through our weakness. He will guide us in wisdom and use our obedience, even if we only plant a seed for someone else to come along and water (1 Cor. 3:6-9).