



# CHRISTMAS LESSON 1

*The Son of Man is born in Bethlehem*

LUKE 2:1-20



**Jesus was born to save people like us.**



*“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger” (Luke 2:11–12).*

## Supporting Truths

1. Jesus was born to save sinners.
2. Jesus was born to bring joy and peace to those who believe.
3. Jesus was born to glorify God.
4. Jesus’ birth really happened.
5. Jesus was born into ordinary human life.

## Objectives

1. State why Jesus needed to be born.
2. Explain why Jesus’ birth brings joy and peace, and describe the shepherds’ faith.
3. Describe how the angels and people praised God.
4. List several details that show that Jesus’ birth really happened.
5. Explain how Jesus entered ordinary human history as an ordinary human child to save ordinary human beings.



# STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

*The Son of Man is born in Bethlehem • Luke 2:1–20*



## Lesson Summary

Jesus' birth was both lowly and exalted. He was born to ordinary parents in an animal shelter in a tiny town in an obscure part of the Roman Empire. His birth came at an inconvenient time and place for His parents, and it was announced to lowly shepherds. But it was also perfectly orchestrated by God Himself—announced by angels and accompanied by God's glory. It is the center of all history, when God became man to bring salvation to the world.

## Spotlight on the Gospel

The birth of Jesus is rich with meaning. His birth exposes our sin, revealing our need of salvation. It also reveals God's commitment to save, since He was willing to leave the splendor of heaven to save those who had set their hearts against Him. And it shows that God saves, not to remove us from our lives and trouble, but to enter into them Himself in order to give us joy and peace through the struggles of life.

**THIS WEEK**



**The Son of Man is born  
in Bethlehem**  
*Luke 2:1–20*

**NEXT WEEK**



**The Son of Man is  
presented in Jerusalem**  
*Luke 2:21–38*

**IN TWO WEEKS**



**The Son of Man is  
identified in the temple**  
*Luke 2:39–52*

**THE SON OF MAN IS BORN**

# Lesson Commentary

*Jesus was born to save people like us.*

In the midst of the memories and traditions, Christmas can easily become only that—memories and traditions. But Luke recorded this story not as tradition or legend, but as real history. Unlike good memories or nostalgia, Luke tells of a real Jesus, one who is able to provide real answers for all the hopes and needs of the human race. The story of Jesus' birth is a story of how a real child was born into a real world to save real people—people like us.

## Setting: A Child was born into the world (2:1–7)

Luke carefully recorded the time of Jesus' birth to show us that Jesus entered real history. It was during the reign of Caesar Augustus, emperor of Rome from 29 BC to 14 AD (Luke 2:1). Although Augustus was viewed by many as a savior because of the peace he had brought to the empire, the real Savior and Prince of Peace was born in a small corner of his empire. Jesus was born during the first census administered by Quirinius, a census ordered by Caesar Augustus in 8 BC but implemented in Palestine between 6 BC and 4 BC.

Jesus was born into the difficulties of a real world. Mary was about to give birth to her firstborn child, but nothing seemed to be going right. The registration required a journey of more than 70 miles, which took several days, not to mention the time spent in Bethlehem (2:3–5). On top of that, the timing of Jesus' birth seemed terrible (2:6). Instead of enjoying privacy and peace, Mary was surrounded by noisy crowds. Instead of giving birth in her own home with everything arranged just right, she gave birth in an animal shelter (2:7). Instead of leaning on family for help and support, she was at the mercy of strangers. The decrees of far away rulers seemed to be making everything go wrong.

But everything was going exactly right. Mary had to be pregnant while a virgin (2:5) to fulfill prophecy (Isa 7:14) and to show that the Messiah was the Holy

One and the Son of God (Luke 1:35). The Messiah also needed to be born in David's hometown of Bethlehem (Mic 5:2) in order to show that Jesus was the promised son of David (1 Sam 17:12; 2 Sam 7:12, 16). The great Caesar Augustus, like all rulers, was simply a tool used by the hand of God (Prov 21:1) to move the family from Nazareth to Bethlehem at just the right time. When we suffer disappointments and inconveniences, we can be encouraged, knowing that God is at work in all the troubles of real life to perfectly accomplish His good plan (Ps 115:3; Rom 8:28).

We can also be encouraged by remembering that Jesus has been there too. He was born into all the disadvantages of poverty and oppression. Although equal to God, He became a humble man (Phil 2:6–7). Although He was the highest, He became the lowest so that the lowest could be lifted up to God (2 Cor 8:9). When God came to save, He did so by truly entering our world. He entered it in the past through the tabernacle when He wandered with the Israelites in the wilderness (2 Sam 7:6). And He will enter it again in the future when He lives with the redeemed forever in the new heaven and new earth (Rev 21). But in the *incarnation, when Jesus took on human flesh* (Luke 2:7; John 1:14), God Himself entered the real world as a real child named Jesus.

## Purpose: A Child was born to save (2:8–14)

God chose to announce Jesus' birth to shepherds first, which helps us to understand three things about our Savior (Luke 2:8). First, Jesus came to offer salvation to the lowly, because shepherds were generally uneducated and unskilled. Second, Jesus came as the promised good shepherd (Ezek 34:23; John 10:11). Third, Jesus came to die for sins. The sheep near Bethlehem were just 5 miles from Jerusalem, many of which were used as temple sacrifices. So Jesus would die as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (Isa 53:7; John 1:29).

### THINK ABOUT IT

As the great Shepherd and the perfect Lamb, Jesus came to save even lowly people like us.



# STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON



## The Son of Man is born in Bethlehem • Luke 2:1–20

Imagine the amazement of the shepherds when the light of God's glory suddenly pierced the darkness of the night. The shepherds saw what few have ever seen—the glory of God's presence. God's glory had come upon the tabernacle (Exod 40:35) and later upon the temple (1 Kings 8:11), but now, almost 600 years since God's glory had departed from Israel (cf. Ezek 11:22–23), these common shepherds had the privilege of seeing God's glorious presence. When Jesus came to save, He came to lead sinners back into God's presence to delight in His glory forever (Rev 21:23).

The angel confirmed Jesus' divine rescue mission by giving Him three titles: Savior, Christ, and Lord (Luke 2:11). First, Jesus is Savior. He was born to save us from our sins (Matt 1:21). That means He was born to die (Isa 53), because sin cannot be atoned for apart from the blood of a spotless sacrifice (Lev 17:11). Second, Jesus is the Christ. He is Israel's long-expected Messiah, the one anointed by God (Dan 9:25–26) to be both Savior and King (Luke 1:32–33). Third, He is Lord, meaning that He is Yahweh Himself. Indeed,

there is no Savior besides the LORD (Isa 43:11), and He promised to personally shepherd His people (Ezek 34:15). This is what Christmas is about: God Himself becoming the human Messiah to save us from our sins.



### THINK ABOUT IT

Christmas reminds us of the sad reality of our own sin, but also the great joy of having our sins forgiven.

To show just how incredible this truth is, God arranged something incredibly unusual. Angels had delivered messages in the past, but never before had they been accompanied by a multitude of the **heavenly host** (Luke 2:13)! Why so many **angels**? Because God was about to display His glory in bringing peace to earth (2:14). This is peace, first and foremost, between God and man (Rom 5:1). To have peace with God is to have true peace, no matter how turbulent the times (Phil

4:7). But the peace believers experience now is only a foretaste of the peace to come. What Christ began at His first coming He will finish at His second coming, when He comes to establish perfect peace in the new creation (Rev 21:4, 25).

This gift of peace is for “those with whom he is pleased” (Luke 2:14). Literally, it is for “men of favor.” It is for those God has made the object of His love. In other words, peace is a gift from God, not something that we deserve or could ever earn. Those who receive this peace do not merit it by their own efforts. Rather, it is for those who fear God (Luke 1:50); for those who receive God's free gift of salvation by faith (Rom 5:1).

### Response: A Child was born to be trusted (2:15–20)

This is exactly how the shepherds respond: by faith. Like the shepherds, those who believe obey and hurry quickly to come to Jesus (2:15–16; Matt 11:28). They become true witnesses to others of God's true word and salvation (2:17). Mary showed another aspect of faith when she treasured all that had happened in her heart (2:19). She pondered and considered, reflecting deeply on everything that had happened. So those who believe meditate on the truth of God (1 Tim 4:15), grow in knowledge (2 Pet 3:18), and long to know God more (Phil 3:10).

After all this, the shepherds returned to their sheep (Luke 2:20). They were still humble shepherds, but their lives would never be the same: they returned glorifying and praising God (2:20). That is how God saves: He saves real people in the real world. Instead of lifting us out of this world, He enters into our world. Instead of taking us out of difficulty, He puts His life, joy, and peace in us in the midst of difficulty. This is the message of Christmas: Jesus came as a real child into our real world to save real people like us.

# Lesson Outline

*Jesus was born to save people like us.*



## AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE

1. Jesus was born (2:1–7).
2. Jesus was born to save (2:8–14).
2. Jesus was born to save all those who trust in Him (2:15–20).



## AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE

1. **Setting: A Child was born into the world (2:1–7).**
  - He was born into real human history (2:1–3).
  - He was born in the right place and in the right family (2:4–5).
  - He was born in an ordinary and humble way (2:6–7).
2. **Purpose: A Child was born to save (2:8–14).**
  - His salvation brings the glory of God (2:8–9).
  - His salvation brings joy from God (2:10–12).
  - His salvation brings peace with God (2:13–14).
3. **Response: A Child was born to be trusted (2:15–20).**
  - The shepherds believed, came to Jesus, and told others (2:15–18).
  - Mary thought deeply about all that had happened (2:19).
  - The shepherds returned to their common life with uncommon praise (2:20).





## Lesson Questions

*Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.*



### Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

- 1. Where was Jesus born?**  
Bethlehem, the city of David.
- 2. Who announced Jesus' birth?**  
An angel, and then a multitude of angels.
- 3. To whom did the angel announce Jesus' birth?**  
To shepherds.
- 4. Did the shepherds believe? How do you know?**  
Yes. We know because they immediately obeyed. Then they told others and glorified God.



### Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

- 1. Who was emperor and who was governor when Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem?**  
Caesar Augustus was emperor and Quirinius was governor.
- 2. Why does it matter who the rulers were?**  
It shows us that Jesus' birth is real history. It really happened. It also shows that Jesus, not rulers like Augustus, is to be honored as the Savior and Prince of Peace.
- 3. Was Jesus born in a nice place?**  
No. He was born in an animal shelter in a crowded, tiny town.
- 4. Why was Jesus' birth announced to Shepherds?**  
To show that He came to save even the lowly, to show that He would be the chief shepherd, and to show that He would be the sacrificial lamb.
- 5. What did the angel say Jesus came to do?**  
He came to bring salvation, joy, and peace.
- 6. What three titles did the angel give Jesus?**  
Savior (He came to save), Messiah (He is the promised King), and Lord (He is God).
- 7. How did Mary respond to the shepherds' report?**  
She "treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). She thought deeply about what she heard, even though she didn't understand it all.
- 8. What did the shepherds do afterward?**  
They went back to their sheep. Life went on, but it would never be the same.



# Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



INTRODUCE

## SUNDAY SCHOOL CENSUS

Before the lesson, call up each child in order to take a “census” of your classroom. Ask each child to state his first and last names, sibling’s names, birthplace, month of birth, favorite color, etc. After all the children are registered, you might divide the class into groups based on the information you collected: boys on one side of the room, girls on the other; those with siblings here, those without there; January birthdays here, February birthdays there; etc. Use this activity to explain why Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem to be registered.

## A VERY SPECIAL BIRTHDAY

Decorate the room with birthday related items: streamers, party favors, wrapped gifts, birthday cake (or cupcakes), candles, etc. As the children arrive, ask them whose birthday it is. Tell the children that today we will learn about a very special birthday: the birth of Jesus.



ILLUSTRATE

## FROM THE EYES OF A SHEPHERD

Tell the story from the perspective of one of the shepherds to whom the angel spoke. Dress like a shepherd and bring in various items to help illustrate the story: clipboard and pencil (census), stuffed donkey, stuffed sheep, manger, baby boy doll, shepherd’s staff, etc.

## THE LAMB OF GOD

Tell the children that many of the sheep the shepherds in our story watched over were used as temple sacrifices. Explain that these sacrifices for sin were offered year after year in the temple, but their blood could never pay the penalty for the people’s sin. Like the sheep, Jesus came to give His life as a sacrifice for sin. The Bible even calls Jesus the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29). However, unlike the sheep, God accepted Jesus’ sacrifice as payment for sin. Now all who trust in Jesus have their sins forgiven. You may illustrate this by giving the children a dark colored dot (sin) to place on a stuffed lamb (Jesus). Tell the children that Jesus is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).



APPLY

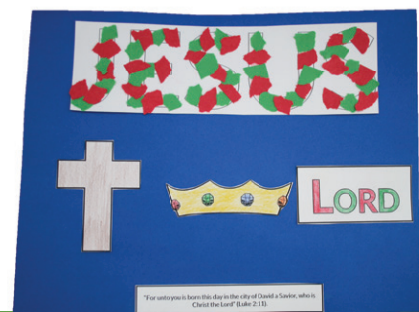
## FOR UNTO YOU IS BORN

See *Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2*.

**Materials:** Craft sheets, construction paper, scissors, glue, and crayons.

**Directions:** Pre-cut pictures, “JESUS” strip, and the verse from the craft sheets and tear tiny pieces of red and green construction paper. Have children color and glue the pictures to a sheet of construction paper. Glue “JESUS” strip to construction paper and glue tiny pieces of red and green construction paper to fill in the letters. Glue on the verse.

*For Unto You Is Born*  
See *Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2*





# TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

The Son of Man is born in Bethlehem • Luke 2:1–20



AGES 6–8



INTRODUCE

## THE HUMILITY OF CHRISTMAS

Ask the children to describe Christmas and the birth of Jesus in just one word. While many words could be used to describe Christmas, one of the most fitting is the word “humility.” As a class, read Philippians 2:3–11 and identify the numerous ways Jesus humbled Himself when He left His throne in heaven in order to rescue His enemies on earth.

## MEANINGFUL NAMES

Bring a baby-name book to class. Use it to look up the children’s names and share the meanings with the class. Then ask the children if any of them know what the name of Jesus means. Give them a hint: the meaning is found in Matthew 1:21 (“Savior”). Tell the children that in today’s lesson we will learn about the Savior who was born to save people like us.



ILLUSTRATE

## ACT IT OUT

Today’s lesson will be very familiar to most children. They have likely heard it taught each year at Christmas time and will know the basic storyline. Assign the children roles in the Christmas story the week before. You may also want to give them short lines to learn during the week. Ask them to bring in a costume to wear during the play. The story can then be acted out during the lesson time.

## BORN TO DIE

Bring in various plans: a blueprint, a sport’s playbook, a set of directions, an itinerary, a program, etc. Use these to show that it was always God’s plan that His Son would die as a sacrifice for sin (Acts 2:22–23; 2 Tim 1:9; Rev 13:8).



APPLY

## THE ANGEL’S ANNOUNCEMENT

See Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2.

**Materials:** Craft sheets, white cardstock, black construction paper, scissors, tape, and gold and silver glitter glue.

**Directions:** Copy the angel template onto a piece of white cardstock, or draw it onto a paperplate. Cut along all the solid lines. Fold along dotted lines A and B. Fold A toward B and tape lines A and B together. Flip arms down in front of head and fold along dotted line in center. Tape the angel and the verse to a sheet of black construction paper that has been folded in the middle. Instruct the students to decorate the paper with glitter glue to represent the glory of the Lord.

The Angel’s Announcement  
See Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2



AGES 9–11



INTRODUCE

### GOD IS BORN

Help the children understand what a unique and incomprehensible event Jesus' incarnation was. Begin by reminding the children of God's incommunicable characteristics (those characteristics that only God has), such as His eternality, omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. As God the Son, Christ has all these characteristics. However, when He came to earth as a man, He laid aside independent exercise of some of them, though He still was fully God. This is something that our finite minds cannot fully comprehend. Understanding this should cause us to praise Him for who He is and what He has done.

### IT REALLY HAPPENED

*Ripley's Believe It or Not!* is an American company that presents unusual events and facts that seem too bizarre to be true. Share some true, albeit unusual or bizarre, facts with the children before the lesson. Use this activity to begin a discussion about the birth of Jesus. While some might say that Jesus' birth is too strange to be true, we can be confident that it really happened. In our lesson today, we're going to see that Jesus came as a real child into our real world in order to save real people like us.



ILLUSTRATE

### AN AMAZING INSTRUCTION

The angel gave the shepherds an unusual instruction, but they obeyed and were blessed. To illustrate this, give a child an unusual instruction. It could be something like, "Look in the piano bench" (where you have hidden some candy). Did the child follow your instruction? The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem to see the child of whom the angel spoke.

### PEACE WITH GOD

Show the children a picture of a traditional peace sign as made popular in America during the 1960s and 1970s. Ask them if they know what this means. Explain that this kind of peace—the absence of war among mankind—is not the type of peace this verse is talking about. Nor is it talking about an internal sense of calm or tranquility. It describes the ending of the sinner's war with God (Rom 5:10) and is a result of the justification we receive by faith (Rom 5:1; Col 1:21–22).



APPLY

### THE PERFECT SACRIFICE

In the Old Testament we learn about the sacrificial system that God set up for the Jews. An unblemished lamb, one with no defect, had to be sacrificed. Tell the children that Jesus was that perfect lamb for us (John 1:29). Explain that God's requirement for a perfect sacrifice never was compromised through Jesus. He lived a perfect life, without sin. Talk to the children about how this, along with Jesus' virgin birth and His genealogy, was to show the Jews that He was the Messiah, the Chosen One.