



8

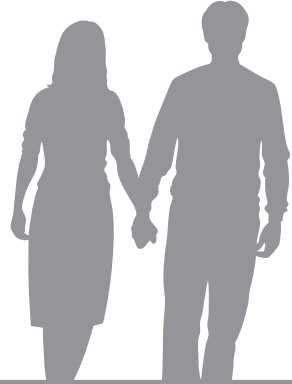
Birth of Christ

Key Passages

- Luke 2:1–20; John 1:1–14, 5:18, 10:30–33, 20:27–28; Philippians 2:5–8

What You Will Learn

- How Jesus was born.
- Why Jesus's humble birth was surprising.



Lesson Overview

Jesus, the King of kings, was born humbly and laid in a manger. His birth was first announced, not to kings and royalty, but to shepherds tending their flocks in the fields. Who would have thought that the Creator God would enter the world this way? But that is how Jesus, the God-Man, chose to come. The Creator God came quietly and humbly to save His people from their sins.

Memory Verse

Philippians 2:8

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.



Prepare to Learn

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

God's angels were sent to herald the coming of the promised Messiah—first, to the priest Zacharias about his son, John the Baptist, who would prepare the people for the coming of the Lord (Luke 1:13–15), and then to the virgin Mary, who would miraculously conceive a Son. This Son—Jesus, Immanuel, God with us—was the one who would save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21–23).

Mary was a young Jewish woman who recognized herself as a maidservant of the Lord and willingly accepted God's plan for her (Luke 1:38). By the world's standards, her credentials should not merit this call from God to be the mother of Jesus. Like all people, she was also in need of a Savior (Luke 1:47), and Jesus, though He honored her, did not elevate her (e.g., Matthew 12:46–50; Luke 11:27–28)

And yet this is how it started. In the little town of Bethlehem, Mary brought forth her firstborn Son, wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him—not with kings and royalty—but in a manger used to feed animals, because there were no other rooms for them to stay in (Luke 2:7). This simple birth was not announced to the affluent society of Judea, nor to the Jewish scribes and Pharisees, but instead to simple shepherds living out in

the nearby fields (Luke 2:8). The announcement was spectacular. First, an angel of God appeared to the shepherds with the glory of the Lord shining all around. The angel brought good tidings of great joy—that a Savior, who was Christ the Lord, was born. Suddenly, the shepherds witnessed a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:9–14). With haste, the shepherds made their way to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger just as the angel had said (Luke 2:15–16).

This was a humble, earthly beginning for the great Redeemer King—the incarnate God Himself. Some say He couldn't be God—that God wouldn't enter the world that way. Yet Scripture instructs us in many places that this Jesus, the humble Babe, was in fact God. As John begins his Gospel, we read that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He [the Word] was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1–2). God, through the Apostle John, revealed Jesus Christ as God. A little later in his Gospel, John stated that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (John 1:14). The Word was God

and the Word became flesh. The Word was Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah and Savior.

Again in the Gospel of John, Jesus's disciple Thomas, upon seeing the resurrected Jesus, confirmed Jesus's deity when he proclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

Jesus Himself proclaimed that He was God when He told the Jews that He and His Father are one (John 10:30). And when the Jews picked up stones to stone Him, they revealed that they had no doubt that Jesus, being a man, had claimed to be God (John 10:33).

Jesus is fully God and fully human. Jesus knew He was God, yet though He was God, He willingly gave up the heavenly honor, glory, and rights that were His. He took the form of a bondservant and came to earth as a man. He lived in humility and finally humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death on the Cross (Philippians 2:6–8).

Jesus came as a humble servant, and we should follow His example (Matthew 10:24–25). We are called to do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but humbly consider others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3–5). Believers in Jesus Christ are called to be followers of Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:24; John 10:27). We are called to be conformed to His image (Romans 8:29). And we can be confident that if we are in Christ, He who began a

good work in us will complete it according to His will and for His glory (Philippians 1:6).

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Stop and think about this for a minute: this Jesus, who was born as an infant and laid in a manger, is the one who made and holds the entire universe together (Colossians 1:15–17). That very striking fact should boggle our minds and give us pause to worship the babe in the manger as the Lord of all. This amazing union of God and man is something that we cannot fully comprehend, but it is clearly taught in Scripture. The doctrine is known as the hypostatic union and describes how Jesus was fully God and fully man. Scripture teaches that Jesus had two natures in one Person—He was 100 percent God and 100 percent man—the God-Man, Jesus Christ. Early in the history of Christianity, this idea was attacked in several different ways. Let's briefly review a few of them, pointing out the errors they lead to.

Arianism—Arius taught that Jesus was created by God at a certain point in time. This is similar to the modern view of Mormons. However, Scripture soundly refutes this idea. Jesus has always been fully God (Genesis 1; John 1). He was not created, but was the Creator of all things (Colossians 1:16). If we say Jesus was created, He can't be the Creator. Arianism is a false doctrine.

Docetism—The Gnostics and others in the first and second century taught that Jesus was a divine being who “appeared” (from the Greek *dokein*) to be a man but was not. If we adopt this view, we again find ourselves fighting against Scripture. Jesus had to come in a body and the form of a man so that He could identify with Adam’s race, obey the Law as a man, and act as the substitute to appease God’s wrath against mankind. The sin of the first Adam was removed by the Last Adam, our kinsman-redeemer (1 Corinthians 15:45–49).

Adoptionism—This view teaches that Jesus was born as a normal human and was adopted as the Son of God at His baptism. This view stands in contradiction to Scripture because it denies the virgin birth and the preexistence of Jesus as the Word that was with God in the beginning (John 1).

All of these views are heretical—they lead to a false view of Jesus and a false view of the salvation He offers. Holding to one of these views, or the many other variations (e.g., Apollinarianism, Modalism, Monophysitism, etc.), leads to a false gospel and damnation for those who persist in these errors (Galatians 1:6–12; 2 John 9).

These false views of Christ’s nature arose early in church history. Arianism was part of the Trinitarian Controversy, which led to the Nicene Creed in AD 325, defining the orthodox view of Christ. In part it states: “I believe

. . . in one Lord Jesus Christ . . . God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.”

Sadly, many of the false views of Jesus are held by people today. Understanding that Jesus is fully God and fully man is a necessary part of biblical Christianity. Our God humbled Himself to become like one of His creatures who had rebelled against Him and stepped into our lawless world, even being laid as a newborn baby in a feed trough. He came from the glories of heaven to a sin-cursed world to redeem rebels. God became man to bring mankind back to God.

Switching to a less-dangerous type of error, there are a lot of misconceptions about the birth of Christ in the minds of people. Many of these misconceptions have come from relying on popular media or dramatic recreations of the birth narrative. Have you ever played the innkeeper in a Christmas pageant? Where did your lines come from? Well, they didn’t come from the Bible because there is no innkeeper mentioned in the Bible! What about all of the animals? Well, none of them are mentioned in the Bible either. We infer that there were likely animals around since Jesus was laid in a manger, so having animals in a nativity scene is not unrealistic. Well, there were three wise men, right? We will answer that in the next lesson.

Many of these elements make for good drama, but they aren't found in Scripture. Most presentations have Mary barely making it off the donkey she rode from Nazareth before she goes into labor. But Scripture is clear that is not the case. Luke 2:1–7 gives the account. In those verses we read, "So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered." They were already in Bethlehem for some time before the birth, possibly staying with relatives in a crowded house.

All of God's Word is true. And it is important that we study it and

use it as our absolute authority. Regardless of whether our misconceptions lead to damnable error or some small misunderstandings, we cannot compromise the truth of the Word of God. We must seek biblical accuracy in order to glean a better understanding of the living Word, who became flesh to dwell among us, who lived a life of perfect obedience, and who died for our sins to redeem us. We can only learn about the Word, Jesus, from God's Word—the Bible. And we must be diligent to do that thoroughly and with discernment.



Before and After

Follow the instructions on the Before and After worksheet.



Studying God's Word

Can God demonstrate humility?

Take notes as you study the following passages.

Luke 2:1-20

John 1:1-14

John 5:18

John 10:30-33

John 10:27-28

Philippians 2:5-8



God's Word in the Real World

1. What did you realize today about the influence that movies and dramas based on the Bible have on the way we think about the biblical accounts, particularly with the account of the birth of Jesus?

2. Knowing that Jesus was willing to humble Himself, take on flesh, live in our sinful world, and die on the Cross for you, a sinner, how can you use that knowledge to stir up your devotion to Him?

3. How has God demonstrated humility, and what example does this give for us?

4. We have said that Jesus was 100% man and 100% God—the Hypostatic Union. Is this idea a contradiction or just something that is difficult for us to fully comprehend?

5. Many other religious people do not consider Jesus to be God. For example, many Jews and Muslims consider Jesus to be a great teacher or even a prophet, but they consider it blasphemous to call Him God or to offer Him worship. How could you use the Bible to proclaim and teach this truth to a Jew or a Muslim who thinks this way?

6. Throughout the last 2,000 years, there have been many different attempts to explain who Jesus is and to describe His nature. You can read about some of these ancient heresies in the introductory material to this lesson. One that is still alive and well today is found in both the Mormon and Jehovah’s Witnesses teachings. Both of these groups believe that Jesus is not God, but was created by God. Their Jesus is *a* god. How would you use Scripture to help them understand that this is not what the Bible teaches?



Prayer Requests
